Sadra and Hegel on the Relationship between Essence/Existence and Subject/Object

Kamal Abdulkarim Shlbei

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SADRA AND HEGEL ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ESSENCE/EXISTENCE AND SUBJECT/OBJECT

A Dissertation
Submitted to McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Kamal Abdulkarim Shlbei

May 2013
SADRA AND HEGEL ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ESSENCE/EXISTENCE AND SUBJECT/OBJECT

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ABSTRACT

Sadra and Hegel on the Relationship between Essence/Existence and Subject/Object

By
Kamal Abdulkarim Shlbei
May 2013

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Jennifer Bates

This dissertation examines the problematic status of Truth within the intersection of the medieval ontological relationship of essence/existence and the modern epistemological relationship of subject/object. The main question that motivates this dissertation is this: does the modern distinction between subject and object find its roots in the medieval distinction between essence and existence? Rather than investigating the many medieval and modern philosophers in whom we could find answer to this question, this dissertation focuses only on two philosophers as study cases: One is the Islamic philosopher Mulla Sadra, and the other is the German philosopher George. W. F. Hegel. My chose of these two philosophers is not arbitrary. According to many scholars, whereas the medieval relationship of essence/existence finds its highest development in Sadra’s Absolute Existentialism, the modern relationship of subject/object finds its
highest summit in Hegel’s Absolute Idealism. Sadra’s Absolute Existentialism breaks with the metaphysical essentialism of both Greek philosophy and Arabic philosophy. However, Sadra’s Absolute Existentialism is not explicitly mentioned by Hegel—neither in the historical development of the Philosophical Idea in the Lectures on The History of Philosophy, nor in the conceptual development of the Logical Idea in the Science of Logic. If the moment of the Absolute Existentialism is contained within Hegel’s Absolute Idealism at all, it is so implicitly, as a moment within the Hegelian Idea’s self-dialectical process of determining. In this dissertation, I unveil Sadra’s moment of the Absolute Existentialism within Hegel’s moment of the Absolute Idealism. I argue that, although Sadra’s Absolute Existentialism and Hegel’s Absolute Idealism are different, both challenge the traditional views of the metaphysical essentialism of Plato and Aristotle. That is to say, both Sadra and Hegel criticize and reject the view that abstract essence is the ultimate reality. I provide the logical connection between Sadra’s and Hegel’s critiques of metaphysical essentialism. I show that, within Hegel’s Absolute Idealism, Sadra’s Absolute Existentialism emerges in opposition to quality as affirmative reality in the metaphysical essentialism of the Aristotelian tradition.
DEDICATION

To the memory of my father, AbdulKarim H. Shlbei
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful for the opportunity to thank those who have made this dissertation possible. Dr. Jenifer Bates deserves special thanks for following me through every stage of this process with great rigor and insight. Her energy and assistance are invaluable. I would also like to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Therese Bonin and Dr. James Swindal for their support and the great care with which they took in reading this dissertation. I would like to thank my wife Fatma and my children Kamila, Kyan, Sohel, Sehl, and my new baby Sarah for making my life better and more meaningful and for motivating me every day. Finally and most of all, I would like to thank my mother Kamila in Libya for her continues prayers for me.
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Introduction

*He makes the night enter into the day and makes the day to enter into the night and brings forth the living from the dead and brings forth the dead from the living*—The Holy Qur'an (3: 27)

*For everyone there is a direction to which he turns his face. Strive, then, to excel each other in good deeds. Wherever you are, God will bring you all together. God is certainly powerful over everything*—The Holy Qur'an (2: 48)

Among the ontological relationships, which enriched philosophy in Middle Ages, the relationship of essence to existence seems to be the ontological relationship *par excellence*. In contrast, the relationship of the knowing subject to the known object imposed itself as the prominent epistemological relationship in modern philosophy. Modern philosophy’s break with medieval philosophy makes these two relationships of essence/existence and subject/object look different; each has its own philosophical concerns. Nonetheless, if we look to the center around which both of these relationships revolve, the concept of ‘Truth’ emerges as the promising one.

Both of these relationships of essence/existence and subject/object aim to approach Truth. While the medieval approach of the relationship of essence/existence leads to ontological Truth claims, the modern approach of the relationship of subject/object leads to epistemological Truth claims. From the standpoint of the relationship of essence/existence we can pose this fundamental question: Does Truth have a substantial relation with essence and just an accidental relation with existence or

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1 See: Etienne Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers* (Toronto: PIMS, 2005), especially chapter II, “Essence and Existence”.

2 In this regard Barry Sandywell writes, “Where the dominant focus of pre-modern philosophy was onto theological—asking questions about the nature of existence and Being (being *qua* being in Aristotle’s idiom), God or Nature—the focus of modern epistemology centers on the relationship between the knower and the known—how can the mind know the world? What is the spectatorial relationship between subject and object (or the knowing subject and the object of knowledge)?” Barry Sandywell, *Dictionary of Visual Discourse: A Dialectical Lexicon of Terms* (England: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2011), p. 267.
vice versa? The response to this question usually introduces two opposite philosophical
tendencies, Essentialism and Existentialism; each regards Truth from a different
ontological point of view. Whereas Essentialism affirms the priority of essence over
existence, Existentialism maintains that “existence precedes essence.”3 We can
reformulate the latter question from the standpoint of the relationship of subject/object by
asking whether Truth has a substantial relation with the knowing subject and just an
accidental relation with the known object or vice versa. In response to that, we find
ourselves in front of two different modern schools, Subjectivism and Objectivism; each
claims Truth from its own epistemological perspective.

Does the modern epistemological distinction between subject and object find its
deep root in the medieval ontological distinction between essence and existence? To what
extent is the break of modern philosophy with medieval philosophy, on the basis of the
modern epistemological relationship of subject/object, legitimate? These are some
questions that motivate this dissertation. However, this dissertation does not claim to find
answers to the problematic status of Truth at the intersection of the medieval relationship
of essence/existence and the modern relationship of subject/object. This task exceeds the
limit of this dissertation. Rather than investigating the many medieval and modern
philosophers in whom we might find answers to my proposed problem, this dissertation
focuses on two philosophers as study cases: One is the Islamic philosopher Sadr Al-Din
Muhammad Al-Shirazi (1571-1641), known as Mulla Sadra, and the other is the German
philosopher George. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831).4

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4 With respect to the importance of Hegel in the problem of the relationship of Subject/Object, I draw and
benefit from Nectarios G. Limnatis, *German Idealism and The Problem of Knowledge: Kant, Fichte,
Sadra, who labeled his philosophy *Transcendent Wisdom*, wrote many books and treatises. My reading focuses on his major books related to his Absolute Existentialism. These are: *The Transcendent Wisdom of The Four Journeys of The Intellect*, *The Book of Metaphysical Prehensions*, *The Wisdom of The Throne*, and *The Define Manifestations*. As for Hegel, my reading primarily focuses on *Lectures on The History of Philosophy*, *Science of Logic*, and *The Encyclopaedia Logic*.

Let me now explain why I chose these two philosophers as study cases for the problematic status of Truth within the relationships of essence/existence and subject/object. Although Sadra does not, chronologically speaking, belong to medieval philosophy, his philosophy is based on philosophical developments of the medieval problem of the relationship of essence/existence. Moreover, in Sadra’s theory of knowledge, the modern relationship of the knowing subject to the known object is implicit in his medieval doctrine of the unification of the intellect/knower with the intelligible/known. As for Hegel, he represents the philosophical summit of the modern problem of the relationship of subject/object. But what is significant in particular for this investigation is that Hegel’s logical treatment of the relationship of essence to existence is central to his Absolute Idealism.

But why do I choose Sadra from the East and Hegel from the West? This question becomes more appealing when we know that these two philosophers do not know each other, though they are well known in their own regions. Both Sadra’s Absolute Existentialism and Hegel’s Absolute Idealism are represented by many scholars as the important, if not the most important, philosophical moments in East and West.

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respectively. Investigating the relationship of essence/existence and subject/object in
terms of the relation between these two philosophical giants is thus significant.

For Hegel, philosophy in its dialectical development must sublate its previous
principles. Accordingly, for Hegel, his philosophy represents the highest philosophical
moment within which not only the previous principles of western philosophy, but also the
principles of eastern philosophy are sublated. On the other side, Sadra’s Absolute
Existentialism, as many scholars argue, contains and overcomes the main principles of
its predecessors: Peripatetic, new-Platonic, and Intuitionism.

The moment of Sadra’s Absolute Existentialism is not explicitly mentioned by
Hegel—neither in the historical development of the Philosophical Idea in the Lectures on
The History of Philosophy, nor in the conceptual development of the Logical Idea in the
Science of Logic. If the moment of the Absolute Existentialism is contained within
Hegel’s Absolute Idealism at all, it is so implicitly, as a moment within the Hegelian
Idea’s self-dialectical process of determining.

In this dissertation, I unveil Sadra’s moment of the Absolute Existentialism within
Hegel’s moment of the Absolute Idealism. I argue that within Hegel’s Absolute

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6 Hegel writes, “Although it must certainly be conceded that all philosophies have been refuted, it must also
equally be affirmed that no philosophy has ever been refuted, nor can it be….So “refuting” of a philosophy
means only that its restricting boundary has been overstepped and its determinate principle has been
reduced to an ideal moment.” Hegel, The Encyclopaedia Logic, § 86 addition 1, p. 138. It is not my
purpose to argue with or against Hegel’s latter claim. I cite it for the purpose of my general argument in this
dissertation.

7 In this regard, some prominent scholars in Islamic Philosophy, such as Oliver Leaman and Seyyed
Hossein Nasr, consider Sadra as one of the most important Islamic philosopher in the last four hundred
years. See: Oliver Leaman, A Brief Introduction to Islamic Philosophy (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press,
1999), pp. 88-107. See further Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Islamic Philosophy from its Origin to the Present:

8 By including Sadra though Hegel did not, I amend Hegel’s account of the history of medieval philosophy.
According to Hegel, “We find the various stages of the Logical Idea in the history of philosophy in the
shape of a succession of emerging philosophical systems, each of which has a particular definition of the
Absolute as its foundation.” Hegel, The Encyclopaedia Logic, § 86 addition 1, p. 138. I argue that Sadra
has a logical position in this Hegelian history.
Idealism, the moment of Sadra’s Absolute Existentialism emerges in opposition to a
moment in the metaphysical essentialism of the Aristotelian tradition, that is, in
opposition to quality as *affirmative reality*.\(^9\)

In order to achieve this task, I firstly investigate how Sadra’s Absolute
Existentialism has emerged (to speak in a Hegelian way) in opposition to its previous
moment. This previous moment lies in the traditional views of the metaphysical
essentialism of Plato and Aristotle as Sadra inherited them from his Islamic
predecessors—especially Avicenna,\(^{10}\) Suhrawardi, and Ibn Arabi. By the metaphysical
essentialism of Plato and Aristotle, therefore, I do not mean what Plato and Aristotle
really hold regarding the relationship of essence/existence. Rather, I mean the traditional
views which are widely attributed to Plato and Aristotle by the Avicennian Peripateticism
and the Illuminationist tradition in the Islamic East. These traditional views, as Sadra
understands them, maintain that the ultimate reality is essence, whether in its
transcendental sense of the Platonic Ideas or in its immanent sense of the Aristotelian
substantial forms.

To show that Sadra’s Absolute Existentialism presents a challenge to the
traditional views of metaphysical essentialism, I provide a comprehensive interpretation

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\(^9\) I use the term ‘moment’ in accordance with Hegel’s terminology. For Hegel, the term ‘moment’
represents an aspect of the whole. A ‘moment’ of the whole is fully intelligible only in its relation to the
other moments or aspects which constitute the whole. As Magee explains “Hegel sometimes uses the term
'moment' to refer to an 'aspect' of something, or, more technically, a part which is separable from the whole
only in thought.... In Hegel's Logic, each category is a moment in the whole. Each is a part, but not a literal,
physical part--and each derives its meaning from its place in the whole, and is thus not fully intelligible
considered in separation from it.” Glenn Alexander Magee, *The Hegel Dictionary* (New York: Continuum
International Publishing Group, 2010), pp. 150-151.

\(^{10}\) Avicenna’s influence on Sadra is significant when we consider Avicenna’s influence on the medieval
philosophers. In this regard Parviz Morewedge writes, “Ibn Sina[Avicenna]’s influence on Jewish and
Christian philosophies has been well documented. For example, basing many of his Christian metaphysical
theological issues, such as the essence-existence distinction, on Ibn Sina’s philosophy, Aquinas mentions
the Persian philosopher over five hundred times. In this light, it is impossible to exaggerate his influence on
either latter Muslim philosophers or on Latin fathers of Christian tradition.” Parviz Morewedge, *The
of Sadra’s Absolute Existentialism. This is accomplished in Chapter One. There, I argue that Sadra’s critique of essentialism is based on his double view of the reality of essence: essence-in-itself, and essence-for-other (existence). Whereas the reality of essence-in-itself is equivalent to nothing, the reality of essence-for-other makes sense only as a mental being in the knowing subject. Under the impact of the reality of existence, the knowing subject, from within, creates universal concepts/essences and then mistakenly attributes them to the existents as their inner reality. For Sadra, this is an inadequate account of reality, performed by the cognizing soul at one of its stages of unfolding into Absolute existence. Here I discuss Sadra’s doctrine of substantial motion to show how the unfolding of existence is correlated with the unfolding of knowledge.

According to Sadra’s doctrine of substantial motion, existence is one objective reality with various existential grades of unfolding towards Absolute Existence.

Thus the existence which descends from the higher degrees begins to ascend from the lowest degree, and gradually in ascent it returns to the ultimate level from which it had descended. So existence is like a circle which revolves around itself, its end joining the beginning, as God the exalted said: *As He originated you so will you return* [7:29], and He said: *It is He who originates creation, and then He will bring it back again* [30:27].

To grasp the reality of existence neither as a multiplicity of existents nor as a unity of universal essences but rather as multiplicity-in-unity, the knowing subject must pass to a higher stage of unfolding: the stage of intellection. Here, the difference between one existent and another is not their abstract essences but their grade of existence. Existence is the qualitative deferential element of reality and essence is just a negative quality that can be equated with nothing.

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The result of my analysis in Chapter One shows that, for Sadra, the unity of the Absolute cannot be fully known. It can only be approached by the intuitive grasp of the Extended Existence as unity-in-multiplicity which Sadra calls the “Truth of truths.” This intuitive knowledge of the Truth of truths is a kind of mystical knowledge that goes beyond the understanding’s principle of abstract identity. If the discursive knowledge of understanding takes “multiplicity” and “unity” as true only in their separation, Sadra’s mystical knowledge takes them in their unity. In this regard, Sadra’s mystical knowledge of the Extended existence as unity of distinct opposites is similar to Hegel’s speculative knowledge. For Hegel,

the meaning of the speculative is to be understood as being the same as what used in earlier times to be called “mystical”, especially with regard to the religious consciousness and its content….About this we must remark first that the “mystical” is certainly something mysterious, but only for the understanding, and then only because abstract identity is the principle of the understanding. But when it is regarded as synonymous with the speculative, the mystical is the concrete unity of just those determinations that count true for the understanding in their separation and opposition.\(^\text{(12)}\)

But, whereas Sadra limits this mystical knowledge of the opposites to the Extended Existence as the proximate grade of the Absolute Existence, Hegel extends it to the Absolute itself. As I conclude in the fourth chapter, from Hegel’s view, the deficiency of Sadra’s account of the Absolute lies in that Sadra does not consider negation as an essential drive of the Absolute’s self-determination.

Sadra’s account of existence is not without difficulties of its own. The main difficulty consists in his account of the inessentiality of essences. Essences in-themselves, Sadra maintains, are nothing; they are not even objects of creation. They “have never

\(^\text{12}\) Hegel, The Encyclopaedia Logic, § 82, addition. p. 133.
inhaled the perfume of real existence at all,”\(^{13}\) as Sadra expresses. The identity of the individual existent, especially when we consider Sadra’s account of the motion in the category of substance, is problematic. Sadra argues that what identifies a determinate existent is its existential grade within the whole picture of the ontological gradation of existence towards the Absolute. But the individual existent is inherently in a state of substantial change from one existential degree to another degree. The existent’s substantial state of changing contrasts its state of identity with itself. Unlike Hegel, who argues that there is a speculative sublation of opposites, Sadra appeals to the doctrine of intellective forms which he posits in the eternality of God’s knowledge. To me, this doctrine does not solve the problem of the unity of God, which is not only central to Sadra’s philosophy but to Islamic philosophy in general. For how can we save the absolute unity of God if His knowledge contains all the existents as unique species? I raise these difficulties in Sadra’s philosophy again in the final chapter.

In Chapter Two, I investigate Hegel’s reading of Plato and Aristotle in his Lectures on The History of Philosophy. This step is important in that it helps us understand the difference between Hegel and Sadra in terms of their critiques of metaphysical essentialism. Hegel’s interpretation of Plato and Aristotle not only differs from the traditional views of metaphysical essentialism but also stands over against the subjective Idealisms and objective Idealisms of modern philosophy. Thus Hegel’s critique of the Kantian thing in-itself, for example, can be well understood in light of Hegel’s account of the relationship of essence to existence.\(^{14}\)


\(^{14}\) One could argue that Kant’s critique of the ontological proof of the existence of God does not start from a genuine critique of the medieval relationship of existence/essence upon which the proof originally stands.
The main result of Chapter Two is that Hegel does not consider Plato’s and Aristotle’s accounts of essence as two different views of reality: (i.e., he does not accept that the “idealist” Plato just believes in the transcendental world of essences or that the “empiricist” Aristotle just believes in the objectivity of existence). Hegel’s dialectical reading of Plato and Aristotle unveils the speculative moment of essence within their philosophies. Truth does not lie in the isolated world of objective transcendental essences, nor does it lie in the isolated world of the subjective essences of cognizant finite beings.

The speculative account of essence that Hegel finds in the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle is a negative dynamicity that contains its mediation within itself. The question as to whether this is consistent with what essence is in Hegel’s speculative philosophy, is dealt with in Chapter Three, in which I examine Hegel’s own position as he represents it in his *Science of Logic*.

But let me first mention another two important results of Chapter Two. The first one is related to the general approximation between Hegel and Sadra in terms of their disapproval of considering the abstract essence as a true correspondence to reality. The second important result concerns Hegel’s discussion of the four Aristotelian principles. Hegel makes Aristotle’s *formal principle* equivalent to “determination or *quality as such*, the wherefore of anything, *essence or form*.”15 This result raises the following idea: If Hegel really maintains that Aristotle’s account of essence is equivalent to *quality as such*,

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then in Hegel’s *Logic* we must look to the sphere of Quality rather than the sphere of Essence, if we want to make sense of Hegel’s critique of metaphysical essentialism.

Whether Aristotle’s account of essence is indeed equivalent to *quality as such* is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, Aristotle has four meanings for quality; one of them makes sense with what Hegel says above. In Book V in his *Metaphysics* Aristotle says,

> We call a quality (1) the *differentia of the substance*, e.g. man is an animal of a certain quality because he is two-footed, and the horse is so because it is four-footed; and a circle is a figure of particular quality because it is without angles—which shows that the *differentia* with reference to substance is a quality—this, then, is one meaning of quality—*differentia of substance*.16

I find that Hegel’s account of quality in his *Lectures* confirms his account of quality in his *Logic*. So Hegel’s critique of the *qualitative determination* of Truth in his *Logic* can be taken as equivalent to his critique of the traditional views of essentialism. Given this, Sadra’s moment of the Absolute existentialism as an opposition to the traditional views of metaphysical essentialism may be found within Hegel’s treatment of the category of Quality in the *Logic*.

I suspend my last result until I see first if Hegel’s strict division of Arabic philosophy into (theologians /speakers) and (commentators /philosophers) is also applicable to Sadra. And this was the task of Chapter Three.

In Chapter Three, I show that Hegel’s and Sadra’s critique of Arabic philosophy share some common concerns. Both refuse the speakers’ claim of causality which takes

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16 *Aristotle, The Completed Works of Aristotle*, vol.2. ed. Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 1020a 34-b2, p. 1611. (my emphasis). Moreover, in his *Categories* Aristotle says, “I call ‘quality’ that in virtue of which some things are said to be such and such. But the name ‘quality’ is used in many ways….A forth genus of qualities is ….the *form* of each thing….And each thing, with respect to its *form*, is said to be such and such.” 16 *Aristotle, Aristotle Selected Works*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle & Lloyd P. Gerson (Grinnell, Iowa: The Peripatetic Press, 1991), pp.45-46.
the connection between cause and effect as a mere habit. Moreover, both of them criticize
the formal logic of understanding upon which the metaphysical essentialism of Arabic
philosophers is based. Therefore, Sadra’s philosophy cannot be properly fit within
Hegel’s division of Arabic philosophy into “theologians/ speakers” and
“commentators/philosophers”.

In order to see whether Sadra and Hegel start from the same standpoint in their
critique of Arabic philosophy, I examined the principles underlying Sadra’s and Hegel’s
critique of Arabic philosophy. They are different. Whereas Sadra take existence as the
*ground* in which the opposites find their dissolution, Hegel takes essence as the *ground*
into which the opposites find their sublation. Sadra’s dissolution of opposites into the
absolute unity of existence is different from Hegel’s sublation of the opposites into the
speculative unity of essence. Whereas Sadra builds his account of the absolute
groundedness of existence on the assumption that essence-in-itself is an indeterminate
negativity that he equates with nothing, Hegel’s essence-in-itself as a ground is a
dynamic self-sublation of its own determinations—a sublation that must result in
existence. In order to prove the last point, I provide a detailed analysis to two important
moments in Hegel’s *Logic*: “Essence’s issuing from Being” and “Essence’s emerging
into Existence.”

Chapter Four concludes the dissertation by buildings upon the results of the
previous chapters. I examine the result that I reached in Chapter Two regarding *quality* as
a determination of truth in metaphysical essentialism. Three results emerged from my
detailed analysis to Hegel’s sphere of Quality in his *Logic*. Firstly, Hegel’s *immediate*
account of quality resembles the traditional Aristotelian view of essence as *positive*
quality. Secondly, Sadra’s account of essence-in-itself resembles the moment of negative quality in Hegel’s Logic. Finally, Hegel’s account of essence sublates the previous two moments of positive and negative quality within a higher moment of determinacy that dialectically unfolds towards the Idea of Being and Essence.

Thus, in this dissertation I show that, although Sadra’s Absolute Existentialism and Hegel’s Absolute Idealism are different, both challenge the traditional views of metaphysical essentialism. I also provide the logical connection between Sadra’s and Hegel’s critiques of metaphysical essentialism. I show that, within Hegel’s Absolute Idealism, Sadra’s Absolute Existentialism emerges in opposition to quality as affirmative reality in the metaphysical essentialism of the Aristotelian tradition.
Chapter One

Sadra on Metaphysical Essentialism: The Unfolding of Existence and
the Concealment of Essence

*The whole is one rational being called the ‘great man’ and the world of objects is like his body and exterior, and the world of spirits is like his soul and interior, and the whole is set orderly in one line—Sadra, Divine Manifestations, p.33.*

*For these thousands of years the same Architect has directed the work: and that Architect is the one living Mind whose nature is to think, to bring to self-consciousness what it is, and, with its being thus set as object before it, to be at the same time raised above it, and so to reach a higher stage of its own being—Hegel, Logic Encyclopedia, § 13.*

Introduction

Introducing his philosophical conversion from the metaphysical principality of essence to the metaphysical principality of existence, Mulla Sadra says,

In the past, I used to be firm on the defense of the principality of essence, making existence a mentally dependent abstract entity, until my God guided me and showed me his proof. It became clear to me that the issue is opposite of what has been convinced and determined. Thank God who took me out of the darkness of illusion through the light of comprehension, who removed from my heart the clouds of these doubts through the rise of the sun of truth, and who held me close to the true discourse in this life and the life after. Existences are genuine determinate realties and essences are the eternal “thisnesses” which have never inhaled the perfume of real existence at all.\(^\text{17}\)

Sadra had originally sided with a tendency that premises its account of Truth/reality on an ontological assumption of the metaphysical principality of essence over existence.\(^\text{18}\) But

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\(^{18}\) Fazlur Rahman writes, “Most philosophers [after Ibn Sina’s famous distinction between essence and existence] argued on behalf of ‘essentialism’ on the ground that existence, being a common attribute of all beings, is a most general concept and hence has only the reality of a ‘secondary intelligible’ to which nothing in reality corresponds. The ‘Illuminationist’ philosopher al-Suhrawardi, in particular, strongly argued against the reality of existence.” Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra* (Albany: State University of New York, 1975), p. 27.
he eventually rejected this position and converted to its opposite, the metaphysical principality of existence. The significance of this philosophical conversion is related to the philosophical context of the problem of essence and existence in the Islamic intellectual tradition, a tradition of more than seven centuries.  

In this regard, many scholars have considered Sadra as the representative of the highest Islamic philosophical moment, in which the three different Islamic traditional moments of Peripatetic, new-Platonic, and Intuitionism are synthesized.  

If this is so, Sadra’s philosophy might bear its own confirmation of Hegel’s statement that

in philosophy the latest birth of time is the result of all the systems that have preceded it, and must include their principles; and so, if, on other grounds, it deserves the title of philosophy, will be the fullest, most comprehensive, and most adequate system of all.  

My interpretation of Sadra’s doctrine of the principality of existence, however, is not limited to the explicit Islamic formulation of the problem of essence and existence—as it is manifested clearly with Al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroes.  

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20 The well-known Islamic scholar Nasr Hossein in Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World writes, “He (Sadra) created a synthesis between (ishraq/illumination), and doctrinal Sufism of the School of Ibn 'Arabi. He believed that authentic hikma or philosophy/theosophy could only be attained by combining revealed knowledge, inner illumination, and ratiocination and he called this integral hikma "The transcendent philosophy/theosophy" (al-hikma al-muta aliyya).” Nasr Seyyed Hossein, “Mulla Sadra,” in Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World (USA: Macmillan Reference), pp.491-492. Rahman also writes that “the Peripatetic philosophical tradition emanating from Ibn Sina, the tradition of the Kalam theology, both Shi’i and Sunni, the illuminationist philosophy of al-Suhrawardi and his followers and commentators and, finally, the Sufi tradition culminating in the theosophy of Ibn Arabi and his disciples and commentators—all these went into the intellectual makeup of our philosopher (Mulla Sadra).” Rahman, The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra, p.9.


22 For more about the influence of Al- Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroes on the formulation of the problem of existence and essence in medieval philosophy and its philosophical consequences on modern philosophy see chapter two and three in: Etienne Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers (Toronto: PIMS, 2005).
on its *implicit* formulation in Plato’s and Aristotle’s traditional views of Being—as it is understood by Sadra.

In so doing, I must make it clear at the outset what is meant by the traditional views of Plato and Aristotle, both of which Sadra and Hegel try to overcome. With regard to Plato, the traditional views present him as an *ideal*ist who thinks that “essences/Ideas” exist objectively and absolutely in a transcendental realm of Truth of which the concrete existents/beings of the sensible world are just copies of these essences. The traditional views of Aristotle, on the other hand, present him as a *real*ist philosopher who thinks that “essences/uni-versals” are immanent in substances. Gilson summarizes these views:

> It has often been remarked, and rightly, that the forms of Aristotle are but the Ideas of Plato brought down from heaven to earth. We know a form through the being to which it gives rise, and we know that being through its definition. As knowable and known, the form is called “essence”. Accordingly, these views introduce both Plato and Aristotle as “essentialists” who consider essences to be the truest correspondence of reality.

In order to limit my analysis, I will not deal with the other dimensions of Plato’s and Aristotle’s philosophy. My aim is to analyze how Sadra overcomes the metaphysical claim which considers reality as a correspondence to essence, whether in its Platonic

23 These traditional views, however, do not necessarily reflect what exactly Plato and Aristotle themselves intend to mean. Gray, in his *Hegel and Greek Thought* characterizes these traditional views, which Hegel tries to overcome, by saying: “Tradition, especially modern habits of interpretation, had separated them (Plato and Aristotle) and had made Plato “the patron saint of mere enthusiasm” and Aristotle the progenitor of empiricism in philosophy. Plato was the fountain head of all idealism, Aristotle the source of realism.” J. Glenn Gray, *Hegel and Greek Thought* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), p.77.

24 Gadamer describes this Platonic traditional view by saying that “the prevailing form of interpretation in which Plato’s philosophy has been passed on to us has advocated the two-world theory, that is, the complete separation of the paradigmatic world of ideas from the ebb and flow of change in our experience of the sense-perceived world. Idea and reality are made to look like two worlds separated by a chasm, and the interrelationship of the two remains obscure.” Hans Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato*. Trans. P. Christopher Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 156.

25 Gilson, *Being and Some Philosophers*, p.47.
transcendental form or in its Aristotelian immanent form. This will be in light of the ontological relationship between essence and existence, on the one hand, and the epistemological relationship between subject and object, on the other hand. This parallels my general argument in this dissertation, which claims that, both in Sadra and Hegel, the ontological duality of essence and existence implies the epistemological duality of subject and object, and vice versa.\textsuperscript{26}

The Ontological Difference between (Being/Essence) and (Existence) and its Epistemological Reflections\textsuperscript{27}

If for every philosopher there are central questions around which his investigations revolve, Sadra’s main philosophical questions could be formulated in three

\textsuperscript{26} Sadra, unlike Hegel, does not devote long chapters to display and discuss Plato’s and Aristotle’s philosophies. He was satisfied with the rich heritage of many commentaries on Plato’s and Aristotle’s works, which had passed on to him from his Islamic predecessors, especially Avicenna. With regard to Aristotle, Sadra, in fact, does not criticize the Greek Aristotle but the Arabic Aristotle, who, in a historically famous mistake, had been confused with Plotinus. For more about the relation between Sadra and Plotinus see: Rahman, The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{27} The conceptual distinction between existence and essence in Sadra’s metaphysics is based upon another distinction, which is absent in Greek philosophy, namely the distinction between Being and existence. The concept of existence has emerged as a significantly distinct concept within the context of the Islamic metaphysical investigations on Greek philosophy. In this regard, Charles H. Kahn, for instance, in his essay, “Why Existence Does Not Emerge as a Distinct Concept in Greek Philosophy”, argues that “in the extended discussion of the concept (or concepts) of Being in Greek philosophy from Parmenides to Aristotle, the theme of existence does not figure as a distinct topic for philosophical reflection…. The new metaphysics seems to have taken shape in Islamic philosophy, in the form of a radical distinction between necessary and contingent existence: between the existence of God, on the one hand, and that of the created world, on the other.” Charles H. Kahn, “Why Existence Does Not Emerge as a Distinct Concept in Greek Philosophy?” in Philosophies of Existence Ancient and Medieval, edited by Parviz Morewedge (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), p.7. Gilson also relates the emergence of the concept of existence to Islamic philosophy and argues that when Aristotle “speaks of being, he never thought of existence. He does not reject it, he completely overlooks it….Once evidenced by sense or concluded by rational argumentation, existence is tacitly dismissed.” Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, p.46. This conceptually metaphysical turn from Greek metaphysics is firstly inaugurated by Al-Farabi and then found its summit with Avicenna, through whom the concept of existence found its direct way into the Christian medieval philosophers. Thomas Aquinas found in Avicenna’s distinction of existence and essence many answers for the relationship between the creator God and the created world, and opened the door to the concept of existence to be an essential part in most of the western modern metaphysical discussions. See: Frederick Copleston, A History of Philosophy, vol. 2 (Kent: Burns & Oates, 1999), pp.334-335. For more about Avicenna’s influence on Aquinas, see: Rahim Acar, Talking about God and Talking about Creation: Avicenna’s and Thomas Aquinas’ Positions (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp.3-8.
interrelated questions: does “existence” exist in a determinate and concrete sense the way things in the external realm exist? Is the corresponding reality of the affirmation of “existence is an existent” the same as that of the affirmation of “a tree, for instance, is an existent”? How could the difference between, as Sadra puts it, “the existence of things and the existent status of existence itself,” be philosophically employed in order to perform a comprehensive theory of reality?

The question of existence is central in Sadra’s thinking:

The question of existence is the foundation of the principles of wisdom, the basis of philosophical theology, and the millstone of sciences of unity, the resurrection of souls and bodies, and of much else that only we have developed and articulated.

In order to avoid the loss of the implications and philosophical direction of Sadra’s thought, it is important to isolate and make clearly recognizable the fundamental and primary meaning of the Arabic term (wujud)/existence. Sadra’s writings are imbued with the word wujud. In this regard, Chittick, in his translation of Sadra’s The Elixir of the Gnostics, states that

\[\text{wujud is the primary topic of discussion. In the Asfar}^{30} \text{ and its commentary the word itself is employed 15,000 times, not to mention its verbal forms and derivatives.}^{31}\]

The Arabic term wujud, however, remains an approximate, rather than an exact, translation of the English term “existence”. Here I disagree with some scholars such as Toshihiko Izutsu who considers wujud to be “an Arabic word which exactly corresponds

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29 Ibid., p.3.
30 The Arabic word Asfar means “journeys” and refers to one of the most important books of Sadra’s ontology of existence: The Transcendent Philosophy of the Four Journeys (Asfar) of the Intellect.
to the English word existence.” In fact, the exact literal translation of *wujud* is “to find” and it entails, moreover, an involving of the human cognitive faculties by which something can be actually found. As Seyyed Naser explains,

As far as the etymological derivation of the term *wujud* is concerned, it is an Arabic term related to the root *wjd*, which possesses the basic meaning “to find” or “come to know” about something. It is etymologically related to the term *wijdan*, which means ‘consciousness,’ ‘awareness,’ or ‘knowledge,’ as well as to *wajd*, which means ‘ecstasy’ or ‘bliss’.

Not recognizing this literal meaning and this implied epistemological dimension of the Arabic term *wujud* could cause confusion when we relate *wujud* with the English term “existence”.

Within this literal meaning of *wujud*, both “consciousness” and “presence” furnish the initial epistemological and ontological web for an object to be found. In propositions such as “I find it”, existence epistemologically and ontologically extends (yn‘basid) between the subject/knower and the object/known. The literal meaning of *wujud* thus demands that, for an object to be found for a conscious subject, both object and subject must be present in some definite place and at some definite time. In this

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33 Seyyed H. Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy From its Origin to the Present*, p.66.
34 With regard to the epistemological dimension of *wujud*, Chittick rightly notes that “one important dimension of the discussion of wujud that is immediately lost to sight in translation is the fact that the word itself demands consciousness and perception.” William Chittick, *Perception According to Mulla Sadra* (London: Institute of Islamic studies, 2002), p.228.
35 We will see, when I discuss Sadra’s doctrine of the unity of the knower/subject, the known/object, and the act of knowing, how his theory of “knowledge-by-presence” is related to the epistemological dimension of *wujud/existence*. In this context, the literal meaning of the term *wujud*, when it is related not only to its ontological dimension but also to its inherent epistemological dimension based on “tasting and finding,” or what Sadra calls *kashf* (unveiling or unconcealedness), could bear a significant comparison with Heidegger’s interpretation of Truth as it is manifested in the Greek term *aletheia*. Heidegger writes, “What the Greeks name ἀλήθεια [Aletheia] we ordinarily "translate" with the word "truth." If we translate the Greek word "literally," however, then it says "unconcealedness.” Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. Andre Schuwer & Richard Rojcewicz,(Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 11.
limited linguistic sense, the Arabic term *wujud* bears similarity with the German term *Dasein*. As Gilson notes, the well-known Arabic philosopher

> Averroes remarks that, in common language, when people want to say that a thing exists, they say that it is “to be found,” just as, in order to convey that a certain thing does not exist, they say that it is “not to be found.” We ourselves would now say that, to Averroes’ compatriots, as to some German philosophers, *to be is to be there: sein is dasein*.  

> Hence, the concrete *presence* of an object is constitutive in the literal meaning of *wujud*. Sadra employs this implied sense of the objective concreteness of *wujud* to stress “the realized determination” of existence that appears as an evident result of the existential realization of an object. As he says, “The realization [lit. inner-reality] of existence in its *presence* and inner revelation is the most evident of all entities, whereas its essence is the most hidden in concept and in its inner-being.”

> When we apply this meaning of *wujud/existence* to concepts *per se*, or essences *per se*—without any spiritual, imaginative, or material correlation—we find that none of them can be *found* or can be concretely *present*; that is, none of them exists. Essences *qua essences*, therefore, are indeterminate. When they are regarded without any reference to their existential correlations, essences are equivalent to “nothingness”. Essences in themselves stay forever in their concretely *absent* state and this is why they, as Sadra says, “have never inhaled the perfume of real existence at all.”

> The forever-concretely *absent* state of essences in themselves constitutes their own peculiar ontological status. This leads me to what I call the Sadrian dualism of what is *concretely presence* and what is *concretely absence*. The former refers to existence in its determinate presence and the latter refers to essence *per se* in its forever absence and forever indeterminate state.

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36 Gilson, *Being and Some Philosopher*, p.53.
The Difference between Essence-in-itself and Essence-for-Existence

For Sadra, although essence is ontologically absent when it is considered solely in-itself, it has an ontological presence when it is considered in relation to the external existence. Hence Sadra distinguishes between two ontological accounts of essence: essence-in-itself, and essence-for-existence, so to speak. It is the former account of essence which Sadra considers as equivalent to nothingness. That is, when we cognitively consider essence-in-itself without any extra-mental correlation, then essence does not have any reality:

An essence, considered only in itself apart from existence, would be deprived of existence. If it [an essence] is considered in itself regardless of both existence and privation, it would be neither an existent nor an entity deprived of the status of being an existent. 39

Essence in itself is thus indifferent to its own existence or non-existence. This makes essence deprived of any kind of activity and effects. Essence, however, acquires a meaningful sense in relation to something other than itself. If the status of essence-in-itself is ontologically poor to the extent it becomes equivalent to nothing, essence-for-existence is only meaningful in relation to the reality of existence. For Sadra, essences, as Rahman puts it “arise only in the mind by the impact of reality upon it.” 40 In this sense, Sadra considers essences no more than a consequence of the human understanding’s conceptual analysis of the objective reality of the external world. Consequentially, Sadra posits the ontological reality of essences within the ontological status of what he calls “mental Being”:

We can make true affirmative judgments about things that have no existence in extra-mental reality at all. Similarly, we can judge what possesses being. We judge it comprehensively for all its quantitative realized particulars. For example,

40 Rahman, The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra, p.11.
we say ‘every Gryphon flies’ and ‘every triangle has three sides’. Now we know the reference [truth] of every affirmative judgment requires the existence of its subject. Since we know that the subject of the judgment has no concrete existence, we know that it must have another existence. That is mental Being.  

Mental here refers to the human mind as a subjective creator of the cognitive forms of the reality of existence. The soul creates from within itself concepts and abstract universals under the impact of the external reality of existence. It is important here to stress the point that Sadra believes in the active role of the knowing subject in the cognitive process of knowledge. For him, the cognitive forms, as he writes, “present to the cognizant soul, and [are] related to it as an act is related to its actor, not as something received is related to its recipient.” Within this epistemological view, essences, as abstract universals, are formed by the active knowing subject. Essences, accordingly, do not objectively exist in a Platonic transcendental realm, nor are they immanent as the most real in substances in the Aristotelian traditional sense. Rather, essences emanate from within the cognitive transformation of the knowing subject himself under the impact of the reality of existence on him.

The reality of existence is thus the main differential factor between existences. This does not mean that things do not differ from each other by means of their essences. It is true for Sadra that the essence of man is different from the essence of stone, but this difference stems fundamentally from the reality of existence.

Although its species and its individuals differ in essence, and its genera and differences are diversified by definition and by essence, existence in its totality is

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41 Sadra, Asfar, vol.1, pp. 269-270.
42 For Sadra, “perceptible forms,” as Rahman puts it, “are operations of or emanations from the soul itself and the presentation of an object to a sense organ only provides the occasion for the projection of the form from the soul. All forms in knowledge are produced by the soul in this way and Sadra says that the relationship of cognitive forms to the soul is analogous to the relationship of the contingent to the Necessary Being, God.” Rahman, The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra, p. 211.
a unique entity, having but a single unique essence, simply presenting superior and inferior levels and degrees.\textsuperscript{44}

The difference in terms of essences is thus secondary and not primary. The difference in essence is a \textit{conceptual} difference and not a \textit{real} difference. What determines the real difference between man and stone consists primarily in their existential degree, which, subsequently, results conceptually in a difference of essence. Essences, in this metaphysical vision, are merely the cognizing soul’s self-approximation to the reality of existence, and the difference essences bring remains abstract and not concrete.

Why, for Sadra, is the knowing subject in all knowledge (sense-perception, imagination, and intellection) not a passive recipient of the material forms or the bodily qualities of the external object? The reason for this consists in the different nature of the material forms of the external object from the inner nature of the cognizing soul itself. For Sadra, “the external sensible and the affections of the sense organ are merely preparatory and provide the ‘occasion’ for the rise in the soul, or rather, the creation by it, of the perceptible form.”\textsuperscript{45} According to Sadra, the cognizing soul’s self-creation of its cognitive forms, under the impact of the reality of existence, constitutes the condition of the identity between the knower and the known. For it is in this case that the nature of the knower and the nature of the known becomes similar, and thus the identity between them could be possible. This point is explained in this following important passage. Sadra explains,

\begin{quote}
Perception in general does not take place—as the well-known doctrine of the majority of the philosophers states—by the perceptual faculty’s abstraction of the perceptible form itself from matter and encountering it along with its enveloping material attachments—since it has been established that forms imprinted in matter cannot move locally….Perception occurs because the giver (of forms, i.e., the
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{44} Sadra, \textit{The Metaphysics of Mulla Sadra}, p.4.
\textsuperscript{45} Sadra, \textit{The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra}, p. 223.
soul itself) bestows another psychic and luminous cognitive form, thanks to which perception or knowledge arises. This form is the actual sentient and the actual sensible at the same time. As for form-in matter, it is neither sentient nor sensible, but is only a condition (or occasion) for the emanation of that (actually cognized) form.\(^\text{46}\)

Sadra’s account of the cognitive activity of the knowing subject as a self-creator of forms is based first on his critique of abstraction. He criticizes his preceding Islamic philosophers in their misapprehension of the Greek’s philosophers’ true view of abstraction by saying:

These philosophers, when they read in the books of the ancient sages that the various types of knowledge—sense perception, imagination, and intellection—take place by a kind of abstraction, took this “abstraction” to mean that certain qualities or parts (of the known object) are removed while others are preserved. On the contrary, all knowledge comes through a sort of existence—one level of existence being replaced by another.\(^\text{47}\)

Sadra reinterprets the ancient’s view of abstraction in a way that could support his metaphysical theory of the simultaneous unfolding of existence and knowledge:

The meaning of their (i.e., the philosophers’) statement that every type of knowledge involves a kind of abstraction and that difference in the ranks of knowledge corresponds to the difference in the levels of abstraction is—as we have already said—not that abstraction involves the removal of certain qualities and retention of certain others, but its meaning is that existence changes levels—from lower and baser to higher and nobler.\(^\text{48}\)

The knowing subject’s self-creation of successive knowable forms results in the unfolding of knowledge as identical to the unfolding of existence. For the knowing subject’s existential status in the stage of sensible knowledge, for instance, will not be the same as that of imaginable knowledge or intellectual knowledge.

For Sadra, the existential cognitive process of unfolding does not exclude its lower ones but includes them. That is, the higher existential and cognitive level that the


\(^{48}\) *Ibid.*
knowing subject reaches not only exceeds but also includes the lower level. To emphasis this important point, Sadra writes, “Thus, when the soul is perfected and becomes actual intellect, it is not the case that it loses some faculties, like the perceptive, and comes to have others, like the rational.”

On the contrary, the cognizing soul in its higher stage of existence/knowledge both includes and transcends its previous levels. The same soul in its higher and simple stage of unfolding is all-inclusive. The same soul is, as Sadra writes, “intellective, perceptive, smelling, tasting, walking, growing, self-nourishing, appetitive, and angry.”

The true knowledge is thus that kind of existence which envelops all of its ontological and epistemological developments within simple wholeness. Rahman stresses this point by saying:

According to Sadra, the higher does not “abstract from” or negate but absorbs, includes, and transcends them: they exist in it in a simple manner. That is why, while characterizing God, he enunciates the principle, “a simple being is [i.e., includes] all things.”

If we could use Hegel’s terminology, the cognizing soul in its higher stage sublates its previous levels of existence/knowledge. The highest moment that the cognizing soul could reach is the actual intellect. At this stage, the knowing subject becomes, as Sadra says, “pure existence free from matter”:

Knowledge is neither a privation like abstraction from matter, nor a relation but a being (wujud/existence). (It is) not every being but that which is an actual being (bil-fī ‘l), not potential (bil-quwwah). (It is) not even every actual being, but a pure being (wujdan khalisan/pure existence), unmixed with non-being. To the extent that it becomes free from an admixture of non-being, its intensity as knowledge increases.

49 Ibid., pp. 233-234.
50 Sadra, Asfar, IV, 1, P. 65, in Rahma, p. 235.
Sadra, in his view of the ontological and epistemological transformation of the knowing subject, breaks with his predecessor Aristotelian philosophers. As Rahman explains, “According to Sadra, the Aristotelian-Ibn Sinaian theory of abstraction holds, whereas the objects of knowledge change—from the sensibles, through the imaginables to the intelligibles—the cognizing subject, the soul, remains the same.”\(^{53}\) In contrast, Sadra, based on his theory of “the substantial change,”\(^{54}\) maintains that the knowing subject substantially changes from one level of (existence/knowledge) to another higher level of (existence/knowledge). The unfolding of existence implies the unfolding of knowledge and vice versa.

In this existential evolutionary process of the knowing subject, essences come to be mere conceptual creations arising from within the soul at a certain level of its existential development, in which the soul is still preoccupied by the affairs of its body. Essences in this existential and cognitive development of the knowing subject are mere approximation to the reality of existence but not the true correspondence of it. They are illusory representations of the reality of existences. What correspond to the reality of the external existences are their individual intellective forms rather than their universal essences. Does Sadra confuse the intellective forms with the essences in the Platonic sense? Rahman explains Sadra’s position by writing,

As for the intellective forms, Sadra’s position is that these forms exist in their own right in a Platonic sense, and as immaterial individuals (afrad) and that when

\(^{54}\) I will explain and discuss Sadra’s theory of substantial movement later on in this chapter. But, this following comment of Rahman in this regard is helpful: “This evolution of the soul itself—the successive levels of its existence—is an important proof, for Sadra, of the law of substantive change to which the entire field of natural existence is subject, a law from whose operation only God and the transcendent intelligences (which are parts or attributes of God) are exempt.” Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra*, p. 234.
the soul fully knows them, it does so by an illuminationist direct knowledge whereby it becomes identical with them.  

These intellective forms, however, are not universal essences under which individuals of certain kind are subsumed. Rather, they are themselves unique individuals. That is, each material existent in the realm of contingency has its unique intellective form that exists as a pure existential difference in the divine mind or the actual intellect. When the individual existent progressively becomes his intellective form, it at once becomes a unique species. So, although Sadra’s metaphysical position of intellective forms has Platonic merit, there is considerable difference that we can see. For whereas the Platonic essences are immaterial *universals* under which material individuals of certain kind are subsumed, the Saderian intellective forms are immaterial *individuals*. They are pure existences free from matter, each of which is devoted only to one material individual.

Sadra, however, is aware of Plato’s theory of Ideas. He thought that he comprehended it more correctly than his Islamic predecessors. He, for instance, criticizes Avicenna who considers Plato’s Ideas as “abstract universal essences” devoid of all particularity.  

Sadra argues that these traditional views of Plato misunderstand what Plato really meant. For Sadra, Plato’s Ideas should be understood not as isolated and abstract entities, not as universals under which individuals univocally subsumed, but as a “concrete and existential order of existence which contains within it all particularities and determinations.”

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55 Ibid., p. 215.  
56 In this regard, Rahman says, “Indeed, Sadra accuses Ibn Sina (Avicenna) of confusing unity-by-abstraction with unity-by-integration and concretization, between which Plato must have distinguished.” Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra*, p.47.  
57 Ibid., p.47.
The key point in Sadra’s reinterpretation of Plato consists in his transformation of the Platonic Ideas from being universal essences to being individual intellective forms.

However, at the end of this chapter we will see how Sadra’s position of intellective forms is still problematic and forms a weak point in his metaphysics of existence. But let us just mention again that Sadra does not think that he rejects what Plato really says about the Ideas, only what his interpreters understand. Sadra’s position in this point is exactly the same as Hegel’s. For, as we will see in the next chapter, Hegel thinks that Plato is misinterpreted by many interpreters, modern and medieval, and Hegel’s task is to reinterpret Plato in a way proper to the development of the philosophical idea.

**Sadra’s Triple Metaphysical View of Existence**

In Sadra’s metaphysics, there are three grades of existence: The Absolute, the Extended, and the Relative. The Absolute existence in its pure simplicity and unity is completely undetermined and unlimited. The Extended existence, on the other hand, represents the first manifestation of the Absolute existence. Sadra also refers to this Extended existence as the First Intellect, or the Sacred Effusion. In its unity, the Extended existence possesses infinite ontological determinations. From this single Extended existence all the ontological differentiations, which are manifested in the cosmos, issue. So, whereas the Absolute existence is unity that produces only unity, the Extended existence is unity that produces multiplicity. But this does not mean that unity and multiplicity are exclusive opposites within the Extended existence. It is only so from

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the perspective of the third degree of existence: the Relative or the Relational existence. This degree of existence refers to all the existents existentiated by the Extended existence.\(^{60}\)

These three grades of existence correspond to three cognitive levels:

1- The Absolut existence (The Absolute Unity)—completely unknowable.

2- The Extended existence (Unity in Multiplicity/ Multiplicity in Unity)—knowable only by intellectual intuition.

3- The Relative existence (Multiplicity and Unity as exclusive opposites)—knowable by sense-perception and conceptual analysis.

But these three ontological degrees of existence with their epistemological correspondences are all manifestations of God’s Truth. In this existential metaphysical view of reality, all existents are appearances, attributes, names, and manifestations qualifying the simple reality of existence in its Absolute necessity. God, as the absolute simplicity of the reality of existence, includes and transcends at the same time all His manifestations.

You should know that The Necessary [Existent]/[God] is the true in its Reality. Each simple reality, due to its unity, is the totality of all entities. [As it is stated in The Quran] “It leaves out nothing, Small or Great, but takes account thereof.” [18:49]\(^{61}\)

In His absolute degree of existence, God is the pure unity that is completely unknowable by the human mind. Sadra also calls this absolute degree of existence “the

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\(^{60}\) See: *Ibid.*., pp. 92-93.

\(^{61}\) Sadra, *The Metaphysics of Mulla Sadra*, p.62. Rahman explains the formula of “each simple reality is the totality of all things”: “Each higher stage of existence includes all the lower ones and transcends them; this is expressed by the formula, "a simple reality is everything," i.e., the higher a reality is, the simpler and more inclusive it is; the more something has or achieves of existence, the less it has of essence, since, while existence is real, concrete, determinate, individual, and luminous, essences are exactly the opposite and arise only in the mind by the impact of reality upon it. Hence, God being pure existence has no essence at all.” Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra*, p.11.
Hidden Ipseity,” which, as Zailan writes, “transcends all limitations and determinations and which is absolutely unknowable.” 62 In the extended degree of existence, God is manifesting as “unity in multiplicity” and “multiplicity in unity”. Since this degree represents the first manifestation of the Absolute, it is, according to Sadra, the Truth of truths. This is the highest epistemological stage that the human mind, by means of the intellectual intuition, can reach. In the relative degree of existence, God is manifesting in the infinite ontological determinations of multiplicity as relational existents. This is the lowest degree of existence in which the individual existents are viewed by conceptual analysis as distinct essences in the human mind.

In this triple metaphysical view of existence, everything originates from and returns to the Absolute existence. Origination is the descending of existence from its (absoluteness), through (extendedness), to (relativity). Returning is the reverse movement of existence that progressively moves forwards towards its origin and never moves backwards. In its metaphysical Extension mode as ascending towards the Absolute, Relative existence unfolds in gradual intensive progress from a lower degree to a higher degree of existence. In this metaphysical picture of gradation, the Extended existence still preserves its simple unity:

Existence is a single, objective and simple reality, and there is no difference between its parts, unless in terms of perfection and imperfection, strength, and weakness. 63

With this existential, gradational ontology in view, the Extended existence is the ontological center around which the Absolute existence’s self-manifestations are different, but it is also the same center around which they are identical. This relationship

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62 See: Ibid., p. 92.
finds its implication in the important Sadrian principle which states that existence is “‘unity/one’ in ‘multiplicity/many’ and ‘multiplicity/many’ in ‘unity/one’.”

Here we notice three ontological and epistemological moments interwoven in Sadra’s account of the Extended existence. The first moment is the immediacy of the unity of existence—the concept of existence as self-evident for the knowing subject. The second moment is the multiplicity of existences—the knowing subject’s self-creation of essences as an approximation to the reality of existence. The third moment is the synthetically, mutual relationship between “unity in multiplicity” and “multiplicity in unity”—the knowing subject’s intuitional grasp of the reality of existence. For Sadra, it is precisely this third moment that truly reveals the Truth of truths.

In the first moment of unity, we, from a Hegelian point of view, face the sphere of immediacy. Like Hegel, Sadra rejects this one-sided principle of Truth which does not recognize the other principle of distinction and difference. He rises from this point of view of unity in which all things are undistinguished to the point of view of multiplicity, distinction, and difference. Although this sphere, in which things mediate each other in terms of their differences, that is, in terms of their “essences,” seems more precise and elaborated than the sphere of immediacy, Sadra refuses to see Truth from this one-sided view of difference. For him, the sphere of classification and difference, which results in

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64 Sadra, Asfar, vol. 1, p.92.
65 The Truth of truths, in which unity and multiplicity are identical, represents the manifestation of God as Extended existence, which, as we saw, is the first manifestation of God, and thus the most representative of His Truth. Now, for Sadra, the knowing subject cannot grasp this (unity in multiplicity) and (multiplicity in unity) until he goes beyond the logic of the conceptual analysis of reality based on the primacy of essence over existence. The Truth of truths, as manifested in the Extended existence in its unfolding based on the substantial motion of existence, can be grasped only by the intellectual intuition in which the knowing subject and the known object are identical. It is the moment in which the cognizing soul becomes identical with the actual intellect. Here the existence of the soul becomes nobler and higher than its previous developmental stages. It is nobler and higher in that it at once includes and transcends its previous existential and cognitive stages.
multiplicity as essences in the human mind, constitutes just part of Truth but not the whole of Truth.

To grasp Truth in its highest ontological sense is to rise over both “unity” and “multiplicity” to “unity in multiplicity”/“multiplicity in unity”. For Sadra, the true unity must have the multiplicity within it, and vice versa. This is the ontological case of the Extended existence in its perpetual unfolding towards the Absolute existence. God, as the ground of Origination and Return, is the Absolute unity of the Extended existence and the Relative existence. The infinite existence has the finite existence within it only by the mediation of the Extended existence, which is at once finite and infinite. The Extended existence is infinite in its immediate emergence from the Absolute, yet it is finite in its relation with the multiplicity of the Relative existences.

The Extended existence, with all its ontological differentiations, is constitutive of our subjectivity as knowers. For we, as Relative existents within the Extended existence, create all kinds of knowable forms, including essences. But this epistemological emergence of the cognitive forms within our soul is correlated with the absolute unfolding of the Extended existence from which we are initially emerged.

According to this analysis, there is tension between two relationships in Sadra’s metaphysics. The first one is between relativity and absoluteness, and the second one is between the knower and the known. The ontological dimension (of relativity in absoluteness and absoluteness in relativity) and the epistemological dimension (of knower in known and known in knower) implicitly entail each other in Sadra’s account of the Absolute existence. By the mediation of the Extended existence, Sadra thinks that the problem of how multiplicity issues from the Absolute unity of God is solved. Whether he
is aware to the mutual relationship between what is epistemological and what is ontological is another issue that could be answered under the light of our later discussion of Hegel.

**The Substantial Motion of Existence (al-harakat al-jawhariyya)**

The Extended existence, in its unfolding extension from a lower degree of existence to a higher degree of existence towards the Absolute, represents the perpetual dynamic nature of existence in itself. Sadra’s consideration of the unfolding of existence is based on his break with the Aristotelian account of motion. In contrast to the Muslim Peripatetic tradition, Sadra affirms the motion in the category of “substance” itself. He introduces his different view of motion by saying:

> According to most philosophers, the remaining categories in which motion is supposed to occur are four, but in our opinion they are five: *substance*, quality, quantity, place, and position.\(^{66}\)

Admitting motion in substance forms a revolutionary break with the Aristotelian theory of motion. Whereas Aristotle does not accept motion in the category of substance but only in the accidental categories of quantity (growth or diminution), quality (alteration), and place (locomotion),\(^{67}\) Sadra does not only insist on the motion in substance, but also makes it the foundation of his metaphysics:

> Note that motion, being essentially both a renewal and passing-away of things, is identified with this thing in motion. So motion’s proximate cause must be some identity essentially nonperduing. Otherwise the components of motion would not be annihilated and so motion could not be motion, and renewal could not be renewal but only rest and cessation. *The agent of motion must be itself in motion intrinsically*.\(^{68}\)


\(^{68}\) Sadra, *Transubstantial Motion and the Natural World*, p 97.
It is not my purpose, however, to analyze the three complicated and long arguments that Sadra presents in his Asfar to support his claim of the substantial motion of existence.\(^{69}\) What is important here is Sadra’s awareness of the reason behind Aristotle’s refusal of the motion in substance. This reason is concerned with the principle of identity, according to which substance must remain unaffected throughout its motion. For Aristotle, substance must be the stable foundation of motion; otherwise it will lose its identity. Hence, motion must happen in accidents of which substance is the substratum. Aristotle’s substance does not have a contrary and hence the motion in substance leads either to destruction (change from positive to negative) or generation (change from negative to positive).\(^{70}\)

For Sadra, the Aristotelian’s concern about the loss of identity in motion is not a problem because the identity of substance is related primarily to its existence, and not to its essence. This constitutes a critique of the abstract law of identity based on the principality of essence over existence.\(^{71}\) Having considered existence as the sole principality of reality, Sadra holds that substance preserves its identity during its existential motion insofar it moves gradually, and not by leaps, from a realistic degree of existence to another realistic degree of existence. The new existential form that substance realizes in the course of its substantial change does not exclude but includes its previous one. Substance only actualizes and realizes itself existentially in this substantial motion from one existential mode of existence to another, more intensive existential mode. This

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\(^{69}\) For more about these arguments and about Sadra’s discussion of the theories of motion in Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle, see chapter four in my book: *The Priority of Existence in Mulla Sadra: From the Centrism of Essence to the Centrism of Existence*, (Damascus: Dar Safahat, 2008).


\(^{71}\) Sadra’s implied critique of the abstract law of identity of essence is compared with Hegel’s critique of the abstract law of identity of understanding in chapter three of this dissertation.
substantial change, as we have seen, is applied by Sadra to the cognizing soul in its cognitive and existential evaluation from one level of realization to another higher level.

According to this metaphysical vision, the knowing subject graduates substantially from a lower intensive degree of existence (with its higher intensive corresponding essence/mental Being) to a higher intensive degree of existence (with its lower intensive corresponding essence/mental Being). The more the knowing subject realizes itself existentially the more it negates the abstract universals of reality and becomes closer to the Absolute existence, which is pure existence without any corresponding essence. Essence in the Absolute existence is perfectly vanished both concretely and conceptually. For, as discussed above, the Absolute existence is pure and simple oneness without any multiplicity that could be represented as essence. That the Absolute is pure existence without any trace of essence needs more discussion. This will be clarified now in light of Sadra’s important difference between the concept of existence and the reality of existence.

**The Ontological and Epistemological difference between The Concept of Existence /Mental Being and The Reality of Existence**

The linguistic implication of the Arabic term *kaun/Being* will shed more light on the correlation between ‘the concept of essence’/‘mental Being,’ on one hand, and ‘the concept of existence’/‘the reality of existence’, on the other hand. *Kaun*, as a name, can be considered as an equivalent Arabic term to the English term “Being” when “Being” is used as equivalent to universe-cosmos-world. On the other hand, *kaun*, as a verb, has copulative uses related to the three tenses (past-present-future), similar to some extent to the English verb *to be*. However, *kaun* in this verbal sense designates more specifically
the past tense. In light of this linguistic implication and on the basis that what is past is concretely absent, essence-in-itself as absent becomes more related to *kaun* as past Being.

It is worthwhile here to notice the linguistic similarities—in terms of the correlation of essence and past Being—between Arabic and German. In this regard, Hegel himself says,

> With respect to other meanings and uses of the category of Essence, we may note that in the German auxiliary verb, *sein* (to be), the past tense is expressed by the term for Essence (*wesen*): we designate past being as *gewesen*. This anomaly of language implies to some extent a correct perception of the relation between Being and Essence. Essence we may certainly regard as past Being, remembering however meanwhile that the past is not utterly denied, but only laid aside and thus at the same time preserved.\(^72\)

Thus, while the reality of existence addresses what is concretely present, (the concept of essence // past Being) addresses what is absent in the concrete level of the external world. The ontological *preservation* of the concept of essence as past Being is performed in the human mind as a knower. Sadra, however, introduces what he calls “mental Being” as an ontological *preservation* not only for the concept of essence but also for the concept of existence as well as any imaginative or unreal concept. Mental Being here is considered in general as another order of existence, different in degree from the order of the reality of existence.

Sadra’s metaphysics busies itself chiefly with the relationship between the cognitive forms, which have the ontological status of mental Being, including the concept of essence and the concept of existence, on one hand, and the reality of existence, on the other hand. Moreover, the crucial insertion of the epistemological dimension of mental

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Being within the relationship of existence/essence makes this relationship neither purely ontological nor purely epistemological but a combination of both.

The difference between the order of existence in its external reality and the order of existence in its conceptual mental Being can be clarified more in the light of the difference between the existential propositional form of (X is, or X exists) and the copulative propositional form of (X is Y). To clarify this important difference let us take the example which Sadra borrows from Aristotle.\(^73\) An existential proposition such as “Homer is” can be transformed to “Homer is an existent.” If we compare this existential proposition with another copulative proposition, such as “Homer is a poet,” we find that “an existent” grammatically and logically plays the same role as “a poet”—both are predicates denoting a quality of Homer. For Sadra, it is only at this level of logical/Mental analysis of reality that existence could be regarded as a property or a categorical accident.\(^74\) That is, it is only the ‘concept of existence’, not the ‘reality of existence’, which can be considered as a predicate or an accident of an essence.

According to Sadra, the main confusion of the philosophers, who value essence over existence, lies in their consideration of existence only in its conceptual level (abstract Being), rather than in its concrete external level. That is to say, they confuse the ontological and the epistemological dimensions of reality. If existence is taken in its

\(^{73}\) Kahn notices that Aristotle “distinguishes in passing between the use of to be in “Homer is a poet” and the “absolute” use of the verb in the sentence “Homer is” (in De interpretation 11); and he repeatedly distinguishes in Posterior Analytics II between the questions “What is X” and “Whether x is or not?” Kahn, “Why Existence Does Not Emerge as a Distinct Concept in Greek Philosophy?”, p.7.

\(^{74}\) For Aristotle, as Risto Vilkko puts it, “existence could not serve alone as a predicate term because it would have been too broad a term, not restricted to any one category and thus not an essence of anything [An. post., B 7, 92b, 13-15]. In this sense, according to Aristotle, existence was not a predicate. However, it could be a part of the force of a predicate term.” Risto Vilkko, “Existence, identity, and the algebra of logic” in Foundations the Formal Sciences: The History of the Concept of the Formal Sciences. ed. Löwe Benedikt (London: College Publications, 2006), pp. 255-265.
conceptual consideration only, Sadra agrees that essence will be prior in principle to existence:

From the mental point of view, [...] the prior factor is essence, because it is a universal mental notion which is realized in its deep-seated sense of being in the mental realm; it is not obtained [in the mode of being concrete] from existence, except in a general and mental concept. Therefore, essence is the principle factor in mental propositions but not in the realm external to the mind. This priority in this respect is a priority in meaning and essence rather than a priority in existence.75

At the level of the reality of existence, however, the comparison between the two propositions of “Homer is an existent” and “Homer is a poet” is totally different. While in the latter proposition Sadra agrees that “Homer” is the subject and “a poet” is the predicate, in the former proposition of “Homer is an existent” he completely reverses the relationship between the subject and the predicate. For in the latter proposition Sadra considers “existence” as the real subject, while “Homer” is but an accident or a predicate determining or modifying existence into a particular thing (Homer). For, as Sadra writes,

The reality of anything is its existence, which ranks with its effects and implications. Existence, therefore, must be the most real of [all] things for it is the possessor of reality, because whatever possesses reality possesses reality [only] due to it. Existence is the reality of anything possessing reality.76

At the conceptual level of mental Being, then, existence in its predicative form (X is Y) does not necessarily negate “nothingness” but could imply it. Here we can say that “Homer is a poet and is not a musician” at the same time. We can affirm at the same time that Zayd is in the house and is not in the market. We can conceptually affirm that the unicorn is an existent, for it exists in the mental Being. Here the reality implied in the verb ‘is’ does not necessarily have a correspondence in the external world. What corresponds to “is” remains confined within the conceptual sphere of judgment as

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75 Sadra, The Metaphysics of Mulla Sadra, p.38.
76 Ibid., p.10.
affirmation or negation. Essences-in-themselves belong to this general “absence” of is-
ness. In contrast to this conceptual view of existence as mental Being and taken from the
stand point of the reality of existence, the concrete existence of “Zayd” transgresses the
logical or mental boundaries of the judgment in that it corresponds to the realized
concreteness of “Zayd” as an existent. This marks a significant difference between the
subjective, logical realm of essences as mental Being, on one hand, and the objective,
external realm of the reality of existence, on the other hand. From the standpoint of the
reality of existence, the subjective realm of the mental Being/essences could be an
ontological realm of contradictions and impossibilities, for we can posit in our mind even
what is really impossible and contradictory e.g., a square circle. On the other hand, the
reality of existence is necessarily an ontological realm of consistencies and actualities.

Sadra builds his metaphysics around the privileging of presence over absence. However, his metaphysics of presence is not of pure presence of essences or pure
presence of existence—which becomes, among other kinds of presence, the target of
critique for the western deconstructive thinkers—but of concrete presence of existence.

Let us clarify this point more in light of Sadra’s distinction between (the concept of
existence) and (the reality of existence).

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77 Examples of these thinkers are Heidegger and Derrida. In his critique of the metaphysics of pure
presence, Derrida writes, “The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these
metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix […] is the determination of being as presence in all the senses of this
word. It would be possible to show that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center
have always designated the constant of a presence—eidos, archê, telos, energia, ousia, aletheia,
transcendentality, consciousness, or conscience, God, man, and so forth.” Jacques Derrida, “Structure,
Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences” in Structuralist Controversy: The Languages of
Criticism & the Sciences of Man (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), p. 249. It is
possible that even Sadra’s account of presence could be included within the target of Derrida’s critique. But
I want to differentiate Sadra’s existential presence from the essential presence of western metaphysics
which is the main target of destructive thinkers.
As we have seen earlier, the distinction between essence and existence is only conceptual, in our experience. In the external world, however, existence and essence are identical and there is no real distinction between them.\(^{78}\)

If it is affirmed that the existence of every contingent is identical with its essence in the determined [realm], then either there is or there is not a difference between them in meaning and conception. The latter is invalid, because it implies that “man,” for example, and “existence” would be synonymous utterances, and our saying “man [is] man” would be the same, and it would be impossible to imagine one of them while disregarding the other.\(^{79}\)

But this conceptual distinction between essence and existence means that existence is also taken as a concept. Sadra agrees that existence could be viewed as a concept in the logical analysis of mental Being, but he criticizes his philosophical Islamic predecessors, who could not think of existence outside of its conceptual dimension. In contrast to his predecessors, Sadra stresses the reality of existence over the concept of existence. While the latter can be reconciled with Aristotle’s universal categorical scheme of substance/Being/essence, the former cannot. For Sadra, the conceptual level of existence is similar to that of essence; both are situated within the static and univocal realm of mental Being rather than the dynamic and equivocal realm of the reality of existence.

Let us analyze more what Sadra means by the distinction of the concept of existence and the reality of existence. An object has its ontological status of mental Being/essence as long as it is possible to be conceived. By means of this epistemological act, an external object can be conceptually transformed from the ontological status of the reality of existence to another ontological status of mental Being/essence—from its

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\(^{78}\) Sadra’s doctrine of the conceptual, rather than the real, distinction between essence and existence is significant in terms of Heidegger’s preference of Suarez’s conceptual distinction between essence and existence and his critique of Aquinas’s real distinction between essence and existence. For more on Heidegger’s view of the distinction between essence and existence see: John D. Caputo, *Heidegger and Aquinas: An Essay on Overcoming Metaphysics* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), pp.64-72.

concrete level to its abstract level. But this conceptual transformation of a present existent/object does not reflect the inner reality of this object because it cannot transform it ontologically but only epistemologically. It is only the representation of an existential object that is in the mind of the subject, and not the object itself. It is true that the object has now another ontological status of mental Being but this is different from its ontological status as concrete existence. For Sadra, the former is reflected as the concept of existence, while the latter is the reality of existence.

Although the concept of essence and the concept of existence are now both considered within the abstract level of knowledge, there is a difference between them. Unlike the concept of essence, which is complex because it is combined from genus and differentia, the concept of existence is simple, self-evident, and cannot be deduced from an ultimate concept. It is conceptually the most apparent presence to the degree in which the concept of existence is by no means definable. This primary concept of existence demands no intermediary. As Sadra himself says, “its understanding cannot be supplied by anything more manifest and prevalent than it.” He emphasizes this unique, distinguished feature of the concept of existence:

It is a mistake to attempt to describe existence, for it would need to be described by something more hidden than the [entity] itself—unless the aim were to [approach it by] either an indication or an ostensive notification, or some description; the latter is merely a syntactical [lit. linguistic inquiry].

The difference between the concept of existence, which is now correlated with the mental Being/essence located epistemologically in the mind of the subject, and the reality of existence, which reflects the concrete presence of an existent/object, is crucial in

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80 See: Sadra, Asfar, vol.1, p.53.
81 Ibid., p.6.
82 Ibid., p.7.
Sadra’s metaphysics of Truth. What we are now dealing with is a single term “wujud,” but taken in two different degrees of precision: the abstract level and the concrete level. The former level implies all kinds of concepts including the concept of existence. The latter level stands exclusively as an ontological realm for the reality of existence. So, although the concept of existence is not the same as the concept of essence, both are now situated within the same realm of the abstract mental Being of the subject/knower. As a result, neither the concept of existence nor the concept of essence, but only the reality of existence is what can account for the present objectivity of the concrete existence. Now, if Truth, as Sadra thinks, consists within the very objectivity of existence rather than the mental Being of the subjectivity of concepts, then it must correspond neither to the concept of existence, nor to the concept of essence, but solely to the reality of existence.

This sharp distinction between the concept and reality of existence will result in the exclusion of any conceptual universal—whether it be essence, form, species, or genus—from being the true correspondence of reality. Any knowledge obtained through a formal or conceptual mediation cannot grasp the reality of an object: 83

All notions which arise from [our experience of] the external world and are fully grasped by the mind, their essences are preserved [in the mind] even though the mode of their existence changes [in the mind]. But since the very nature of existence is that it is outside the mind and everything whose very nature it is to be outside the mind can never possibly come into the mind—or else, its nature will be completely transformed—hence, existence can never be [conceptually] known by any mind. 84

Accordingly, neither the concept of essence nor the concept of existence can grasp the reality of existence. For there is no correspondence between the nature of the reality of existence, which always in a state of substantial change, and the nature of the concepts of

83 For more on this kind of knowledge which Sadra calls the knowledge by the mediation of conceptual forms “‘Al-‘ilm al-husuli”, literally means ‘acquisition’, see Hejazi, Knowledge by Presence, p.49.
84 Sadra, Asfar, vol.1, in Rahman’s The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra, p.28.
essence and existence, which are in a state of static fixity. In so far as the reality of existence is in a state of unfolding, the corresponding knowledge must be also in a state of unfolding. That is, the unfolding of existence must be identical to the unfolding of knowledge. This can happen when we consider knowledge not as something distinguished from existence, but as a mode of existence.

The Univocity of (The Concept of Existence and The Concept of Essence/The Mental Being/) and the Equivocity of (The Reality of Existence)

We have seen how Sadra’s distinction between the conceptual order of mental Being and the reality of existence allows the possibility of contradiction in the subjective realm of mental Being. The human faculty of imagination, which is highly estimated in Sadra’s metaphysics and which is considered to be immortal, creates absolute possibility of mental entities within the world of mental Being. As a result, the conceptual realm of mental Being admits an infinite number of mental entities, possible and impossible, fictional and real.

The metaphysical circle of the concept of existence as mental Being becomes more extensive in that it includes within it even what is impossible and chimerical. The metaphysical circle of the reality of existence, on the other hand, becomes less extensive but more intensive in that it includes within it only what is actually realized, unique, individualistic, and concrete. The conceptual realm of existence as the mental Being of concepts, universals, and essences is static and fixed. That is, all the conceptual entities within the mental Being share the same degree of existence. The difference between them

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is only difference in terms of their meanings not in terms of their existence. Existence in the mental Being, i.e., the concept of existence, is applied univocally whether one is talking about God, a man, or a unicorn. In contrast, the realm of the reality of existences is differential and dynamic. The reality of existence that admits degrees of power and perfection is applied equivocally and not univocally to the existences. In this equivocal picture of the reality of existence there are those existences which are more powerful and perfect and those who are less. An accident, for example, is less perfect than its substance on the real level of existence. The most powerful and perfect existence is the Absolute existence. The other existences are but His manifestations, attributes, names, and modifications. These existences are related to the Absolute by the mediation of the Extended existence, as we have seen.

Sadra and Kant on the Knowledge of the Thing-in-itself

Sadra is proud that he is the first philosopher to become aware of the difference between the concept of existence, on one hand, and the reality of existence, on the other hand. To make modern sense of this claim, let us compare it with the Kantian duality of phenomenon and noumenon.

The Kantian phenomenon and the Sadrian concept of existence are both located in the mind. On the other hand, the Kantian noumenon is similar to the Sadrian reality of existence in that both are outside the mind. For Kant, appearances, or phenomena, are transcendentally ideal objects because they exist only in the mind according to epistemic conditions, and for this reason they are knowable. Things-in-themselves, on the other hand, are transcendentally real objects existing outside us because they are not subject to

the epistemic conditions, and for this reason they are unknowable. Sadra also argues intensively throughout his writings that the *reality of existence* cannot be captured by any understanding or rational reasoning. He also would have agreed with Kant that this inner reality of existence can be knowable only through a very peculiar kind of intuition. But while Kant argues that “such an intuition, namely intellectual intuition, lies absolutely outside our faculty of cognition,” Sadra believes that such an intuition is possible.

The difference between Kant and Sadra in terms of the unknowability of the real is related to their different understandings of “existence”. Kant, in his critique of the ontological proof of God, asserts that existence is not “a real predicate, i.e., a concept of something that could add to the concept of a thing. It is merely the positing of a thing or of certain determinations in themselves.” Sadra in his philosophical career faced this issue of the predictability of existence, which the Islamic prominent essentialist Al-Suhrawardi had raised as an argument for the principality of essence over existence. To make sense of this point in relation to my discussion it is sufficient to quote Rahman’s description of this argument:

Al-Suhrawardi further argued that if existence were a constituent of external reality, then existence will have to exist and this second existence will, in turn, have to exist, and so on ad infinitum…. He then enunciated a general principle

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90 In the Islamic tradition of Sufism, this kind of intuition consists of two spiritual movements called *Fana* and *Baqa* which literally mean “annihilation” and “survival” respectively. In the spiritual experience of annihilation, knowing subject cleans his mind from its relations with anything other than the absolute reality. The knowing subject must reach the stage of “the annihilation of annihilation” in which his consciousness of his own annihilation disappears from his consciousness. Thshihiko Izutsu, who is scholar in both Islamic and Buddhist studies, writes that “this experience would correspond to a spiritual event which is known in Zen Buddhism as the mind-and-body-dropping-off (*shin jin datsu raku*).” Thshihiko Izutsu, *The Concept and Reality of Existence*, p.16.
that every general concept (like existence, unity, necessity, contingency, etc.)
whose nature is such that, if a corresponding factor or form is assumed to exist in
external reality, this will lead to an infinite regress, must exist only in the mind
and not in external reality. What these arguments really prove is that existence is
not an extra factor or attribute in external reality but merely denotes a status of
being more or less in Kantian terms.\(^92\)

Against this Kantian status of being which operates by an abstract notion of existence
which eventually leads him to consider it as an empty concept, Sadra defends the realistic
side of existence which lies in its realized concreteness. Taken as a concept, Sadra would
agree with Kant, as he agrees with Al-Suhrawardi, that existence is just an analytic
concept that does not add any new conceptual knowledge to what is already known. But
this view is only a one-sided view of existence. In contrast to this Kantian abstracted
notion of existence which results in viewing existence as an object without any content
whatsoever, Sadra looks to existence as the full content of every reality. Viewed from this
perspective, existence is completely synthetic, for it is the determination of the thing in
itself by which it gains its uniqueness. Existence—as a reality, and not just as a concept—
accordingly, does not only signify the “positing” of a thing, as Kant insists, but also
constitutes its unique determination. Existence as a reality becomes the sole differentia by
which things are distinguished and individuated, as it will become clear when I discuss
individuation as a mode of existence. As a result, the present concreteness of existence is
the rich reality of Truth.

So, while the real cannot be captured by reason, it can be captured by an unusual
kind of cognition. The technical terms Sadra gives to this kind of cognition are:
“presence” (hudur), “inner witnessing” (shuhud), “tasting” (dhawq), or “illumination”
(ishraq). As Izutsu puts it, this mode of cognition

\(^92\) Rahman, The philosophy of Mulla Sadra, p. 27.
in the view of Mulla Sadra, consists precisely in knowing ‘existence’ through the “unification of the knower and the known”, i.e., knowing “existence” not from the outside as an “object” of knowledge, but from the inside, by man’s becoming or rather being “existence” itself, that is, by man’s self-realization.\(^{93}\)

In order to grasp the reality of existence, we need another kind of cognition that could overcome not only the epistemological but also the ontological gap between the subject and the object, a cognition that is peculiar to the reality of existence itself. Sadra writes, “The knowledge of the reality of existence cannot be except through the illuminative presence and an intuition of the [immediate] determined [reality].”\(^{94}\) Here Sadra argues in favor of a special kind of intuitional immediacy in which the knower/subject, known/object, and the knowledge are existentially unified.\(^{95}\)

In order to grasp this kind of unification between the knower and the known, the object of knowledge must be considered in another appropriate mode. Here comes what I consider the turning point in the relationship between ontology and epistemology in Sadra’s metaphysics. The highest object of knowledge that can reveal the truth of reality is no longer essences or abstract universals— as it is the case with the traditional views of Plato and Aristotle. If, as Sadra says, “the reality of anything is its existence, which ranks with its effects and implications,”\(^{96}\) then, the true object of knowledge is nothing else but existence in its own realization as an existent in itself. Sadra affirms that “existence is [in itself] existent.”\(^{97}\) It is important to note here that, for Sadra, “existence in itself” as “an existent” is different from other existents,

\(^{95}\) See: Hejazi, *Knowledge by Presence*, p. 18.
\(^{97}\) Ibid., p.25.
for its [ontic status] as the possessor of reality is not in need of any other reality. It is determined due to its inner-reality. Other entities—namely essences—are determined due to it and not due their own inner-natures.  

Thus, the absolute identity between the subject and the object can be perfectly performed only if the object of knowledge is “existence” and not “essence”. This point forms a break with the metaphysical tendency of the traditional views of Plato and Aristotle, which consider essence as the real object of knowledge. It also marks a significant difference with Hegel’s Absolute Knowing, as I will argue in the later chapters.

Rather than identifying the true knowledge with the concept of essence or with the concept of existence, Sadra thus identifies it with the reality of existence. For him, as far as the reality of existence negates “nothingness”, knowledge negates “ignorance”. This process goes side by side. The more we epistemologically negate “ignorance” the more we ontologically negate “nothingness” and, hence, the more we intensify our mode of existence.

Let us view the problem within the limit of the traditional views of Plato and Aristotle, which introduce the logical realm of essences as static and unchangeable. Against such views which take the static feature of essences as a criterion of Truth, Sadra argues that it is exactly this feature that makes essences equivalent to “nothingness”, and it is exactly this claimed feature that constitutes the factor of contradiction internal to the logic of essence. Concrete existence, on the other hand, is dynamic life. It is this ever-vital dynamicity of existence that negates “nothingness” and makes contradiction impossible in the extra-mental reality and thus gives to existence its consistency.

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98 Ibid., p.10.
The Philosophical Appropriation of the Theological Conception of Creation

The theological conception of “creation” requires that the world must exist out of “nothing”. Sadra’s theological sense of the reality of “existence” reflects the conceptual emergence of “essences” from “nothingness” to their ontological status as “mental Being” in the human mind. Earlier in this chapter, we saw that, for Sadra, the cognizing soul creates from within itself all kinds of knowledge. The sensible, imaginable, and intellectual forms of existence are related to the knowing subject as its acts. For Sadra, the creative relationship between the cognizing soul and its own cognitive forms resembles the creative relationship between God and the contingent world. For the contingent world is related to God as His acts. In this regard, Rahman writes,

> For just as God is Pure and Simple Existence, the Absolute Existence, the Absolute Mind and all other existents are related to Him, thanks to the “unfolding existence [extended existence/ wujud munbasit]” at different levels—which constitute a systematically ambiguous world of existence of identity-in-differences, at the same time generating a semi-real realm of essences—so the soul gives rise, thanks to the unfolding knowledge (which is a perfect analogue of the “unfolding existence” of God) to different levels of knowables—of perception, imagination, estimation, and intellection—as systematically ambiguous knowables which are, in a sense, different and in a sense identical.

The metaphysic of creation is reconciled with a philosophical theory of reality by the mediation of the substantial motion of the unfolding existence or the Extended existence. It is by virtue of this dynamic changeability of existence that essences emerge in the mind as subjectivity; otherwise, they will stay forever in their “nothingness”:

> They [i.e., essences], so long as they remain un-illuminated by the light of existence, are not something to which the mind can point by saying whether they exist or not….They eternally remain in their native concealment and their original

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99 In this regard, Khan says, “My general view of the historical development [of the concept of existence] is that existence in the modern sense becomes a central concept in philosophy only in the period when Greek ontology is radically revised in the light of a metaphysic of creation.” Kahn, “Why Existence Does Not Emerge as a Distinct Concept in Greek Philosophy”, p. 7.

state of non-existence. They (essences) cannot be said to be or not to be—neither do they create, nor are they objects of creation [the objects of creation being the contingent existences, not essences]. … [Contingent] existences, on the other hand, are pure relations [to absolute existence]; the mind cannot point to them either when they are considered out of relation with their sustaining Creator, since these have no existence independently [of God]. However, in themselves [unlike essences], these [contingent] existences are concrete realities, uninfected by the indeterminacy [of essences], pure existences without [the admixture] of essences and simple lights without any darkness. 101

Sadra here refers to the un-creativity of essences in the realm of the reality of existence, not in the mental realm of existence/ mental Being. The un-creativity of essences in the existential real level makes them no longer entities that exist in their own transcendental realm, nor are they real distinct entities immanent in things. Essences are created only by the cognizant soul, and they merely have the ontological status of mental Being. What are there to be found in the reality of existence are “concrete realities,” as Sadra says above.

But we should refer here to a kind of inconsistency in Sadra’s view of essences, contingent existents, and Absolute existence. For although the contingent existences are different from essences in that they are concrete realities, they do not enjoy their own reality out of their relation to the Absolute existence. They are pure relations to God, as Sadra says. Creation—whether on the conceptual level of mental Being, or on the concrete level of the reality of existence—is viewed within the substantial motion of the Extended existence. 102 But the Extended existence, as we have seen, emerges from the Absolute existence as its first manifestation and simultaneously includes the Relative existence within it. That is, multiplicity and unity are reflected in the absolute substantial

102 For Sadra, “time” is another existential dimension of the contingent existences added to their magnitude dimensions. Sadra regards “time” as the fourth dimension of existents rather than a measurement of their motion in the Aristotelian sense: “Time is related to the physical nature (or form) in respect of its time-dimension just as spatial magnitude is related to the bodily nature (or form) in respect of its space-dimension.” Ibid., p.92. Sadra supports his claim of the substantial motion of existence from the Holy Quran: “And you see the mountains supposing them as fixed, while they fly like the flight of clouds - an act of Allah who has perfected everything. Surely, He is All-Aware of what you do.” Al-Naml (88).
motion of the Extended existence, which produces the multiplicity in its pure illuminative relation to the Absolute. Hence all the various manifestations of existence are pure relations to the Absolute Existence, with no self-subsistence of their own.  

**Individuation as A Mode of Existence**

The Islamic traditional view of the Platonic dualism of (real essences/apparent existences) is substituted by the Sadrian dualism of (conceptual essences/concrete existences). What is considered really real in the traditional Platonic sense becomes in Sadra’s account of reality merely mental Being deprived of any concrete effects, while what is considered mere appearance in the traditional Platonic sense becomes determinate manifestations of the reality of existence in Sadra’s metaphysics.

As for the Aristotelian duality of matter/form, Sadra reinterprets it in light of the Aristotelian duality of genus/differentia. An overturning of the latter duality involves an overturning of the former duality. The priority of differentia over genus, in terms of the determination of reality, would reflect the priority of existence over essence. Sadra’s centrality on the primacy of the reality of existence does not accept genus or the common nature of existents to be the main determination of individuality. He writes,

A particular individual must have something more than the common nature of which it partakes and this additional factor must be a factor peculiar by its inner-reality, which is inconceivable as the result of the mere multiplicity of notions.  

The decisive point here consists in Sadra’s equation of differentia with existence. He asserts that “individuation is identical with existence.” In another place he says, “The

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103 I agree with Toshihiko Izutsu’s comment on Sadra’s use of the word “relation”. Izutsu writes, “The world ‘relation’ (idafah) should not be take in the sense of an ordinary relation subsisting between two terms each of which is conceived as a self-subsistent entity. For in this particular context, ‘relation’ means ‘illuminative relation’ (idafa ishraqiyyah). That is to say, the things of the empirical world are established as partial realities only through the illuminative or self-manifesting act of the one absolute Reality.” Izutsu, *The Concept and Reality of Existence*, pp.70-71.

existence of everything is equal to its individuation and its individuation is equal to its
existence. And that which gives it existence gives it its individuation, too.” 106 Hence,
there is no other meaning for existence except these conditions of which a particular
individual becomes existentially distinguished and unique. Existence, taken as a realized
reality and not as a concept, is the principal of differentia because, as Sadra says, “all
other entities are individuated due to it, each realized entity is realized due to it, and each
determinate and specified entity is determined due to it.” 107 The overturning of the
ontological principality of essence, therefore, releases differentia from being limited only
within what Aristotle considers as a secondary substance.

For Sadra, the relationship between genus and differentia in Aristotle is related to
the relationship between form and matter. Both of these relationships, Sadra thinks, find
their origin in the Aristotelian categorical scheme of Being/Substance. 108 Sadra’s main
goal is to liberate differentia from the universal subsuming of genera in the Aristotelian
categorical scheme of Being/Substance. Rethinking substance, for Sadra, means
rethinking the whole Aristotelian theory of Being. He notices that, although Aristotle
introduces his account of reality, in contrast to Plato, as a philosophy of individual
substances, Aristotle still operates within a philosophy of species, since what is mostly
real in substance is nothing else but its universal form which, at the end, is a kind of
essence. Sadra says,

The substance, quality and the other categories are kinds of essence, and there are
universal meanings which are called genus, species, being essential and being

105 Ibid., p.49.
106 Sadra, Divine Manifestations, trans. Fael Asadi Amjad & Mahdi Dasht Bozorgi (London: ICAS Press,
2010), p.33.
107 Ibid., p.10.
108 For more on how Sadra interprets the relationship between genus/differentia and matter/form in
accidental. But, in contrast, the realities which exist are concrete determined inner-natures and specific inner-realities, which cannot be included in the classes under a universal, be it that of inner-reality or accident. Substance, for example, is a universal essence, whose truth in the external concrete realm is not to be in a subject. Quality is a universal; its ontic status of reality is a universal reality, whose truth in the external realm of concrete existence is not to be receptive either of division or of relation. Similarly it is the case for the other categories.¹⁰⁹

I take this passage as a clear break with the Aristotelian categorical scheme of reality within which Being/substance is limited.¹¹⁰ Here we see how the collapse of substance as a universal essence results in the collapse of the other categories. By asserting that Aristotle’s substance is a kind of a universal essence, just like the other accidental categories, Sadra exposes Aristotle’s metaphysical essentialism of Truth. The “concrete determined inner-nature” of the present existence refuses to be subsumed under any kind of universality.

Sadra’s displacement of essence from the differential dynamic realm of the reality of existence to the identical static realm of the mental Being prevents essence from being the main principle of Truth. That is, essence in its static ontological state of mental Being cannot grasp the inner dynamic nature of the differential realm of existence. The intensive differential element of the reality of existence, which is not reducible to any type of universality but demands its own uniqueness at the equivocal level of the realized existence, and not at the univocal level of the mental Being, is Sadra’s account of individuation. The abstract universal of mental Being that results in essences, therefore, cannot capture this unique existential mode of an individual. Essence as a universal can

¹¹⁰ I should mention here that my intent in this discussion is to show how Sadra understands Aristotle, not what Aristotle himself actually understands. For the limits of this dissertation does not allow including in details what exactly Aristotle means. For more on Aristotle’s philosophical consideration of substance and essence, see: Charlotte Witt, *Substance and Essence in Aristotle: An Interpretation of Metaphysics VII-IX* (New York, Cornell University, 1994).
side only with this static univocity of mental Being, and, for this reason, it cannot grasp the dynamic nature of existence.

Sadra’s metaphysical vision of one simple reality of existence refuses the Islamic Platonicty of Being/Becoming as well as the Islamic Aristotelian duality of substance/accident. In contrast to two distinct realms, Sadra’s metaphysics introduces only the simple Truth of the concrete perpetual unfolding of existences—in which any change that happens in accident is necessitated by a previous change in substance itself. Accordingly, essences of any kind—whether they are Platonic Ideas, or Aristotelian forms, are not sufficient to be the real correspondence of reality. Against the Platonic traditional views of truthful unchangeable essences, and against the Aristotelian traditional views of truthful unmoved substantial forms, Sadra introduces the truthful ever-unfolding of concrete existences. And, as Sadra says,

The truth of existence is the actuality and the realization of existence itself not in an abstract sense, as all previous philosophers thought, but in the sense that existence is itself the truth of realization. And for those who do not attach for existence any truth other than this abstract concept, it is difficult for them to consider existence as pure good.111

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Having elaborated Sadra’s metaphysics of existence and essence, we must now point to the main problem with it. This problem is related to the tension between monism and pluralism in his metaphysics. Let us view the problem in this question: does Sadra’s view of one simple reality with its two univocal and equivocal dimensions break with the one-sided view of monism and the one-sided view of pluralism?

Against the view of reality as monism, in which distinct substances lose their own realities in one univocal substance, and against pluralism in which distinct substances

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are considered only in their plurality, Sadra wants his metaphysics to be like a synthesis of the abstract static univocity of the concept of existence, on the one hand, and the dynamic concrete equivocity of the reality of existence, on the other hand. Sadra warns his readers,

Be not like those who are committed the effeminacy of pure immanence or the enunchism of mechanically combining both, like a Janus-faced object, but be in your belief like the inhabitants of the sanctuaries of the Divine Realm, the lofty ones, those who believe that existence by its very nature is both unitary and diverse, and both in a real sense.\textsuperscript{112}

But Sadra’s synthesis of unity and diversity is not free from inconsistency. On the one hand, Sadra considers the reality of existence as the mode of individuation for every existent in the Relative realm of existence. This consideration implies that individuals have their own realities that make them distinguished as concrete existences. On the other hand, Sadra insists that all Relative existents are appearances, manifestations, and mere relations to the Absolute existence. This line of thought deprives the individual existents from their own realities and makes them just shadows of the Absolute. Sadra’s attempt to synthesize these two different realms by means of the Extended existence is still problematic. This principle of synthesis itself results in contradiction that Sadra does not resolve. For although Sadra’s mediation of the Extended existence might save the unity of the Absolute from being self-contradictory, it does not save the contradiction within the Extended existence itself, which, as a unity, is made to produce multiplicity.

Sadra shifts the principle of self-development, whereby the Relative existents are comprehended by the knowing subject who is relative as well, from the Absolute existence to the Extended existence. He thought that by doing so the Absolute would be saved in its absolute eternity. The substantial motion of existence neither happens in the

\textsuperscript{112} Sadra, \textit{Asfar}, IV, p. 376, in Rahman, \textit{The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra}, p. 177.
Absolute nor in the intellective forms of things which exist in the divine mind. But if these intellective forms of the relative existents stay in their ontological absoluteness in the divine mind and the relative existents are appearances of them, then we return to kind of Platonism.

It is true that Sadra distinguishes between these intellective forms and essences. Under the impact of the reality of existence, essences, as we have seen, exist in the knowing subject as his self-creation. The intellective forms, on the other hand, exist in the divine mind as his own-creation. The analogy between the Human mind’s self-creation of essences and the Divine mind’s self-creation of intellective forms is striking. For if the intellective forms that exist in the Divine mind are the true correspondence of the reality of existence, and the essences which exist in the Human mind are just false approximations for them, then the process of the unfolding of the knowing subject is itself false.

**From Sadra to Hegel: Short Transition**

For Sadra, if the Absolute existence is the realm of Necessity, and the Relative existence is the realm of Contingency, the Extended existence is posited as the mediated realm of both Contingency and Necessity. The Absolute existence/God is the true Who is the beginning/origination and the end/return of the substantial movement of existence, yet the Absolute does not change. For Hegel, the true, "is the process of its own becoming, the circle that presupposes its end as its goal, having its end also as its beginning."\(^{113}\) For Sadra, the Extended existence, with its infinite ontological determinations which constitute the Relative existence, has the Absolute as its end and

also as its beginning. The Extended existence already presupposes its end as its goal. The movement of existence is forward and it never moves backward. For Sadra,

Every prior form of existence behaves like genus or matter and is swallowed up into the concreteness of the posterior from which behaves like differentia or form. This movement from the less perfect to the more perfect is, further, uni-directional and irreversible, for existence never moves backwards.\textsuperscript{114}

But Sadra does not recognize, as Hegel does, that the unfolding truth of reality, though it is forward and never backward, is at once circular. The circularity of truth demands the dialectic as the driving principle of movement. Nonetheless, Sadra’s philosophy, based on the inner substantial movement of existence as the subject matter of knowledge, is in principle dialectical. However, even if dialectic is implied in his philosophy, Sadra might not conscious enough of it.

Hegel could argue—as he does with Plato and Aristotle— that the reason for Sadra’s deficiency in grasping the Notion as dialectical circularity consists in the form by which he represented his philosophy, which is still pictorial and not rational and systematic enough. This claim will undergo further examination after I show how Hegel discovers, in Plato and Aristotle, the implied dialectical relationship of subject/object, on the one hand, and Being/essence/existence, on the other hand.

\textsuperscript{114} See: Rahman, \textit{The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra}, p. 36.
Chapter Two

Hegel on Metaphysical Essentialism: The Unlocking of Essence

*Philosophy is not somnambulism, but is developed consciousness, and what these heroes have done is to bring that which is implicitly rational out of the depths of Mind, where it is found at first as substance only, or as inwardly existent, into the light of day, and to advance it into consciousness and knowledge. This forms a continuous awakening—Hegel, Lectures on the History of Philosophy.*

*Would anyone, who wished for fruit, reject cherries, pears, and grapes, on the ground that they were cherries, pears, or grapes, and not fruit?—Hegel, Logic Encyclopaedia,*§13

Introduction

Hegel’s Introduction to his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* is not simply an opening to the philosophies with which Hegel deals. In its deep dialectical sense, this introduction reflects the main principles of Hegel’s view of Truth. These principles, as Hegel writes, “are the two principles of *Development* and of the *Concrete.*”¹¹⁵ Their significance for his view of Truth is prominent when we see how they speculatively rather than abstractly serve as a guide by which Hegel distinguishes, preserves, and sublates, what is essential from what is unessential in every philosophy he deals with. From the speculative perspective of the movement of thought, these principles are not static presuppositions of Truth. Rather, they are the product of the developmental activity of thinking:

The product of thinking is the thought; thought is, however, still formal; somewhat more defined it becomes Notion, and finally Idea is Thought in its

totality, implicitly and explicitly determined. Thus the Idea, and it alone is Truth.¹¹⁶

If the Idea alone is Truth, then, “the aim of Philosophy,” Hegel adds,

is to know this one Truth as the immediate source from which all else proceeds, both all the laws of nature and all the manifestations of life and consciousness of which they are mere reflections, or to lead these laws and manifestations in ways apparently contrary, back to that single source, and from that source to comprehend them, which is to understand their derivation.¹¹⁷

For Hegel, recognizing these elements of Truth in the succession of “noble minds, a gallery of heroes of thought”¹¹⁸ is a reactivation of their inherent activity. By doing so, he delves deeper into what is most fundamental in those “noble minds”. His reading of Plato and Aristotle pushes in this direction of filtering their philosophical views from the abstractions and empty generalities that are imposed upon them in the course of the history of philosophy. Hegel’s aim is to reinstate Plato and Aristotle correctly within the context of the concrete development of Truth.

Within the horizon of the dialectical relationship between subjectivity and objectivity, on the one hand, and the dialectical relationship between thought and reality, on the other hand, Hegel’s interpretation of Plato and Aristotle exhibits two interrelated ways. The first way exposes the deficiency of some modern philosophies, especially the philosophies of intuition, and the philosophies of understanding (Verstand). The second way supports some philosophical themes evolving around Hegel’s appreciation of speculation and reason (Vernunft). My task in this chapter is to follow these two ways in

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p. 20. Hegel emphasizes the point that truth is equivalent to the Idea in his Logic: “The Idea is truth in itself and for itself — the absolute unity of the notion and objectivity. Its ‘ideal’ content is nothing but the notion in its detailed terms: its ‘real’ content is only the exhibition which the notion gives itself in the form of external existence, while yet, by enclosing this shape in its ideality, it keeps it in its power, and so keeps itself in it.” G.W.F Hegel, Hegel’s Logic: Being Part One of The Encyclopaedia of The Philosophical Sciences (1830), trans. William Wallace (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1975), § 213, p. 247.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p.1.
order to grasp their inner dialectical joints. This exposes the mutual relationship between subjectivity/objectivity, on the one hand, and essence/existence, on the other hand, in Hegel’s thought.

**Hegel’s Method of Reading Plato**

In his presentation of Plato’s philosophy, Hegel writes,

This philosophy has been differently understood in different periods of time; and more than all, because it has been much and roughly handled in modern times by those who have either read into it their own crude notions, being unable to conceive the spiritual spiritually, or has regarded as the essential and most significant element in Plato’s philosophy that which in reality does not belong to Philosophy at all, but only to mode of presentation.\(^{119}\)

It is clear from this passage how Hegel’s critique of Plato’s philosophy is not directed merely against Plato himself. Hegel finds reasonable justifications for some deficiencies in Plato’s philosophy related basically to the concrete development of Truth. As Hegel says, “the philosophical culture of Plato, like the general culture of his time, was not yet ripe for really scientific work.”\(^{120}\) However, Hegel discovers in Plato rich philosophical content that could be redirected as a critique against those philosophies which satisfy themselves only with what is explicit and unessential and could not look deeper into what is implicit and essential in Plato’s philosophy.

Hegel’s reading of Plato, then, does not concern itself with what is stated by Plato explicitly, but with what is included implicitly.\(^{121}\) Hegel dialectally regulates this tension between what is implicit and what is explicit in Plato’s philosophy in a way similar to his

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\(^{121}\) Hegel says, “In order to gather Plato’s philosophy from his dialogues, what we have to do is to distinguish what belongs to ordinary conception—especially where Plato has resources to myths for the presentation of a philosophic idea—from the philosophic idea itself; only then do we know that what belongs only to the ordinary conception, as such, does not belong to thought, is not the essential.” *Ibid.*, p.217.
This strategy of reading could be viewed as a confirmation of the Hegelian statement which states that “all knowledge, and learning, science, and even commerce have no other object than to draw out what is inward or implicit and thus to become objective.”\textsuperscript{123} Two interrelated results follow from this Hegelian strategy of \textit{drawing out what is inward} in Plato’s philosophy. Firstly, it liberates many central Platonic themes—related to God,\textsuperscript{124} soul,\textsuperscript{125} the theory of recollection, and, most importantly to my discussion, the central Platonic theory of Ideas—from their traditional metaphysical dogmatism. Secondly, it gives to these same themes a Hegelian phenomenological dimension.

By making what is implicit in Plato’s philosophy explicit, Hegel achieves what Plato himself could not achieve, and reads into him what modern philosophers could not read. This gives the justification of Hegel’s statement when he demands that “we must stand above Plato.”\textsuperscript{126} This standing above Plato, however, cannot be done until we “acquaint ourselves with the needs of thoughtful minds in our own time.”\textsuperscript{127} This means nothing other than reading Plato through the lens of speculative logic rather than the lens of formal logic.\textsuperscript{128}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{122} Hegel writes, “In order to comprehend what development is, what may be called two different states must be distinguished. The first is what is known as capacity, power, what I call being-in-itself (\textit{potentia}, δύναμις); the second principle is that of being-for-itself, actuality (\textit{actus}, ενέργεια)….The whole variation in the development of the world in history is found on this difference.” \textit{Ibid.}, p. 21.
\item \textsuperscript{123} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 22.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Hegel says, “If, however, it is taken as a philosophic dogma on Plato’s part that God made the world, that higher beings of a spiritual kind exist, and, in the creation of the world, lent God a helping hand, we may see that this stands word for word in Plato, and yet it does not belong to his philosophy.” \textit{Ibid.}, p. 218.
\item \textsuperscript{125} Hegel says, “When in pictorial fashion he (Plato) says of the soul of man that it has a rational and irrational part, this is to be taken only in a general sense; Plato does not thereby make the philosophical assertion that the soul is compounded of two kinds of substance, two kinds of thing.” \textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{126} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 207.
\item \textsuperscript{127} \textit{Ibid.}
\item \textsuperscript{128} Hegel, in his \textit{Lectures on the History of Philosophy}, does not give specific names to the philosophers who read Plato’s dialectic through the formal logic of understanding. Even when he returns to the same point in the final chapter, The Absolute Idea, of his \textit{Science of Logic}, Hegel speaks in general about those
\end{itemize}
concrete, the latter merely displays what is separated, finite, and unreal in Plato’s philosophy.

One of the main achievements of this strategy is to rediscover in Plato’s philosophy not only the apparent negative moment in which Plato’s dialogues result, but also the negation of this negative moment. This strategy of reading, therefore, breaks with the strategy of “formal philosophy,” which, as Hegel says,

cannot look at dialectic in any other way than as being the art of confusing ordinary conceptions or even Notions, and demonstrating their nullity, thus making their result to be merely negative.\(^\text{129}\)

So, if the philosophies of formal logic stop at the negative results of Plato, Hegel’s speculative insight goes a further step to explore the hidden affirmative moment in Plato’s speculative thinking. Accordingly, and as Hegel says, “it would be perfectly

who misunderstood Plato’s real meaning of the dialectic. He writes, “Dialectic is one of those ancient sciences that have been most misunderstood in the metaphysics of the moderns, as well as by popular philosophy in general, ancient and modern alike. Diogenes Laertius says of Plato that, just as Thales was the founder of natural philosophy and Socrates of moral philosophy, so Plato was the founder of the third science pertaining to philosophy, namely, dialectic—a service which the ancient world esteemed his highest, but which often remains quite overlooked by those who have most to say about him.” G.W.F. Hegel, Science of Logic, trans. A.V. Miller (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), p. 831. Hegel here has in mind any philosopher who thinks that Plato’s dialectic makes a sharp distinction between the intelligible world of Universals and the material world of Individuals. He also has in mind the idealist philosophers who in their idealistic view of reality remain skeptical about the extra-mental reality. Leibniz and Kant might be among those Hegel means. For we know that Leibniz had contrasted Plato as an idealist with Epicurus as a materialist. See: Emily Grosholz, “Plato and Leibniz against the Materialists” in Journal of the History of Ideas (Volume 57, Number 2, April 1996), pp. 255-276. And we know that Kant as Idealist remains a skeptic about knowing the reality of the thing-in-itself. Kant criticizes Plato by writing: “The light dove, parting the air in her easy flight and feeling its resistance, might come to imagine that flight would be easier still in empty space. It was thus that Plato left the world of sense, as setting too narrow limits to our understanding, and ventured out beyond it on the wings of the ideas and into the empty space of pure understanding. He did not notice that he was making no progress by means of these endeavors, because he met with no resistance that might serve as a support on which he could rest or against which he could apply his power, in order to cause to understanding to advance.” Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, trans. Marcus Weigelt (London, Penguin Classics, 2007), A5/B9, p. 42. See further: David A. White, “Kant on Plato and The Metaphysics of Purpose” in History of Philosophy Quarterly (volume 10, Number 1, January 1993), pp.67-80. Against such formal interpretation of Plato, Hegel understands the Platonic realm of Universals as that which does not exclude but includes and sublates the individuals. Gray, in his study on Hegel and Greek thought maintains that Hegel in “the attempt to apply his own logical structure to the understanding of the course of Greek thought is responsible for most of the false theories so often lashed by critics.” J. Glenn Gray, Hegel’s Hellenic Ideal (New York: King’s Crown Press, 1941), p 37.

\(^{129}\) Hegel, Lectures on The History of Philosophy, p.248.
justifiable to return to Plato in order to learn anew from him the Idea of speculative Philosophy.”

This returning and learning from the speculative Plato pushes towards supporting Hegel’s attitude concerning the doctrine of Essence provided in his Logic, as we will see.

Hegel’s division of Plato’s works mirrors Hegel’s own division of his Encyclopaedia system. Here Hegel’s first division of Plato’s works, Dialectic, echoes Hegel’s own first division of Encyclopaedia, Logic, especially when we look at the way in which Hegel pushes it in this direction. The other two divisions of Plato’s works correspond to the other two divisions of Hegel’s Encyclopaedia. These divisions, according to Hegel, are Plato’s Philosophy of Nature, and Plato’s Philosophy of Mind, to each of which Hegel devotes a separate and long treatment.

Rather than direct my focus onto the many aspects of Plato’s philosophy upon which Hegel applied his speculative reading, I will center my analysis on one main issue related to my topic. This issue is concerned with how Hegel interprets the relationship between subjectivity and objectivity in the logic of Plato’s Dialectic. I will try to investigate whether Hegel’s Plato is a subjectivist, an objectivist, or, on the other hand, advocates the unity of subjectivity and objectivity, and how, accordingly, the relationship between essence and existence could be interpreted.

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130 Ibid., p. 207.
131 Under this division Hegel considers the Timaeus to be the most significant among Plato’s dialogues. See: Ibid., p. 246. For more details on this division, see: Ibid., pp. 268-286.
132 With regard to this division Hegel says, “The third is the philosophy of the mind—an ethical philosophy—and its representation is essentially that of a perfect state in the Republic.” Ibid., p. 246. For more details on this division, see: Ibid., pp. 287-314.
133 It is worth noting that Hegel also applies the same method of division to Aristotle’s works. Ferrarin in his study on Hegel and Aristotle writes, “Hegel presents Aristotle’s philosophy in the same order as his own encyclopaedic system….They clearly correspond not only to Hegel’s order of treatment but also to his intentions as far as the interpretation of the content is concerned.” Alfredo Ferrarin, Hegel and Aristotle, (UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.55.
134 Hegel writes, “The logical Philosophy the ancients called dialectic, and its addition to philosophy is by the ancient writers on the subject ascribed to Plato.” Ibid., p.245.
The Three Dialectical Moments in Hegel’s Platonic Dialectic

According to his view that the true speculative logic must deal only with the necessary movement of pure Notions and should result in an affirmative moment, Hegel selects from Plato’s dialogues only three that could confirm to Hegel’s speculative demand. These dialogues are *Parmenides, the Sophist,* and *the Philebus.* In these speculative dialogues, Plato, as Hegel says,

lays great stress on the dialectical point of view, which is not the point of view of the merely external, but is a living point of view whose content is formed of pure thoughts only, whose movement consists in their making only their unity in what is truly justified.

Generally speaking, the Hegelian interpretation of these Platonic speculative dialogues, on the one hand, and the Hegelian logical Notion, on the other, dialectically conclude with the same positive affirmation of the absolute unity of subjectivity/objectivity, on the one hand, and thought/reality, on the other. In his introduction to the general notion of Logic in his *Science of Logic,* Hegel is aware of this affinity between his logic and that of Plato. In the context of stressing the Notion of pure logic, Hegel writes,

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135 “We have already remarked by way of preparation that the Notion of true dialectic is to show forth the necessary movement of pure Notions, without thereby resolving these into nothing; for the result, simply expressed, is that they are this movement, and the universal is just the unity of these opposite Notions.” Hegel, *Lectures on The History of Philosophy,* p. 246.

136 *Ibid.,* p. 253. In this regard, Gadamer considers Hegel as “the discoverer of the truly speculative Platonic dialogues, the *Sophist, Parmenides,* and *Philebus,* which did not even exist for eighteenth-century philosophy and which only because of him were recognized as the real core of Plato’s philosophy in the following period, which lasted until the feeble attempts in the middle 1800s to demonstrate that these works were spurious.” Hans G. Gadamer, *Hegel’s Dialectic: Hermeneutical Studies,* Tran. P. Christopher Smith (USA: Yale University, 1976), p.7.

137 Hegel, *Lectures On The History of Philosophy,* p.255. In his *Science of Logic* Hegel emphasizes the same point: “What we are dealing with in logic is not a thinking about something which exists independently as a base for our thinking and apart from it, nor forms which are supposed to provide mere signs or distinguishing marks of truth; on the contrary, the necessary forms and self-consciousness of thought are the content and the ultimate truth itself.” G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic,* trans. A.V. Miller (London: Allen & Unwin, 1969), p. 50.
To get some idea of this [pure movement of thought] one must discard the prejudice that truth must be something tangible. Such tangibility is, for example, imported even into the Platonic Ideas which are in God's thinking, as if they are, as it were, existing things but in another world or region; while the world of actuality exists outside that region and has a substantial existence distinct from those Ideas and only through this distinction is a substantial reality. The Platonic Idea is the universal, or more definitely the Notion of an object; only in its Notion does something possess actuality and to the extent that it is distinct from its Notion it ceases to be actual and is a non-entity; the side of tangibility and sensuous self-externality belongs to this null aspect.\textsuperscript{138}

Contrary to Plato's speculative dialogues, the other Platonic dialogues, which Hegel excluded from his speculative selection, contain, in general, the one-sided unessential moments of subjectivity and objectivity which could be found in the dialectic of consciousness in the \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}.\textsuperscript{139} The resemblance here, however, is not to be taken in its perfect form but only in its general spiritual sense related to the moment of negation at which the dialectic in both cases arrives. Hegel explains these two sides of subjectivity and objectivity in Plato's dialectic:

These first two sides of the dialectic, directed as they are towards the dissolution of the particular and thus to the production of the universal, are not yet dialectic in its true form: it is a dialectic which Plato has in common with the Sophists, who understood very well how to disintegrate the particular.\textsuperscript{140}

The final conclusion of the one-sided dimension of the un-speculative Platonic dialogues is similar to the final conclusion of the one-sided dimension of consciousness in \textit{Phenomenology} in that both are not sufficient to grasp the True.\textsuperscript{141}

\textsuperscript{138}Hegel, \textit{Science of Logic}, p. 50.
\textsuperscript{140}Hegel, \textit{Lectures on The History of Philosophy}, p. 249.
\textsuperscript{141}At the end of the section of Consciousness in his \textit{Phenomenology} Hegel finds that the one-sided unessential moments of consciousness falls short of grasping the True. Hegel writes, “In the dialectic of sense-certainty, Seeing and Hearing have been lost to consciousness; and, as perception, consciousness has arrived at thoughts, which it brings together for the first time in the unconditioned universal. This, now, if it were taken as an inert simple essence, would itself in turn be nothing else than the one-sided extreme of
Thus the aim of many of Plato’s Dialogues, which conclude without any positive affirmation is to show that the immediately existent, the many things that appear to us, although we may have quite true conceptions of them, are still not in themselves, in an objective sense, the true, because they alter and are determined through their relation to something else and not through themselves; thus we must even in the sensuous individuals consider the universal, or what Plato has called the Idea.\textsuperscript{142}

This reminds us, as Gadamer shows, of the moment of the one-sided principle of sense-certainty in Hegel’s \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}.\textsuperscript{143}

Contrary to the philosophers who concern themselves only with the Platonic dialogues that conclude without any positive affirmation—whether reflected in the subjective side or the objective side of the Platonic dialectic—Hegel grasps Plato’s philosophical depth in the unity of these two sides of the dialectic. This unitary principle is inherent in the three mentioned speculative dialogues. For Hegel, it is precisely this unitary side of the dialectic which represents the truly speculative Plato. This does not mean that the one-sided principles of subjectivity and objectivity are not necessary. Rather, they are constitutive in the process of the whole. The point that concerns Hegel most is that the dialectic does not stop only at one side of subjectivity or objectivity but progresses in its dialectical movement carrying what is essential in these previous principles into their sublation moment.

Hegel’s progress from Plato’s un-speculative dialogues to Plato’s speculative dialogues reflects the progress from the stage of understanding to the stage of reason, from the stage of differences to the stage of the speculative unity of differences, from the

\textsuperscript{142} Hegel, \textit{Lectures on The History of Philosophy}, p. 247.

\textsuperscript{143} Gadamer remarks that “Plato's great accomplishment was in fact that he exposed sense certainty and the belief in it as illusion. He thus made thought so sufficient that it might strive to know the truth of reality in the pure universality of thought without interference from dense perception.” Gadamer, \textit{Hegel's Dialectic}, p.8.
stage of abstractness to the stage of concreteness. The three speculative dialogues, with which Hegel’s reading is mostly concerned, are the most difficult for the formal philosophies of understanding, “just because they deal with pure thought.”¹⁴⁴ In Plato’s speculative dialogues, thought reaches the moment of reason’s self-dialectical movement— not in its relation to the external things, which is the case of understanding, but in its relation to the pure notions of thought.

Thus, Hegel invites us to explore the depth of the Platonic philosophy within the concrete sense of the Idea, rather than the abstract sense of the Idea. The former unites the different determinations of Truth in a higher identity whereas the latter deals only with determinations in their separation and externality. This invitation is in fact an invitation to Hegel’s own view of Truth. In his Introduction to his Lectures, he states it clearly:

It is a common prejudice that the science of Philosophy deals only with abstractions and empty generalities…. In itself the Idea is really concrete, for it is the union of the different determinations. It is here that reasoned knowledge differs from mere knowledge of the understanding, and it is the business of Philosophy, as opposed to understanding to show that the Truth or the Idea does not consist in empty generalities, but in a universal; and that is within itself the particular and the determined.¹⁴⁵

The speculative universal, therefore, differs from the abstract universal in that it does not exclude the particular but includes it. Accordingly, if the Platonic Absolute world of essences is the truth of the particular determinate existents, the Absolute must be viewed as a concrete universality rather than abstract universality; that is to say, a universality which includes existence in an immanent way rather than excludes it in a transcendent way.

¹⁴⁴ Hegel, Lectures on The History of Philosophy, p. 253.
¹⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 24.
The Absolute of Plato, as being the one in itself and identical with itself, is at the same time concrete in itself, in that it is a movement returning into itself, and is eternally at home with itself.\textsuperscript{146}

This “movement returning into itself” makes the “difference” within Plato’s Absolute an immanent difference rather than transcendent difference. That is to say, the moment of “opposition” within Plato’s Absolute is an internal moment of opposition, and not an external moment of opposition. The former moment is speculative and exists for an internal reflection/reason while the latter is empirical and exists for an external reflection/understanding. Hegel thus presents Plato within the speculative horizon of the internal reflection of thought in which the Absolute opposes itself and distinguishes itself from itself. That is to say, the Absolute determines itself by negating itself; its determination is its own negation. Viewed from this perspective, the Absolute, which Hegel now discovers in Plato, is a rediscovery of the Absolute that Hegel already introduces in his \textit{Phenomenology} by saying:

\begin{quote}
It is itself and its opposite in one unity. Only thus is it difference as internal difference, or difference in its own self….The two differentiated terms both subsist; they are in themselves as opposed, i.e., each is the opposite of itself; each has its other within it and they are only one single unity.\textsuperscript{147}
\end{quote}

Hegel’s interpretation of Plato’s dialectic leads, therefore, to the dialectical construction of the opposite moments of subjectivity and objectivity. While he is aware of the fluid nature of these moments in the Platonic dialectic, Hegel’s aim is to conceptually grasp their internal organic unity within the dialectical movement of thought. In order to do so, Hegel does not consider the Platonic dialogues as merely an external reproduction of the previous philosophies, but as a unity of what is most fundamental in them.

\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., p. 227.
\textsuperscript{147} Hegel, \textit{Phenomenology of Spirit}, pp. 160-161.
Plato’s Dialogues are not to be considered as if their aim were to put forward a verity of philosophies, nor as if Plato’s were an eclectic philosophy derived from them; it forms rather the knot in which these abstract and one-sided principles have become truly united in a concrete fashion.  

These abstract and one-sided principles are the one-sidedness of subjectivity inherited from Parmenides, on the one hand, and the one-sidedness of objectivity inherited from Heraclitus, on the other hand. For Hegel, the former resembles the logical moment of Being, whereas the latter resembles the logical moment of Becoming. The Parmenidean Being expresses the static essential side of Truth, while the Heraclitean Becoming expresses the dynamic existential side of Truth. These are the two moments of Truth which formal philosophies of understanding treat as two separated principles, as two opposite moments that could not be united. In contrast, Hegel’s dialectical interpretation of Plato shows that, although these two principles are introduced by Plato expressly and separately in many dialogues, which are the ones we have mentioned above, there is still another implicit principle in his dialectic in which these opposite principles are indeed united:

Plato grasped the Absolute as the unity of Being and non-being—in Becoming, as Heraclitus says—or of the one and the many. He further now took into the objective dialectic of Heraclitus the Eleatic dialectic, which is the external endeavour of the subject to show forth contradiction.

Thus, Hegel’s Platonic dialectic introduces not only two moments but three moments; two of them are explicitly stated by Plato and the third is already implicit. The two explicit moments are subjectivity and objectivity, and they reflect respectively the moments of affirmation and negation. The third moment is the unity of these previous

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149 Hegel explains, “The concrete is the unity of diverse determinations and principles; these in order to be perfected, in order to come definitely before the consciousness, must first of all be presented separately.” Ibid., p. 210.
150 Ibid., p. 251.
moments of subjectivity and objectivity. This latter synthetic moment reflects the moment of the negation of the negation, the sublation of contradiction. Here we reach the summit of the Hegelian interpretation of Plato by which Hegel does not only stand above Plato, but also above the modern philosophies of subjective idealism and objective idealism, as well as the theological interpretation of Plato. For Hegel, this implied moment of sublation in Plato’s dialectic is exactly what the Platonic Universal means, and it is exactly this moment which formal philosophy could not understand. He writes,

The universal is hence determined as that which resolves and has resolved the contradictions in itself, and hence it is the concrete in itself; thus this sublation of contradiction is the affirmative. Dialectic in this higher sense is the really Platonic; as speculative it does not conclude with a negative result, for it demonstrates the union of opposites which have annulled themselves. Here begins what is difficult for the understanding to grasp.  

The important point that concerns my discussion is the notion of the immanency of the universal in which the opposites are absorbed. Hegel does not see in Plato a transcendent universal that exists beyond the existentiality of the apparent opposites of existence. In contrast, Hegel sees in Plato the immanent universal that has within it its own resolved contradictions. This leads me to a disagreement with Gadamer who argues that Hegel’s reading of Plato

relies far more upon the principles of the Cartesian method, on the learning of the Catechism, and on the Bible. Thus Hegel’s admiration for the Ancients is intertwined in a curious way with his feeling that modern truth shaped by Christianity and its renewal in the Reformation is superior.

151 Hegel thinks that he stands above the wrong interpretations of Plato and reveals Plato’s real meaning, but he also thinks that he stands above Plato himself. For he reveals the real Plato in more thoughtful and systematic way than Plato himself does. For Hegel, some of Plato’s deficiencies are simply a function of the time in history in which Plato lived (e.g., his use of myths, which I discuss later on in this chapter).
152 Ibid., p.249.
In contrast to Gadamer’s view, it is of this Cartesian principle of subjectivity guided by the knowledge of understanding, as well as of this Christian dogma of a transcendent world guided by intuitive knowledge,\textsuperscript{154} which Hegel finds the true speculative Plato to be free, or at least, Hegel tries to free Plato from it. The difficulty that Hegel mentions in the above passage refers to the insufficiency of the philosophies of understanding which operate within the sphere of abstract essence, including that of Descartes. Within this sphere of abstract essence, knowledge stops merely at the level of separation, at the level of contradiction, at the level of duality. It cannot go a further step as to unite these opposite determinations. That is to say, the abstract knowledge of understanding produces formal universals which cannot move beyond the limitation of essence governed by the abstract law of non-contradiction. It cannot solve the contradiction since it will violate its abstract law of identity. The result is the production of abstract or empty absolute—a God which is void from the richness of reality.

Hegel warns his readers of the deficiency of this one-sidedness of thought right from the beginning of his introduction to his \textit{Lectures on the History of Philosophy}:

\begin{quote}
Were the Idea abstract, it would simply be the highest conceivable existence, and that would be all that could be said of it; but such a God is the product of the understanding of modern times. What is true is rather found in motion, in a process, however, in which there is rest; difference, while it lasts, is but a temporary condition, through which comes unity, full and concrete.\textsuperscript{155}
\end{quote}

The dismissing of the internal relations between objects and the focus on the externality alone cannot reveal the inner truth of an object. Hegel’s Platonic dialectic sublates this

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{154} In this regard, Hyppolite says, “Theology was realizing the intelligible beyond intelligence. Hegelian logic recognizes neither the thing-in-itself nor the intelligible world. The absolute is not thought anywhere else than in the phenomenal world.” Jean Hyppolite, \textit{Logic and Existence}, trans. Leonard Lawlor & Amit Sen (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), p.58.

\textsuperscript{155} Hegel, \textit{Lectures on The History of Philosophy}, p.25.
\end{footnotesize}
The speculative moment of externality by recognizing interiority as a constitutive principle in the reality of the Idea.

The insufficiency of the one-sided principle of subjectivity is not found in Plato’s dialectic and this why Hegel asserts that

the idealism of Plato must not be thought of as being subjective idealism, and as that false idealism which has made its appearance in modern times, and which maintains that we do not learn anything, are not influenced from without, but that all conceptions are derived from out of the subject.\(^{156}\)

This passage implies an attack on the innate ideas of the Cartesian subjectivity, of which the idea of abstract God is substantial. And Hegel clearly refuses to attribute the notion of the innate ideas to Plato’s theory of recollection:

We must not think that the bald conception of innate ideas is hereby indicated—such an expression implies the existence of ideas by nature, as though our thoughts were in part already implanted, and had in part a natural existence which did not first produce itself through the movement of the mind.\(^{157}\)

Subjectivity and objectivity in Hegel’s Plato are just immanent moments of the development of the universal, which needs more determination to become more concrete. The speculative moment of Truth cannot be achieved until the previous moments of subjectivity and objectivity, thought and reality, essence and existence, are sublated to a higher moment in which the contradictions are dissolved.

**The Hegelian Refreshment of the Platonic World of Essences**

The subjective principle of Truth in Hegel’s Plato is, therefore, neither that of Parmenides nor that of the false subjective idealism. The Platonic subjectivity does not reflect only the universal static side of essence. Nor does it dismiss the objective side of

\(^{156}\) Ibid., p. 240.  
\(^{157}\) Ibid., p. 227.
existence reflected in the sensible world. Nor is the Platonic objectivity that of Heraclitus
or the objective idealism, in which the dialectical role of subjectivity is absent. For Hegel,

Plato’s highest form is the identity of Being and non-being. The true is that which
is, but this Being is not without negation. Plato’s object is thus to show that non-
being is an essential determination in Being, and that the simple, self-identical,
partakes of other-being.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 263.}

If Plato’s object, as Hegel now says, is “to show that non-being is an essential
determination in Being, and that the simple, self-identical, partakes of other-being,” then
Hyppolite seems mistaken when he asserts that

Platonic alterity allows for an immobile dialectic, a dialectic that still does not
have the self for its driving force. Hegelian dialectic, however, deepens alterity
into opposition and opposition into contradiction.\footnote{Hyppolite, \textit{Logic and Existence}, p. 113.}

But Hegel, as we saw, highlights the moment of negation which already is implicit within
the conceptual realm of the rational Platonic Universal. It is this internal negation of the
Platonic Universal which constitutes the determination of the Absolute, and, by way of
mediation, it constitutes the determination of the particulars. By negating itself, the
Platonic Universal posits “difference” as an essential element within itself, and, as thus,
“non-being” becomes “an essential determination in Being”. This makes the important
point that negation is both within the external existential world and within the internal
essential world, in both of which the Absolute is the mediation. By negating itself as a
transcendent essence, the Absolute posits itself as immanent existence. That is to say,
both essence and existence contain their own negation by means of the mediation of the
Absolute. The ontological contradiction of essence parallels the ontological contradiction
of existence; each of which contains and reflects the other. On the other hand, the
epistemological contradiction of subjectivity parallels that of objectivity, each of which contains and reflects the other—each of which negates and sublates the other.160

If this reading of the Hegelian interpretation of the dialectical movement of essence/existence-subjectivity/objectivity truly reflects the really Platonic dialectic, then the traditional metaphysical view of the central theory of the Platonic Ideas with its implied static essentialism opens up a different dimension. The point here is to oppose the dynamicity of the Platonic Universal with the static nature of the formal Universal of the philosophies of understanding. Whereas the formal Universal is confined within species and within the law of abstract identity, Hegel sees the dynamic unity of differences, the dissolution of contradictions, and the true expression of what is dialectically more determinate, in the Platonic speculative Universal. And while the formal Universal is only concerned with one side of Truth—whether it is the subjective or the objective, the essential or the existential—Hegel’s Platonic Universal is the moment in which not only the subjective essential moment of Truth, but also its objective existential moment is absorbed and sublated. Hegel writes,

The Idea is nothing else than that which is known to us more familiarly by the name of the Universal, regarded, however, not as the formal Universal, which is only a property of things, but as implicitly and explicitly existent, as reality, as that which alone is true…. Through the presentation of his Ideas, Plato opened up the intellectual world, which, however, is not beyond reality, in another place, but is the real world.161

160 While it is possible to find examples from Plato’s dialogues for the contradiction in the external world of existence—when existence is regarded as the world of becoming, change, and opinion—it is difficult to find clear examples for the contradiction in Plato’s world of essences. This is exactly what makes Hegel’s reading of Plato look unique in comparison with the common reading of Plato. Hegel’s discovery of the self-rebellion or the contradiction in Plato’s world of essences is performed by means of applying his speculative dialectic on Plato’s dialogues. Since my dissertation is on how Hegel understands Plato more than on what Plato himself says, I prefer to keep the results of my analysis of Hegel’s Plato without confusing them with examples from Plato.

161 Hegel, Lectures on The History of Philosophy, p. 226.
To Hegel, therefore, the Platonic world of essences is not a transcendental static world that is totally free from contradiction and totally isolated from the objective existences of the phenomenal world. If essence is transcendent in a second world, then it cannot be distinguished, and that kind of undistinguishable world, for Hegel, is dead. Hegel thus breathes life into the traditional and false views of the Platonic static world of essences by stressing the activity of the mutual, dialectical relationships of essence

/existence, reality/appearance, subject/object:

The undistinguished is the lifeless; the active, living, concrete universal is hence what inwardly distinguishes itself, but yet remains free in so doing. Now this determinateness consists in the one being identical with itself in the other, in the many, in what is distinguished. This constitutes the only truth, and the only interest for knowledge in what is called Platonic philosophy, and if this is not known, the main point of it is not known. 162

This passage makes the decisive point: Plato’s world of essences inwardly distinguishes itself. That is to say, essence includes its negation within itself as a part of its definition or determination. Plato’s essence thus reaches the state of essence in Hegel’s Logic Encyclopaedia, where essence, as Hegel writes, “is negativity relating itself to itself, and hence by being self-repulsion from itself; thus it contains the determination of distinction essentially.”163

With Hegel, the ideal Platonic world of essences is thus no longer a world of subjective essences that are totally beyond the objectivity of existence. Essence, as speculative universal of reason rather than formal universal of understanding, gets its own identity with itself in the particular objective world of existence, “in the other, in the many, in what is distinguished.” Hegel’s Plato is, therefore, far away from being

162 Ibid., p. 264.
considered as essentialist in the Parmenidean sense or in the subjective idealism sense. Nor can it be considered as existentialist in the Heraclitean sense or in the empirical objective idealism sense. Accordingly, the relationship between essences and their objective real existence is not merely a relation of separation and opposition, a relation of priority and posterity—as the traditional views say. In other words, the relationship between essence and existence is not a relation of transcendence, but a relation of immanency. It is a dialectical relation of concreteness and development, determination and sublation.

By not confining contradiction within the objective realm of existence but rather making it equally constitute the main element in the subjective realm of essence, Hegel radically departs not only from the old traditional interpretation of Plato but also from any transcendental ontology. Having admitted qualitative differences within the traditional view of the absoluteness of essence, Hegel discovers in Plato’s speculative philosophy an ontology that breaks with the transcendence, with the beyond, with the thing-in-itself.

This union of what is different, of Being and non-being, of one and many &, which takes place without a mere transition from one to another, constitutes the inmost reality and true greatness of Platonic philosophy. This determination is the esoteric element in Platonic philosophy, and the other is the exoteric.

If Truth in Hegel’s Plato finds its highest dialectical sense in the unity of differences, in the unity of subjectivity and objectivity, and in the unity of reality and appearance, it also

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164 If my reading of Hegel’s Plato does not reflect only Hegel’s interpretation of Plato but also Hegel’s own account of the immanency of essence with existence, then it agrees with Deleuze’s review of Hyppolite’s Logic and Existence. Deleuze summarizes Hyppolite’s Hegel by saying: “Philosophy must be ontology, it cannot be anything else; but there is no ontology of essence, there is only an ontology of sense […] Thus, that there is no second world is, according to Hyppolite, the major proposition of Hegel’s Logic, because it is at the same time the reason for transforming metaphysics into logic, and for the transformation of logic into the logic of sense.” Gilles Deleuze, “Review of Jean Hyppolite’s Logic and Existence” in Hyppolite, Logic and Existence, pp.191-193.

165 Hegel, Lectures on The History of Philosophy, pp. 264-265.
finds its highest moment in the unity of essence and existence. “Essence therefore,” as the *Logic Encyclopaedia* concludes, “is not behind or beyond appearance, but since it is the essence that exists, existence is appearance.”166

This result, again, disagrees with Hyppolite who says that, “by admitting negation, he (Plato) wanted to avoid falling into contrariety and contradiction. […] In contrast, Hegelian dialectic will push this alterity up to contradiction.” 167 According to my analysis, the contradiction is already implied in Hegel’s Plato’s world of essences. It is this Hegelian detection of the contradiction within the Platonic world of essences which allows Hegel’s Plato to resolve the tension between the universal subjective world of essence and the particular objective world of existence. Hegel, rather, pushes the Platonic relationship of (essence/existence)-(reality/appearance) up to the relationship of subjectivity and objectivity. In its highest dialectical moment, this latter relationship, like any other relationship, is the “union of what is different.”

Having discovered in Plato’s essences the implied inner dialectical nature of reason’s concepts, Hegel shows that this inner dialectical nature of reason constitutes reason’s own driving principle. It is through this inner activity of reason that reason overcomes the contradictions of understanding and becomes able to capture the dialectical inner nature of the objective external world of existences. As a result, nothing can escape the all-comprehensive dynamicity of dialectical reason, not even the thing-in-itself.

This analysis of Hegel’s reading of Plato disagrees with Julie Maybee’s reading. Whereas Maybee argues that Hegel uses Kant against Plato, or, as she says, “Kant’s view

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that reason itself is dialectical provides the key to responding to Plato’s argument.\textsuperscript{168} my reading shows that Hegel uses Plato against Kant, particularly against Kant’s dogmatic unknowable thing-in-itself. The moment of the \textit{esoteric} sublation in Plato’s dialectic, which Hegel makes \textit{exoteric}, explains how the unity between thought and reality is possible. This point reflects the break with the Kantian dualism of appearance and the thing-in-itself. For Hegel’s Plato

grasped in all its truth Socrates’ great principle that ultimate reality lies in consciousness, since, according to him, the absolute is in thought, and all reality is Thought. He does not understand by this a one-sided thought, nor what is understood by \textit{false idealism} which makes thought once more step aside and contemplate itself as conscious thought, and as in opposition to reality; it is the thought which embraces in an absolute unity reality as well as thinking, \textit{the Notion and its reality in the movement of science}, as the Idea of a scientific whole.\textsuperscript{169}

Maybee’s error, Hegel would argue, consists in her focusing on the \textit{exoteric} element of the Platonic philosophy rather than its \textit{esoteric} element.\textsuperscript{170} She reads Plato through the lens of reflective understanding rather than the lens of speculative reason. This kind of reading mistakenly places Hegel’s view of Plato within the same traditional views of Plato, which consider the world of Ideas in its eternal fixity. She says,

Rationality itself, he [Plato] assumed, must be constant and unchanging, static and fixed. For Hegel, Plato’s assumption can be rejected by pairing the messy world with a new conception of rationality that is not constant, static and unchanging, but contains its own moving principle, contradiction and opposition, and so is capable of overgrasping the messiness, the comings and goings, the imperfections of world.\textsuperscript{171}


\textsuperscript{169} Hegel, \textit{Lectures on the History of Philosophy}, pp. 198-199.

\textsuperscript{170} Maybee traditionally describes Plato’s Forms by saying: “The Forms or rational concepts must be in another world or in a separate realm—the realm of the Forms.” Maybee, \textit{Picturing Hegel}, p.9.

\textsuperscript{171} \textit{Ibid.}, p 36.
Against such interpretations of Hegel’s Plato, my reading shows that the view that rationality contains negation and that thereby it is changeable is not a new concept that Hegel imposed upon Plato’s theory of Ideas, but rather a concept that he discovered in the Platonic dialectic. If Hegel uses Kant, he uses him not in an argument against the speculative Plato, but in one against the false traditional views of Plato. Both these false views of Plato and the transcendental idealism view of Kant are sublated in a higher moment of speculative Idealism that is peculiar to Hegel’s system.\(^{172}\)

Moreover, I disagree with Sadler who writes that Hegel, by understanding Plato as the discoverer (albeit still in quasi-mythological garb) of ‘the concept’, had made it possible, through the equation concept = \(eidos\) = category, to understand Plato as a ‘Kantian’ philosopher.\(^{173}\)

Such views confine Hegel’s Plato within the strict limitation of subjectivity and within the strict limitation of understanding. On the contrary, my view presents Hegel’s Plato within the free activity of the unlimited speculative reason, in which the mutual dynamic relationships of subjectivity and objectivity, reality and appearance, essence and existence are manifested. It is not surprising, therefore, that Hegel returns to Plato at the end of his *Science of Logic* where Hegel gives his own account of The Absolute Idea. Hegel, in contrasting his absolute method of the speculative reflection with the external reflection of understanding, writes,

\[
\text{The procedure of the finite cognition of the understanding here is to take up again, equally externally, what it has left out in its creation of the universal by a process of abstraction. The absolute method, on the contrary, does not behave like}
\]

\(^{172}\) In his tracing of the origin of Hegel’s Logic, Baillie shows how the principle of objective universality in Greek thought and the principle of subjectivity in Kant’s philosophy influenced Hegel’s own intellectual development: “The antithesis between Kantian doctrine and the Greek spirit is seen to be no mere superficial contrast, but a deep-seated opposition of fundamental principle…. Now there seem little doubt that it was Hegel’s appreciation of the full significance of this opposition, and the struggle to resolve it and harmonies the elements it contained, that determined his further development.” J.B.Baillie, *The Origin and Significance of Hegel’s Logic* (London: Macmillan Company, 1901), p. 18.

external reflection but takes the determinate element from its own subject matter, since it is itself that subject matter’s immanent principle and soul. This is what Plato demanded of cognition, that it should consider things in and for themselves, that is, should consider them partly in their universality, but also that it should not stray away from their catching at circumstances, examples and comparisons, but should keep before it solely the things themselves and bring before consciousness what is immanent in them.\textsuperscript{174}

The Hegelian Transition to Aristotle

According to Hegel, Plato’s three speculative dialogues nonetheless still suffer from a kind of deficiency: they do not “show forth the necessary movement of pure Notion,”\textsuperscript{175} due to some external considerations from which Plato could not perfectly free himself. Hegel’s reinterpretation of Plato’s speculative dialectic is an overcoming of this deficiency. He argues that this deficiency could be found in any philosophy that treats the movement of pure thought not within its internal pure notions alone, but also with relation to external things. In accordance with his logic, Hegel demands that speculative concepts must necessarily define themselves in relation to each other, rather than in relation to external things. Based on this demand, Hegel dialectically purifies Plato’s dialectic by dropping out any external material consideration in the movement of thought. By doing so, his dialectical interpretation pushes the Platonic dialectic towards the very final ends of the \textit{Logical} moment of the Notion in which essence and existence are absorbed, on the one hand, and the \textit{Phenomenological} moment of the Absolute Knowing in which subjectivity and objectivity are dissolved, on the other.

In the preface of his \textit{Phenomenology}, Hegel writes,

I can bear in mind that if at times the excellence of Plato's philosophy has been held to lie in his scientifically valueless myths, there have also been times, even called times of ecstatic dreaming, when Aristotle's philosophy was esteemed for

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[\textsuperscript{174}] Hegel, \textit{Science of Logic}, p. 830.
\item[\textsuperscript{175}] Hegel, \textit{Lectures on The History of Philosophy}, p.246.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
its speculative depth, and Plato's *Parmenides* (surely the greatest artistic achievement of the ancient dialectic) was regarded as the true disclosure and positive expression of the divine life, and times when, despite the obscurity generated by ecstasy, this misunderstood ecstasy was in fact supposed to be nothing else than the pure Notion.\(^\text{176}\)

Although the speculative moment of the unity of subjectivity and objectivity, essentiality and existentiality, in which Truth gets its fuller determination, is implicitly present in Plato’s speculative dialectic, Plato himself was not conscious enough of it. Plato’s mythical presentation of thought, Hegel argues, is behind this failure.

But this failure is not only concerned with Plato but also with those philosophers who misapprehend him.\(^\text{177}\) Against those philosophers who overlap the form and content of Plato’s philosophy, Hegel insists that we must keep “the form in which Plato has propounded his ideas…distinct from Philosophy proper.”\(^\text{178}\) Hegel, therefore, excludes myth from being an adequate form of truth on the basis that “the merit of Philosophy consists alone in the fact that truth is expressed in the form of the Notion.”\(^\text{179}\) He writes,

The myth is always a mode of representation which, as belonging to an earlier stage, introduces sensuous images, which are directed to imagination, not to thought; in this, however, the activity of thought is suspended, it cannot yet establish itself by its own power, and so is not yet free. …[W]hen the Notion attains its full development, it has no more need of the myth.\(^\text{180}\)

\(^\text{176}\) Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 71. Regarding this passage, Rockmore remarks, “His (Hegel’s) allusions here to the speculative depth of Aristotle and to Plato's *Parmenides* as the greatest example of ancient dialectic indicate his understanding of the relation of his position to the ancient tradition.” Tom Rockmore, *Cognition: An Introduction to Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), p.21.

\(^\text{177}\) Hegel writes, “However much, therefore, Plato’s mythical presentation of Philosophy is praised, and however attractive it is in his Dialogues, it yet proves a source of misapprehensions; and it is one of these misapprehensions, if Plato’s myths are held to be what is most excellent in his philosophy.” Hegel, *Lectures on The History of Philosophy*, p.216.


This critique of myth is also a critique directed to sensation, feeling, perception, and all forms of religious dogmas.\textsuperscript{181} What stands above these presentations, which parallel to some extent those stages in the \textit{Phenomenology} through which consciousness dialectically passes forward, is what Hegel seeks in Plato’s speculative dialectic. He warns his modern readers\textsuperscript{182} not to be captured by these forms of Truth even if such a representation of Plato’s philosophy can be supported by Plato’s own words; but one who knows what Philosophy is, cares little for such expressions, and recognizes what was Plato’s true meaning.\textsuperscript{183}

The Hegelian dialectical reading of Plato, thus far, leads us beyond what looks more interesting but less true to what is less interesting but more true in Plato’s dialogues. And, as Hegel says, “If we read with interest what is speculative, we are apt to overlook what is most beautiful.”\textsuperscript{184} In terms of the form of thought, the Hegelian task with Aristotle seems easier than with Plato, since Aristotle’s mode of presentation is free from

\textsuperscript{181} Hegel’s critique of myth, however, comes under attack from some scholars. Gray, for example, says that “Hegel’s absorption with logic prevented him from doing justice to the poetic insights of Plato.” Gray, \textit{Hegel’s Hellenic Ideal}, p.78. Markus Gabriel, from his side, concludes that Blumenberg “is right in stressing the fact that Hegel’s closure of reflection upon itself is only expressible in the form of mythology. When Hegel speaks about the ‘circle of circles,’ ‘the Bacchanalian revel,’ or the ‘Eleusinian mysteries,’ and so on in order to elucidate the gesture of logos’ closure upon itself, he himself makes use of the mythological unity of form and content.” Markus Gabriel, “The Mythological Being of Reflection-An Essay on Hegel, Schelling, and the Contingency of Necessity” in Markus Gabriel & Slavoj Zizek, \textit{Mythology, Madness, and Laughter: Subjectivity in German Idealism}, (London: Continuum, 2009), p.64. Gabriel also says, “Shelling insists that Hegel is not capable of overcoming mythology precisely because he reads logical contents into the form of mythology instead of self-consciously creating a new mythology.” \textit{Ibid.}, p.65. Ferrarin in his \textit{Hegel and Aristotle} concludes that “one could regret that Hegel never makes a philosophical use of his friend Creuzer’s Symbolik and its interpretation of myths apart from his aesthetics and philosophy of history.” Ferrarin, \textit{Hegel and Aristotle}, p.53. For me, it is exactly this Hegelian dialectical absorption with logic that revealed the poetic insights of Plato. The imaginative consciousness in Hegel’s systematic view of Truth is better understood as a dialectical moment among other dialectical moments of thought that furnish the concrete development of the Idea. For more on the importance of the imagination in Hegel’s philosophy see: Jennifer A. Bates, \textit{Hegel’s Theory of Imagination}, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004).

\textsuperscript{182} We find Gadamer, for instance, takes this Hegelian advance seriously in his reading of Plato’s \textit{Timaeus}: “Thus a task is precisely set for us. We must make up for what has not been done and, in penetrating behind the form of myth, we must make clear its relationship to Plato’s dialectic as a whole.” Hans Georg Gadamer, \textit{Dialogue and Dialectic: Eight Hermeneutical Studies on Plato}, trans. P. Christopher Smith (Binghamton: The Vail-Ballou Press, 1980), pp. 158-159.

\textsuperscript{183} Hegel, \textit{Lectures on the History of Philosophy}, p. 218.

\textsuperscript{184} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 252.
myth. However, with regard to the content of thought, the task with Aristotle is different.

“Aristotle,” as Hegel confesses,

is much more difficult to comprehend than Plato. In the latter there are myths, and we can pass over the dialectic and yet say that we have read Plato; but with Aristotle we enter at once upon what is speculative.\(^{185}\)

**Hegel’s Strategy of Reading Aristotle**

Hegel’s strategy of reading Aristotle heads in the same direction as that of his reading of Plato. It is less a critical reading of Aristotle than a critique directed, implicitly or explicitly, at other philosophies—especially the modern idealism of his age.\(^{186}\)

Somewhat paradoxically, Hegel sees in Aristotle, as the founder of the law of identity, the rich philosophic content that he can employ against the modern philosophies of identity:

> With Aristotle it is thus no *dry identity* of the abstract understanding that is indicated, for he distinguishes subjective and objective precisely and decisively. Not *dead identity* such as this, but energy, is for him what is most to be reverenced, God.\(^{187}\)

This passage reflects the interpretive conclusion Hegel gives to Aristotle’s Absolute—God—after a long discussion that mainly centers on the Aristotelian relationship of (matter/form)-(potentiality/actuality).

What strikes me most about Hegel’s reading of Aristotle is the difference between Hegel’s beginning and his ending. Hegel begins with the traditional ontological duality of matter/form--/potentiality/actuality and ends with the modern epistemological dualities of

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\(^{186}\) In his study of Hegel and Aristotle, Ferrarin writes, “It is easy to show that Hegel’s praise of the ancients and of Aristotle in particular is no resuscitation of dead dogs, to invoke Lessing’s remark about Spinoza that was later taken by Marx, but the necessary counterbalance to Kantian and Fichtean subjectivism.” Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle*, p. 47. He also says, “In the Lectures on the Metaphysics [of Aristotle] Hegel curiously argues polemically against Schelling by showing the superiority of the *energeia* of the Aristotelian God (the unity with itself that realizes itself in its self-objectification) over the abstract system of identity.” *Ibid.*, p. 145.

subjectivity/objectivity. This Hegelian circular reduction makes the difference between
the beginning as ontology and the ending as epistemology seem problematic. This
reduction finds its ultimate point of view in Hegel’s modern appropriation of the
Aristotelian Absolute:

We in our way of speaking designate the Absolute, the True, as the unity of
subjectivity and objectivity, which is therefore neither the one nor the other, and
yet just as much the one as the other; and Aristotle busied himself with these same
speculations, the deepest forms of speculations even of the present day, and he
has expressed them with the greatest definiteness.\textsuperscript{188}

In light of Hegel’s high estimation of the speculative Aristotle, I will, firstly,
follow the dialectical steps by which Hegel reaches this account of Aristotle. Secondly,
within the horizon of this Hegelian reducibility of matter/form-potentiality/actuality to
subjectivity/objectivity, I will try to offer an interpretive reading of the relationship
between essence and existence.

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Hegel presents Aristotle as “one of the richest and deepest of all the scientific
geniuses that have as yet appeared—a man whose like no later age has ever yet
produced.”\textsuperscript{189} As with Plato’s philosophy, Hegel considers Aristotle’s philosophy a
victim of many misapprehensions throughout the course of the history of philosophy. For
Hegel, Aristotelian philosophy has been falsely dissolved into five different forms. These
false forms started with the Peripatetic and passed through the New-Platonic, the

\textsuperscript{188} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 345. Hegel, moreover, says, “Thus, although Aristotle does not express himself in modern
philosophic language, he has yet throughout the same fundamental theory; he speaks not of a special kind
equates the Absolute Idea (his own highest reality and truth), with ‘the \textit{noesis noeseos} which Aristotle long
ago termed the supreme form of the idea…. For Hegel, not only was this Aristotle’s most profound answer
to the question of being \textit{qua} being, but it was his own answer to essentially the same question. Hegel had
not, so he considered, answered this question differently, but had clarified both question and answer at a
higher level of consciousness, more ‘dialectically’ than had been possible for Aristotle.” Sadler, \textit{Heidegger
and Aristotle: the Question of Being}, p.9.

\textsuperscript{189} Hegel, \textit{Lectures on the History of Philosophy}, p. 314.
Scholastic, the Renaissance, and ended with the “false modern ideas and conception,” of Aristotelian philosophy. None of these forms grasped “the deep and properly speaking speculative side of Aristotelian philosophy.” Their main fault consists in viewing Aristotle as a realist who is opposed to Plato and whose philosophy is, as Hegel says, “mere empiricism—Locke’s philosophy at its worst.” Hegel’s task is to purify Aristotle from these false forms and to discover in him what the others could not discover. By doing so, Hegel thinks that he could reinstate Aristotle in his proper stage within the concrete development of Truth.

Before I proceed into Hegel’s interpretation of Aristotle, it is important to mention a fact related to Hegel’s survey of the different historical forms of Aristotelian philosophy. The point I raise here is related more specifically to the schools of Peripatetic philosophy. Hegel mentions only the Roman philosopher Cicero. Moreover, Hegel generally characterizes Peripatetic philosophy as a “form of a popular philosophy, in which attention was principally directed to natural history and to morals.” Hegel here entirely excludes many Islamic Peripatetic philosophers such as Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Avicenna, and Averroes. Interestingly, the traditional Aristotelian view of the Islamic Peripatetic philosophers, especially Al-Farabi and Avicenna, is in agreement with Hegel’s view that there is no essential opposition between Plato and Aristotle. Al-Farabi, for instance, devotes a well-known book, The Harmonization of the Two Opinions of the Two Sages: Plato the Divine and Aristotle, to the argument that the two philosophers

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190 Ibid., p. 327.
191 Ibid., p. 327.
192 See: Ibid., pp.315-316.
193 Ibid., p. 327.
Plato and Aristotle are in agreement on their main principles. “So let it be clear to you,” writes Al-Farabi, “that, in what they [Plato and Aristotle] presented, their purpose is the same, and that they intended to offer one and the same philosophy.”\textsuperscript{195}

I raise this point because Sadra is considered as the inheritor and the complement of the Islamic Peripatetic tradition, though in a different direction. This point, however, will be examined more when I conceptually contrast Hegel with Sadra in the next chapter.

\textbf{From Substance to Subject}

For Hegel, Aristotle does not confine his thought only within one determined dimension of truth. Aristotle, rather, is open to different aspects of determinations in their reference to the whole. Although his starting point is from the external empirical facts in their particular determinations, from existence in its independent objectivity, Aristotle keeps holding truth in its wholeness which includes all its determinations. Aristotle, as Hegel maintains, “does not omit determinations; he does not hold now to one determination and then to another, but takes them as all in one.”\textsuperscript{196}

Here Hegel presents Aristotle as an observer and a thinker at the same time. That is, Hegel’s Aristotle is not only an observer, who loses himself in the objectivity of existence, nor is he a thinker who only sinks in the abstract subjectivity of essence. If the mere observer consumes himself in the existentiality of the objective world while the thinker consumes himself in the subjectivity of the essential and ideal world, Aristotle, as


\textsuperscript{196} Hegel, \textit{Lectures on The History of Philosophy}, p. 329.
a speculative philosopher, finds truth in the dialectical relationship between objectivity and subjectivity, existentiality and essentiality:

For Aristotle’s empiricism is a totality because he always leads it back again immediately to speculation; he may thus be said to be a perfect empiricist, yet at the same time a thinking one.  

With this speculative picture of Aristotle in view, Hegel puts us in the midst of the three interrelated moments of the movement of thought: sensation, understanding, and reason. Regardless of the different details of his tracing of these moments in his Phenomenology and his Logic, Hegel’s tracing of these moments in Aristotle’s philosophy reaches similar results. For Hegel, Aristotle’s account of truth is neither sensation in its immediate presentation of identity, nor understanding in its mediated presentation of non-identity. Hegel’s Aristotle rises up to the sublated moment of reason in which the identity of “identity and non-identity” is the true presentation of the Idea. For Hegel, the three epistemological, Aristotelian moments of sensation, understanding, and reason interweave with the three ontological, Aristotelian modes of substance (Sensible Substance, Human Nous, and Divine Thought). If these two sides of epistemology and ontology are taken speculatively and not abstractly, they reflect the logical aspect of the progressively unfolding of the Idea.

To see how Hegel reaches the above mentioned point, I will proceed with his investigation of the four Aristotelian principles of substance:

In this ontology or, as we call it, logic, he [Aristotle] investigates and minutely distinguishes four principles: first, determination or quality as such, the wherefore of anything, essence or form; secondly, the matter; thirdly, the principle of motion; and fourthly, the principle of final cause, or of the good.

\[^{197} \text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 330.\]
\[^{198} \text{See: Ibid., p. 338.}\]
\[^{199} \text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 335.\]
There are two interesting features in this passage. The first one is Hegel’s approximation of Aristotle’s ontology—Aristotle’s science of being qua being—with Hegel’s speculative logic. The second one is Hegel’s equation of Aristotle’s “form” with “quality as such,” which he further equates with “essence.”

Hegel’s characterization of Aristotle’s “essence” as that which constitutes the “quality as such” of substance—as that determination without which substance ceases to be—problematises the status of the category of “quality” in Hegel’s Logic. In Hegel’s logical doctrine of Being, the characterization of the Hegelian “Quality” looks similar to the Aristotelian “essence”:

Quality is, to begin with, the determinacy that is identical with being, in such a way that something ceases to be what it is if it loses its quality.

While in his Logic Hegel considers “quality” as one of the categories of the doctrine of Being rather than one of the categories of the doctrine of Essence, his interpretation of Aristotle now locates “quality as such” as equivalent to “essence” itself. Why this is so can be articulated more when we see how Hegel moves to the two crucial determinations of substance in Aristotle’s ontology: Potentiality and Actuality.

Hegel introduces the two Aristotelian principles of potentiality and actuality by saying:

There are two leading forms, which Aristotle characterizes as that of potentiality and that of actuality; the latter is still more closely characterized as entelechy or free activity, which has the end in itself, and is the realization of this end.

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200 I find Etienne Gilson reaches to the same point in his analysis of Hegel’s philosophy. He concludes, “In Hegel’s philosophy, logic is the concrete dialectic of being qua being, wherein it appears as progressively conquering all determinations which belong to it as such.” Gilson, Being and Some Philosophers, p. 141.

201 Hegel, The Encyclopaedia Logic, § 85, p. 136. Hegel, moreover, says, “The something is what it is only through its quality; in contrast, although it is true that the thing likewise only exists insofar as it has properties, it is not bound with this or that determinate property and therefore it can lose the property without ceasing to be what it is” Ibid., § 125, p. 195. That Hegel considers quality in terms of the Aristotelian account of essence will be discussed more in chapter four in this dissertation.
Hegel’s translation of the Aristotelian *energeia* is “*Tätigkeit /activity*”. In Hegel’s translation, as Ferrarin puts it, “actuality cannot be understood independently of actualization, an actuality without activity is for him unthinkable.” In light of this correlation between activity and actuality, if Hegel’s subjectivity is a "spontaneous conscious activity [that] exists for itself and within itself," then subjectivity should be viewed not only as activity but also as actuality. Now, if what constitutes substance in its deep speculative sense is nothing but essence as “actualizing form”, then substance can be understood also as a subject insofar as subject is itself actuality. This explains to some extent what Hegel means at the beginning of his *Logic Encyclopaedia*:

Philosophy should be quite clear about the fact that its content is nothing other than the basic import that is originally produced and produces itself in the domain of the living spirit, the content that is made into the *world*, the outer and the inner world of consciousness; in other words, the content of philosophy is *actuality*. The Aristotelian actuality parallels the Hegelian being-for-itself /subjectivity, while the Aristotelian potentiality parallels the Hegelian being in-itself /objectivity.

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202 Hegel, *Lectures on The History of Philosophy*, p. 335. Aristotle explains the four causes by saying: “Evidently we have to acquire knowledge of the original causes (for we say we know each thing only when we think we recognize its first cause), and causes are spoken of in four senses. In one of these we mean the substance, i.e. the essence (for the ‘why’ is reducible finally to the definition, and the ultimate ‘why’ is a cause and principle); in another the matter or substratum, in a third the source of the change, and in a fourth the cause opposed to this, the purpose and the good (for this is the end of all generation and change).” Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), *Metaphysics*. I.3, p. 1555.

203 Hegel’s translation of *energeia* by activity comes under attack from many philosophers. According to Ferrarin, “it has been repeatedly pointed out that Hegel's translation of *energeia* by "activity" misconstrues the Aristotelian meaning.” Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle*, p. 15. Ferrarin introduces many philosophers—such as Schelling, Trendelenburg, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger—who argue against Hegel’s translation of Aristotle’s *energeia* as activity. See: *Ibid.*, pp-15-27. With regard to Schelling, for example, Ferrarin says, “This understanding of *energeia* as including process came very soon under attack. Back with a vengeance, Schelling poked sarcasm at Hegel’s absolute as a God who knew no Sabbath. Hegel’s God is an eternal incessant activity and not a simple final cause like Aristotle’s.” *Ibid.*, p.16.


207 Hegel writes, “In order to comprehend what development is, what may be called two different states must be distinguished. The first is what is known as capacity, power, what I call being-in-itself (*potentia*,
Hegel seems obscure in his identifying of potentiality with objectivity, he is clear in his identifying of actuality/activity with subjectivity. He writes,

The Energy [Activity], or more concretely the Subjectivity, is the actualizing form, the negativity which relates to itself. When we, on the other hand, use the term “Essence,” we do not posit [express] activity in it; but Essence is only the In-itself only potentiality without infinite form [“infinite” means self-related].

We notice here that essence is posited within the logical horizon of “potentiality” or “the In-itself” just because it does not have “activity in it”. However, it is exactly this dead kind of essence that Hegel refuses to consider as a true candidate for the Idea. The state of in-itself constitutes just a moment in the process of the unlocking of the essence. In order for essence to be able to grasp the True as the whole it must be not inert or fixed, it must rather be in a state of activity. And if actuality is an active state of actualization which includes its end within it, essence as actuality must be not only in-itself but also for-itself. We already find this meaning of developmental essence in Hegel’s preface of his Phenomenology:

The True is the whole. But the whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development. Of the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially a result, that only in the end is it what it truly is; and that precisely in this consist its nature, viz. to be actual, subject, the spontaneous becoming of itself.

For Hegel’s Logic, the appearance of essence—essence’s shining-forth — is the existential actualization of essence, and this happens through mediation—through the

\[\delta\nu\nu\alpha\varsigma\); the second principle is that of being-for-itself, actuality (\(\alpha\epsilon\tau\upsilon\, \epsilon\nu\varepsilon\pi\epsilon\alpha\varsigma\))....The whole variation in the development of the world in history is found on this difference." Hegel, Lectures on The History of Philosophy, p. 21.

\[208\] Hegel writes, “The expression \(\delta\nu\nu\alpha\varsigma\) is with Aristotle the beginning, the implicit, the objective; also the abstract universal in general, the Idea, the matter, which can take on all forms, without being itself the form-giving principle.” Ibid., p. 335.


\[210\] Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, § 20, p. 11.
negative, self-relating of essence. It is in this Hegelian account of the speculative Aristotle that essence becomes the “actualizing form” which breaks with the static traditional view of essence which does not move beyond the level of “in-itself”. The actualization of essence constitutes the essence of essence, so to speak. And this essential actualization is manifested in the dialectical movement from the moment of in-itself to the moment of for-itself, that is, from potential objectivity to actual subjectivity.

But this movement is not enough for essence to be true speculative actuality. For the speculative essence must be not only “in-itself”, nor only “for-itself”, but “in-and-for itself”. As Hegel says in his Science of Logic, essence

is not only this being-in-itself; as mere being-in-itself it would be the abstraction of pure essence, but it is equally essentially being-for-self; it is itself this negativity, the self-sublating of otherness and determinateness.

Essence within this third moment of the Idea is no longer that of immediate essence of intuition, nor of abstract essence of understanding, but of speculative essence of reason. Essence becomes the Notion which includes within it its determinations not in a state of immediacy, nor in a state of opposition and difference, but in a state of sublation. The relationship of in-itself/for-itself is also articulated in the language of Hegel’s Phenomenology to support the same point, though from different perspective:

So long as Science lacks this actual dimension, it is only the content as the in-itself; the purpose that is as yet still something inward, not yet Spirit, but only spiritual Substance. This in-itself has to express itself outwardly and become for itself, and this means simply that it has to posit self-consciousness as one with itself.

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213 Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, § 26, p. 15.
In light of these two Aristotelian determinations of potentiality/actuality, and their Hegelian corresponding relationship of in-itself/for-itself, I will try now to see how the dialectical relationship between subjectivity and objectivity unfolds, and how, accordingly, the relationship between essence and existence can be viewed.

**The Three Dialectical Moments of the Aristotelian Idea**

Hegel recognizes and discerns two opposite sides within the Aristotelian substance, both of which, taken separately and abstractly, do not reveal the truth of the Idea. On the one side, we have potentiality, being-in-itself, or objectivity. The reference of this side is the sensuous perceptible substance. On the second opposite side, we have actuality, being-for-itself, or subjectivity. The reference of this side is human *nous* or understanding. Now, generally speaking, Hegel shows that the true speculative Aristotle cannot be found in either of these one-sidednesses of substance. Hegel’s Aristotle should be found in the third higher moment of substance which represents the true speculative Idea and which sublates the two preceding moments. This higher speculative moment is the divine Thought—the true concrete Subject.215

For the sake of my argument, I take the first Aristotelian side of substance as the representative of the logical Hegelian doctrine of Being—not in its sophisticated details

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214 Hegel writes, “The closer determination of this relation of energy [actuality] to potentiality, of form to matter, and the movement of this opposition, gives rise to the different modes of substance.” Hegel, *Lectures on The History of Philosophy*, p. 338.

215 In addition to this theological dimension of Hegel’s account of Aristotle’s Absolute as divine Thought, Hegel considers the Absolute from the stand point of the pure speculative logic as the Absolute Idea. Hegel’s speculative understanding of the Absolute Idea moves beyond religion insofar as religion stays occupied with picture thinking and fails to recognize reason as the act of the Self. Hegel writes, “The Spirit of the revealed religion has not yet surmounted its consciousness as such, or what is not the object of its consciousness; Spirit itself as a whole, and the self-differentiated moments within it, fall within the sphere of picture-thinking and in the form of objectivity.” Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 788, p. 479. In the *Logic*, Hegel writes, “Reason, which is the sphere of the Idea, is the self-revealed truth in which the Notion possesses the realization that is wholly adequate to it, and is free, inasmuch as it cognizes this its objectivity world in its subjectivity and its subjectivity in its objectivity world.” Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 597.
by which Hegel surpasses Aristotle in the Doctrine of Essence, but only in its general point of view. Similarly, the second Aristotelian side of substance operates as the representative of the logical Hegelian doctrine of Essence. Just as Hegel’s *Logic* shows that neither the doctrine of Being in its immediate presentation of the Idea nor the doctrine of Essence in its mediate presentation of the Idea grasps the Idea in its concreteness, so we find that neither the first side of the Aristotelian substance, reflected in the objectivity of sensuous substance, nor the second side of the Aristotelian substance reflected in the subjectivity of the human *nous*, grasps the concreteness of the Idea. And as the Hegelian logical doctrine of the Notion represents the summit of the Idea in which subjectivity and objectivity are dialectally dissolved in the identity of identity and non-identity, so too ends the doctrine of the Aristotelian divine Thought.

Unlike the case with Plato, these three moments of the Idea are not included implicitly in the philosophy of Aristotle but are explicitly articulated by him. If Hegel’s task with Plato consists in making these implied moments of the speculative Idea explicit, and bringing them together in a system, Hegel’s task with Aristotle is to bring together these explicit moments in a system. In what follows, I will give a summary account of the Hegelian systematic view of these three moments in order to see how the Idea is not only Substance but also Subject, or in Hegel’s words, how “everything turns on grasping and expressing the True, not only as *Substance*, but equally as *Subject***.”

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216 Hegel points to the unsystematic order of the different kinds of the Aristotelian substance: “Here Aristotle enumerates the substances, and to him they appear as a series of different kinds of substance, which he merely takes into consideration one by one, without bringing them together into a system.” *Ibid.*, p.338.

217 Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 17, p.10.
The Sensuous Perceptible Substance or the Immediate Moment of Objectivity

The sensuous substances are all these kinds of material objects that we encounter in our ordinary experience. They are all these individuals around us. At this stage of sense-experience, these individual substances seem objective in their independent unity—each represents its individual objectivity in itself regardless of its relation to the others. But the dialectic of the object shows that this seemingly individual unity is not an internal unity between the constitutive principles of matter and form. Matter and form, potentiality and actuality, are related externally rather than internally. The absence of the self-organizing factor within sensuous substance is a deficient characteristic of this stage of the Idea. As a result, this moment fails to grasp the inner depth of the self-constructed Idea. Hegel writes,

The sensuous perceptual substance is that in which the matter is still distinguished from the efficient form. Hence this substance is finite; for the separation and externality of form and matter are precisely what constitute the nature of finite. 218

This moment, then, does not reflect the true unity of the two determinations of matter/potentiality and form/actuality. That is, it does not reflect the concrete-self-identity of essence. Essence as such has not been actualized speculatively to be “for-itself”. In Hegel’s language, this is an inadequate standpoint of the Idea since it reflects just the externality of the unity of subjectivity and objectivity. “Thus in sensuous substance,” Hegel concludes, “there appears the diversity of the moments, though not as yet return into themselves.” 219 This returning into itself of the diversity of the moments is what

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218 Hegel, Lectures on The History of Philosophy, p. 338. Hegel, in the introduction to his Lectures, says, “The finite is not true, nor is it what it is to be—its determinate nature is bound up with its existence. But the inward Idea abolishes these finite forms: a philosophy which has not the absolute form identical with the content, must pass away because its form is not that of truth.” Ibid., p.37.

219 Ibid., p. 339.
constitutes the moment of “for-itself”, the moment of actuality, which the subjective, next stage of the Idea is its realization.

The Human Understanding or the Moment of Abstract Subjectivity

The second kind of substance is the subjective soul as a thinking activity. Here we find that the moments of subjectivity and objectivity are not external like that of the sensuous substance, but internal. Hegel explains,

A higher kind of substance, according to Aristotle (Met, IX.2; VII.7; XII.3), is that which already contains the activity which is the object of its process. This is the in-and-for-itself determined Understanding whose content is the final cause which it actualizes through its activity without undergoing change like the mere sensuous substance.220

That is to say, the Aristotelian rational soul, as a moment of subjective activity, is the object of its own activity. The aim of the activity of this subjectivity, which for the rational soul “is essentially actuality,” and “not only formal activity”221 is itself the content of understanding. The content of this activity, as well as the realization of this content, does not come “from somewhere else,” as Hegel says, but from within the activity of thought itself. This kind of substance, therefore, is not only in-itself but also for-itself. This in-and-for-itself constitutes “understanding” as absolutely determined.

The content of the activity of understanding, however, does not remain only internal to itself. “The active,” Hegel says, “posits its content in reality.”222 Consider, for instance, an architect who actualizes a project he has in his mind by building a house. But this activity of the understanding which is now actualized in reality is different from a matter upon which the idea is realized. Matter here appears as a condition for the actualization of the Idea.

220 Ibid. p. 340.
221 Ibid.
222 Ibid.
Thus here we still have a matter which understanding demands as its hypothesis. The two extremes are matter as potentiality, and thought as efficiency: the former is the passive universal, and the latter the active universal.\footnote{Ibid., p. 340.}

Although this moment exhibits the Idea in more comprehensive view than the previous moment, it is still not adequate enough to articulate the pure speculative Idea. This moment is an abstract subjectivity which knows how to distinguish but does not go a further step to unite the differences. This moment, in Hegel’s language of the *Science of Logic*, does not "free itself from its immediacy and external concretion,"\footnote{Hegel, *Science of Logic*, § 10.} and, moreover, does not "attain to the pure knowing which takes as its object those same pure essentialities as they are in and for themselves."\footnote{Ibid.}

**The Divine Thought or the Absolutely Differentiated Idea: The Speculative Subject**

If the two preceding moments of objectivity and subjectivity exhibit a sense of separation and externality between (potentiality/in-itself) and (actuality/for-itself), between matter and form, between reality and thought, between existence and essence, the third moment resolves absolutely all these kinds of deficiencies. All these dualities are now sublated in a high speculative identity represented in the Absolute as unmoved mover.

The highest point is, however, that in which potentiality, activity and actuality are united—the unmoved, which yet at the same time moves, and whose *essence is pure activity*, without having matter.\footnote{Hegel, *Lectures on The History of Philosophy*, p.340.}

With this moment, therefore, we reach the stage of the truly speculative Idea in which all determinations are internal to the Idea and in which all the material and external
considerations are sublated. It is the moment in which essence is no longer static identity but “pure activity”. Essence is thus liberated from the strict limits of the abstract understanding and becomes free activity within the unlimited circularity of the immanent Reason. Essence as pure activity, as pure subjectivity, is no longer a transcendent entity that exists beyond the objectivity of essence, and it is no longer the unknowable thing-in-itself. The epistemological and ontological gulf between thought and reality is totally absorbed in the Aristotelian Absolute of the unmoved mover. Hegel’s summary of the internal activity of Aristotle’s Absolute pushes in the same direction of Hegel’s own philosophy. He writes,

The object of thought is first produced in the activity of thinking, which in this way separates the thought as an object. Hence, in thinking, that which is moved and that which moves are the same; and as the substance of what is thought is thought, what is thought is the absolute cause which, itself unmoved, is identical with the thought which is moved by it; the separation and the relation are one and the same. The chief moment in Aristotle’s philosophy is accordingly this, that the energy of thinking and the object of thought are the same.

It is thus only when essence breaks with the limitations of the abstract identity of understanding that Substance can become Subject. And Hegel is clear in this:

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227 Both Hegel's Absolute Idea and Aristotle's prime unmoved mover is perfectly independent and self-sufficient. However, there is difference between them. On the one hand, Aristotle does not systematically regard the prime unmoved mover as a unity of parts but as pure and simple form without parts. In contrast, Hegel considers the Absolute as the wholeness of organic totality in which the parts are contained and sublated. In this regard, Glenn Magee writes, “It could be said that Hegel transplants Aristotle's criterion for "natural substance" into the "heavens," and conceives the Unmoved Mover (Absolute Idea) on the model of organic being. This should not be surprising, for Hegel would regard Aristotle's transcendent Unmoved Mover as an unrealized abstraction.” Glenn Alexander Magee, Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition (New York: Cornell University Press, 2001), note 7. p.189. See also: De Gruyter, Is Aristotle Prime Mover A Pure Form? in Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science, Vol. 15, No. 2 (December1981), pp. 80-95. Hegel, in his Science of Logic, writes, “The Absolute Idea, as the rational Notion that in its reality meets only with itself, is by virtue of this immediacy of its objective identity, on the one hand the return to life; but it has no less sublated this form of its immediacy, and contains within itself the highest degree of opposition.” Hegel, Science of Logic, p. 824. J.F. Findlay writes, “The mind for Hegel, as for Aristotle, is thus the place of forms, a bustling Agora where such forms are involved in endless transactions and conversations, and though it is by the intermediations of such forms that there is a reaching-out to their individual instances, they none the less enjoy a relative independence there, a detachment in the thought-ether, that they never enjoy elsewhere.” J. F. Findlay, Forward in Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, p. xi. 228 Hegel, Lectures on the History of Philosophy, pp. 344-345.
If Aristotle had made the jejune identity of understanding, or expression, his principle, he would never have risen to a speculative Idea like this, wherein individuality and activity are placed higher than universal potentiality.\textsuperscript{229}

Reason’s sublation of understanding, in fact, represents the deep speculative meaning not only for Aristotle’s philosophy—as Hegel argues—but also for Hegel’s own philosophy. Hegel selects a crucial and long quotation from Aristotle’s metaphysics, *Met. XII.7*, to suggest that Aristotle’s Absolute supports the Hegelian theme of the circularity of reason.

Hegel enthusiastically comments on that quotation by saying:

This great definition given by Aristotle of absolute Being as the circle of reason which returns into itself, is of the same tenor as modern definitions; the unmoved which causes movement is the Idea which remains self-identical, which, while it moves, remains in relation to itself.\textsuperscript{230}

It is this crucial moment of the circularity of reason which supersedes understanding and brings identity in difference and difference in identity, motion in stability and stability in motion, potentiality in actuality and actuality in potentiality, essence in existence and existence in essence.\textsuperscript{231} All these dualities are absorbed in the dynamicity of the dialectical relationship between subjectivity and objectivity. Hegel, therefore, distinguishes his speculative Idealism from the idealism of his age. And he does not hesitate to oppose his celebrated discovery of the speculative Aristotle against his opponents:

If in modern times it has seemed a new thing to define the Absolute Essence as pure activity, we see that this happened only through ignorance of the Aristotelian philosophy. The scholastics have rightly viewed this as the definition of God, and

\textsuperscript{229} Ibid., p. 346.

\textsuperscript{230} Ibid., p. 343.

\textsuperscript{231} Hegel presents this notion of circularity from the outset of his Introduction to his Lectures by saying: “As concrete, this activity is a succession of processes in development which must be represented not as a straight line drawn out into vague infinity, but as a circle returning within itself, which, as periphery, has very many circles, and whose whole is a large number of processes in development turning back within themselves.” Ibid., p. 27.
have applied to Him the designation of *actus purus*; there is no higher idealism than this.\(^2\(^\text{32}\)\)

If there is no “higher idealism” than this, then it is inevitably Hegel’s own idealism that is now presented in *approximate manner* with Aristotle and the scholastics. For my reading, it is a dialectical approximation which operates as mediation by which Hegel aims to reform the deficiencies of the philosophies of modern times — as an effort to reinstate the Idea in its concrete philosophical development. Hegel, after all, does not merely stop at the Greek level of the Idea but moves further to “the Christian Teutonic” level of Spirit.\(^2\(^\text{33}\)\) Whether Hegel’s discovery of the speculative Idea of Plato and Aristotle can be used as mediation to reform Sadra’s transcendental Existentialism is the topic of my later chapters.

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\(^{233}\) Hegel says, “The Greek world developed thought as far as to the Idea; the Christian Teutonic world, on the contrary, has comprehended Thought as Spirit; Idea and Spirit are thus the distinguishing features.” Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, p. 101. In this regard and according to Hegel’s speculative Aristotle, Hegel would agree with Jennifer Bates that “what is missing in the Aristotelian account” is “the inwardizing movement of *Geist,*” but I do not think he would agree with her that Aristotle misses “the unity of the idea.” See: Bates, *Hegel’s theory of imagination*, p. 63.
Chapter: Three

Sadra and Hegel on the Metaphysical Essentialism of Arabic Philosophy

Introduction:

In his introduction to his *Encyclopaedia Logic*, Hegel writes,

Speculative Logic contains all previous Logic and Metaphysics: it preserves the same forms of thought, the same laws and objects—while at the same time remodeling and expanding them with wider categories.\(^\text{234}\)

The speculative Idea here requires its dialectical concrete development in such a way that it should not only negate but also sublate its previous stages. Does not that mean that any speculative philosopher, in order to produce his new philosophy, should be conscious of the principles of the philosophies that precede him? Although this demand theoretically looks possible, practically it seems difficult. Difficulties such as the foreign language and the distant geographical places of the previous philosophies could contribute to preventing the philosopher from being fully aware of previous philosophies. Sadra and Hegel are cases in point. The satisfaction of absorbing the previous philosophies cannot be applied to Sadra, for he is not aware of the modern progression of philosophy in the West.\(^\text{235}\) Neither can it be applied to Hegel, whose evaluation of Arabic philosophy ends


\(^{235}\) There is no any mention of any modern western philosopher in Sadra’s writings. For more on Sadra’s life and philosophical works see: Sajjad Rizvi, *Mulla Sadra Shirazi: His Life, Works and Sources for Safavid Philosophy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007). One of the main reasons for this absence is the stoppage of the movement of translation from other foreign languages to Arabic. After the decline of Arabs in Spain in 1492, the movement of translation is reversed from Arabic to Latin. As Hegel writes, “The fact that Arabs studied Aristotle is historically important. Aristotle’s works were translated from Arabic into Hebrew (in particular by Jews in Spain and Portugal, who were closely associated with the Arabs), and from these [Hebrew] versions they were translated into Latin, or they were translated from Arabic into Latin. So translation from Arabic is one of the main channels through which the writings and philosophy of Aristotle become known in the West.” G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825–6 Volume III, Medieval and Modern Philosophy*, trans. R.F. Brown and J.M, Stewart with the assistance of H.S. Harris, (Oxford: Clarendon Press 2009), p.30.

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with Averroes. In this context, more than four centuries of the history of Arabic philosophy— from the death of Averroes in the thirteenth century up until the death of Sadra in the seventeenth century— are totally absent in Hegel’s *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*.

Situating Sadra’s philosophy within Hegel’s *Lectures* raises two interrelated problems. The first one is concerned with the historical period in which Sadra’s philosophy appeared. The second one pertains to the nature of the philosophical themes of Sadra’s thought. If we follow Hegel’s division of the historical development of philosophy, Sadra, whose philosophy flourished in the seventeenth century, could be situated within Hegel’s classification of “The Third Period: Modern Philosophy.” More precisely, it could be better fit within what Hegel called “Transition to the Modern Era.” Here we meet with Hegel’s treatment of Francis Bacon and Jacob Boehme, both of whom are contemporary to Sadra. This account, however, conflicts with the themes of Sadra’s philosophy. The problematic relationship between existence and essence, which constitutes the basic ground of Sadra’s philosophy, is more related to “The Second Period: Medieval Philosophy,” rather than Modern philosophy.

Considering Sadra from the Hegelian standpoint of medieval philosophy faces another problem. Despite the fact that Sadra does not chronologically belong to this period, Hegel deals externally and briefly with “Arabic Philosophy,” to which Sadra belongs. He writes, “In this second period, philosophy has its locus in the Christen world;
we need refer to Arabs and Jews only in an external way, for the historical background.” Sadra’s situation with Hegel becomes further complicated if we add the fact that Sadra, whose writings are mostly in Arabic, is ethnically Persian. Sadra is thus seemingly excluded from the divisions of Hegel’s history of philosophy. He lacks a place in Hegel’s *Lectures*, for neither could he properly be fit within modern philosophy, nor within medieval philosophy.

Hegel’s critique of Arabic philosophy, however, could be used as an entrance to appropriate Sadra’s thought within Hegel’s *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*. The point here is to see whether Hegel’s critique of Arabic Philosophy is applicable to Sadra’s philosophy. If it is applicable, then the stage of Sadra’s philosophy within the development of philosophy would face the same judgment that Hegel already passes on that of Arabic philosophy. “We cannot say that Arabic philosophy involves its own proper principle and stage in the development of philosophy,” Hegel states. In what follows, I will argue that the main points which Hegel considers as deficiencies of Arabic philosophy are among those that Sadra himself criticizes and tries to overcome. This will be in light of Sadra’s account of the primacy of existence over essence, on the one hand, and the identity of the knower and the known, on the other hand.

The earlier chapters have dealt with Sadra’s and Hegel’s critiques of the traditional views of the Greek essentialism of Plato and Aristotle. Without entering in specific differences between them, both Sadra and Hegel refuse to accept the abstract considerations of essence to be equivalent to Truth. In this chapter, Sadra’s critique of the

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242 For more on the influence of the Parisian culture on Sadra, see: Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Sadr al-Din Shirazi and his Transcendent Theosophy, Background, Life and Works* (Tehran: Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies, 1997).
essentialism of Arabic philosophy will be examined under the light of Hegel’s critique of Arabic philosophy.

**Hegel’s Reading of Arabic Philosophy**

Two remarks can be noted concerning Hegel’s concise presentation of Arabic Philosophy. First, Hegel’s sources do not rely on his immediate contact with the primary texts of Arabic philosophy—neither in its original Arabic nor in its Latin translated version.\(^{244}\) His sources rather rely primarily on secondary sources written by the Jewish philosopher, Maimonides, and the German historian, W. G. Tennemann.\(^ {245}\) This emphasizes the point that Hegel’s critique of Arabic philosophy is of an external character. Secondly, Hegel confuses two distinct and opposite Islamic currents of thought. The first one is led by the theologians, known as *Speakers/Medabberm*,\(^ {246}\) who, as Hegel rightly says,

> used Greek [philosophical] science especially for the defense of their dogmas, since there was a pressing need to defend Islam against the Christian who made up a large part of the peoples they had subdued.\(^ {247}\)

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\(^{244}\) Hegel is aware of the Latin translation of Arabic philosophy. He writes, “Some of these commentaries were also translated into Latin and printed, and they are still extant, but nothing much is to be gained from them.” Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. Brown, p.30.


\(^{247}\) *Ibid.*, p. 30. In contrast to Hegel, Massimo Campanini presents two other opinions for the purpose of Muslims’ translation and use of Greek philosophy. One is maintained by Gutas who argues that the reason beyond this translation is politics: "translations were carried out because they were useful to the policies of the first Abbasid caliphs". As for the second opinion, Campanini writes, "The Moroccan philosopher al-Jabri, presenting a somewhat different view from that of Gutas, asserts that...Philosophy was to be a weapon against the ideological attack of Gnosticism which threatened the very foundations of state." See:
The second intellectual current, which comes as an opposition to the first one, is established by the Islamic philosophers, who deal with Greek philosophy in itself, not in order to serve religious interests. 248 Hegel, however, subsumes the Islamic philosophers under the rubric of “Commentators of Aristotle.” 249 For him, these philosophers “sank into a metaphysics of the understanding and into a formal dialectic.” 250 He briefly mentions Alkendi, Alfarabi, Avicenna, Algazel, Tofail, and finally Averroes, with whom Arabic philosophy is, in Hegel’s view, supposedly terminated. 251

Hegel’s listing of the theologian Algazel, who is the very opposite to the philosophers, 252 among the commentators of Aristotle supports the point that Hegel is not aware enough of the opposition between the speakers and the philosophers in Arabic philosophy. This opposition, in fact, has a long history in Arabic philosophy. It eventually culminates in two well-known books: The Incoherence of The Philosophers by the theologian Algazel, and the reply book of The Incoherence of The Incoherence by the

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248 For more on the opposition between the speakers and the philosophers in Arabic philosophy, see: Majid Fakry, A History of Islamic Philosophy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp.209-240.
249 Hegel, Hegel’s Lectures on the History of Philosophy, trans. Haldane, p.34.
250 Ibid., p. 25.
251 See: Ibid., pp.34-35.
252 As Michael Marmura mentions in his introduction to Algazel’s The Incoherence of the Philosophers, Algazel undertakes “to refute twenty philosophical doctrines. Seventeen are condemned as heretical innovations, three as totally opposed to Islamic belief, and those upholding them as outright infidels.” Michael E. Marmura, Translator’s Introduction, in Al-Ghazali, The Incoherence of the Philosophers, trans. Michael E. Marmura (Provo, Utha: Brigham Young University Press, 2000), p. xv. And, as Algazel himself writes, “the source of their [Islamic Philosophers’] unbelief is in their hearing high-sounding names such as “Socrates,” “Hippocrates,” “Plato,” “Aristotle,” and their likes and the exaggeration and misguidedness of groups of their followers in describing their minds; the excellence of their principles; the exactitude of their geometrical, logical, natural, and metaphysical sciences—and in [describing these as] being alone (by reason of excessive intelligence and acumen) [capable]of extracting these hidden things.” Ibid., p. 2.
philosopher Averroes. These two books represent the highest phase of the opposition between faith and reason in Arabic philosophy, if not even in medieval philosophy.

Whereas the opposition between the speakers and the philosophers is not central in Hegel’s reading of Arabic philosophy, for Sadra, it is exactly the attempt to overcome this opposition that distinguishes him from both the speakers and the philosophers. This claim increases the problematic situation of Sadra within Hegel’s Lectures, for Sadra cannot be fit even within the Hegelian division of Arabic philosophy into speakers/theologians and philosophers/commentators. Sadra’s philosophy, in fact, forms a kind of synthesis between the irrationality of the speakers based on faith, on one hand, and the one-sided rationality of the philosophers based on the formality of understanding, on the other hand. This claim will be supported in light of Hegel’s critique of both the speakers and the philosophers.

**Hegel’s Critique of the Speakers**

Hegel’s critique of the Islamic speakers’ dogmas is a continuation of his systemic critique of religion, faith, feelings, myths, and mysterious knowledge. For him, these

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254 Averroes’ interpretation of Aristotle had well-known influence on number of Christian philosophers in the latter Middle Ages and during the Renaissance. The movement of Latin Averroism entered in conflict with the faith of church. Hegel wrote on this matter without mentioning Averroes. He wrote, however, about the significant role of “the University of Cordova in Andalusia” in which Averroes was the most prominent philosopher. Cordova was, as Hegel says, “a center-point of learning; many from the lands of the west journeyed thither, just as even the Pope Sylvester II...for the purpose of studying under the Arabs.” Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. Haldane, p. 74. When Hegel wrote about the consequence of this learning which leads to the conflict with faith he referred to Aristotle, not to Averroes’ interpretation of Aristotle. Hegel writes, “On the first appearing of the Aristotelian writings, the Church made difficulties; the reading of his metaphysics and physics and the abstracts prepared therefrom, as also the exposition of the same, was forbidden by a church synod held at Paris 1209.” *Ibid.*, p. 47.
cognitive forms are external considerations of truth; they do not stem internally from the pure activity of the speculative reason. These forms do not, as Hegel writes, “come from reason as independent;” they do not take “self-consciousness,” as “an essential moment in the truth.”

Within this line of thought, Hegel writes,

The Arabians, like the Christians of the West, were restricted by the dogmas of their Church (if one may call it so), few though these dogmas were; yet this last circumstance of the small number of the dogmas certainly gave them greater liberty. But according to all that we know of them, they established no principle of self-conscious reason that was truly higher, and thus they brought Philosophy no further. They have no other principle than that of revelation, therefore only a principle that is external.

For Hegel, then, the speakers’ determinations of truth are external in that they drive their principle from outside and not from within thought itself. Thought in this case is not free and spontaneous. Speakers’ thought is restricted with what Hegel describes as “the dead externality of authority.”

Although Sadra accepts “revelation” as a source of knowledge, he is different from the speakers who only look to how philosophical arguments, as Hegel critically says, “had to be deployed in order to support their assertions.” Sadra’s account of revelation, rather, shares what Quentin Lauer describes as “Hegel’s conviction that a

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257 Ibid., p.30.
258 Hegel describes philosophy in modern times as different from that of middle ages by saying that “because the independently existent thought, this culminating point of inwardsness, is now set forth and firmly grasped as such, the dead externality of authority is set aside and regarded as out of place.” Ibid., pp. 217-218.
revelation must be intelligible if it is to be a revelation at all.” In fact, what Hegel found interesting in the Church Fathers can be also applied to Sadra’s method of thought. For Hegel, Church Fathers do not restrict themselves to the level of the writings of the Bible but go beyond that to reach its deep spirit. Their principle, as Hegel points out, is: “the letter kills but the Spirit gives life.” This principle is also present in Sadra’s philosophy. He, for instance, devotes a book, *Breaking the Idols of Ignorance*, just to criticize the theologians and the Sufi for their inability to go deeper to the meaning of revelation. Exposing the reason behind their failure to capture the spirit of revelation, Sadra writes,

This is because the sight of their intellect is concentrated on the forms of things and their imaginary frames and they do not extend their sight to their secrets or truths, nor do they perceive the balance between the seen world and the unseen realm. They have missed that and have become confused by the contradictory parables explained by the religious laws and prophets. Thus, they neither perceive, in the way the elite perceive, anything of the truths of belief in God, His attributes, signs, angels, books, messengers and the Last Day.

Before seeing how Hegel examines the self-consistency of the speakers’ thought-content, some remarks should be mentioned on Hegel’s reading of the speakers. Firstly, among the many Islamic theological schools, the two opposite schools of Asharite and Mutazilite are the only theological schools which Hegel brings in his treatment of Arabic philosophy. On the one hand, he does not give more attention to Mutazilite School and just considers it as “the first to take an interest in the abstract knowledge.” On the other hand, he focuses exclusively on the ontological and epistemological consequences

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of Asharite’s doctrine of atoms. I raise this point because the significant difference between these two schools in regard to the theory of causation, which Hegel criticizes, is absent in Hegel’s reading of them.\(^{265}\) Sadra, on the other side, was aware of this opposition between these two theological schools. His theory of causation overcomes this opposition, as we will see.

In order to satisfy some theological demands related to divine freedom, the speakers make some modifications on the Greek theory of atoms.\(^{266}\) It is not my purpose to enter into these details. My point, rather, is to see how Hegel identifies the contradiction of the speakers’ account of causation in relation to their theory of atoms. In this regard, Hegel writes,

Maimonides says: “The ground-principle of the Medabberim[speakers] is that men can have no certain knowledge of the nature of things, because in the understanding the contrary may ever exist and be thought. Besides this they in the majority of instances confound imagination with understanding, and give to the former the name of the latter.” They adopted as a principle, “atoms and empty space,” where all connection appears as something contingent. “Production is nothing but a connection of atoms, and decay nothing but the separation of the same; and time consists of many ‘nows.’”\(^{267}\)

After this short quotation from Maimonides, Hegel criticizes the speakers by saying:

In this way nothing but the atom really exists. They have thus in the more advanced cultivation of thought brought to consciousness the main standpoint, then as now the standpoint of Orientals—that of substance, the one substance. This pantheism, or Spinozism, if you like to call it so, is thus the universal view of Oriental poets, historians, and philosophers.\(^{268}\)

\(^{265}\) For more on The Mutazilite-Asharite debate on causality see: Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, pp. 518-543.

\(^{266}\) In his *The History of Philosophy in Islam*, de Boer writes, “The Atomic doctrine of the Muslim dialecticians had its source, of course, in Greek Natural Philosophy; but its reception and farther development were determined by the requirements of theological Polemic and Apologetic.” T.J de Boer, *The History of Philosophy in Islam*, trans. Edward R. Jones (London: Luzac, 1903), p.57.


\(^{268}\) *Ibid.*
Although it is difficult to understand how Hegel reduces in one step the speakers’
unlimited atoms into Spinoza’s one substance, three serious points of deficiency in the
speakers can be deduced. The first one is related to their skeptical epistemological view.
The second one is related to their ontological view based on the permanency of substance
and the ever-changeability of accidents. The third one is concerned with their view of
time.

Hegel starts from the speakers’ account of knowledge and moves to their account
of ontology. He, following Maimonides, bases the speakers’ ontology on their “ground-
principle” of the uncertainty of knowledge. In fact, the case with the speakers is the
opposite. It is their ontology of the permanency of substance and their account of the
ever-changeability of accidents that lead them to their skeptical view of knowledge. That
is to say, their ontology is prior to their epistemology. Hegel, however, touches on this
point later when he further elaborates on the speakers’ account of accidents. He writes,
“In the same way knowledge also is an accident, which is created by God at every
moment that I know anything; today we no longer possess the knowledge which we
yesterday possessed.”269 As we will see later on, Sadra focuses his critique of the
speakers on the three points that Hegel mentions—that of epistemology, ontology, and
temporality. But his critique—contra to Hegel and Maimonides—starts primarily from
exposing the deficiency of the speakers’ ontology of the permanency of substance that
eventually leads them to consider knowledge as an accident. Rather than starting from
epistemology and moving to ontology, in his own philosophy Sadra moves from ontology
to epistemology. And rather than arguing for the account of the permanency of substance,
Sadra argues that substance *substantially* moves. With this account of *trans-substantial

269 Ibid., p.32.
motion of existence, knowledge is re-defined. Knowledge is not to be understood as an accident, as the speakers assert, but as a mode of existence. The intensification of existence goes side by side with the intensification of knowledge. The more existence becomes simple and pure, the more knowledge becomes simple and pure—as we will see later.

Hegel discovers in the speakers the notion of the contingency of relations which reflects the speakers’ denial of the necessity of the causal connection between events. In order to find room for the omnipotence of God, who is not bound to laws of nature, the speakers deny the necessary connection between cause and effect. Instead, they consider the causal relationship as a mere habit. In his *Incoherence*, Algazel, who, as Hegel acknowledges, “was a sceptic of great ability” — well before Hume — writes,

The connection between what is habitually believed to be a cause and what is habitually believed to be an effect is not necessary, according to us. But with any two things, where “this” is not “that” and “that” is not “this” and where neither the affirmation of the one entails the affirmation of the other neither the negation of the one entails negation of the other, it is not a necessity of the existence of the one that the other should exist, and it is not a necessity of the nonexistence of the one that the other should not exist—for example the quenching of thirst and drinking, satiety and eating, burning and contact with fire, light and the appearance of sun, death and decapitation, healing and the drinking of medicine, the purging of the bowels and the using of a purgative, and so on to [include] all [that is] observable among connected things in medicine, astronomy, arts, and crafts. Their connection is due to the prior decree of God, who creates them side by side, not to its being necessary in itself, incapable of separation.  

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270 Ibid., p 35. For more on Algazel’s skeptical method, see: Tamara Albertini, Crisis and Certainty of Knowledge in al-Ghazali (1058-1111) and Descartes (1596-1650) in *Philosophy East and West*, Volume 55, No. 1, (Jan, 2005), pp. 1-14.

271 On the comparison between Algazel and Hume, Edward Moad writes, “The first part of al-Ghazali’s seventeenth discussion in the Tahifut [Incoherence], though bearing a superficial similarity to Hume's discussion of causation, does not locate the epistemological source of the idea of causation in constant conjunction, as does Hume, but only argues that constant conjunction is all that we observe between the objects in question. The most that can be said is that al-Ghazali mentions that habit might account for our association of the events so conjoined, but not that it accounts for the very concept of causation. As Hume rightly points out, such a view is fatal to occasionalism, or to any meaningful idea of divine power, for that matter.” Edward Omar Moad, Al-Ghazali on Power, Causation, and Acquisition in *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Jan, 2007), p. 12, no. 30.

272 Algazel, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, p. 166.
Hegel, however, criticizes the speakers’ dogmas without discussing Algazel’s debate with the Islamic philosophers. For him, Algazel just “held the words of the Prophet to be pure truth, and wrote the *Destructio of Philosophorum*.“\(^{273}\)

On the basis of their belief of the continuity of God’s creative activity, the speakers, as Hegel says, argue that “no accident can endure for two moments; as soon as it arises it perishes too, and the substance (God) always creates another in its place,”\(^{274}\)

Here the only true cause is God:

> Everything may just as well be something else as what it is, and there is no reason at all why anything should be one way rather than another. They (the speakers) term it a mere habit that the earth revolves round a center-point, that fire moves upward and that it is hot; it is just as possible, they say, that fire should be cold.\(^{275}\)

The speakers’ rejection of the idea of different, discrete substances acting upon each other through necessary causation leads Hegel to this conclusion:

> In the pure philosophy of the so called “Speakers” was expressed the principle, peculiar to the Oriental mind, of the dissolution of definite thought in all its consequences as the dissolution of all connections and relation.\(^{276}\)

For Hegel, what make thought definite are its concrete determinations. The concreteness means that the dialectical, inclusive relationship between various determinations must be brought dialectically back into a systematic totality—a totality that insofar as it excludes and negates its parts, it includes and sublates them. Truth as a whole, then, must include all determinations—nothing should be left out. That is to say, truth should have nothing outside itself but contain everything within it. This inclusive view of truth contrasts with the speakers’ account of substance which does not include its


accidents/determinations. In the speakers, there is no reconciliation of particulars, accidents, or qualities—taken as determinations— with the whole as a substance or God. “All determinations are thus fleeting or perishable; the individual alone is permanent,” writes Hegel.

With the speakers, therefore, determinations are always in a state of negation—a negation that never comes into self-consciousness. For Hegel, this kind of negation does not reach the stage of the speculative negation in which different moments of the dialectic must be sublated in a higher stage. The speakers, therefore, do not go beyond “the abstract moment of negativity.” Hegel writes,

“This abstract negativity combined with the permanent unity, is thus a fundamental conception in the Oriental way of looking at things….Thus the Arabians developed the sciences and philosophy, without further defining the Idea; their work is rather the dissolution of all that is definite in this substance, with which is associated mere changeableness as the abstract moment of negativity.”

**Hegel’s Logic and the Critique of the Speakers**

Let us now turn to Hegel’s *Logic* and see whether his criticism of the speakers’ account of causation is consistent with his own position. The abstract moment of negativity, which Hegel finds in the speakers’ account of causation, can be approximated to what, in his doctrine of essence, Hegel calls “*External negation*”:

*External negation*—and this is what abstraction is—only shifts the determinateness of being away from what is left over as Essence; it only puts them, so to speak, elsewhere, leaving them the affirmative character they possessed before.

For Hegel, since the speakers’ negation of accidents neither emerges internally from substance itself, nor returns into substance, this negation is an external and abstract

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277 Ibid., p.31.
278 Ibid., p.33.
negation. This kind of negation would ground substance upon something other than its own essence. Its essence would be, as Hegel describes in his logic, “inherently lifeless and empty.” Now, since the speakers consider God as the only one substance whose determinations are abstractly negated, this speakers’ God is abstract. We have seen that Hegel characterizes the speakers’ account of substance as a kind of Spinozism. This characterization is in accord with his critique of Spinozism in his Logic when he writes that “Spinozism is a defective philosophy because in it reflection and its manifold determining is an external thinking.” For Hegel, in order to give concrete meaning to God as the absolute ground of opposite determinations, the relationship of ground/grounded must be re-thought.

For Hegel, rethinking the relationship of ground/grounded means shifting it from the sphere of abstraction to the sphere of speculation. In the former, the duality of ground and grounded is thought under the abstract distinction between the opposites of identity/positive and difference/negative. In the latter, the duality is thought within the horizon of the unity of opposites. As Hegel writes, “the proximate result of opposition (when realized as contradiction) is the Ground, which contains identity as well as difference superseded and deposited to elements in the completed notion.” Hegel’s speculative account of ground does not thus operate within the abstract moment of negativity in which the opposites are excluded as determinations. Rather, ground is viewed as the principle into which the opposite determinations speculatively return. To

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280 Ibid.
281 See the beginning of our discussion to Hegel’s critique of the speakers in this chapter.
282 Hegel, Science of Logic, p. 536.
283 Hegel, Hegel’s Logic, p. 174.
clarify this point and approximate it to Hegel’s critique of the speakers, we will take finite being and necessary being as our example of opposites.

Hegel writes, “Finite things in their indifferent multiplicity are simply this, to be contradictory and disrupted within themselves and to return into their ground.” But what is the ground of finite beings? The speakers, from their theological account, consider God as the ungrounded ground of finite beings. However, in their inference of the necessary being from the contingent beings, the speakers’ absolute view of the ungrounded ground suffers a contradiction. For, as we learn from Hegel’s logic, the contingent being as the grounded—which in the case of the speakers is abstractly excluded from the necessary being— is included in the necessary being. “The grounded,” as Hegel finds, “completely contains within itself the ground, their relation is an undifferentiated essential compactness.” According to Hegel, the necessary being is not ungrounded as the speakers’ inference claims. Hegel explains,

The true inference from a finite and contingent being to an absolutely necessary being does not consist in inferring the latter from the former as from a being that is and remains the ground. On the contrary, the inference is from a being that, as is also directly implied in contingency, is only in a state of collapse and is inherently self-contradictory.

It is thus only when we think the contradiction within a finite being as a speculative negation rather than an abstract negation that the inference of the necessary from the contingent is true. “The truth,” Hegel writes, “is that the absolute is, because the finite is the inherently self-contradictory opposition, because it is not.”

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284 Hegel, Science of Logic, p. 443.
286 Hegel, Science of Logic, p. 462.
287 Ibid., p. 443.
288 Ibid.
In contrast to the speakers, Hegel considers the self-contradictory of a finite being not as a defect that should be excluded from the necessary being but as something essential and inherent in everything. “Contradiction,” as Hegel writes, “is the very moving principle of the world: and it is ridiculous to say that contradiction is unthinkable.”\(^{289}\) Hegel rethinks contradiction as the ground which is “the approximate result of opposition.” Contradiction is thus included within the absolute being as the ground in which the finite beings dissolve their self-contradiction. So, although the necessary is, as Hegel says, “derivative, it must still contain the antecedent whence it is derived as a vanishing element in itself.”\(^{290}\) The speakers’ derivation of the necessary is, accordingly, abstract in that it does not explicitly contain its determinations within it. “It only puts them, so to speak, elsewhere, leaving them the affirmative character they possessed before,” as Hegel says above.

If the speakers consider the relationship between the absolute being as ground and the finite being as grounded as a one-sided relation of dependency, Hegel considers it as a relation of \textit{mutual} dependence. For him, this relationship is not unilateral relationship but circular relationship. That is, insofar as the grounded absolutely depends on the ground, the ground absolutely depends on the grounded:

The ground and what is grounded are one and the same content: the difference between the two is the mere difference of form, which separates simple-relation on the one hand, from mediation or derivativeness on the other.\(^{291}\)

As the dialectic proceeds, the category of ground is developed further in the category of reciprocity. Here the relation of cause and effect finds its ultimate speculative unity as a self-contained relationship. “Reciprocity,” as Hegel writes, “is undoubtedly the proximate

\(^{290}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 208.
\(^{291}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 176.
truth of the relation of cause and effect, and stands, so to say, on the threshold of the notion.\textsuperscript{292} Here the cause, although it is distinct from its effect, is at the same time its own effect, and vice versa. That is, cause and effect imply one another:

\begin{quote}
effect contains nothing whatever that cause does not contain. Conversely, cause contains nothing which is not in its effect. Cause is cause only in so far as it produces an effect, and effect is nothing but this, to have a cause. Cause as such implies its effect, and effect implies cause.\textsuperscript{293}
\end{quote}

In this speculative account of causality, the relationship between cause and effect is no longer a mere habit or accident, as the speakers say, but something inherent and necessary. Cause and effect are essentially mutual implications within the development of truth towards the Absolut Idea.

As in his \textit{Lectures}, Hegel in his \textit{Logic} is aware of the reason behind the theologians’ rejecting of the necessity between cause and effect—a reason that is related to their concern about the freedom of God. But, as Hegel writes in his \textit{Logic}, “those, who fancy they honor Divine Providence by excluding necessity from it, are degrading it by this exclusiveness to a blind and irrational caprice.”\textsuperscript{294}

\textbf{Sadra’s Critique of the Speakers}

While the speakers stop, as Hegel concludes, at “the abstract moment of negativity,” Sadra goes a moment further. The ever changeability of determinations which led to the dissolution of definite thought—which Hegel discovers in the speakers’ account of the relationship between accidents/determinations and substance /unity—is pushed by Sadra further into substance itself. With Sadra, the changeability of the

\textsuperscript{292} Ibid., p. 219.
\textsuperscript{293} Hegel, \textit{Science of Logic}, p. 559.
\textsuperscript{294} Hegel, \textit{Hegel’s Logic}, p. 209. For Hegel, even simple-minded religious people believe that necessity constitutes the essence of God. Hegel writes, “In the simple language of the religious mind which speaks of God’s eternal and immutable decrees, there is implied an express recognition that necessity forms part of the essence of God.” \textit{Ibid.}
contingent world emerges primarily from within the inner activity of substance itself. As we have seen in the first chapter, for Sadra, substance is substantially a dynamic unity of process. In light of this necessary dynamicity inhered in substance—which reflects the dynamicity of existence as a whole—the habit-relationship between cause and effect is criticized and rejected.295

For Sadra, therefore, the changeability of accidents is a necessary consequence of the changeability of substance in itself. Substance’s changeability is thus not imposed from outside but emerges from within. The importance of this account of the inner changeability of substance is reflected in its consequences related to time. As Fazlur Rahman explains,

Mulla Sadra illustrates the succession of body in time with the example of the continuity of body in space. Just as a body extended in space is made up of continuous and successive parts, so do the potentially infinite successions in time constitute movement and extension in time. This continuity ensures both the difference and unity of a thing in time. Just as parts of an extension in space are essentially and existentially different from one another, so are the parts of movement in time different from one another: A thing is no longer the same in two successive moments. It is not only of the nature of matter to experience continuous change through different forms, but it is of the nature of body form itself to change continuously.296

In contrast to the speakers’ theory of atoms in which the world is, as de Boer says, “a discontinuous mass, without any living reciprocal action between its parts,” Sadra defends the view that the world is a continuous process based on the necessity of the

295 Fazulr Rahman remarks on Sadra’s account of motion in the category of substance by saying, “Indeed, according to Sadra, movement primarily occurs in the substance and only secondarily affects the rest of categories. The result is substance-in-motion; or, rather, since substance, being liable to perpetual change and motion, is itself not stable, the result is a ceaseless flux and pure movement, without there being anything moving, and this continuous movement and change is the only stable reality or substance.” Fazlur Rahman, The Eternity of the World and the Heavenly Bodies in Essays on Islamic Philosophy and Science (New York, State University of New York Press, 1975), p. 229.
296 Ibid., p. 232.
297 De Boer, The History of Philosophy in Islam, p. 60. In light of this discontinuity between substances, the speakers regard motion “as a leaping onward from one point in space to another, and Time as an advance affected in the same manner from one moment to another.” Ibid., 61.
substantive change of existents. His philosophy thus breaks with the abstract unity of substance defended by the speakers.298

The relationship of existence/essence, as well as the relationship of substance/accident, is reinterpreted by Sadra in light of the relationship of cause/effect. According to his account of causation, the substantial motion of existence—as a primordial cause of everything—results in the various essences as effects. For Sadra, it is because of the primary and necessary changeability of existence as a cause in itself that effects, as well as the changeability of effects, are produced. Essences as effects of the substantial movement of existence are reflected as mental representations in the human mind. In other words, existence in its actual and substantial movement manifests itself to the human mind in and through various essences. This conceptual reflection of essences in the human mind reflects, in effect, the intelligible content of reality. The intelligibility of reality is thus not given from outside existence, but from the inner activity of existence itself. That is to say, the intelligibility of reality emerges from within and not from something beyond. For Sadra, it is on the ground of this immanent intelligibility of existence that the identity of thought and being, the knower and the known is possible. In this regard, Kalin writes,

Sadra establishes a close link between degrees of existence and levels of consciousness. A logical result of this is a doctrine of ‘ontological vitalism’ according to which all things, animates and inanimate, have some degree of consciousness by virtue of the fact that they exist. It is within this context that Sadra develops his central thesis that when we interact with the world around us,

298 Fazlur Rahman contrasts the speaker’s atomism with Sadra’s theory of movement by saying: “Atomism, however, denies the reality of movement absolutely and posits recreation every moment. Mulla Sadra, on the other hand, bases his whole theory on the assertion that movement not only exists but is, in effect, the only reality in the world and his thought appears to operate within the terms of Aristotelianism, although through a radical modification of that doctrine.” Rahman, The Eternity of the World and the Heavenly Bodies, p.230.
we interact with the various modalities and degrees of existence. What we know or claim to know is always an aspect of existence.\textsuperscript{299}

Sadra’s attempt to overcome the deficiency of theological thought of the speakers from within, however, does not set him completely free from some dogmatic attachments. In Islamic tradition, the problem of causation is not taken in itself as a scientific problem; rather, it is taken in terms of the theological problem of the relationship of the divine will to the human will. Sadra’s approach to the problem of causation consists of how positing \textit{a priori} causation within the cosmos would not run contrary to the free will of God. So, the question that is central to Sadra is this: How could “determinism and freedom” in God, Man, and Nature be possible without contradiction? Sadra’s answer to this question is guided by his metaphysical existentialism. The answer aims to clarify the \textit{causal}, ontological relationship between existence and essence, on the one hand, and the \textit{causal}, epistemological relationship between subject and object, on the other hand.

To clarify Sadra’s view of determinism and freedom within the framework of the existential causality, the following long passage by him is important:

The saying attributed to the foremost monotheist, ‘Ali,’ “There is neither total determinism [of human acts] nor total freedom,” does not mean that a given human action is a sort of composite of determinism and freedom; nor does it mean that it neutralizes both [by becoming a compound of them]; nor does it mean that from one point of view it is by constraint while from another point of view it is free; nor yet does it mean that man is really determined and is free only in form—as the chief of philosophers [Avicenna and indeed al–Farabi] has expressed it; nor, finally, does it mean that man has a partial and deficient freedom and a similarly partial and deficient determination. What this saying means is that in man [voluntary actions]…freedom and determinism \textit{are the same}. The adage, “In everything the golden mean is the best,” is truly realized in this view; [only we must make its meaning precise in this context]. For, the mean between extremes is sometimes produced by a compounding of the two extremes in such a way that

both sides lose their extremeness; for example, water may achieve such a balance between hot and cold that it is no longer either hot or cold actually, and yet it cannot go outside these two categories. In such a mean, it is said, the mean “cancels out” both sides. But there is another sense of ‘mean’ [which is more appropriate in our case]; this means that in a simpler and higher level or mode of existence, both sides are actually present [and neither of them is removed], but they become identical with one another in such a way that they do not contradict each other [nor do they cancel each other out]. ‘Mean’ in this sense is better than the mean in the earlier sense.  

The idea that underlies this passage can be interpreted in the general light of Hegel’s idea of sublation.  

In the above passage Sadra suggests a “means” by which the absolute simplicity of existence is a mediation of extremes, of opposites, of what is different. Mediation here is nothing other than existence in its highest simple mode—existence as absolute infinity which includes all finites. For Sadra, the “means” in its true highest simplicity must be neither one of its extremes, nor the combination of both in such a way that they are abstractly negated. Instead of the abstract conception of “means” based on the traditional Aristotelian view of the abstract essence in which the opposites are canceled, Sadra’s existential account holds a “means” in which the opposites are actually identical. The two opposite extremes, as Sadra says, “become identical with one another in such a way that they do not contradict each other nor do they cancel each other out.” This moment of identity can be realized at a final stage of the unfolding of existence. God, Man, and Nature, as three distinct moments, are reflected within this progressively unfolding of


“What is sublated,” as Hegel writes, “is not thereby reduced to nothing. Nothing is immediate; what is sublated, on the other hand, is the result of mediation; it is a non-being but as a result which had its origin in a being. It still has, therefore, in itself the determinateness from which it originates.” Hegel, *Science of Logic*, pp. 106-107. The idea of sublation is, however, more understandable in its realized explanation in Hegel’s texts. Later on in this chapter, Hegel’s idea of sublation will be clarified more when I analyze essence’s self-sublating of its own determinations toward existence.
existence that leads to the absolute identity of determinism and freedom. Freedom thus excludes and includes determinism insofar as determinism excludes and includes freedom. They are distinct and identical at the same time. Each abolishes, preserves, and transcends the other.

**Hegel’s Logical Account of Ground**

Let us now consider Hegel’s account of the relation between identity and difference in comparison with Sadra’s above view. To make this comparison consistent also with Hegel’s critique of the speakers, we will view it in light of Hegel’s account of ground.

Hegel writes, “The Ground is the unity of identity and difference.”

Ground here is the source into which identity and difference solve their contradiction. But what is the relation of ground in terms of essence and existence? Sadra and Hegel, as we will see, provide two different answers.

Sadra, as we have seen above, maintains that the ground into which the opposites of identity and difference return is existence in its simplicity. For him, the reconciliation of differences is reflected in the continuous process of the unfolding of existence. As Sadra writes, “everything is an instantiation and ‘particularization’ of existence which unfolds itself in a myriad of ways, modes, states, and degrees.”

This process of existential unfolding ultimately finds its final realization in the self-centered totality of the Absolute simplicity of existence. In this stage of absolute existence, the differences that constitute the nature of essences are completely identical to the degree that there would be no essence but only pure existence.

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302 Hegel, *Hegel’s Logic*, p. 175.
In contrast to Sadra, Hegel writes, “The ground is the essence in its own inwardness; the essence is intrinsically a ground; and it is a ground only when it is a ground of somewhat, of an other.” 304 Moreover, contrary to Sadra’s “positive simplicity of existence,” Hegel introduces the “negative simplicity of essence” as the ground into which identity and difference found their solved contradiction: “Essence, as infinite return-into-self, is not immediate but negative simplicity; it is a movement through distinct moments, absolute self-mediation.” 305 Now, since, as Hegel writes, “an Existence only proceeds from the ground,” 306 and since the ground is the essence, then, existence proceeds from essence. But how come that essence is the ground from which existence proceeds? To understand the emergence of existence from essence we should first understand the emergence of essence from being.

**Essence in Itself: Essence’s Issuing From Being**

At the end of the Doctrine of Being and on the section of “Transition into Essence” Hegel writes, “Absolute indifference is the final determination of being before it becomes essence; but it does not attain to essence.” 307 The indifference which precedes the issuing of essence refers to the general feature of the sphere of Being in which the categories of the immediate being are indifferent to each other. They are immediately taken to be externally distinct from each other. But their logical movement ultimately unveils the deficiency of this relationship of indifference. As the dialectic proceeds in the section of measure, the qualitative determinations and the quantitative determinations of the immediate being necessitate each other. In their unity in measure, quality becomes in

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304 Hegel, *Hegel’s Logic*, p. 175.
itself quantity and vice versa. They now intrinsically mediate each other. They are no longer indifferent immediate determinations of being as the ordinary consciousness considers them.\textsuperscript{308} Being at this moment is a unity constituted by relative, non-immediate moments. “We now obtain,” as Hegel writes, “the being that is negated in its determinations, in general terms the sublated being that is Essence.”\textsuperscript{309} Hegel summarizes the process of the emergence of essence from Being in § 111 of his \textit{Encyclopaedia Logic}:

Instead of the more abstract sides (of being and nothing, of something and another, etc.) the infinite, the affirmation as the negation of the negation, now has quality and quantity for its sides. Theses sides (α) have passed over into one another: quality into quantity (§ 98) and quantity into quality (§ 105), and they have thus exhibited themselves to be \textit{negations}. (β) But in their unity (in measure) they are at first distinct, and each is only through the mediation of the other; and (γ) after the immediacy of this unity has proven to be self-sublating, this unity is now \textit{posited} as what it is \textit{in-itself}, as simple self-relation that contains within it being in general and its forms as sublated.—Being or immediacy which, through self-negation, is mediation \textit{with itself} and relation to itself, and which is therefore equally mediation that sublates itself into relation to itself or into immediacy—this being or immediacy is Essence.\textsuperscript{310}

Essence, therefore, is not something beyond the immediate being, as the traditional views of the metaphysical essentialism might think. It is rather the result of the dialectic of quality, quantity, and measure, as determinations of being that are no longer fixed but pass over into each other. That is, essence emerges at the moment when the relation between the determinations of immediate being is not the indifferent relationship of immediacy, but different relationship of mediation.

At the end of the doctrine of being we reach, therefore, the conclusion that the immediacy of being is no longer simple immediacy but mediation. Essence as mediation is thus not the starting point of thought, for it comes after the thought of what is

\textsuperscript{308} Hegel writes, “Ordinary consciousness interprets things as [simply] being, and considers them in terms of quality, quantity, and measure.” Hegel, \textit{The Encyclopaedia Logic}, § 111, p. 173.
\textsuperscript{309} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{310} \textit{Ibid.}, § 111, p. 173.
immediately there before us. “Essence,” as Hegel writes, “issues from being; hence it is not immediately in and for itself but is a result of that movement.” Essence is non-immediacy and as thus it is the negation of immediacy. Here we reach the negative feature of essence. For, although essence issues from immediacy, it is the negation of immediacy.

If, however, essence emerges when it has been proved that the immediacy of being is not simple immediacy, essence cannot be understood apart from its relation to immediacy. Essence here is the essence of what is immediately given. This means that essence at the moment of its emergence from the immediate being is not independent as such. Regarding essence in its immediate contrast with the immediate being, essence seems to have its own immediacy as the essential comparing to what is unessential. That is, when we take essence to be immediately different from the immediacy of the doctrine of being, immediacy is still in consideration of essence. Here we have two kinds of immediacy: the immediacy of essence itself and the immediacy from which essence has emerged. The latter is the simple immediacy of the doctrine of being which is now negated by the essence in its own immediacy.

The dialectic of essence, however, does not stop at this “first negation” of the initial immediacy of being. If it stops at this moment, Hegel would be a traditional essentialist who believes in two distinct beings, one essential and the other unessential. For him, essence is rather the negation of the immediate negation of immediacy, or

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311 Hegel, _Science of Logic_, p.393.
312 “In this way,” Hegel writes, “being and essence are again related to each other as others; for each has a being, an immediacy, and these are indifferent to each other, and with respect to this being, being and essence are equal in value.” _Ibid._, p. 394.
313 Hegel writes, “Closer consideration shows that when essence is characterized as essential only relatively to what is unessential, it is because it is taken only as sublated being or determinate being. In this way, essence is only the first negation.” _Ibid._, p. 395
absolute negativity of being. “But essence,” Hegel writes, “is the absolute negativity of being.”314 In this double negation of immediacy,

the immediate that is still distinguished from essence is not merely an unessential determinate being but the immediate that is in and for itself a nullity; it is only a non-essence, illusory being.315

Although illusory being also seems as if it is distinct from essence,316 essence’s reflective movement shows that this illusory being is itself projected by the essence itself.317 As Hegel writes, “This illusory being is not something external to or other than essence; on the contrary it is essence’s own illusory being.”318 This makes Hegel again different from an essentialist in the traditional sense. For, in the light of considering essence as a process of negativity, there is no distinction between what seems to be illusion and what is immediately taken to be beyond this illusion.319 The illusion of the immediacy of being is “essence itself in the determinateness of being.”320

In its process of self-negativity, essence, however, does have immediacy in itself.321 But the intrinsic immediacy of essence is not the first immediacy of essence that results in the difference of essence from both the unessential being and the illusory being.

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314 Ibid.
315 Ibid.
316 Hegel writes, “Illusory being is all that still remains from the sphere of being. But it seems still to have an immediate side that is independent of essence and to be simply an other of essence.” Ibid.
317 Hegel writes, “Illusory being, in so far as it is distinct from essence, sublates itself and withdraws into essence….the determinations which distinguish it from essence are determinations of essence itself, and further, that this determinateness of essence which illusory being is, is sublated in essence itself.” Ibid., p. 397.
318 Ibid., p. 394.
319 In this regard, Houlgate writes, “Essence does not constitute the foundation of real or apparent being, because to think of it that way is to confer on it a simple immediacy which it cannot actually have. Yet, on the other hand, Hegel has explained why people might believe that the essence does constitute such foundation: because the essence is precisely the process of seeming to be such a foundation. It is the process of seeming to be simple immediacy and of seeming to underlie any immediacy it seems to have.” Stephen Houlgate, “Hegel’s critique of Foundationalism,” in German Philosophy Since Kant, ed. Anthony O’Hear (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p 41.
321 Hegel explains the immediacy of essence in its negativity by saying: “The negativity is negativity per se; it is its relation to itself and is thus in itself immediacy.” Ibid.
It is rather the sublation of this first immediacy, which does not reflect the true
determination of essence. Hegel characterizes essence’s intrinsic immediacy that sublates
the first immediacy, which results in unessential being and illusory being, as “the
immediacy that is as pure mediation or absolute negativity.” Essence’s intrinsic
immediacy as pure mediation and absolute negativity determines the very nature of
*essence in itself*.

This latter consideration of *essence in itself*, which Hegel also calls *simple
essence*, leads us to sharp distinction between Hegel and Sadra. As we have seen in the
first chapter, Sadra treats essence from two prospective: essence in itself, and essence for
existence. We found that Sadra’s essence in itself is equivalent to nothing. For Sadra,
essence in itself does not have any meaningful sense; essence has meaning only in
relation to the reality of existence. In contrast, the meaningful richness of *essence in itself*
in its Hegelian account makes it the absolute negativity that exposes the deficiency of any
kind of external immediacy, whether it be the immediacy of the unessential being or the
immediacy of the illusory being. For Hegel, *essence in itself* is not mere nothing as Sadra
maintains but “the *movement of nothing to nothing, and so back to itself.*” 
Essence in
*itself* contains its mediation; as thus, it is not (abstract self-identity) that could be equated
with nothing. Hegel’s *essence in itself* is rather (speculative self-identity) in which
opposition is not left out but included within essence as ground—a ground in which the
contradiction of the opposites is resolved.

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However, Hegel’s consideration of essence does not stop only at the level of essence in itself. Here are the three interrelated perspectives of essence as Hegel introduces them before he treats them in details:

I. As simple essence, essence in itself, which in its determinations remains within itself
II. As emerging into determinate being, or in accordance with its Existence and Appearance
III. As essence that is one with its Appearance, as actuality.  

These are the three sections that cover the whole of the Doctrine of Essence. Our above analysis is only related to section one, which Hegel further named as “Section One: Essence as Reflection Within Itself.”  
Let us now touch on the second section in which essence emerges into existence.

**Essence’s Emerging into Existence**

Before its issuing from the general immediacy of the sphere of Being, “essence,” as Hegel writes, “was already implicit within measure.” The unity of simple essence, or essence in itself, is thus contained in the sphere of Being but “only as an implicit unity.” Essence in this state is “indeterminate essence.” If essence at the end of the doctrine of being has no determinate being, the sphere of essence is its own sphere in which “it must develop determinate being.” Hegel writes,

Since essence is at first simple negativity, it now has to posit in its own sphere the determinateness that is only implicit in it, in order to give itself determinate being and then being-for-self.[…] The negativity of essence is reflection; and the determinations are reflected, posited by essence itself and remaining in essence as sublated.

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326 Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, § 111, p. 173
In its own reflective process of negativity essence determines itself within itself as the ground of its two moments of reflection: (inward reflection/identity) and (reflection-into-another/difference). Essence as ground is thus the unity of identity and difference. But this unity is not abstract; instead, it is self-sublating unity.\(^{331}\) For Hegel, it is in considering the unity of identity and difference as speculative unity rather than abstract unity that essence as ground determines itself and thus emerges into existence. That is, the speculative unity of essence as ground involves essence’s self-sublating of its own determinations that results in its emerging into existence. Hegel writes,

> The ground is self-sublating and what it sublates itself toward, the result of its negation, is existence. Existence, therefore, which is what has emerged from the ground, contains the latter within itself, and the ground does not remain behind existence; instead, it is precisely this process of self-sublation and translation into existence.\(^{332}\)

Essence in its own meditating movement of reflection thus sublates itself within itself. Essence’s sublating of itself constitutes it as ground that does not result in nothing—as Sadra might argue—but in existence. As Hegel writes, “reflection, in ending with the sublating of itself, does not therefore have for result nothing.”\(^{333}\) Existence, rather than nothing, is, therefore, the reflective result of essence’s meditating movement with itself in which the ground and the grounded become identical. As Hegel writes, “essence has passed over into Existence in so far as essence as ground no longer distinguishes itself from itself as the grounded, or in so far as this ground has sublated

\(^{331}\) Hegel writes, “When we say that ground is the unity of identity and distinction, this unity must not be understood as abstract identity, for then we would just have another name for a thought that is once more just that identity of the understanding which we have recognized to be untrue.” Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, § 121 addition, pp.188-189.


itself.”  In this essence’s self sublating of its own determinations, the reflected determinations of essence are dialectically affirmed as the ground of existence.

If existence proceeds from essence, does that imply the priority of essence over existence? It looks as if we retreat with Hegel to a kind of essentialism in which essence in its ontological primacy takes advantage over against existence. But Hegel’s existence is not viewed as an ontological entity that is bestowed or predicated upon a static essence, which might exist in the Platonic world of Ideas or in God’s knowledge. For Hegel, the inner dynamicity of essence in itself, which constitutes it as pure mediation or absolute negativity, produces existence not “as a predicate or as a determination of essence”—as the traditional metaphysics of essentialism holds. Instead, the intrinsic dynamicity of essence as the ground of its own opposites produces existence as “a being that has come forth from negativity and inwardness.” This result breaks with the transcendental relationship between essence and existence in its traditional sense. For, as Hegel writes,

Having issued from the ground, existence contains the ground in it; the ground does not remain, as it were, behind existence, but by its very nature suspends itself and translates itself into existence.

In its intrinsic process of negativity toward its unfolding as existence, essence has determined itself as ground. Essence as ground is speculative unity of its inclusive opposites rather than abstract unity of exclusive opposites. Essence emerges into existence when it proves to be the ground in which the contradiction of identity and difference is resolved. In its unfolding process into existence, essence sublates its three immediate moments of unity: (1) The immediate unity of essence as implicitly reflected

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334 Ibid.
335 Ibid.
336 Ibid., p. 479.
in the section of measure in the sphere of Being, (2) the immediate unity of essence when it is regarded in contrast to what seems as unessential being, and (3) the immediate unity of essence as reflected in the positing reflection of illusory being. Essence as ground that emerges into existence is the sublation of all these immediacies. The movement of essence by which it emerges into existence is thus intrinsic movement within essence itself. Existence is thus the result of essence’s immanent movement within itself—a reflective movement from one of its determinations to its opposite one and so back to itself. In this immanent movement, the opposite determinations of essence do not stand on their own dependency—as it is the case with the determinations in the sphere of Being. In Essence, as Hegel writes,

we do not have a genuine other, but only diversity, relation between the One and its other. Thus in Essence passing-over is at the same time not passing-over. For in the passing of what is diverse into another diversity, the first one does not vanish; instead, both remain within this relation.\(^{338}\)

The remaining of the opposites within the same mediated relation of essence does not mean that they are in static relationship, for they are sublated by essence itself in its emerging into existence. This reflective dialectic within essence results in existence. Here, as Hegel writes, “Existence is essence’s absolute emptying of itself.”\(^{339}\)

Let us analyze further essence’s reflective movement within itself that results in existence, as we found above. At the beginning of the doctrine of essence, Hegel deals intensively with three types of reflection: positing/pure, external, and determining reflection.\(^{340}\) In what follows I will not enter into the complex details of the development of these reflections. I just want to follow the general path that essence, in its reflective


process of determinacy, takes in the way of its determining itself as ground. The point is to see the logical results of these moments of reflection that essence intrinsically endures before it “converts itself into ground and passes over into Existence.”341

Essence’s initial movement as positing reflection results in considering the immediacy of the sphere of Being neither as distinct unessential being nor as distinct illusory being. With positing reflection the two latter kinds of being no longer stand in their immediacy contrasting the immediacy of essence. They are now reflectively brought back into essence itself. In this inward reflection, essence determines itself as identity with itself. As Hegel writes in his introducing to the category of identity in his Encyclopaedia Logic, “essence shines within itself or is pure reflection. In this way it is only relation to self (though not as immediate but as reflected relation): identity with itself.”342 But this inward reflection which results in essence’s category of identity is further opposed by essence’s external reflection. If the former reflection is inward reflection that results in identity, the latter reflection is reflection-into-another that would result in difference. As the external reflection opposes the positing reflection, they are now both united further in the determining reflection. “Determining reflection is,” as Hegel writes, “the unity of positing and external reflection.”343 The reflective movement of essence as manifested in determining reflection is thus the unity of positing reflection/identity and external reflection/difference. It is in this determining reflection that essence sublates its own opposites of identity and difference and then determines itself as the ground in which the contradiction is resolved. Hence, as Hegel writes,

341 Ibid., p. 393.
343 Hegel, Science of Logic, p. 405.
“Ground is the unity of identity and distinction….the inward reflection which is just as much reflection-into-another and vice versa.”\textsuperscript{344} It is in this moment of its reflective totality as ground of its own opposites that essence determines itself.

Thus essence, in determining itself as ground, proceeds only from itself. As ground, therefore, it posits itself as essence, and it is in positing itself as essence that its determining consists.\textsuperscript{345}

Essence thus determines itself as ground that sublates its own reflected determinations. Through the mediation of determinate ground, the dialectic of essence proceeds from the absolute ground to the conditioning ground.\textsuperscript{346} At the moment of the determinate ground we reach the sufficiency of ground in which “there is nothing in the ground that is not in the grounded, and there is nothing in the grounded that is not in the ground.”\textsuperscript{347} But this identity of the ground and the grounded “remains a mere formalism and empty tautology.”\textsuperscript{348} It is not until the formalism of the determinate ground is further sublated in the conditioning ground that essence emerges into existence. “For existence,” as Hegel writes, “is the immediacy that has emerged from the sublating of the mediation by which ground and condition are related, and in emerging it sublates this emerging itself.”\textsuperscript{349}

Hegel’s essentialism is thus not abstract essentialism in which the relation between existence and essence stands as abstract duality. For essence’s reflection is neither only inward reflection of identity nor only external reflection of difference. The determining reflection of essence is rather the speculative totality of these previous kinds

\textsuperscript{344} Hegel, \textit{The Encyclopaedia Logic}, §131, p. 188.
\textsuperscript{345} Hegel, \textit{Science of Logic}, p. 445.
\textsuperscript{346} See: \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 447-478.
\textsuperscript{347} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 457.
\textsuperscript{348} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 458.
\textsuperscript{349} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 481.
of reflection and kinds of being. It is the speculative unity of identity and difference that determines essence as ground that emerges into existence. Here the identity of essence is not to be taken as abstract identity, nor is difference to be taken as abstract difference.

Hegel’s essentialism is different from abstract essentialism in that it is not a one-sided determinateness of truth. For Hegel does not view identity as “unmoved identity,” governed only by the mere nature of the law of identity as “analytic”. “It is evident,” for Hegel,

that the law of identity itself, and still more the law of contradiction, is not merely of analytic but of synthetic nature. For the latter contains in its expression not merely empty, simple equality-with-self, and not merely the other of this in general, but, what is more, absolute inequality, contradiction per se. But…the law of identity itself contains the movement of reflection, identity as a vanishing of otherness.  

By discovering the “synthetic” nature of the law of identity, Hegel becomes able to state that “truth is complete only in the unity of identity with difference.” We will see in the next chapter how Hegel’s synthetic approach of essentialism is a sublation of the two analytic views of the positive, qualitative account of essence of the traditional metaphysics, on the one hand, and the negative, qualitative account of essence of Sadra, on the other hand.

But our above analysis of the relationship between essence and existence does not mean that Hegel stops at the moment of essence’s emerging into existence. Existence itself becomes an immanent moment within essence’s unfolding toward the Notion. As a dialectical movement of reflection toward the Notion, the Logic of Essence has three general moments: positedness, transitoriness, and determinateness. The latter moment is

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350 Ibid., p. 413.
351 Ibid., p. 416.
352 Ibid., p. 414.
the sublation of the previous two moments. In this context, Hegel writes, “it is the
determinate that has brought into subjection its transitoriness and its mere positedness, or
has bent back its reflection-into-other into reflection-into-self.” 353 Not until the logical
movement of reflection reaches its category of “reciprocity,” does essence free itself from
the externality of its other and becomes self-determined reflection. For it is in the
opposites of cause and effect as reciprocal determinations of essence that mediation
becomes self-mediation rather than mediation by its other. Here “reciprocity,” as Hegel
writes, “stands, so to say, on the threshold of the notion.” 354 Notion as self-mediation is
thus the sublation of the mediation of Essence and the immediacy of Being. “The
Notion,” Hegel writes,

is to be regarded in the first instance simply as the third to being and essence, to
the immediate and to reflection. Being and essence are so far the moments of its
becoming; but it is their foundation and truth as the identity in which they are
submerged and contained. They are contained in it because it is their result, but no
longer as being and essence. 355

Let us conclude here by returning to our discussion of Hegel and Sadra in relation
to the speakers. There is a difference between Hegel’s and Sadra’s critiques of the
speakers’ account of causation. While Hegel treats it from outside its theological context,
from outside its sophisticated details related to other theological themes, Sadra reads,
analyzes, and exposes its deficiency from within its theological context. Despite the two
different approaches of Sadra and Hegel, the final result looks similar. Both of them
refuse to accept the relationship between cause and effect to be a mere habit. Both insist
on the necessity between cause and effect. Both push this necessity between cause and
effect to a high level of identity which ultimately finds its manifestation in the Absolute.

353 Ibid., 407.
354 Ibid., p. 219.
Whereas Sadra’s Absolute is the higher moment of “simple existence”\(^{356}\) that progressively includes and transcends essence, Hegel’s Absolute is the highest moment of the speculative Idea that dialectically includes and transcends Being and Essence.

**Sadra’s Critique of the Philosophers’ Account of Causality: From the Essential Contingency to the Existential Contingency.**

Supposing that an effect must need a cause, what is the main reason of having a need for a cause? In other words, why does an effect need a cause? Or, as As-Sadr puts it, “why do things require causes or agents without which they cannot come to exist; and what is the real cause that makes them depend on those causes and agents?”\(^{357}\) Prior to Sadra, there were two opposite Islamic answers, one by the speakers and the other by the philosophers. As we have seen above, Sadra’s philosophy is in accord with Hegel’s in rejecting the speakers’ denial of the necessary connection between cause and effect. We will see now how Sadra’s rejection of the philosophers’ account of causality is grounded on the basis of the primacy of existence over essence.

Under the influence of the theological account of creation in time, the speakers maintain that the reason why an effect needs a cause consists in its “temporal origination”. For them, because the existents have been preceded by “non-existence,” they need a cause to bring them to existence. The speakers, therefore, consider “the need of things for their causes as based on the creation of these things.”\(^{358}\) Accordingly, God is

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\(^{356}\) In this regard Rahman writes, “According to Sadra, the higher does not “abstract from” or negate the lower forms of existence but absorbs, includes, and transcends them: they exist in it in a simple manner. That is way, while characterizing God, he enunciates the principle, “a simple being is [i.e., includes] all things (basit al-haqiqa kull al-ashya).”” Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mulla Sadra*, p. 91.


uncaused cause because He is not created. In other words, since God is not originated in time, then He does not require a cause.

This account of causality is rejected by another revival scheme of causation offered by the philosopher Avicenna. Sadra, however, rejects Avicenna’s view. Let us first explain Avicenna’s view to understand how Sadra rejects it. For Avicenna, “contingency,” rather than “temporal origination,” is the reason why an effect needs a cause. This account is viewed within Avicenna’s three modalities of Being: Necessity, Impossibility, and Contingency. By definition, neither “necessity” nor “impossibility” is the reason for having a cause. On the other side, contingency by definition means that an essence has an equal relation to “existence” and “non-existence.” The crucial point that implies this account is this: Contingency is eternally realized in essence before it exists or originates in time. That is to say, essence subsists before its actual existence. On this account, it is possible to consider “essence” as eternal and originated—eternal in its contingency and originated in its temporality. That is to say, it is because in the first place an essence in itself is eternally contingent/possible that it is then temporally originated. Hence, the eternal contingency/possibility of an essence is prior to its temporal origination. For if an essence is in itself impossible, rather than possible, it cannot come to exist. Accordingly, in order to be granted “necessity of existence” or “necessity of non-existence,” an essence needs a cause. The reason why an essence or an effect needs a cause thus is part of its contingency. God does not need a cause since He is necessary rather than contingent.

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359 For more on Avicenna’s account of contingency and necessity, see: Lenn E. Goodman, Avicenna (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.49-60.
According to Sadra, the consequence of Avicenna’s philosophical solution to the problem of causality is the affirmation that existence is an accident supervenient to essence. In other words, existence is temporally added by God to an essence which is eternally contingent. Hence, the philosophical account of essential contingency as a basis of causality results in the ontological priority of essence over existence. Essence in this account is a distinct ontological entity indifferent to existence and nonexistence; essence could exist if there is sufficient cause and it could not exist if there is no sufficient cause. For the [Avecennian] philosophers, therefore, since contingency (could be/could not be) rather than impossibility (could not be) is equivalent to essence, then essential contingency is the reason why an essence needs a cause—a cause for an essence to make it appear or exist. Essence for the philosophers, as Sadra describes it, “is made contingent, so it needs [a cause to bring it to existence]. Then it is made necessary, so it is necessitated.”\(^{360}\) Hence, the contingency of essence is viewed as a primary ontological stage that precedes the existential externality of essence. This philosophical account of causality makes the contingency of essence an ontological condition for existence. That is to say, existence is conditioned and preceded by another entity than itself.

This dependency of existence on something other than itself, which implicitly or explicitly supposes that essence precedes existence, is totally rejected by Sadra. He considers it as a deficiency in the Islamic philosophers.

Although Sadra supports the philosophers’ view that contingency is the reason why things require causes, he criticizes them for their mistaken connection between “contingency” and “essence.” His critique can be viewed as an exposition of the metaphysical essentialism of the Muslim philosophers. Against the notion that essence is

\(^{360}\) Sadra, Asfar, p.234.
the bearer of contingency in a contingent— which entails the pre-reality of essence over its external existence— Sadra denies all reality to essence. Avicenna’s account of causation implies that essences in their eternal contingency share a kind of eternality with God. In order to save the eternality only for God, Sadra consider essences as pure negativity or nothing. God, in this case, must be pure existence without any trace of essence. It is only when we view God as pure existence unmixed with essence that He is in no need of a cause. That is to say, it is only on the basis of the primacy of existence over essence that God is uncaused cause.

In order to make God the only cause that does not require cause, the reason why things require causes must consist in the existential possibility rather than the essential possibility. This line of thought pushes Sadra to consider that, essences, as Rahman puts it,

are nothing, i.e., even “something” cannot be predicated of them except when they are conceived by the mind; otherwise, they are absolutely indiscernible in their native darkness. The locus of contingency is, therefore, the contingent existent itself insofar as it has the possibility of existence.  

The existential contingency here affirms the necessary priority of existence over essence. Contingency on the existential level, rather than the essential level, means the necessary ever-newness of existence according to its substantial movement. For Sadra, this eternal, existential contingency constitutes the reason why the things require causes. On this existential account of causality, it is not the case that existence causes the essence to exist as if essence is “something” independent and waits for an accidental act. This latter view of causality is accepted only from an analytical point of view based on the limitation of the faculty of understanding. In the external realization of truth, existence as Absolute

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simplicity has nothing outside itself and consequently develops itself within itself. To understand this point more clearly let us look how the concept of “necessity” is situated in Sadra’s scheme of Being.

For Sadra, the logical relation of “necessity” in terms of “affirmation” and “negation” determines three modes of being: “Must be/Necessary,” “Could not be/Impossibility,” and “Might be or Might not be/Contingency.” In their logical relation to “necessity,” these three modes of being can be further explained as follows:

1- The absolute “affirmation” of “necessity” is equivalent to “Must be,” as manifested in the Necessary Existent/God—the pure actuality.

2- The absolute “negation” of “necessity” is equivalent to “Could not be,” as manifested in Non-Existence/Nothing—the pure potentiality or the prime matter.

3- The indifference of negation and affirmation of necessity is equivalent to “Might be or Might not be,” as manifested in the contingent existents—the world as a compound of potentiality/actuality and essence/existence.

But these above distinctions remain, for Sadra, conceptual distinctions rather than real distinctions. If we conceptually consider “necessity” in an absolute and unqualified sense, then we reach the notion of the Absolute Necessary Existent/God— which entails that He Must be. Similarly, if we conceptually posit an absolute negation of “necessity” then the result would be the notion of “Absolute non-existence/ Could not be.” But if, on the other hand, we consider “necessity” as relative to both “affirmation” and “negation,” then neither “Absolute existence,” nor “Absolute non-existence” is our notion. Rather, a
new notion emerges that will be neither the notion of “Absolute existence” nor the notion of “Absolute non-existence” but the synthesis of both.

This new synthetic notion reflects the notion of the “existential contingency” in which “existence” and “non-existence” are progressively related in a dialectical, implied sense. On the basis of this “existential contingency,” the world incessantly evolves through successive stages into its simplest form, ultimately recognizing its existentiality in the simplicity of the Absolute Existence/God. Sadra here uses the term “simple” to mean, as Rahman says, “that that which exists at the lower levels with separate or mutually exclusive parts exists at the higher levels as mutually inclusive and unitary.”

Existence as absolute simplicity, therefore, includes all things in its unity. Existence embraces in its simple unity the totality of its different modes.

The point that could find appreciation in Hegel’s *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* consists in Sadra’s representing of the simple Absolute existence not as empty and abstract unity, but as a unity of the different modes of existence. These different modes of existences are internally produced due to the substantial movement of existence itself.

The innermost existential activity of substance as determined in itself, and not as imposed externally from outside, brings us to Hegel’s notion of organic life of the whole. The notion of the unfolding of the world on the basis of its inherent, existential contingency has, Hegel would say, “its efficacy in itself.”

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363 Hegel extends his account of organic life to cover the three elements of his system: the logical, the natural, and the spiritual. He differentiates, “logical life as pure Idea from natural life which is dealt with in the philosophy of nature, and from life in so far as it stands in connexion with spirit.” Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 762.
That which has organic life, whose principle is formative, which has its efficacy in itself, and in the same only remains at home with itself and maintains itself, is nothing but the end, the activity determined in itself, which in its relation to what is different does not comport itself as mere cause, but returns upon itself.\textsuperscript{364}

Sadra’s notion of the Absolute simplicity of existence entails this Hegelian idea of the cause that “returns upon itself.” For Sadra, existence alone is real and God is pure existence. The reality of existence reveals itself as organic unity in which the different modes of existence, as plurality, find their identity not only in their relation to one another but also in their relation to the life of the whole. The contingent existents, as modes of the Necessary existence, find their existential originality in God.\textsuperscript{365} For Sadra, the Necessary existence/God is pure life, and the contingent existents—in their relations to their origin/God—are manifestations of the organic life of existence in its simple totality.\textsuperscript{366} Hence the existentiality of the organic life of the whole is a self-contained cause which finds its causality in itself. And, as Sadra writes,

existence, insofar as it is existence, has no agent from which it emanates, no matter into which it transforms, no subject in which it is found, no form by which it is clothed, no goal for which it is [established]. Rather, it itself is the agent of all agents, the form of all forms, and the goal of all goals.\textsuperscript{367}

Against the one-sided causality based on the temporality of the world, on the one hand, and the one-sided causality based on the eternality of world, on the other hand, Sadra’s view of causality synthesizes temporality and eternality in terms of the metaphysical unity of the unfolding existence. But this synthesis is first preceded by Sadra’s distinction of two lines of causes: the horizontal, temporal line of causes, and the vertical, eternal line of causes. The former is related to natural causes. The latter is related

\textsuperscript{364} Hegel, \textit{Hegel’s Lectures on the History of Philosophy}, p.125.
\textsuperscript{365} See: Sadra, \textit{Asfār}, p. 47.
\textsuperscript{366} See: \textit{Ibid.}, p. 329.
to God’s *existential* identity with “the Intelligence of Muslim Peripatetics, the Forms of Plato, and the Attributes of the theologians.” These two lines of causes are interrelated. The natural temporal causes cause movement and change but do not give existence to the effects. Existence, rather, comes through the vertical line of causes. This does not mean that God causes Platonic Forms to come into existence. Existence rather is *substantially* in a state of flux, in a state of unfolding toward its absolute simplicity realized in God. The graduated levels of reality correspond to the gradual unfolding of existence on the scale of these two interrelated lines of causes. The existential causality here reflects this causal dialectical relationship between what is natural and what is supernatural, what is material and what is spiritual, what is immanent and what is transcendental. Within this causal viewpoint of reality, existence maintains itself as the ultimate real cause which eternally emerges from itself and returns to itself.

**Sadra’s and Hegel’s Critiques of The Formal Logic of Arabic Philosophers**

What Sadra considers as “the concept of existence,” —a concept that we abstractly have in our mind about the external and actual existence—approaches what Hegel means by the abstract account of “existence” in his *Logic*. For both Hegel and Sadra, the concept of existence as “abstract category of thought” is an inadequate predicate of truth or God. Both of them try to advance over the finite characteristics of the faculty of understanding which limit reality only within the abstract form of existence. In the context of his critique of the metaphysics of abstract existence, Hegel writes,

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369 Sadra’s account of the graduated levels of existence is discussed in the first chapter in this dissertation.
370 The difference between “the concept of existence” and “the reality of existence” in Sadra’s philosophy is elaborated upon in our first chapter.
The thinking of the old metaphysical system was finite. Its whole mode of action was regulated by categories, the limits of which it believed to be permanently fixed and not subject to any further negation. Thus one of its questions was: Has God existence? The question supposes that existence is an altogether positive term, a sort of *ne plus ultra*. We shall see however at a latter point that existence is by no means a merely positive term, but one which is too low for the Absolute Idea, and unworthy of God.\(^{371}\)

That which is unworthy of God is not existence in its concrete and actual sense, but existence in its abstract sense. Hegel, therefore, refuses to accept the abstract, narrow, and rigid term of existence to be an equivalent to truth. For him, existence, taken as isolated and abstract category, is finite form. “But truth,” Hegel writes, “is always infinite, and cannot be expressed or presented to consciousness in finite terms.”\(^{372}\) But what Hegel means here by infinite “is not to be conceived as abstract away and away for ever and ever.”\(^{373}\) Instead of this spurious infinity, Hegel argues that truth is “the genuine Notion of infinity.”\(^{374}\) If the spurious infinity is the infinite of the understanding in which the finite is negatively excluded from the infinite, the genuine infinite of reason is that which speculatively includes the finite within it. For if every negation is a determination then the infinite’s negation of the finite implies the determination of the infinite along with the determination of the finite. But this means that the infinite is limited. As thus, the infinite contradicts its definition. It is only when we understand the infinite as the negation of negation that we reach the genuine infinite as a sublation of the spurious infinite. Hence, as Hegel writes, “in saying what the infinite is, namely the negation of the finite, the

\(^{371}\) Hegel, *Hegel’s Logic*, p. 49.
\(^{374}\) Hegel, *Science of logic*, p. 137.
latter is itself included in what is said; it cannot be dispensed with for the definition or
determination of the infinite.”

The difference between the notion of existence as “abstract” and “an isolated
predicate of a thing,” on the one hand, and the notion of existence as “concrete,” on the
other, is significant in both Sadra’s and Hegel’s philosophy. Sadra reflects this
difference between these two different senses of existence by saying,

The reality of existence-qua-existence is not limited by generality and
delimitation, universality and particularity, and inclusiveness and specificity. It is
neither one [numerically] by a oneness added to it, nor many…. In its inner most
truth, it is nothing but full realization, actuality and manifestation. These
meanings of contingency, concepts of universality, attributes of rational
consideration, and terms of mental analysis are attached to it on account of its
degrees and stations.

For Hegel, this difference between the abstractness and concreteness of existence reflects,
in fact, the difference between Dialectic and Reflection:

Dialectic is different from Reflection. In the first instance, Reflection is that
movement out beyond the isolated predicate of a thing which gives it some
reference, and brings out its relativity, while still in other respects leaving it its
isolated validity. But by Dialectic is meant the indwelling tendency outwards by
which the one-sidedness and limitation of the predicates of understanding is seen
in its true light, and shown to be the negation of them.

Within these Hegelian and Sadrian account of the concreteness of existence, the Islamic
philosophers do not advance over the stage of the metaphysics of abstract knowledge. In
his critique of the Arabic philosophers on this limited view of knowledge, Hegel writes,

375 Ibid., p. 143.
376 Hegel writes, “It is the fashion of youth to dash about in abstractions; but the man who has learned to
know life steers clear of the abstract ‘either—or’, and keeps to the concrete.” Hegel, Hegel’s Logic, p.115.
377 Sadra, Asfar, quoted in Kalin, Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy: Mulla Sadra on Existence,
Intellect, and Intuition, p. 90.
“The Arabians developed the metaphysics of understanding and a formal logic,” but “much good is not to be got from them.”

The reason why "much good is not to be got from” the Islamic philosophers’ formal logic lies in its inability to unite in a concrete system many pairs such as subjectivity/objectivity, simplicity/complexity, infinity/finitude, etc. For Hegel, the sphere in which this formal logic operates is Essence: “The terms in Essence,” Hegel writes, “are always mere pairs of correlatives, and not yet absolutely reflected in themselves. Hence in essence the actual unity of the notion is not realized, but only postulated by reflection.”

This means that the categories of essence are not the final categories by means of which thought can adequately grasp the truth. Although the doctrine of essence is an advance over the doctrine of being in that it is no longer only immediacy but includes mediation, the mediation of essence is still mediation by another and is not self-mediation. As we have seen before, logic shows that each category of essence is mediated by its opposite. Here the opposites within the categories of essence are not absolutely taken to be identical; they are “not yet absolutely reflected in themselves,” as Hegel says above. Essence, therefore, does not absorb the opposites within an absolute unity in which these opposites are sublated.

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379 Hegel, *Hegel’s lectures on the History of Philosophy*, p. 34.
380 In the context of his critique of the old metaphysics, in which Islamic philosophy is included, Hegel gives some examples of those predicates which could not in their abstractness grasp the truth: “As an example of such predicates may be taken: Existence, in the proposition, ‘God has existence’; Finitude or Infinity, as in the question, ‘Is the world finite or infinite?’; Simple and Complex, in the proposition, ‘The soul is simple’—or again, ‘The thing is unity, a whole,’ etc. Nobody asked whether such predicates had any intrinsic and independent truth, or if the propositional form could be a form of truth.” Hegel, *Hegel’s Logic*, p.48.
Since the opposites that determine the essence are not yet themselves identical, essence is not self-determined. Accordingly, the sphere of essence is not the sphere of freedom but the sphere of necessity. “Freedom,” by contrast, Hegel writes,

belongs to the Notion because that identity which, as absolutely determined, constitutes the necessity of substance, is now also sublated or is a positedness, and this positedness as self-related is simply that identity.382

This is why Hegel finds that “in essence the actual unity of the Notion is not realized,” for it will be realized only when essence’s necessary determination by its other is sublated by the free self-determination of Notion in which there is nothing outside it. Here we reach the genuine Notion of infinity which does not take the finite outside it but within it. The infinite of the understanding which is considered by the logic of essence as “the absolute Truth” is for Hegel, “absolute contradiction.”383 For if, according to the logic of abstract essence, infinite and finite are just opposites, the infinite will be as Hegel shows “the limit of the finite and is thus only a determinate infinite, an infinite which is itself finite.”384

Here we can find some general similarity between Hegel and Sadra with regard to the relation of essence to Truth as Absolute. For Hegel, as we have seen above, essence in its abstract sense is posited within understanding’s epistemological standpoint of Truth. For him, this stage of knowledge is a necessary stage toward a further higher stage of knowledge, but it is not the ultimate one. Essence accordingly is not the higher definition of the Absolute. Essence as a result of the external reflection of understanding, which knows how to distinguish between its own isolated determinations, is higher than the mere immediacy of sensation, which takes these different determinations in simple

382 Hegel, Science of Logic, p. 582.
383 Ibid., p. 139.
384 Ibid., p. 140.
self-relation. But this stage of abstract essence still falls short in expressing Truth in its Absolute and unconditioned sense. For, as we have seen above, this stage knows how to distinguish its own opposites but does not know how to unite them. Any attempt that the abstract view of essence makes to unite the differences would result in contradictions that could not be reconciled under the formal logic’s principle of non-contradiction. In order to embrace the differences in a higher stage, truth as Absolute infinity must, therefore, advance over the abstract logic of essence.

To clarify Sadra’s epistemological view in terms of the relation between essence and truth, it is important to explain his understanding of the relation between subject and object. Sadra’s theory of knowledge operates against many Islamic philosophers who do not accept the identity between subject and object. With this regard, let us take, for instance, Sadra’s critique of the Master of the Islamic philosophers, Avicenna. Sadra writes,

There are two points we have to know before delving into the critique of what the Master and others have said to reject the unification between the intellector [knower] and the intelligibilia [known] in a general and specific way. The first is that existence in everything is the principle reality in existentiation, and it is the principle of its particularity, the source of its quiddity, and the measure of its essence. Existence belongs to the category of things that allow intensification and diminution in terms of perfection and imperfection, and it has fundamental qualities and modes in every degree of intensification and diminution other than what it had before. The second [point]: as motion and transformation take place in quality and quantity, it also occurs in the formal substance (al-jawhar al-suri), which is connected to matter in a certain way. Motion in every category is necessitated by a single existence that is continuous, individual and gradual, and has, in every presumed moment of the time of this motion, a specific delimitation.

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385 Quentin Lauer writes, “It has so often been asserted that Hegel denies the principle of non-contradiction ....The fact is that Hegel affirms over and over again that non-contradiction is an indispensable principle of formal logic, of abstract understanding (Verstand); to ignore it on this level can lead to nothing but confusion. What is a necessary principle of abstract understanding, however, need not be a principle of concrete reason (Vernunft). This is not to say that reason violates the rules of understanding, nor, worse still, that reason dispenses with understanding. It is to say that reason, whose standpoint is that of totality, infinity, is not compelled, as is understanding, to fight shy of contradiction.” Quentin Lauer, Hegel's Concept of God (Albany: State University of New York, 1982), pp. 6-7.
among the limits of existence, which exists neither before nor after it [i.e., motion].

This passage reflects how Sadra’s theory of the unification of subject/“intellect” and object/“intelligible” is based on his theory of existence. His critique of the epistemological view of the formal logic is basically founded on his critique of the ontological ground of that logic.

If, for Sadra, the distinction between existence and essence is only conceptual, then the way to bridge this conceptual gap between existence and essence is to bridge the epistemological gap between the subjectivity of thinking and the objectivity of that which is thought. This needs another mode of knowledge that goes beyond the abstract knowledge of understanding. Sadra would agree with Hegel in his statement that “the battle of reason is the struggle to break up the rigidity to which the understanding has reduced everything.” This “battle of reason” eventually culminates in the identity of existence/essence by means of the identity of subject/object. The true triumph of the battle of reason against the abstractness of understanding is when man reaches ‘complete existence’ through consciousness and self-realization.

Another example of Sadra’s arguing against his previous Islamic philosophers can be viewed in the light of Suhrawardi’s refusal of the unity between subject and object. Suhrawardi, who is one of the most prominent defenders of the primacy of essence in Arabic philosophy, writes,

Some people have thought that when the perceiver perceives something, he becomes [identical with] it. […] When we say that A becomes B, does A remain the same and then we have B, thus both of them becoming multiple entities? Or is it rather that A is destroyed and B has not come into being, in which case there is no unification between the two?…When the soul thinks of A, does it remain the

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386 Sadra, Ittihad in Majmu ah, quoted in Kalin, Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy, p. 52.
387 Hegel, Hegel’s Logic, p. 53.
same as it was before [it thought it]? If so, then there is no union or the establishment [of a new being]. Or perhaps the soul is destroyed and something else has come into being, in which case there is again no unity [obtained between the soul and its object of intellection].

In his response to this passage, Sadra exposes Suhrawardi’s metaphysical essentialism.

He writes,

The Shaykh (i.e., Suhrawardi) has assumed that disparity [differentiation] (tafawut) takes place between two things in terms of perfection and deficiency in their shared quiddities [essences] without regard to any other condition concerning difference (fasl) or accident. The truth is that a single concept (ma’fhum) does not possess disparity [differentiation] from the point of view of its meaning (ma ‘na). Disparity [differentiation] can be only in reference to more intensity and weakness through the modes of actualization and concrete beings (al-wujudat) because existence allows disparity [differentiation] [in terms] of perfection and deficiency.

Sadra clarifies his position against Suhrawardi more clearly by saying:

The realization of this matter [i.e., the unification of the intellect and the intelligible] is impossible except through the principles that were mentioned in the beginning of this book [i.e., the Asfar] concerning the view that existence is the principle reality and essence is derived from it. It is certain that existence allows intensification and diminution, and whatever is strong in existentiation (qawiyy al-wujud) becomes more inclusive and encompassing of universal meanings and abstract intellective quiddities. When existence reaches the level of the simple intellect which is completely disengaged from the world of corporeal bodies and quantities, it becomes all of the intelligibila/universals and all things in a manner more virtuous and nobler than what they are based upon. Whoever has not tasted this path cannot understand the simple intellect which is the source of all detailed sciences. That is why you see most of the virtuous people finding it very difficult and unable to verify it in spite of their deep involvement in following the science of wisdom such as Suhrawardi in the Mutarath, Talwihat, and Hikmat al-ishraq, who has clearly rejected this view, and Imam [Fakhr al-Din] al-Razi and those who are in their state and class.

On the epistemological level, Sadra thus believes that the reconciliation of opposites could be reached by the intellectual intuition in which the knower and the

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389 Sadra, Hashiyah shara hikmat al-ishraq, p.210, quoted in Kalin, Knowledge in Later Islamic Philosophy, p.65. On Sadra’s account of the graduated levels of existence, see my chapter one.
390 Sadra, Asfar, I, 3, pp. 373-374, quoted in Ibid., p.66.
known are identical. Here the intellectual intuition is the epistemological ground in which the opposites of the knower and the known are dissolved. On the other side, Sadra’s absolute simplicity of existence is the ontological ground in which the opposites of essence are absolutely dissolved. For Hegel, this higher stage of groundedness is the stage of the Absolute Idea in which Being and Essence, the immediate and mediated, subject and object, are brought dialectically in a higher system of totality. This totality, however, is not abstract totality in which differences are not distinguished. It is rather a sublated identity in which differences are preserved in the higher whole. Both Sadra and Hegel consider this process toward the Absolute as unfolding. For Sadra, it is the unfolding of the actual existence. For Hegel, it is the unfolding of the Idea which reflects the speculative unity of Being and Essence.

If we take Sadra’s insistence on the difference between the abstract sense of existence and the concrete sense of existence, and add the fact that his philosophy is based on the substantial movement of existence, then we can say that Hegel’s notion of Dialectic is already implicit in his philosophy. This can be supported by what Hegel means by Dialectic when he says:

> It is of the highest importance to ascertain and understand rightly the nature of Dialectic. Wherever there is movement, wherever there is life, wherever anything is carried into effect in the actual world, there Dialectic is at work.\(^{391}\)

Despite these general similarities between them, Hegel’s and Sadra’s critiques of the deficiencies of Arabic philosophy are significantly different. Whereas Hegel’s critique is external in the sense that it is imposed upon Arabic philosophy from outside its actual formulation, Sadra’s critique emerges from within the dynamicity of the cultural context of the Arabic philosophy itself. In this sense, Sadra’s critique of his Arabic previous

philosophies satisfies Hegel’s demand of the progression of philosophy. That demand which, as Yovel puts it, must “emerge from within the development of actual knowledge and actual forms, and not as an artificial imposition upon them.”392

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Chapter Four

Hegel, Sadra, and the Qualitative Determination of Truth

In his *Science of Logic*, right before the section of “The Transition to Essence,” Hegel reaches this account of essence:

This unity thus posited as the totality of the *process of determining*, in which it is itself determined as indifference, is a contradiction in every respect; it therefore has to be *posited* as sublating this its contradictory nature and acquiring the character of a self-determined, self-subsistent being which has for its result and truth not the unity which is merely *indifferent*, but that immanently negative and absolute unity which is called essence.\(^{393}\)

This long and complex sentence displays the most progressive moment in the doctrine of Being, in which the immediate unity of Being eventually shows itself to be “a contradiction in every respect.” As the dialectic proceeds, the *indifferent* unity of Being is sublated by the absolute unity of essence. Essence, however, is a moment within the total spontaneity of the *process of determining* that unfolds dialectically towards the *Idea*. If, for Hegel, the determining process of truth is “the nature of the content itself which spontaneously develops itself in a scientific method of knowing,”\(^{394}\) *Logic* is this method which dialectally proceeds as a self-explanatory process of scientific knowing. The importance of Hegel’s *Logic* lies in this self-explanatory principle that exposes truth’s *process of determining*—a process that leads to the unitary totality of the speculative *determinate being* as Absolute. In my view, *Logic* as a self-explanatory *process of determining* reveals three *main* logical moments of *determinate being.*

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\(^{393}\) Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 379, my emphasis.

Determinate being is firstly manifested within the sphere of “Quality.”\textsuperscript{395} The qualitative determinate being corresponds to the epistemological standpoint of immediacy in general. The second logical moment of determinate being is “essence” as unfolded by the mediation of the epistemological view of reflection.\textsuperscript{396} “But,” as Hegel discovers,

the \textit{determinate being} which essence gives itself is not yet \textit{determinate being} as in and for itself, but as given by essence to itself, or as \textit{posited}, and is consequently still distinct from the \textit{determinate being} of the Notion.\textsuperscript{397}

Thus, the third logical moment of determinate being is “Notion” as is speculatively culminated within the epistemological view of sublation. For Hegel, as he concludes,

“Notion is the absolute that in its \textit{determinate being} is absolute.”\textsuperscript{398}

In what follows, I argue—as a conclusion to this dissertation—that Hegel’s speculative account of truth sublates both the traditional metaphysical view of truth based on considering essence as \textit{affirmative quality} on the one hand, and Sadra’s existential metaphysic based on considering essence as \textit{negative quality} on the other. This sublation lies basically in Hegel’s speculative treatment of the qualitative determinateness of truth as presented in “Section One: Determinateness (Quality)” of his \textit{Science of Logic}.

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In his Introduction to his Objective Logic, Hegel writes,

Objective logic is therefore the genuine critique of them [categories as determinations of thought and being]—a critique which does not consider them as

\textsuperscript{395} Hegel explains the first moment of the emergence of determinate being by saying: “From becoming there issues determinate being, which is the simple oneness of being and nothing.” \textit{Ibid.}, p. 109.

\textsuperscript{396} I should mention here that I do not consider Hegel’s logic as merely an epistemological logic but also as ontological. Hegel’s speculative categories as determinations of Truth/Idea are not only self-determinations of thought but also self-determinations of being. Hegel’s logic is this dialectical relationship of determining what it is to be and what it is to think—a dialectical relationship that leads to the speculative identity of thought and being.

\textsuperscript{397} \textit{Ibid.}, p.391.

\textsuperscript{398} \textit{Ibid.}
contrasted under the abstract forms of the *a priori* and the *a posteriori*, but considers the determinations themselves according to their specific content.\(^{399}\)

According to my reading, Hegel’s Objective Logic is a critique to the first two moments of determinate being: that of (the qualitative determinations of immediacy) as manifested in the doctrine of Being, and that of (the reflective determinations of mediation) as manifested in the doctrine of Essence. The former can be directed to the classical, formal logic which takes the forms of thought as a *posteriori*—as abstraction from the external objective world. The latter is directed to the modern, transcendental logic which take the *a priori* determinations of thought as the objective element of universality and necessity.

This leads me to consider Hegel’s objective logic as a critique to two accounts of the one-sided objectivity of truth:

1. The classical account of the objectivity of the qualitative determination of truth—
as represented especially by the Aristotelian traditional view.

2. The modern account of the objectivity of the transcendental logic of truth—as
represented especially by Kant.

Whereas the first point is implicit in Hegel’s objective logic, the second point is explicit. In this regard, Hegel writes, “What has been called objective logic would correspond in part to what with him [Kant] is transcendental logic.”\(^{400}\) Unlike Kant, who focuses on “the so-called transcendental aspect of the categories,” Hegel focuses on “the treatment of the categories themselves.”\(^{401}\) His aim is to expose, first, “what they (categories) are in themselves without the abstract relation to the ego common to all,” and, second, “what is

\(^{399}\) Ibid., p. 64.
\(^{400}\) Ibid., p. 62.
\(^{401}\) Ibid., p. 63.
their specific nature relatively to each other and their relationship to each other.”

Hegel’s speculative treatment of the categories, represented more effectively in the doctrine of Essence, leads to the third shape of determinate being: The Absolute Idea determined in-and-for-itself, as exhibits in the speculative logic of Notion.

That Hegel treats the sphere of quality as a critique of the traditional view of essence can be generally clarified in light of the difference between quality and property. “Property,” Hegel warns, “should not be confused with quality.” For, as he adds, “something is what it is only by its quality: whereas, though the thing indeed exists only as it has its properties, it is not confined to this or that definite property, and can therefore, lose it, without ceasing to be what it is.”

In contrast to the accidental property, quality is thus the essential characteristic that is identical with being to the extent a determinate being ceases to be what it is if it loses its quality. This point makes the essentiality of quality in regard to a determinate being equivalent to essence in the traditional sense. But, as we will see later on, Hegel’s dialectical method of self-determining of Truth exposes the deficiency of the one-sided view of the qualitative determination of Truth.

Several passages from Hegel support my last point. The striking passage can be found in Hegel’s Lectures on Logic, Berlin, 1831. In this passage, Hegel explicitly mentions Aristotle:

Such a determinate being is first given out to be the quale, quality [τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι]405, as Aristotle says. Something is constituted by such and such a nature,

\[402 \text{Ibid.} \]
\[403 \text{Ibid., p. 182.} \]
\[404 \text{Ibid. my emphasis.} \]
\[405 \text{The Greek phrase τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι refers to what a thing was to be, or the essence of the thing.} \]
and if it loses that nature its very being falls by the wayside. Its [qualitative] determination is inwardly connected with its very being.\textsuperscript{406}

It is not by chance that in this passage Hegel brings in Aristotle. This passage is in accord with Hegel’s identification of the four Aristotelian principles as he introduces them in his \textit{Lectures on The History of Philosophy}. Hegel writes,

\begin{quote}
In this ontology [Aristotle’s] or, as we call it, logic, he [Aristotle] investigates and minutely distinguishes four principles: first, determination or \textit{quality as such}, the wherefore of anything, \textit{essence} or form; secondly, the matter; thirdly, the principle of motion; and fourthly, the principle of final cause, or of the good.\textsuperscript{407}
\end{quote}

Essence, in its Aristotelian metaphysical sense, can be thus equated with a specific \textit{quality} completely jointed to a determinate being. If, for Aristotle, a thing’s essence is the statement of its definition, of \textit{what it is},\textsuperscript{408} then, as Hegel writes, “quality is, in the first place, the character identical with being: so identical that a thing ceases to be \textit{what it is}, if it loses its quality.”\textsuperscript{409} And, again, “a something is \textit{what it is} in virtue of its quality, and losing its quality it ceases to be \textit{what it is}.”\textsuperscript{410}

It is clear from these passages that the function Hegel assigns to quality in the logic of being is, in general, equivalent to the function which is assigned to essence by the Aristotelian metaphysics. However, this does not mean that Hegel agrees that quality is equivalent to the truth of a determinate being. This is merely an initial account of the truth of a determinate being within the total spontaneity of the process of determining.

That is to say, both Hegel’s initial account of quality and the Aristotelian qualitative

\begin{footnotes}
\item[407] Hegel, \textit{Lectures on The History of Philosophy}, p. 335.
\item[409] Hegel, \textit{The Encyclopaedia Logic}, p. 124.
\item[410] \textit{Ibid.}, 134.
\end{footnotes}
account of essence are regarded as the ontological principle of a determinate being—a principle the loss of which makes the determinate being cease to be what it is; its very being, as Hegel mentions, falls by the wayside. As Hegel writes, “take away from the dog its animality, and it becomes impossible to say what it is.” Quality in this limited sense in Hegel’s doctrine of Being thus plays the same ontological role that essence plays in the classical metaphysics. We will see later how Hegel shows the inconsistency of regarding quality as equivalent to the truth/essence of a determinate being.

There is another point that could support my claim of considering Hegel’s quality—in this circumscribed sense— as equivalent to the Aristotelian account of essence. Let us, following Hegel’s evaluation of the speculative Aristotle, take Aristotle as the systematic philosopher with whom the concept of being takes its proper place in the classical metaphysics. Aristotle’s science of being as being differs from other determinate sciences— such as mathematics, physics, etc. — in that it is not limited or restricted to a particular genus of being. Aristotle’s being as being is, therefore, free from all the restrictions and limitations of a determinate being. In this sense, being as such is the negation of all determinations. Being as such is thus an indeterminate being.

In my view, the starting-point of Hegel’s Science of Logic carries out this Aristotelian demand of the absolute indifference of being as being to its highest possible form or mode. For Hegel, “it is the abstract indeterminateness and immediacy in which

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411 Ibid., p. 37.
412 Aristotle says, "There is a science which investigates being as being and the attributes which belong to this in virtue of its own nature. Now this is not the same as any of the so-called special sciences; for none of these others treats universally of being as being. They cut off a part of being and investigate the attribute of this part; this is what the mathematical sciences for instance do.” Aristotle, Metaphysics (1003a18-25), in The Complete Works of Aristotle, p. 1584.
413 In his Heidegger and Aristotle, Ted Sadler writes, ‘Hegelian ‘Logic’ becomes ontological by no longer confining itself to the rules of thinking but determining the nature of being, by again taking up being qua being as the first of all questions[...] As he pursued this question, Hegel become more attracted to
it must be the beginning.” Pure being, as the starting-point of *Logic*, is absolutely different from any other kind of being. While the other modes of being are, determinate, restricted, limited, particularized, and therefore finite, pure being is absolutely indeterminate to the extent it “becomes” identical to “nothing.” “*Becoming,*” then, as Hegel shows, consequentially proceeds to “*determinate being,*” from which the other categories deduce themselves spontaneously.

Thus both Aristotle’s being *as such* and Hegel’s pure being do not presuppose any determination. However, in his semi-systematic process of determining, Aristotle’s being *as such* reaches the essential consideration that the very nature of a determinate being lies in, as Hegel says, “its qualitative determination.” That qualitative determination Hegel writes, “is inwardly connected with its very being.” Hegel clearly writes, “It has already been shown that the beginning is made with being *as such,* therefore, with qualitative being.” Quality, in this immediate and limited account, therefore, is the first determination that makes a being a determinate being—a determination so identical to a being to the extent a determinate being ceases to be what it is if it loses its quality. This immediate account of quality thus becomes equivalent to the essence or the “what it is” of a determinate being in the classical metaphysics.

For Hegel, this classical metaphysical account, as thus far expressed, is deficient. In order to show the deficiency of taking quality as an equivalent to the essence of a

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414 Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p.79.

415 Hegel writes, “Being, the indeterminate immediate, is in fact *nothing*, and neither more nor less than *nothing.*” *Ibid.*, p. 82.

416 See my chapter two.

determinate being, Hegel invites us to speculatively contemplate the category of quality itself. The point is to investigate whether this category is self-consistent or self-contradictory. This will be in light of discussing the metaphysical view which bases its account of the distinct quality of a determinate being on the abstract assumption that a genus must exclude differentia. That is to say, a genus, as a universal, must exclude the differences of its species. Genus must only include what is common among its species. The essence of a certain species consists in its qualitative difference from other species. Hence, as W. T. Stace, in his *The Philosophy of Hegel*, shows, “The boundary lines between species and species are qualitative limits.” For example, the essence of man, as a species subsumed under the genus animal, consists in its specific quality of rationality that *differentiates* it from other species. If man loses his quality of rationality that differentiates him from other species, he will cease to be what he is. Difference from others is thus considered in the qualitative determination of man but only as exclusion, and not as inclusion. That is, quality as a distinct characteristic of a determinate being excludes but not includes difference or other. Moreover, when essence in its qualitative determinacy is considered in itself as a universal of its individuals, it also excludes the differences of its individuals. For Hegel, this exclusion of others from the account of quality in the classical sense of essence is self-contradictory. As Stace puts it,

> The problem was how to pass from genus to species in view of the fact that the genus expressly excludes the differentia. Now Hegel’s discovery consists in this, that the required differentia is always the negative, and that, when this is understood, it is seen that the old view that the genus excludes the differentia is not the complete truth.

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Hegel’s *Logic*, as we will see, proves that the other must be included in the account of quality as *determination*.

From the Hegelian point of view, the metaphysical account of essence— as a quality that determines the inner nature of a determinate being—is mistakenly taken to be only the reflection of the affirmative reality of a determinate being in itself. As Hegel writes, “quality, taken in the distinct character of *being*, is *reality*.”420 Hegel criticizes this one-sided affirmative, qualitative account of reality because it excludes *negation* from being an essential moment of the constitution of the *distinct character of being*.

“Reality,” Hegel shows, “is given the value of something positive from which negation, limitation and deficiency are excluded.”421 Against even the conservative religious views which consider God only in his positive quality, Hegel writes, “Thus in God himself, *quality* (energy, creation, power, and so forth), essentially involves the determination of the negative—they are the producing of an *other*.”422 The insufficiency of the determination of quality is exposed further in the logic of Quantity in which, as Hegel proves, “[the] inner connection of being and quality is no longer present.”423 But, for the purpose of my argument, I will not follow the dialectic of quantity in its details.

Let us now turn to Sadra and see how we can appropriate his metaphysical view of essence with Hegel’s critique of the qualitative being. According to Hegel’s *Logic*, “every philosophical system should be regarded as the presentation of a particular moment, or a particular stage, in the process of the development of the Idea.”424 If this is

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421 Ibid.
422 Ibid., p. 85.
423 Ibid.
424 Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, § 86, *Addition* 2. p. 138. Hegel is serious in his claim that every philosophical system should be regarded as a moment of the development of the Idea. He, for example, considers Parmenides, Buddhism, and Heraclitus as the three representative philosophies of the three
so, Sadra’s philosophy can be regarded as the presentation of the opposite moment of
essence as the positive quality of a determinate being. For Sadra, essence is rather the
negative quality of a determinate existent. This claim I consider as an answer to the
question that I had posed at the beginning of the third chapter regarding the philosophical
status of Sadra’s philosophy within Hegel’s evaluation of the history of philosophy.

Arguing that existence is the only reality, Sadra criticizes his predecessors,
including the traditional views of Plato and Aristotle, for giving affirmative reality to
essence—as we saw in chapter one and three. For Sadra, essence-in-itself without
reference to its mode of existence is absolutely “nothing”. By considering essences as
mere negative qualities rather than positive qualities of determinate existents, the
knowing existent unfolds ontologically and epistemologically towards the pure simplicity
of the Absolute Existence/God. The Absolute Truth of truths as Extended existence
negates any qualitative determination by essence. Essence, as quality in itself, is
absolutely negative; it is nothing.

But, in Hegel’s speculative language, Sadra still operates within the abstract
sphere of the qualitative determinateness of truth. From the standpoint of Hegel’s
speculative logic, Sadra’s account of essence makes the inward negativity of essence not
a constitutive element of the Absolute’s process of determining but a mere negative
quality. That is to say, although Sadra’s account of essence implies negation, this
negation is only taken as mere deficiency and not as a principle drive of unfolding and

\[\text{moments of pure being, nothing, and becoming. Hegel writes, “It was the Eleatics, above all Parmenides, who first enunciated the simple thought of pure being as the absolute and sole truth.” Hegel, Science of Logic, p. 83. See further Ibid., p. 94. And he writes, “In the oriental systems, principally in Buddhism, nothing, the void, is the absolute principle. Against that simple and one-sided abstraction the deep thinking Heraclitus brought forward the higher, total concept of becoming and said: being as little is, as nothing is, or, all flows, which means, all is a becoming,” Ibid.}\]
\[425 \text{ For more on Sadra’s account of the Extended existence, see the first chapter of this dissertation.}\]
determining—not as a principle of sublation. Here I agree with Fazlur Rahman that the Hegelian idea of sublation is absent in Sadra’s account of the evolution of existence.

Rahman in his *The Philosophy of Sadra* writes,

Sadra’s thought presents certain interesting features resembling Hegelianism, notably, the explicitly stated idea that contradiction at a lower level are systematically synthesized at a higher level which is, therefore, more concert and real….In the West, the element of movement was systematically worked out by Hegel. In Sadra, however, while the existence of opposites is recognized at all contingent levels, which are synthesized at higher levels (that is why, for Sadra, the law of contradiction is applicable within the perimeters of opposites at a given level only and does not extend beyond that level so far as those opposites are concerned), there is no trace of any explicit formulation of the characteristically Hegelian doctrine of the generation of its opposite or anti-thesis by a thesis. 426

However, I do not agree with Rahman’s characterization of Hegel’s element of movement as a pattern of thesis, anti-thesis, and syntheses. For this pattern still implies a kind of abstract duality between two opposites and implies also a determinate thesis as a given presupposition of the system. On my account, Hegel’s system of logic does not start with a determinate thesis but rather with a radical presuppositionless of any determination—the pure immediate indeterminate being. In this regard I agree with Houlgate who writes that

in a genuinely presupposition-less philosophy we have no right to assume in advance any general model as a standard by which to evaluate Hegel’s particular arguments. We are not to assume, therefore that the Logic is structured according to the famous pattern of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Nor indeed that Hegel arranges concepts in any other, more subtle, triadic sequence. We have simply to consider indeterminate being and observe how, if at all, develops. 427

It is this inadequate account of negation that leads Sadra to consider essence-in-itself as nothing. For Hegel, “negation taken as mere deficiency would be equivalent to

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427 Steven Houlgate, *The Opening of Logic*, p. 34.
nothing; but it is a *determinate* being, a quality, only determinate with a non-being."⁴²⁸

Negation is thus not the same as pure nothing. In contrast to Sadra’s account of negation as nothing, Hegel, therefore, introduces negation as a quality that is also a determinate being. It is this grasping of the role of negativity within essence that makes Hegel stands above the traditional view of the static essence as mere quality in-itself as well as Sadra’s view of essence as mere nothing. “Essence,” for Hegel “is what it is through negativity which is not alien to it but is its very own, the infinite movement of being. It is being that is in *itself and for itself.*”⁴²⁹

Hegel’s dialectical method of determining thus splits quality into two determinate beings, one positive and the other negative.⁴³⁰ Here we are faced with two opposite views of quality: one considers it in its affirmative dimension as a *real quality*—as is the case with the traditional view of essentialism—and the other considers it as a *negative quality*—as is the case with Sadra’s view of existentialism. Hegel accepts both views only to overcome them. For him, real quality and negative quality both entail the same simple oneness that constitutes a determinate being: “Both are determinate being, but in *reality* as quality with the accent on *being*, the fact is concealed that it contains determinateness and therefore also negation.”⁴³¹ For Hegel, the difference between real quality and negative quality within a determinate being is internal difference. It is this internal qualitative difference—which is speculatively inseparable from its “quantitative difference”⁴³²—that eventually constitutes the truth of self-determined, self-subsistent

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 390.
⁴³⁰ “In determinate being its determinateness has been distinguished as quality; in quality as determinately present, there is distinction—of reality and negation.” Ibid., p. 114.
⁴³¹ Ibid., p. 207.
⁴³² Ibid., p 378.
being. In Hegel’s *Logic*, this more concrete determination of being is implicit in the section of “measure” and explicit in the “doctrine of essence”.

Let us now analyze further these two sides of quality—that of the traditional view of essentialism and that of the existential view of Sadra—and see how Hegel not only criticizes them but also overcomes them.

The Hegelian understanding of the traditional view of determination considers essence as the real determinate quality of a being. Regarded only in its *positive* aspect, essence is understood as the quality of being-in-itself that a determinate being enjoys *as such*. In this view, what constitutes the essence/truth of a determinate being lies in its own relation to itself rather than its relation to the other. As thus, essence is pure or abstract self-related being. “Its character, therefore, is to lack all determinate character, to be inherently lifeless and empty,” as Hegel writes. On the other hand, regarded only in its *negative* aspect—as is the case with Sadra—essence as quality is mere being-for-other. Both views, therefore, are one-sided views of quality. Both of them still operate within the standpoint of formal logic. “As formal,” Hegel agrees, “this relation recurs in the two distinct sides.” But, as Hegel further elaborates,

these sides thus continue themselves into each other also in respect of their qualitative determinations; each quality is self-related in the other and is present in each of the two sides, only in a different quantum. Their quantitative difference is thus indifference in accordance with which they continue themselves into each other and this continuation as the self-sameness of the qualities is in each of the two unities. The sides, however, each as the whole of the two determinations and hence containing the indifference itself, are thus at the same time posited as self-subsistent relatively to each other.435

434 Essence’s being-for-other is concerned with the external reality of existence. For Sadra, it is only in relation to what is other than itself, i.e., existence, that essence has a meaning or mental being at all. Essence in-itself without reference to its mode of existence is thus equivalent to nothing.
Otherness, or “the quality of being another,” is thus a constitutive, qualitative moment in the determinate being. Quality therefore must not be considered only in-itself as a positive reality nor only as for-other as a negative quality. For Hegel, at the very core of its nature, a determinate being proves to be its two dialectical moments of being-in-itself and being-for-other.

While the traditional views of metaphysical essentialism focus on the moment of being-in-self as a constitution of the quality of a determinate being, Hegel shows that this moment cannot logically sustain itself without its other moment. He writes, “Something through its own nature relates itself to the other, because otherness is posited in it as its own moment; its being-within-self includes the negation within it, by means of which alone it now has its affirmative determinate being.” This makes the two essential qualities of being-for-other and being-in-itself not two something(s) but one something with two aspects or moments. “Being-for-other and being-in-itself are,” as Hegel writes, “moments of one and the same something.”

In his speculative treatment of quality by which he overcomes the abstract determinateness of quality, Hegel gives this example:

The determination of man is thinking reason; thought in general, thought as such, in his simple determinateness—by it he is distinguished from the brute; in himself he is thought, in so far as this is also distinguished from his being-for-other, from

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437 This identity between something and the other is not an abstract identity in which the other is dissolved completely in something. “The other,” Hegel adds, “is also qualitatively distinguished from this [something] and is thus posited outside the something.” *Ibid.*, 125. That is to say, the quality that constitutes the essence of something should not be regarded only in the affirmation of quality in-itself. Rather, as Hegel says, “the negation of its other is now the quality of something, for it is as this sublating of its other that it is something.” *Ibid.*
438 *Ibid.*, p. 119. For Hegel, as Houlgate puts it, “This difference between something’s being-in-itself and its other-relatedness is not merely accidental but is actually constitutive of being-in-itself: a thing enjoys its ownmost being in itself only insofar as this is explicitly distinguished from the thing’s relation to other things.” Houlgate, *The Opening of Hegel’s Logic*, p. 336.
his own natural existence and sense-nature through which he is directly connected with his other.\footnote{Ibid., p. 123.}

Here Hegel refers to the relation of quality as “simple determinateness” to its other.

Houlgate’s comment on this passage supports my point. He writes,

As an example (borrowing a phrase from Fichte), Hegel mentions the determination of humanity (die Bestimmung des Menschen), which he claims is “thinking reason.” That which characterizes humanity’s proper nature and distinguishes us from the animals, Hegel maintains, is thought (Denken). Thought, however, is not a purely inner quality of which each individual alone is aware. It is a quality that exhibits itself in and suffuses our dealing with others (whether we act in explicit accordance with the dictates of reason or not). Thought is our \textit{determination}, therefore, because it is the defining character of humanity evident in our relation to others.\footnote{Steven Houlgate, \textit{The Opening of Hegel's Logic: From Being to Infinity} (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2006), p 348.}

Moreover, essence as a mere quality of being in itself is limited to what Hegel calls the category of determinateness (\textit{Bestimmtheit}) and not to the category of determination (\textit{Bestimmung}). The former views the determinate being only in the simplicity of its intrinsic quality or nature regardless of its other-relatedness. As Hegel shows, “determinateness thus isolated by itself in the form of \textit{being} is \textit{quality}—which is wholly simple and immediate.”\footnote{Hegel, \textit{Science of Logic}, p. 111.} And again, “the determinateness is in the form of \textit{being}, and as such it is \textit{quality}.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 109.} It is noteworthy to mention here that Hegel in the Doctrine of Essence still considers Modern Idealism as a philosophy that operates within the sphere of determinateness. He writes, “The various forms of idealism, Leibnizian, Kantian, Fichtean, and others have not advanced beyond being as determinateness, have not advanced beyond this immediacy, any more than skepticism did.”\footnote{Ibid., p.396.}

\footnote{Ibid., p. 123.}
\footnote{Steven Houlgate, \textit{The Opening of Hegel's Logic: From Being to Infinity} (West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2006), p 348.}
\footnote{Hegel, \textit{Science of Logic}, p. 111.}
\footnote{Ibid., p. 109.}
\footnote{Ibid., p.396.}
on the other hand, brings the truth of the determinate being not only in its relation to its own affirmative quality but also in its intrinsic quality to others. Hegel writes,

Determination is affirmative determinateness as the in-itself with which something in its determinate being remains congruous in face of its entanglement with the other by which it might be determined, maintain itself in its self-equality, and making its determination hold good in its being-for-other.444

Unlike the traditional views that make essence a quality that encloses in rigid identity, Hegel argues that “it is the quality of something to be open to external influences and to have a constitution.”445 The truth of a determinate being, therefore, does not consist in the abstract unity of the qualitative enclosure of being in-itself. Hegel’s true speculative unity of being, as he writes,

is not abstract but a living, concrete unity in virtue of the fact that in the opposition in consciousness between a self-determined entity, a subject, and a second such entity, an object, is known to be overcome.446

Hegel, therefore, liberates the determinate being from the sole quality of being-in-itself, which represents only its subjective side, by revealing its other essential quality of being-for-other. For Hegel, these two qualities of determinate being—whether in its ontological or epistemological level— are no longer separate. But this does not mean that they are not distinguishable. It is exactly this dialectical difference between these two identical moments of determinate being (being-in-itself/subjectivity, and being-for-other/objectivity) that is essential for the constitution of the determinate being. In its dialectical unfolding toward the Notion, however, determinate being is neither being-in-itself as a positive quality, nor being-for-other as a negative quality, but being-for-self. Hegel writes, “As mere being-in-itself it would be only the abstraction of pure essence;

444 Ibid., p. 123.
445 Ibid., p. 124.
446 Ibid., p. 60.
but it is equally essentially being-for-self; it is itself this negativity, the self-sublating of otherness and determinateness.\footnote{Ibid., p. 390.}

It is important to mention here that the latter statement comes at the very beginning of The Doctrine of Essence. Here it is clear that Hegel equates what is mere “being-in-itself,” which in the Doctrine of Being is equivalent to quality as affirmative reality, with abstract essence. Hegel thus sublates both the traditional view of truth based on the abstract affirmation of essence as \textit{real quality} and Sadra’s view of truth based on the negation of essence as \textit{negative quality}.

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If, as Hegel writes, “the truth of \textit{being} is \textit{essence},”\footnote{Ibid., p. 389.} then, what is “the essence of \textit{being}” which can be considered as “the truth of \textit{being}? Before we answer this confusing question we need to investigate another question: Is it logically valid to substitute Hegel’s proposition of “the truth of \textit{being} is \textit{essence}” with the proposition of “the truth is the essence of \textit{being}” without contradiction? The short answer is this: no, if we consider the latter propositions as abstract propositions, and yes, if we consider them as speculative propositions. To clarify this point, let us again confront Sadra with Hegel by the mediation of the traditional view of essence as quality.

For classical metaphysics, as we have seen, “the essence of \textit{being}” consists in its distinctive quality taken as affirmative reality that excludes negation or difference. In this account, “the truth of \textit{being}” is essence as a quality that holds only what is identical and rejects what is different. For Hegel, this position is logically rejected as one-sided truth that exposes self-contradiction. For Sadra, as Christian Jambet puts it, “if God is
existence, the object of our highest knowledge will be the nature of the act of existing rather than the essence of things.”

Now, if we can substitute Hegel’s proposition of “the truth of being is essence” with the proposition of “the truth is the essence of being,” then, for Sadra, “existence is the essence of being,” because existence is God.

Sadra could agree with Hegel that “the truth of being is essence” only insofar as “the essence of being” is absolutely identical with existence to the extent that “the truth of being” becomes actual existence. In this sense, what is actually determinate, for Sadra, is not essence, but existence. Essence is only reflectively determinate in the subjectivity of the human mind as a mental being. That is to say, essence takes its determination not from itself as an independent real quality but from existence. Existence is independent being while essence is dependent being. Existence is dynamic substance that in its perpetual unfolding towards the existential simplicity of the Absolute/God produces essences as mere conceptual accidents appearing in the human mind. Existence is the real that exists in the most actual sense, while essence appears reflectively in the human mind as inadequate representation of the reality of existence. Sadra thus overturns the Platonism upside down. Rather than essence, existence is itself the differentia that makes a determinate being what it is. What determines and differentiates the quality and value of some existent from other existent is its existential degree that it occupies within its gradual existential unfolding towards the Absolute existence. Existence, therefore, is the real deferential quality of a determinate existent.

For Sadra, the determining process of truth as a whole consists in this ontological tension between the intensification of existence as affirmative qualitative reality and the

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diminution of essence as negative quality. The more existence a determinate existent has, the less essence it has. Consequently, the determinate existent, which is free from any determinations related to the negativity of essence, is the Absolut Existence/ God. Hence, God as absolute affirmative quality of His existential reality is pure and absolute existence. For Sadra, “this absoluteness,” of the existentiality of God is, as Jambet puts it, a simple negation that implies the negation of all qualification, statuses, and determinations…it is the absence of linkage and of definition in a description or a name, a determination, or anything else to the point of negating this negations themselves, in so far as they are things that express only a point of view of the intelligence regarding them.\footnote{Jambe, The Act of Being, p. 183.}

In his description of the unity of this Absolute Existence, Sadra writes,

His Unity is not the particular unity that is found in an individual of a (particular) nature; nor is It the generic or specific unity that is found in any general notion or any quiddity. Neither is It the conjunctive unity that is found when a number of things become assembled or unified into a single thing; nor is It the unity of contiguity found in quantities and measurable things. Nor, as you will learn, is It any of the other relative unities, such as unity by resemblance, homogeneity, analogy, correspondence, reduplication—although (certain) philosophers have allowed that—congruence, or any of the other kinds of unity that are not the True Unity. No, His Unity is other (than these relative ones), unknowable in Its innermost core…except that His Unity is the Source of all (particular) beings.\footnote{Mulla Sadra, The Wisdom of the Throne: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra, trans. James Morris (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 96-97.}

As the source of all particular beings, the unity of the Absolute existence is the existential ground of one Extended existence, which at once includes and transcends the Relative existence. Essences do not proceed from the Absolute existence, for they are “nothing” in themselves. From God, as infinite and eternal existence, comes only existence. “So,” as Sadra concludes, “privation (or “nonbeing”) does not enter into the existence and actual occurrence of a thing, although it may enter into its definition and its concept.”\footnote{Ibid., p. 96.} There is thus no “nothing” in the existential level of realization. “Nothing” is only a conceptual
notion that arises in the human mind when essence is simply considered in itself without reference to its mode of existence.\textsuperscript{453} From God, as pure existence, issues only one existence: the Extended existence, which is the mediation between the unity of the Absolute existence and the multiplicity of the Relative existence. While the Absolute existence remains absolutely unknowable in His unity, the Extended existence as (unity in multiplicity) and (multiplicity in unity) can be grasped by the intuitive rather than the discursive reasoning.\textsuperscript{454}

In Sadra’s metaphysical view of the reality of existence, there is no reality of essence except as a reflective creativity of the human mind under the impact of the reality of existence. Essences \textit{as such}, without the impact of the reality of existence, have no qualitative determination other than absolute nothing. This account makes essence \textit{unessential quality}. But the proposition “essence is \textit{unessential quality}” is a contradiction, for it will imply that the essence of the Absolute is also unessential quality. But Sadra’s Absolute is free from any trace of essence. Sadra’s philosophy cannot solve this contradiction within the Absolute except by appealing to a theory of knowledge that goes against the cognitive laws of understanding. In this aspect, Sadra comes close to Hegel. Sadra, as we have seen in the third chapter, embraces the theory of the identity between knower/intellect and known/intellectual.\textsuperscript{455} As Sadra writes, “Everything that is intelligible in its being is also actively intelligizing. Indeed, every form in perception—

\textsuperscript{453} John Wippel writes, “Thomas [Aquinas] would never admit, and [...] neither would Avicenna, that an essence or nature, taken absolutely in itself, could exist without being realized either as actually existing in an individual, or as being present in the mind in universal fashion.” John F. Wippel, \textit{Metaphysical Themes in Thomas Aquinas II}, Volume 2 (USA: the Catholic University of America Press, 2007), pp. 47-48.

\textsuperscript{454} For more on Sadra’s discussion of intuitive and discursive knowledge, see my first chapter.

\textsuperscript{455} For Sadra, as Jambet writes, “At its root, knowledge is existence itself, not the duplication of the external thing in a psychic form. It reveals the central, immaterial light by which the existent exists. It is, therefore, a recognition of the intelligible in the intellect, a certain mode of unification of the intellect and the intelligible.” Jambet, \textit{The Act of Being}, p. 83.
whether it be intelligible or sensible—is unified in its being with that which perceives it."\(^{456}\) However, on the ontological level, the status of the inessentiality of essence is still a matter of contradiction that Sadra could not solve except by a dogmatic return to the theological account of Plato’s Forms. Although essences, for Sadra, are deficiencies and mere negative qualities that reflectively appear in the human mind, existents still have intellective forms, “existing in God’s knowledge and the world of His Decree.”\(^{457}\) Out of some theological considerations, Sadra is forced to this account, “since none of these Forms and Names has an independent being, but rather are all modes of the Divine Essence and the veils of the divine Lordship.”\(^{458}\)

How can the unessential—essences as negative qualities—on the one hand, and the true—God as pure existence—on the other, be reconciled without contradiction?

While Sadra could not solve this contradiction except by a dogmatic return to the intellectual forms of Plato, Hegel solves this contradiction by the speculative interpretation of the Platonic intelligible world of essences. We have already seen this in Hegel’s reading of Plato in his Lectures on the History of Philosophy.\(^{459}\) The same point is brought back in Hegel’s Logic. Hegel discovers that otherness is implicitly constituted in the classical definition of essence as real quality. Hegel’s speculative account of quality renders explicit what is implicit in the classical definition of essence as affirmative quality of reality. In his Logic, Hegel explicitly brings Plato in order to emphasize that the truth of something, its inner quality that makes it what it is, neither

\(^{457}\) Ibid., p. 143.
\(^{458}\) Ibid.
\(^{459}\) See my chapter two.
should be considered as merely being-in-itself nor as merely being-for-other. Hegel writes,

Plato says: “God made the world from the nature of the One and the Other (touheterou); he brought them together and formed a Third out of them, which is of the nature of the One and the Other.”—This expresses the general nature of the finite which, being something, does not stand over against the other indifferently, but in such a way that it is in-itself the other of itself and hence alters. Alternation exhibits the inner contradiction with which being-there[ determinate being] is burdened from the start, and which drives it beyond itself.\textsuperscript{460}

This passage implies that the internal qualitative difference in a determinate being constitutes a contradiction. But this contradiction is not pure nothing. Rather, it is a determinate negation that provides the main drive of alternation and change at the very core of the determinate being. This result brings us closer to Sadra’s account of the substantial change of a determinate existent. For Sadra, as we have seen in Chapter one, change and alteration emerge from within the inner nature of a determinate existent. That is to say, change is not externally imposed upon a determinate existent but stems internally from its very nature. Hegel agrees,

Such changeableness in existence is to the superficial eye a mere possibility, the realization of which is not a consequence of its own nature. But the fact is, mutability lies in the notion of existence, and change is only the manifestation of what it implicitly is. The living die, simply because as living they bear in themselves the germ of death.\textsuperscript{461}

However, unlike Hegel, Sadra does not take changeability, which for him is inherent in a determinate existent, as a dialectical relationship between two opposite moments, one positive and the other negative. He merely considers the negative aspect of

\textsuperscript{460} Hegel, \textit{Hegel’s Logic}, p. 136. Hegel also writes, “By means of a dialectical treatment, Plato shows in his strictly scientific dialogues the general finitude of all fixed determinations of the understanding. Thus, for example, in the \textit{Parmenides}, he deduces the Many from the One, and, notwithstanding that, he shows that the nature of the Many is simply to determine itself as the One. This was the grand manner in which Plato handled the dialectic.” Hegel, \textit{The Encyclopaedia Logic}, § 81. \textit{Addition} 1. p. 129.

\textsuperscript{461} Hegel, \textit{Hegel’s Logic}, p. 137.
a determinate existent as a mere subjective reflection in the human mind. In the objective side of reality there is but realized existence unfolding gradually from one degree of existence to another higher degree of existence. In this gradual picture of the unfolding of existence there is no reality to essence in itself. Here we reach again the paradoxical proposition in Sadra’s philosophy: Essence is unessential.

If we take the proposition of “essence is unessential” as an abstract proposition that operates by the formality of understanding based on the law of non-contradiction, then this proposition is clearly self-contradictory. Hegel accepts this abstract proposition of understanding only to overcome it by the speculative propositions of reason. Logic’s doctrine of Essence, as we saw in the third chapter, presents Hegel’s critique of such abstract thinking of understanding. For this kind of thinking knows how to distinguish between the essential and the unessential but fails to unite them. From the standpoint of Hegel’s speculative propositions, “the truth of being” is “essence” insofar as what is essential is not only “different” from but also “identical” with what is unessential.

It is thus not surprising that Hegel starts the doctrine of Essence with the section of “The Essential and the Unessential.” And, as he says, “In the sphere of essence, we have first essence opposed to the unessential.”462 This first abstract duality of “the essential and unessential” is thus the foundation for all other abstract dualities, and overcoming this duality will open the door for solving all other abstract dualities. The significance of Hegel’s speculative logic of essence is to prove that the essential—the being-in-itself, the quality as affirmative reality—does not only exclude the unessential, the being-for-other, the quality as negative, but also includes it in a higher speculative unity of being-for-self: “The in-itself into which something is reflected into itself out of

462 Hegel, Science of Logic, p. 399.
its being-for-other is no longer an abstract in-itself, but as negation of its being-for-other is mediated by the latter, which is thus its moment.”

Against the traditional view of essence as inner qualitative nature of determinateness, Sadra asserts the absolute negation of essence. For him, truth consists in the affirmation of the outer existence in its unfolding towards its absolute simplicity in God. From the Hegelian point of view, Sadra’s existential account of truth is still a one-sided view of truth:

The sense in which, on one hand, outer existence is made the criterion of the truth of a content is no less one-sided than when the idea, essential being, or even inner feelings is represented as indifferent to outer existence and is even held to be the more excellent the more remote it is from reality.

For Sadra, the ultimate definition of the Absolute is the pure simplicity of existence in which the mental being of concepts—including the concept of existence and the concept of essence—is dissolved. Existence in its pure simplicity is the Absolute. From the Hegelian point of view, Sadra’s Absolute is indeterminate for it does not contain negation within it and this is why it remains absolutely unknowable for Sadra. Hegel would accept this indeterminate simplicity of the Absolute not as an ultimate moment of truth but as one moment that constitutes the whole mediated movement of the Absolute. In his Logic, at the beginning of the chapter of The Absolute, Hegel writes,

The simple substantial identity of the absolute is indeterminate or rather in it every determinateness of essence and Existence, or of being in general, as well as of reflection, has dissolved itself. Accordingly, the process of determining what the absolute is has a negative outcome, and the absolute itself appears only as the negation of all predicates and as the void.

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463 Ibid., p. 122.
464 Ibid., p. 112.
465 Ibid., p. 530.
Sadra’s Absolute is accordingly the void. For Hegel, the ultimate definition of the Absolute does not stop at this moment, in which “essence and Existence, or of being in general,” are dissolved. Essence and existence are also definitions of the Absolute, but they are inadequate definitions of the Absolute. Unlike Sadra, who excludes essence from the definition of the Absolute and holds firmly only to existence, Hegel includes both essence and existence as moments of the determining process of the Absolute.

We can also point to another difference between Hegel and Sadra—a difference related to the priority of essence over existence. There is a difference between the affirmation that essence has a speculative, logical priority over existence—as it is the case with Hegel—and that it has mental, human, priority over existence—as it is the case with Sadra. Hegel’s speculative priority of essence over existence is considered in Logic without any reference to what is external to the pure thought. “What we are dealing with in logic,” Hegel writes,

is not a thinking about something which exists independently as a base for our thinking and apart from it, nor forms which are supposed to provide mere signs or distinguishing marks of truth; on the contrary, the necessary forms and self-determinations of thought are the content and the ultimate truth itself. 466

In contrast, Sadra’s mental priority of essence over existence is considered in relation to what is external to the human thinking.

Hegel’s view of the logical priority of essence over existence, however, does not mean, as we found in the previous chapter, that essence exists in a transcendental realm over against existence. Nor does he consider existence “as a predicate or as a determination of essence, the proposition of which would run: essence exists, or has

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466 Ibid., p. 50.
existence.”  

Sadra would agree with Hegel’s disapproval of considering existence as a predicate of essence. Unlike the Avicennian tradition, Sadra does not regard existence as an accidental reality superadded to essence. It is only by means of the human mind’s conceptual analysis of reality that essence has priority over existence. In the external sense of reality, it is the essence which can be considered as accident to existence. As far as finite beings are considered, Sadra rejects the real distinction between essence and existence and maintains only the conceptual distinction between them. God is the only existent in whom there is neither real nor conceptual distinction between essence and existence. This is what makes God pure simplicity of existence, for Sadra.

Unlike Sadra, who treats and limits the concept of essence to the human mind, Hegel exposes the ontological possibilities of essence within the scope of the absolute reason that goes beyond the finite mind. If we take Hegel in his own words, what he means by thought is neither subjective in the sense that is only related to human mind, nor objective in the sense that is only related to the extra-mental reality. Rather, thought, which in its immanent activity produces its own dialectical determinations, is the absolute reason. “Logic is to be understood,” Hegel writes,

as the system of pure reason, as the realm of pure thought. This realm is truth as it is without veil and in its own absolute nature. It can therefore be said that this content is the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and finite mind.

Hegel thus simply considers the thought of essence in itself and in its immanent relation to its own determinations. His logic of essence is pure thought without any referring to

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467 Ibid., p. 483.
469 Hegel, Science of Logic, p. 50.
what can be considered as external to the movement of thought. This speculative
treatment of essence in itself leads him to reject the abstract distinction between essence
and existence. Rather than the proposition “essence exists” which implies distinction
between essence and existence, Hegel concludes,

the proposition should therefore run: essence is Existence; it is not distinct from
its Existence. Essence has passed over into Existence in so far as essence as
ground no longer distinguishes itself from itself as the grounded, or in so far as
this ground has sublated itself.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, p. 483.}

Whereas Hegel’s logical priority of essence is a sublated priority that pushes
essence towards more logical unfolding that revels its ontological possibilities, Sadra’s
mental priority of essence confines essence only within its anthropological horizon. Sadra
insists only on essence’s mental being, whose significance is merely reflected within the
human subject. Hegel, on the other side, liberates essence from its anthropological limit
by discovering within it its own logical necessity of contradiction—a contradiction that is
sublated by essence itself as the ground that must result in existence. Essence’s own
sublating of its opposites is the ground that produces existence not as abstract qualitative
determination of reality but as a dynamic net of reciprocal relations of ground and
grounded. By breaking with its anthropological limitations, essence becomes able to push
its unfolding towards its concrete determination as manifested in the Notion. Essence, as
the truth of being, extends and penetrates into all possible aspects of being. For these
aspects of being are themselves essence’s self-negativity that leads ultimately to the truth
as the Idea. And, as Hegel writes, “the definition of the Absolute as the \textit{Idea} is now itself
absolute. All the definitions given previously return into this.—The Idea is the \textit{Truth}.\footnote{Hegel, \textit{The Encyclopaedia Logic}, §213, p. 286.}
As a process of determining, Hegel’s Logic starts with the determination of the indifference as manifested immediately in the sphere of Quality. As the dialectic proceeds, this moment eventually proves to be a contradiction in every respect. Logic consequently proceeds to the determination of difference as manifested in essence “as a system of reflected determinations.”\(^{472}\) Proving that the moment of essence “is still fettered by the externality of immediate being,”\(^{473}\) the Logic is spontaneously necessitated to progress to the third moment of determination in which indifference and difference are brought back in a higher moment of identity. At that point, the Logic reaches the speculative moment of Notion, the speculative identity of undifferentiated unity and differentiated unity, or the speculative identity of immediacy and mediation as shown in the Subjective Logic.

In his Preface to the First Edition of his *Science of Logic*, Hegel writes

I maintain that it is this self-construing method alone which enables philosophy to be an objective demonstrated science. It is in this way that I have tried to expound consciousness in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Consciousness is spirit as a concrete knowing, a knowing too, in which externality is involved; but the development of this object, like the development of all natural and spiritual life, rests solely on the nature of the pure essentialities which constitute the content of logic.\(^{474}\)

*Truth*’s process of determining as a “self-construing method”— whether in the Logic or in the *Phenomenology*— progressively develops itself through an immanent critique of itself. It results in the speculative Idea of Being and Essence if this immanent critique is taken only as a pure movement of the determinations of onto-epistemological categories—a movement that insofar as it shows the immediacy and independency of thought’s own determinations, also shows their mediation and dependency on each other.

\(^{473}\) *Ibid.*
\(^{474}\) Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 28.
But this pure movement of thought dialectically reflects the rational structure of the movement of the reality of the experience as actual existence. “What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational” ⁴⁷⁵ can be understood as a dialectical process by which the speculative logic of the Idea in its pure rationality on one hand, and the phenomenological consciousness of the Absolute Knowing in its realized actuality on the other, are brought into identity-in-difference. Truth in its speculative wholeness reflects this dialectical identity between the logical Idea and the phenomenological Absolute Knowing. But this identity is not abstract identity. Rather, it is a speculative identity of circularity that contains both immediacy (Being) and mediation (Essence) in a higher totality (Idea).

Hegel writes,

there is nothing, nothing in heaven or in nature or mind or anywhere else, which does not equally contain both immediacy and mediation, so that these two determinations revel themselves to be unseparated and inseparable and the opposition between them, it is to be a nullity.⁴⁷⁶

Both the Logic as the science of “pure knowing” ⁴⁷⁷ and the Phenomenology of Spirit ¹⁸⁰⁷ as “the science of manifested spirit,”⁴⁷⁸ represent Hegel’s consideration of these determinations of immediacy and mediation. Considering this opposition between

⁴⁷⁵ G. W. Hegel, Elements of the Philosophy of Right. trans. H.B.Nisbet. ed. Allen Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 20. Kenneth Westphal writes, “Hegel has been accused of conservatism or worse. The most common basis for this charge is Hegel's claim that what is rational is actual and what is actual is rational. This claim has been taken as blanket endorsement of the status quo.” Kenneth Westphal, “The Basic context and structure of Hegel's Philosophy of Right” in The Cambridge Companion to Hegel, ed. Frederick C. Beiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 234. I disagree with such interpretations, for they do not take on their account the inner power of negativity that Hegel discovers within the essence of being by which it overcomes (existence) as a status quo. Essence as Actuality is an advanced moment of rationality that sublates the existence as a status quo. This dissertation, however, is more limited to essence as existence rather than essence as actuality. For more on Hegel’s account of what is actual and what is rational see: Robert Stern, Hegelian Metaphysics, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). In the latter reference, see especially the chapter: Hegel's Doppelsatz: A Neutral Reading, pp. 81-117.

⁴⁷⁶ Hegel's Science of Logic, p. 68

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid.
immediacy and mediation within the pure activity of cognition is the business of the
*Logic*. *Logic* here reveals the concrete unity of immediacy and mediation inasmuch as
this unity reveals “the nature of cognition as such.” However, “the more concrete form
of cognition,” Hegel tells us, “falls to be considered in the philosophy of spirit and in the
phenomenology of spirit.”

Both the *Logic* and the *Phenomenology* begin with immediacy. While the *Logic*
begins with pure immediacy, the *Phenomenology* begins with empirical immediacy. “In
this science of manifested spirit the beginning is made from empirical, *sensuous*
consciousness and this is immediate knowledge in the strict sense of the word.” The
*Phenomenology* ultimately results in “the Idea as pure knowledge,” which itself is the
presupposition of logic. “In logic,” Hegel writes, “the presupposition is that which has
proved itself to be the result of that phenomenological consideration—the Idea as pure
knowledge.” The beginning of *Logic*, therefore, proves to be “neither an arbitrary and
merely provisional assumption, nor is it something which appears to be arbitrarily and
tentatively presupposed, but which is subsequently shown to have been properly made
the beginning.” In the *Logic*, the pure Idea, as resulted from the empirical dialectic of
immediacy and mediation in the *Phenomenology*, is now examined purely and
immanently within the pure dialectic of immediacy and mediation. The resulted Idea of
*Phenomenology* as the beginning of *Logic* remains immanent in its scientific

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479 Ibid.
480 Ibid.
481 Ibid., p. 69.
482 Ibid.
483 In this regard, Karin De Boer writes, “The *Phenomenology* thus concludes by opening up the element of
pure thought, that is, the element within which the *Logic* as well as the philosophies of nature and spirit
485 Ibid., p.72.
development. This immanency of the Idea within its own dialectical development produces its own determinations—the Logic’s different categories as self-deduction. These categories as determinations of “thought and being” are themselves the unfolding of Truth. Since essence and existence are among other determinations that operate within the immanent dialectical relationship of immediacy and mediation, Hegel cannot be classified as an essentialist in the traditional sense or as an existentialist in the Sadrian sense. Hegel’s account of reality, as this dissertation has tried to show, is the sublation of the one-sided view of essence as the qualitative determination of reality and the one-sided view of existence as the sole affirmative qualitative reality. It is the sublation of the one-sided view of the traditional essentialism as well as the one-sided view of the existentialism of Sadra.

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Hegel writes, “The essential requirement for the science of logic is not so much that the beginning be a pure immediacy, but rather that the whole of the science be within itself a circle in which the first is also the last and the last is also the first.” *Ibid.*, p. 71.
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