



Revisiting the Stages of the Evolution of Human Eschatology in Transcendent Philosophy

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.18415/ijmmu.v12i11.7228>

Abstract

In Mulla Sadra's philosophical wisdom, anthropology is considered one of the most fundamental principles addressing the human position. The use of an intra-religious descriptive method and the establishment of a relationship with the rational system of philosophical psychology are among the most essential approaches of "Transcendent Philosophy" (al-Hikmah al-Muta'aliyah) in this regard. The present research aims to examine Mulla Sadra's philosophical viewpoint on the issue of human position through his own philosophical approach. It explores the logical relations among Mulla Sadra's ontological perspective—which overshadows his entire intellectual system—his epistemological framework, and his eschatology, as well as the interconnection among these three philosophical foundations with the stages of the human ascent (Qaws al-Su'ud). Eventually, this study will reexamine and analyze life-meaning theories from the foundational standpoint of "Transcendent Philosophy," with a focus on key principles, such as the substantial and intensifying motion of the soul, human reality in attaining the ultimate degrees of intellect, and the perfection of the soul as an ontological paradigm of man's transcendent station.

Keywords: *Foundationalism; Philosophical Anthropology; Sadrian Psychology*

Introduction

Questions concerning the *reality of the human being* are, in essence, an inquiry into the reason, purpose, value, and function of life itself. Since antiquity, such questions have preoccupied thinkers and philosophers in both the East and the West, each addressing them according to their epistemological scope and cognitive foundations. Undoubtedly, the success of humanity in presenting desirable and effective solutions for society depends on an exalted epistemological understanding of humanity and its existential capacities—an understanding made possible only through the life-giving teachings of divine revelation. Concepts such as *happiness and salvation through reason and contemplation*, *virtue-centered living*, *pure life inspired by divine teachings*, and *spiritual transcendence* represent the genuine meaning

of humanity—ideals that have held a significant place in the history of human thought. Socrates regarded “human happiness” as the ultimate end sought by all human beings (Foroughi, 1987, p. 27; Copleston, 2009 AH: 1/129). Likewise, Plato identified meaning and *happiness* with virtue and the perfection of the soul (Foroughi, 1987, p. 36), while Aristotle linked man’s supreme position to the exercise of reason and reflection (ibid., p. 55; Papken, 2006, pp. 15–18).

Similarly, Islamic philosophers, for their part, have used the concept of *Sa’adah* (happiness or beatitude) as the goal and ultimate end of human understanding. For example, al-Kindi considered the separation of the soul from matter as the ultimate happiness of humans (al-Kindi, 1990, pp. 121–130); in the same vein, al-Farabi defined happiness as the *Supreme Good* (al-Farabi, 2000, pp. 103–106); in addition, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) perceived eternal life and divine proximity as true happiness (Ibn Sina, 2009, pp. 202–209); furthermore, al-Ghazali viewed knowledge and righteous deeds as the foundation of human happiness and success (al-Ghazali, 1997, pp. 103–106). In his discussions on the knowledge of man and its qualitative dimensions, Mulla Sadra followed a course consistent with his cosmological and ontological principles. Drawing inspiration from the Word of Revelation and the Prophetic Tradition, he offered a distinctive interpretation of the ultimate destiny of human material life. At this point, a crucial question arises: did this great philosopher, who made profound and original contributions to the philosophical meaning of life, derive his philosophical principles from divine revelation—or, conversely, interpret revelation in light of his philosophical system? Achieving clarity on this issue becomes possible through the explication and analysis of the fundamental principles and core concepts underlying meaningfulness and their close connection within Mulla Sadra’s philosophical anthropology. Accordingly, this study seeks to reexamine the principles of *transcendent philosophy*, which integrates reason and religion, to determine whether, by employing an intra-religious descriptive method and engaging with Sadrian philosophical principles, one can arrive at a comprehensive view of the *transcendent human being*. By considering the doctrines of *substantial motion of the soul*—which indicates the soul’s dynamism—and *the unity of the intellect and the intelligible*, this research also attempts to reinterpret the meaning-making aspect of Mulla Sadra’s theological and philosophical worldview.

Undeniably, the rational analysis of the foundational aspects of humanity in Mulla Sadra’s philosophy is deeply intertwined with divine revelation. He is the philosopher who most vividly portrayed the harmony among religion, reason, mysticism, and intuitive insight in expressing the truth of human nature. In other words, Mulla Sadra extensively utilized religious sources and mystical experiences in constructing his transcendent philosophical system. He did not regard philosophy, mysticism, and religion as three alien disciplines; rather, he conceived reason as the defender and interpreter of revealed propositions and considered revelation and mystical unveiling as sources of spiritual illumination. Hence, Mulla Sadra viewed reason, revelation, and mystical insight as *different languages of a single truth* (Akbarian, 2007, p. 238). Accordingly, Mulla Sadra proposed that to attain the light of wisdom concerning the mysteries of human knowledge, one must seek illumination through the divine light of revelation and prophethood, believing that he himself had drawn the radiance of wisdom from the niche of the light of prophethood in uncovering the secrets of human destiny (Mulla Sadra, 1430 AH: 9/155).

Several key issues emerge through a close examination of Mulla Sadra’s approach to the study of human knowledge, which will be discussed in the subsequent sections. His religious and theological approach to the epistemological interpretation of human creation—deeply imbued with Qur’anic teachings—markedly differs from that of earlier philosophers. Unlike the literal-minded theologians, Mulla Sadra rationally substantiated religious doctrines concerning creation and the purpose of life with philosophical reasoning and metaphysical principles. Because of his commitment to preserving the literal meaning of the Qur’anic teachings and his profound inclination toward interpreting human existence through the three levels of *Nature*, *Imagination*, and *Intellect*, it can be mentioned that divine revelation played a significant role in shaping several fundamental principles of *Transcendent Philosophy* (ibid., 1361, pp. 231–232). Nevertheless, in explaining the mystery of the *Perfect Man*, Mulla Sadra was the first

philosopher to courageously employ the language of reason and argumentation—marking the beginning of a genuine dialogue between reason and religion on this subject.

Using the intra-religious descriptive method and establishing a correspondence between the levels of the cosmos and the levels of the soul within the rational system of *transcendent philosophy* are among the distinctive features of Mulla Sadra's philosophical approach. Accordingly, this paper focuses on investigating the degree of harmony between *Shari'ah* and reason in explaining the objectivity of the human being. In this context, some of the central hypotheses of Mulla Sadra include the use of the principle of *substantial intensifying motion* and his elaboration on the faculty of imagination—its independence, immateriality, and creative role in manifesting imaginal forms within higher realms. Undoubtedly, his rational-analytical approach to the explanation of the human being aims to demonstrate propositions that affirm the objective reality of human attributes and their reflection in the afterlife. Thus, by reexamining Mulla Sadra's philosophical principles, this study seeks to provide a foundation for scholars in their search for the essential basis of philosophical anthropology.

1. The Mode of Existence and Emergence of the Soul in Mulla Sadra's System of Thought

Similar to al-Farabi (al-Farabi, 1997, p. 41; Kord Firoozja'i, 2011) but contrary to Plato and Ibn Sina—who hold that the soul is immaterial from the outset—Mulla Sadra does not regard the soul as immaterial at its origin. Rather, he maintains that its existence, in harmony with the whole order of creation, commences a unified motion from the predisposed and restless essence of material nature; it begins to grow through bodily powers (the soul is corporeal in origination) and attains immateriality in the course of its intrinsic, substantial motion (the soul is spiritual in subsistence) (ibid., pp. 51–52; Mulla Sadra, 1430 AH: 9/75; idem, 1982, p. 235).

It is worth recalling that, in Mulla Sadra's view, the human soul—similar to other beings in the world—is always (intelligently) in a state of change and transformation in its very constitution, and an internal and essential motion has naturally begun within it (idem, 1992, p. 73). By means of knowledge and action (theoretical and practical intellect), it is permanently directed toward the good and the eternal perfection befitting it (idem, 2003, p. 284). In this perspective, Mulla Sadra regards the soul as a temporally extended identity that, within the bedrock of substantial motion, perfects itself—rising from materiality to imaginal immateriality and thence to complete intellectual immateriality.

He considers the *vaporous spirit* as the true link between soul and body. Accordingly, the body with which the soul is immediately connected is the vaporous spirit rather than the outward elemental body (idem, 1430 AH: 9/67–68). At each perfected stage, the soul is united with the body appropriate to that level. Consequently, it has an intrinsic need for a body as long as it remains a soul and has not attained the station of intellectual immateriality (idem, 1982, p. 238). In addition, it is inevitably embodied at every ontological plane; it has an elemental matter, an imaginal matter, and a psychic matter in the natural world, the Purgatory (*Barzakh*), and the intellectual realm, respectively. The soul acquires its perfections in all three planes from the very core of the body, and this need—due to the addition of *soulhood* (i.e., its relation to the body)—is essential rather than accidental.

According to Mulla Sadra, the human being in this world is accompanied by his purgatorial and eschatological bodies (ibid., p. 240); at the time of death, he casts off the material body and enters the Hereafter with the eschatological body. Moreover, his statements suggest that the purgatorial and eschatological bodies, as the concomitants of the soul, maintain an existential accompaniment and a constitutive relation to the soul's morals, acts, and dispositions, thereby requiring no separate act of origination apart from that of the soul (idem, 1430 AH: 9/30). Even now, while the human soul resides in the natural body, it is accompanied—though only in potentia—by those purgatorial and eschatological bodies, which unfold along a continuum; through substantial motion, they take on forms proportionate to one's intentions, dispositions, and deeds (ibid., p. 7).

In this account, Mulla Sadra has presupposed two foundational principles: the corporeal origination (*Hudūth Jismani*) of the soul and its intensificational substantial motion. More precisely, the soul lacks all perfected forms at the inception of its formation and is merely a corporeal existent with the capacity to attain diverse forms. In its worldly journey, it is always moving toward one of the forms of angelicity, demonicity, bestiality, or ferocity, thereby constructing its purgatorial (*Barzakhī*) and eschatological body. Potency and capacity cease in the soul once it actualizes any of these forms, and its essence is transformed into that type through the ingraining of a given kind; at that point, it abandons the elemental body and subsists with a body fashioned from its beliefs, intentions, and deeds—one purified of matter and potentiality. In truth, it is never without a body as long as it remains a soul; it shapes the higher degrees during earthly life, thereby furnishing the grounds for a meaningful life.

The difference between the natural body and the purgatorial (*Barzakhī*) body is that the latter is the product of the soul's dispositions and acts during worldly life. With the ingraining of ferocious qualities in the soul, its imaginal and purgatorial (*Barzakhī*) body is embodied in the likeness of predatory beasts, as the reality of that soul, at the end of its motion, is precisely the predatory animal in which it has been actualized (*ibid.*, p. 29). This embodiment is typically not witnessed during worldly life because the world lacks the capacity to disclose the inner aspect of acts and the essences of human beings—except to those whose purgatorial sight and inward vision have been opened. The Purgatory (*Barzakh*) and the Hereafter, as the inward dimension of this world (*ibid.*, p. 136), are the realm in which realities are disclosed, inner forms appear, and the truth of souls becomes manifest (Mulla Sadra, 1982, pp. 251–252).

Mulla Sadra cites Qur'anic verses and narrations that indicate the embodiment of deeds as corroboration in this context (*ibid.*, pp. 242–242; *idem*, 1430 AH: 9/6–9, 29–31). Thus, he deems that what is stated in the revealed texts concerning the meaning of pains and pleasures—as manifestations of felicity and wretchedness—can be rationally explained; upon careful consideration, he judges that all the verses regarding the human end accord with and support one another (*idem*, 2003, p. 356).

By means of *intensificational substantial motion*—one of his original doctrines—Mulla Sadra succeeded in resolving the problem of the companionship of an immaterial existent with matter in this world, its purgatorial companionship in the *Barzakh*, and its eschatological companionship in the Hereafter. Nonetheless, based on his philosophical principles, the truth of the soul in origination and in subsistence, unlike in Illuminationism and Peripateticism, is not identical. The soul is initially a material existent, starting from sheer matter; while in the womb, its degree is that of vegetative souls, having traversed all the mineral stages. In this stage, it is actually vegetative and potentially animal—sensation and voluntary motion have not yet begun. It reaches the degree of the animal soul when it attains independent existence in this world. In this stage, the human soul is actually animal and potentially human. Mulla Sadra calls this stage *formal puberty* (*Bulūgh Šūrī*). Then, its spiritual puberty and inner growth begin upon attaining the level of intellectual cognition of the intelligibles and employing the practical intellect. At this stage—approximately at the age of forty—the human becomes *actual*, and thereafter, reaches immateriality along the human degrees and through substantial motion (*idem*, 1430 AH: 8/121).

Accordingly, in the Sadrian system, the soul is not something that connects from outside to the body; rather, given its intensificational substantial transformations (*ibid.*, 9/11–14), it subsists within a single continuous existence that begins from the womb of matter, ascends to higher degrees (the purgatorial immateriality of the imaginal world), and then to the supreme degree (the *Muqarrabūn*, “those brought near”). In the latter phase, it attains a degree to which the material body has no access. Perhaps “soul” can scarcely be named there, as its substance attains complete immateriality after traversing degrees of perfection and transformation; in this stage, the union of soul and body is realized in its strongest mode, such that, in intellectual existence, they subsist as a single existence without mutual otherness (*ibid.*, p. 87). Once that actuality is attained, there is no further need for an imaginal body, and bodily accompaniment in that plane is, in principle, meaningless (*ibid.*, p. 19).

2. The Elemental Body as the Receptive Principle for the Transformation of Soul

Undoubtedly, the elemental body is posited as the *receptive principle* for the soul in Mulla Sadra's system of thought (idem, 1961, Vol. 8, p. 5). The soul is an offspring of the natural world; initially, the soul is bestowed upon the same bodily matter as a "mineral form" (now inhering in the body) (idem, 1982, p. 27). The mineral form—one of the soul's degrees—is a part of human reality that is never severed from him at any stage of life; the "skirt" or "penumbra" of the soul—namely, the mineral and vegetative forms—does not perish even when the soul transitions to the next world (on the principle of intensificational substantial motion). In *Barzakh*, the soul performs the principal function of the mineral form—namely, "preserving the composite from dispersion"—with respect to the purgatorial body; likewise, it preserves the basic function of the vegetative form—namely, nourishment—in *Barzakh* (idem, 2003, p. 343). In Mulla Sadra's view, the soul is a single, simple entity, and the bodily matter and the psychic form are abstracted from its weaker and stronger degrees, respectively. The latter constitutes the whole reality of the human being and possesses the perfections of its inferior degrees. More plainly, the soul is a reality possessing weak and strong degrees: its mineral and vegetative degrees inhere in the body, whereas its animal and human degrees do not inhere—so that a continual movement from potentiality to act is always considered within it. In other words, in its earliest degrees of existence, the soul is the *unconditioned bodily form* which, in its evolutionary course, becomes the vegetative form (a material/bodily form), and, continuing its motion, is elevated either to the animal soul—attaining incomplete imaginal immateriality—or to the human soul—attaining complete intellectual immateriality (ibid., pp. 314–316; idem, 1982, p. 33; Hassanzadeh Amoli, 1986, p. 19).

The philosophical foundations drawn from Qur'anic texts indicate that not only is the truth of the human being his rational soul, but—given Sadra's principles (e.g., *the soul in its unity is all the powers*)—corporeality also constitutes a degree of his reality; the soul gradually, hand in hand with the body, achieves perfection and actuality and acquires its own substantial configuration by means of dispositions, thoughts, and actions (Mulla Sadra, 1430 AH: 8/287; idem, 1999, pp. 412–413).

Appealing to the *Theology of Aristotle (Uthūlūjiyā)*, Mulla Sadra, when discussing the transformation of body across the three realms (Nature, Imagination/the Psychic World, and Intellect), introduces the body as the most important variable component in relation to the soul at all three planes, such that it plays a decisive role in determining the quiddity of soul in this world and the Hereafter (idem, 1430 AH: 9/86). From Mulla Sadra's viewpoint, the human soul is accompanied by a physical body of the type of that world in each realm: in this world, by a material body with an immaterial soul, and in Purgatory, by a purgatorial body—the very body with which one engages in dreams—arising from psychic dispositions and configurations (Abudiyat, 2012, p. 123). Thus, Sadra holds that the soul, by its active power, objectifies the latent realities of its dispositions within the world of imagination—which is a degree of the soul itself, namely, the human connected imagination—and, based on its psychic dispositions, determines its own kind. According to this view, the truth transferred to the Hereafter reflects psychic dispositions, which, through death, pass into Purgatory (*Barzakh*) and the afterlife. Moreover, the human being, in every realm, is necessarily accompanied by a body fitting that realm—a body that he has consolidated in this world through his deeds and psychic dispositions.

Due to this very dependence, it is possible for clairvoyants to perceive eschatological affairs and behold Paradise and its inhabitants even before entering the Hereafter and before the establishment of the Great Resurrection. To perceive the truth of human beings, natural death is not required; one who, in this very material life, acquires eschatological senses can behold the Hereafter in this world. According to this view, extensive evidence can be adduced from verses and narrations (Mulla Sadra, 1430 AH: 9/245–247). Hence, reward and punishment can be claimed to be the natural effects of the dispositions and beliefs formed in this world. From this Sadrian vantage point, the path is opened to explain worldly recompense and penalty with these very limbs and organs—albeit limbs, organs, and a body in which, as Mulla Sadra puts it, the light of sense and life is essentially pervading, and which the soul, so long as it is a soul, never

abandons (ibid., pp. 86–87). From this standpoint, the life of the eschatological body is essential (*Dhātī*), and the truth and meaning of life are realized within it; by contrast, the life of the worldly body is accidental (*‘Arādī*) (idem, 1982, p. 351).

Accordingly, so long as the soul resides in nature, it is accompanied by three layers of body: the natural (physical) body actually exists and continues by natural development toward its own perfection; the purgatorial and eschatological bodies, as the second and third degrees, are shaped throughout worldly life by one’s deeds, dispositions, outlooks, and cognitions. Thus, the human being lacks a predetermined existential degree; he is constantly undergoing existential transformation through voluntary substantial motion arising from knowledge and action (ibid., pp. 293–295).

The most fundamental discussion presented by Mulla Sadra regarding anthropology is that soul and body, despite their difference in rank, exist with a single existence; the more perfect the soul’s existence becomes, the more refined and equilibrated the body becomes, and the more intense their union and connection. In other words, when the soul reaches complete immateriality, no otherness remains between soul and body. Clearly, this body is not elemental and material; rather, it is a body that, first and foremost, is under the immediate governance of the soul, and, secondly, is one over which the soul exercises intrinsic agency (idem, 1430 AH: 9/86–87; Ibn Sina, 1996, p. 249; Mulla Sadra, 1982, pp. 251–252).

3. Individuation and the Reality of the Human Being

According to Mulla Sadra, the body is composed of elemental matter and human form; this human form is referred to as the *human body*. As noted earlier, the body is a composite of natural matter and human form; nonetheless, matter does not interfere with the reality of a thing and, due to the deficiency of form, merely serves as its support. Thus, Mulla Sadra does not regard elemental matter as constitutive of the reality of a thing. Instead, he calls the form the *true body* and deems matter necessary for the form only because the form is deficient in existence and requires a support, and such support accompanies the natural body in the material world. Up to this point, he is in agreement with al-Farabi (1997, pp. 51–53); however, based on his own principles, Mulla Sadra then draws eschatological conclusions. He holds that in Purgatory (*Barzakh*), there is a purgatorial body, and in the Hereafter, there is an eschatological body—and, in this way, he establishes the reality of the human being across three planes of existence.

Evidently, Mulla Sadra holds that the body is composed of matter and corporeal form, with the form being the real body that requires a bearer. So long as one resides in the elemental world, that bearer is composed of elemental materials and compounds—and, from the very moment of genesis, is constantly subject to change and transformation. Throughout human life, these elemental constituents are exposed to change and transformation at every moment; by contrast, the human form remains what it is. The replacement of elemental constituents does not alter human reality, as physical changes persist from the beginning to the end of life, yet these changes in this world do not alter the “true self and human form”; thus, anyone who visited that person in this world and then in the Hereafter will recognize him—even if one indicates, “he has become young” or “he has grown old.”

The human soul and body are the same from the beginning to the end of life. Only the elemental, physical body undergoes transformation. Its transformation plays no role in changing the soul, as elemental materials and compounds neither contribute to the reality of the soul nor to the reality of the (true) body; their replacement changes neither the reality of the soul nor that of the body. The changes and transformations of elemental materials (the material body) do not alter a person’s individuation in this world. In the same vein, in the Purgatory (*Barzakh*) and the Hereafter, if the elemental body is not returned to the human being and, instead, a purgatorial or an eschatological body appropriate to that plane is given, the individuation and individuality of the person are not lost. The soul and the bodily form—which is the human form—do not change from the beginning to the end of life.

Conclusion

- According to Mulla Sadra, the soul is an independent substance that first appears in a bodily form and, through internal transformation, passes through various stages until it is ultimately liberated from the constraints of matter and change unquestionably.
- In Mulla Sadra's intellectual system, human eschatology—understood as the return of all existence, including human beings, to God—is regarded as one of the divine laws (*Sunan Ilāhiyyah*). It relies on the fundamental ontological principle governing his metaphysical worldview, while other ontological and cosmological principles are treated as subsidiary to the doctrine of the primacy of existence (*Aṣālat al-Wujūd*). Collectively, they serve as the philosophical foundations that grant meaning and authenticity to human life.
- The central issue Mulla Sadra has explored in his study of anthropology is the relationship between the soul and the body: though distinct in rank, they share the same existence. As the soul's existence becomes more perfected, the body correspondingly becomes more refined and purer, and the unity and connection between them grow even stronger. When the soul attains complete immateriality, no separation remains between the two. It is clear that by "body," Mulla Sadra does not mean the physical, elemental body; rather, he refers to a body that is, first and foremost, directly governed by the soul and, secondly, one over which the soul possesses intrinsic agency.

Based on this interpretation and Sadra's ontological interpretation of the human being, one may conclude that he affirms neither a purely monistic nor a strictly dualistic understanding of humanity. Instead, he interprets the material aspect distinctively, viewing it as a stage in the soul's existential progression. Thus, as long as man lives in the material world, he strives to actualize and perfect his existential capacities.

- In Mulla Sadra's *philosophical psychology* (*ʿIlm al-Nafs al-Falsafī*), the truth of the human being lies not only in the soul or spirit but also in the body, which represents the lower degrees of the same soul and is never separated from it in any phase of existence. Accordingly, in the discussion of semantics, Mulla Sadra holds that his rational approaches, similar to cosmology, have been derived from the lights of divine wisdom and the niche of the light of prophethood, and his philosophy insists on the harmony between his interpretation and *Sharīʿah* (the Islamic religious law, a set of divine principles and guidelines derived from the Quran and the *Sunnah* (teachings and practices of the Prophet Muhammad), with a reasonable and meaningful vision of human destiny.

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