

EXISTENCE ('UJUD) AND QUIDDITY (MAHJYYAH) IN ISLAMIC PHILOSOPHY

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SUBJECT

There is no issue more central to Islamic philosophy and especially metaphysics than wujud (at once Being and existence) in itself and in its relation to mahiyah (quiddity or essence). For eleven centuries Islamic philosophers and even certain Sufis and theologians (mutakallimun) have been concerned with this subject and have developed on the basis of their study of wujud world views which have dominated Islamic thought and have also had a deep influence upon Christian and Jewish philosophy. Islamic philosophy is most of all a philosophy concerned with wujud and hence with its distinction from mahiyah. To understand the meaning of these basic concepts, their distinction and relationship, is, therefore, to grasp the very basis of Islamic philosophical thought.¹³³

It is true that Islamic metaphysics places the Absolute above all limitations, even beyond the ontological principle as usually understood. It knows that the Divine Essence (al-Dhat al-ilahiyah) stands above even

¹³³ The distinction between 'quiddity' and 'existence' is undoubtedly one of the most basic philosophical theses in Islamic thought. Without exaggeration the distinction may be said to constitute the first step in ontologico-metaphysical thinking among Muslims: it provides the very foundation on which is built up the whole structure of Muslim metaphysics." T. Izutsu. "The Fundamental Structure of Sabzavari's Metaphysics." Introduction to the Arabic text of Sabzavari's *Sharhi-i rnanzumah* edd. M. Mohaghegh and T. Izutsu (Tehran: McGill Univ. Institute of Islamic Studies, Tehran Branch, 1969), p. 49.

Being, that it is Non-Being or Beyond-Being¹³⁴ in that it stands beyond all limitation and even beyond the qualification of being beyond all limitation. Nevertheless, the language of this metaphysical doctrine remains in most schools of Islamic thought that of wujud. Hence, the discussion concerning the choice between wujud and mahiyyah remains central to Islamic metaphysical thought even if the Muslim gnostics and metaphysicians have remained fully aware of the supra-ontological nature of the Supreme Reality and have not limited metaphysics to ontology.

Only too often the concern of Islamic philosophers with wujud and mahiyyah has been traced back solely to Greek philosophy and especially to Aristotle. There is, no doubt concerning the debt of al-Farabi, who was the first Muslim philosopher to discuss fully the distinction between wujud and mahiyyah to the Stagirite. The manner, however, in which he and especially Ibn Sina, who has been called the “philosopher of being” par excellence,¹³⁵ approached the subject and the centrality that the study of wujud gained in Islamic thought have very much to do with the Islamic revelation itself. The Quran states explicitly, “But His command, when He intendeth a thing, is only that he saith unto it: Be! and it is (kun fa-yakun)” (XXXVI;82); it also speaks over and over of the creation and destruction of the world. This world as experienced by the homo Islamicus is, therefore, not synonymous with wujud. It is not “an ontological block without fissure in which essence, existence and unity are but one.”¹³⁶

¹³⁴ For the metaphysical distinction between Being and Non-Being, see F. Schuon, *From the Divine to the Human*, trans. G. Polit and D. Lambert (Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 1982), part one: and his *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism*, trans. G. Polit (Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 1986), part one. Schuon writes, “Beyond-Being or Non-Being is Reality absolutely unconditioned, while Being is Reality insofar as It determines Itself in the direction of Its manifestation and in so doing becomes personal God.” *Stations of Wisdom*, trans. G.E.H. Palmer (London: John Murray, 1961), p.24, n.I.

¹³⁵ ‘See A.M. Goichon, “L’ Unite de la pensee avicennienne.” *Archives Internationales d’ Histoire des Science* 20-21 (1952), 29ff.

¹³⁶ E Gilson, *L’Etre et l’ essence* (Paris: J.Vrin, 1948), p.90; also quoted in Izutsu, “The Fundamental Structure....” pp.54-55.

Moreover, the origin of the “chain of being” is not simply the first link in the chain but is transcendent vis-a-vis the chain. The levels of existence (maratib al-wujud) to which Aristotle and Theophrastus and before them Plato refer are, therefore, from the Islamic point of view discontinuous with respect to their Source which is above and beyond them. The Quranic teachings about Allah as Creator of the world played a most crucial role in the development of Islamic philosophy as far as the study of wujud is concerned. On the one hand, it made central the importance of the ontological hiatus between Being and existents and, on the other hand, bestowed another significance on the distinction between wujud and mahiyyah by providing a meaning to the act of existentionation or the bestowal of wujud upon mahiyyah other than what one finds in Aristotelian philosophy as it developed among the Greeks.

A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE STUDY OF WUJUD AND MAHIYYAH

Already in his *Fusus al-hikmah*,¹³⁷ Al-Farabi distinguishes clearly *huwiyah*, which in the terminology of early Islamic philosophy means that by which something is actualized, hence *wujud*, from *mahiyyah*. Ibn Sina, deeply influenced, by al-Farabi, makes this distinction the cornerstone of his ontology and treats it amply in many of his works, especially the metaphysics of the *Shifa'* and the *Najat* as well as in his final major philosophical opus, *al-Isharat wa'l-tanbihat*.¹³⁸ Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, although a theologian,

¹³⁷ Although some scholars have doubted the attribution of this work to al-Farabi and consider it to be by Ibn Sina (see S. Pines, "Ibn Sina et l'auteur de la *Risalat al-fusus fi'l-hikma*," *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* [1951], 122-124). I see no convincing reason to doubt the view of Islamic philosophers held during the past millennium that the work is by al-Farabi. S.H. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1975) p. 136.

¹³⁸ On Ibn Sina's views concerning *wujud* and *mahiyyah*, see A.M. Goichon, *La Distinction de l'essence et de l'existence d'après Ibn Sina (Avicenna)* (Paris: Desclée, 1937), and M. Rahman, "Essence and Existence in Avicenna," in *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies*, vol. IV (London: Warburg Institute, 1958), pp. 1-16. For Ibn Sina's discussion of *wujud* in

continues his concern for the issue while his contemporary Shihab al-Din Suharwardi, the founder of the school of Illumination or Ishraq, constructs a whole metaphysics of essence which would be inconceivable without the basis established by Avicennan ontology.¹³⁹ A century later in the seventh/thirteenth century, both Nasir al-Din al-Tusi and his student 'Allamah al-Hilli deal extensively with the question of wujud and mahiyyah even in their theological writings¹⁴⁰ as do most of the major philosophical figures between Tusi and the Safavid period such as Qutb al-Din Shirazi, Ghiyath al-Din Mansur Dashtaki, Ibn Turkah, and Jalal al-Din Dawani.¹⁴¹

Finally, with the Safavid renaissance of Islamic philosophy in Persia and the founding of what has now come to be known as "The School of Isfahan,"¹⁴² Islamic metaphysics, based upon the question of wujud, reaches its peak with Mir Damad and especially Sadr al-Din Shirazi (Mullah Sadra) who in his *al-As faral-arba'ah* has provided the most extensive discussion of

general, see S.H.Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), pp. 197ff.

¹³⁹ On Suhrawardi's metaphysics, see S.H.Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, chapter 2; H. Corbin, *En Islam Iranien*, vol. II (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

¹⁴⁰ See *Kashf al-murad-Sharh tajrid al-i tiqad*, of which the text is by Tusi and the commentary by Hilli, ed, with trans, and commentary by Abu'l-Hasan Sha'rani (Tehran: Islamiyyah Bookshop, 1 351 [A.H. Solar/1972], chapter I.

¹⁴¹ On this most obscure period in the history of Islamic philosophy, see S.H. Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought* (Albany: Suny Press, 1981), pp 75ff; and H. Corbin (in collaboration with S. H. Nasr and O. Yahya), *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), especially Part Two written entirely by Corbin; and M. Cruz Hernandez, *Historia del pensamiento'en el mundo islamico*, 2 (Madrid: Alianza Univ., 1981)

Needless to say the Peripatetic school of the Maghrib which survived from the time of al-Ghazzali to the beginning of this period also dealt extensively with the question of wujud and mahiyyah, as can be seen in the commentary of Ibn Rushd upon the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle as well as in many of Ibn Rushd's other works.

¹⁴² On the School of Isfahan, see H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. IV (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), pp.9-201; and S.H. Nasr, "The School of Isfahan," in M.M.Sharif (ed.), *A History of Muslim philosophy*, vol. II (Wiesbaden; O. Harrassowitz, 1966), pp.904-32.

wujud to be found in the annals of Islamic philosophy.¹⁴³ This sage founded a new school of hikmah called the “transcendent theosophy” (al-hikmat al-muta’aliyah) which became the most dominant, although not the only, philosophical school in Persia especially as far as the question of wujud and mahiyyah and their relations are concerned.¹⁴⁴

From the generation of Mullah Sadra’s students such as ‘Abd al-Razzaq Lahiji and Fayd Kashani to the Qajar revival of this school by Mullah ‘Ali Nuri Haji Mulla Hadi Sabziwari, and Mulla ‘Ali Mudarris Zunuzi,¹⁴⁵ numerous works dealing with wujud and mahiyyah continued to appear in Persia while there was no less of an interest in this subject in India where the foremost thinkers like Shah Waliullah of Delhi, dealt extensively with the subject.’ In fact, the centrality of the question of wujud and mahiyyah in Islamic philosophy persists to this day wherever authentic Islamic philosophy

¹⁴³ Mullah Sadra devoted the whole of the first book of his *Asfar* to the discussion of wujud to which he returned in several of his other works, especially the *Kitab al-masha’ir* and *al-Shawahid al-rububiyah*. See H. Corbin’s introduction to his edition of the *Kitab al-masha’ir* (*Le Livre des penetrations metaphysiques*) (Tehran/Paris: A.Maisonneuve, 1964); the introduction of S.J.Ashiyani in Persian and of S.H. Nasr in English to Ashtiyani’s edition of *al-Shawahid al-rububiyah* (Mashhad: Mashhad Univ. Press. 1967); S. H. Nasr, *Sadr al-Din Shirazi and His Transcendent Theosophy* (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1978); and F. Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullah Sadra* (Albany: Suny Press, 1976).

¹⁴⁴ See S.H. Nasr, “Sabziwari,” in Sharif, pp. 1543-56; and Nasr, “The Metaphysics of Sadr al-Din Shirazi and Islamic philosophy in Qajar Persia,” in E.Bosworth and C. Hillentbrand (edd.), *Qajar Iran* (Edinburgh; Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1983), pp.177-98. See also M.S. Shoha, *A Bio-Bibliography of Post-Sadr ul-Muti alihin Mystics and Philsophers* (Tehran: Islamic Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1980)

S.J. Ashtiyani has also dealt with the figures of this period in several introductions to their works, especially those of Sabziwari and two Zunuzis. See, for example, Mullah ‘Abdallah Zunuzi, *Lama’at-i ilahiyah* (*Divine Splendours*) (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy. 1976). Persian prolegomena of Ashtiyani and English and Persian introductions of S.H. Nasr. See also the long Persian introduction of Ashtiyani to his edition of Mullah Sadra’s *Shawahid*.

¹⁴⁵ See, for example, his *faysalat al-wahdat al-wujud wa wahdat al-shuhud* (Delhi, n.d.); and his *Lamahat*, in *Sufism and the Islamic Tradition*, trans. G.N. Jalbani and ed. D.B. Fry (London: The Octagon Press, 1980).

has survived, as in Persia where several major works have dealt with the issue over the past few decades.¹⁴⁶

Traditional teachers of Islamic philosophy begin the teaching of hikmat-i Ilahi (literally theo-sophia), or natural theology as it is called in Persian,¹⁴⁷ by instilling in the mind of the student a way of thinking based upon the distinction between wujud and mahiyah. They appeal to the immediate perception of things and assert that man in seeking to understand the nature of the reality he perceives can ask two questions about it: 1) Is it (hal huwa)? and 2) What is it (ma huwa)? The answer to the first question is wujud or its opposite (‘adam or non-existence) while the answer to the second question is Mahiyah (from the word ma huwa or ma hiya which is its feminine form).

Usually in Islamic philosophy terms are carefully defined, but in the case of wujud it is impossible to define it in the usual meaning of definition as used in logic which consists of genus and specific difference. Moreover, every unknown is defined by that which is known, but there is nothing more universally known than wujud and therefore nothing else in terms of which wujud can be defined. In traditional circles it is said that everyone, even a small baby, knows intuitively the difference between wujud and its opposite, as can be seen by the fact that when a baby is crying, to speak to it about milk is of no avail, but as soon as “real” milk, that is, milk possessing wujud, is given to it, it stops crying.

¹⁴⁶ Such works as ‘Allama Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Tabataba’i’s *Usul-i falsafah wa rawish-i ri’alism*, with commentary by Murtada Mutahhari, 5 vols. (Qum: Dar al-Ilm, 1332 [A.H.solar]/1953); Sayyid Muhammad Kazim ‘Assar, *Wahdat-i wujud wa bada* (Mashhad: Mashhad Univ. Press, 1350 [A.H. solar]/ 1971); Sayyid Jalal al-Din Ashtiyani, *Hasti az nazar-i falsafah wa ‘irfan* (Mashhad: Khurasan Press, 1379 [A.H. lunar]/ 1960); and Mehdi Hairi Yazdi, *Hiram-i hasti* (Tehran: Cultural Studies and Research Institute, 1363 [A.H. solar]/1984); and M.R. Salih Kirmani, *Wujud az nazar-i falasafa-yi islam* (Qum. n.d.), bear witness to the living character of traditional Islamic metaphysics in general and the study of wujud or hasti in Persia in particular.

¹⁴⁷ Metaphysics or the science of Ultimate Reality is called ma’rifah or ‘irfan in the Islamic esoteric tradition or Sufism. In the philosophical tradition, it is called al-hikmat al-ilahiyah in Arabic or hikmat-i ilahi in Persian.

Rather than define wujud, therefore. Islamic philosophers allude to its meaning through such assertions as “wujud is that by virtue of which it is possible to give knowledge about something” or “wujud is that which is the source of all effects.”¹⁴⁸ As for mahiyyah, it is possible to define it clearly and precisely as that which provides an answer to the question “what is it?” There is, however, a further development of this concept in later Islamic philosophy which distinguishes between mahiyyah in its particular sense (bi'l-ma'na'-akhas), which is the response to the question “what is it?”, and mahiyyah in its general sense (bi'l-ma'na'/-a'amm), which means that by which a thing is what it is. It is said that mahiyyah in this second sense is derived from the Arabic phrase ma bihi huwa huwa (that by which something is what it is). This second meaning refers to the reality (haqiqah) of a thing and is not opposed to wujud as is the first meaning of mahiyyah.¹⁴⁹

As far as the etymological derivation of the term wujud is concerned, it is an Arabic term related to the root wajd 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.¹⁵⁰ The Islamic philosophers who were Persian or used that language also employed the Persian term hash, which is of Iranian origin and is related to the Indo-European terms denoting being, such as “1st” in German and “is” in English.

Wujud as used in traditional Islamic philosophy cannot be rendered simply as existence. Rather, it denotes at once Being, being, Existence, and existence, each of these terms having a specific meaning in the context of

¹⁴⁸ See S.H.Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought*, chapter 17, “The Polarization of Being,” pp. 182-87.

¹⁴⁹ P. Izutsu quite justifiably translates mahiyyah in the first sense as quiddity and in the second as essence. See his “The Fundamental Structure” p.73.

¹⁵⁰ It is remarkable how the three terms wujud, wijdan, and wajd resemble so closely the famous sat. chit, and ananda in Hinduism where their combination satchitananda is considered as a name of God and the metaphysical characterization of Reality. See. S.H. Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p.1

Islamic metaphysics. The term “Being” refers to the Absolute or Necessary Being (Wajib al-Wujud), “being” is a universal concept encompassing all levels of reality, both that of creatures and that of the Necessary Being Itself. The term “Existence” refers to the first emanation or effusion from the Pure or Absolute Being, or what is called al-fayd al-aqdas, the Sacred Effusion in later Islamic philosophy, while “Existence” refers to the reality of all things other than the Necessary Being.

Technically speaking, God is, but He cannot be said to exist, for one must remember that existence is derived from the Latin *ex-sistere*, which implies a pulling away or drawing away from the substance or ground of reality. The very rich vocabulary of Islamic philosophy differentiates all these usages by using the term *wujud* with various modifiers and connotations based upon the context, whereas the single English term “existence,” for example, cannot render justice to all the nuances of meaning contained in the Arabic term. Thus throughout this essay we have used the Arabic term *wujud* rather than a particular English translation. There are also terms derived from *wujud* which are of great philosophical importance. Especially the term *mawujud* or *existent* which Islamic philosophy, especially of the later period, clearly distinguished from *wujud* as the “act of existence.” Muslim metaphysicians knew fully well the difference between *ens* and *actus essendi* or *Sein* and *Dasein*, and therefore followed a path which led to conclusions very different from those in the West which finally led to modern Western *Existenz Philosophic* and existentialism.¹⁵¹

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN WUJUD AND MAHIYYAH

¹⁵¹ In his introduction to Mullah Sadra’s *Kitab al-masha’ir*, H. Corbin, who was the first person to translate M.Heidegger into French, has made a profound comparison between the Islamic philosophy of being and Heidegger’s thought.

The starting point of Islamic ontology is not the world of existents in which the existence of something, that something as existent, and the unity of that thing are the same as is the case with Aristotelian metaphysics. For Aristotle the world could not exist. It is, an ontological block which cannot conceivably be broken; thus the distinction between wujud and mahiyah is not of any great consequence. For Islamic thought; on the contrary, the world is not synonymous with wujud. There is an ontological poverty (faqr) of the world in the sense that wujud is given by God who alone is the abiding Reality, all “other” existents coming into being and passing away. The conceptual distinction between wujud and mahiyah,, therefore, gains great significance and, far from being inconsequential, becomes in fact the key for understanding the nature of reality.

According to traditional Islamic philosophy, the intellect (al-'aql) is able to distinguish clearly between the wujud and mahiyah of anything, not as they are externally where there is but one existent object, but in the “container of the mind.” When man asks himself the question “what is it?” with respect to a particular object, the answer given is totally distinct from concern for its existence or non-existence. The “mind” has the power to conceive of the quiddity of something, let us say man, purely and completely as mahiyah and totally distinct from any form of wujud. Mahiyah thus considered in itself and in so far as it is itself (min haythu hiya hiya) is called in Islamic philosophy, and following the terminology of Ibn Sina, “natural universal” (al-kulli al-tabi'i). Mahiyah can also appear in the mind, possessing “mental existence,” and in the external world in concerto, possessing external existence; but in itself it can be conceived completely shorn of any concern with wujud,¹⁵² such as when the “mind” conceives of the mahiyah of man which includes the definition of man without any consideration as to whether man exists or not.

¹⁵² These three ways of envisaging quiddity, namely in itself, in the mind, and in its actualization in the external world are called al-i'tibarat al-thalathah. See Izutsu, “The Fundamental Structure”p.65”.

Moreover, mahiyyah excludes wujud as one of its constituent elements. Or to use traditional terminology, wujud is not a maqawwim of mahiyyah in the sense that animal, which is contained in the definition of man as rational animal, is a constituent or muqawwim of the mahiyyah of man. There is nothing in a mahiyyah which would relate it to wujud or necessitate the existence of that mahiyyah. The two concepts are totally distinct as are their causes. The causes of a mahiyyah are the elements that constitute its definition, namely, the genus and specific difference, while the causes of the wujud of a particular existent are its efficient and final causes as well as its substratum.¹⁵³ For a mahiyyah to exist, therefore, wujud must be “added to it, “that is, become wedded to it from “outside” itself.

In the history of Islamic thought, not to speak of modern studies of Islamic philosophy, there has often been a misunderstanding about this distinction and about the relation between wujud and mahiyyah. It is essential, therefore, to emphasize that Ibn Sina and those who followed him did not begin with two “realities,” one mahiyyah and the other wujud, which became wedded in concrete, external objects, even if certain philosophers have referred to existents as “combined pairs” (*zawj tarkibi*). Rather, they began with the single, concrete external object, the *ens* or *mawjud*, which they analyzed conceptually in terms of mahiyyah and wujud and which they studied separately in their philosophical treatises.¹⁵⁴ These concepts, however, were to provide a key for the understanding of not only the relation between the ‘suchness’ and ‘is-ness’ of existents, but also the ontological origin of

¹⁵³ For a clear Avicennan expression of the distinction between wujud and mahiyyah, see his *al-Isharat wa'l tanbihat* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1960), vol. I, pp. 202-203.

¹⁵⁴ Classical works on Islamic philosophy usually have in fact separate sections or chapters devoted to the principles pertaining to wujud (*ahkam al-wujud*) and those pertaining to mahiyyah. The *ahkam al-wujud*, moreover, are divided into the affirmative (*al-ijabiyah*) and negative (*al-salbiyyah*), the first dealing with unity and multiplicity, causality, potentiality and actuality, and the like, and the negative with such themes as the fact that wujud has no definition, that it has no parts, etc. As for *ahkam al-mahiyyah*, they are concerned with such issues as whether a mahiyyah is simple (*basit*) or compound (*murakhab*), the question of species, genus or specific difference, etc. See S.H. Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought*, Chapter 17.

things and their interrelatedness, as we see in the “transcendent theosophy” of Sadr al-Din Shirazi.

THE QUESTION OF THE “ACCIDENTALITY” OF WUJUD

One of the problems which concerned philosophers who followed in the wake of Ibn Sina was whether wujud is an accident (‘arad) which occurs to mahiyyah, or not. Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and other later Muslim thinkers took Ibn Sina to task for calling wujud an “accident,” while in the Latin West on the basis of an erroneous interpretation by Ibn Rushd of the Avicennan thesis as stated in the *Shifa*¹⁵⁵ and elsewhere, such philosophers as the Latin Averroist Siger of Brabant and even St. Thomas himself understood Ibn Sina to mean that wujud is an “accident” which occurs to mahiyyah. If one understands accident in the ordinary sense of, let us say, a color being an accident while the wood which bears that color is the substance upon which the accident alights from the outside (or *ens in alio*, as the Scholastics would say), then insurmountable problems arise. In the case of the wood which is the place or locus where the accident occurs, the substance exists whether the accident occurs to it or not. The wood remains wood and possesses a concrete reality whether it is to be painted red or green. The wood has a subsistence and only a later stage does the accident of color occur in it.

In the case of wujud, the question would arise as to what state would the mahiyyah be in “before” the occurrence of the “accident” of wujud. If it is already an existent, then wujud must have occurred to it before and the argument could be carried back *ad infinitum*. If mahiyyah were non-existent,

¹⁵⁵ It is the famous sentence from the *Shifa*, “These quiddities (mahiyyat) are by themselves ‘possible existents’ and existence (wujud) occurs (ya’rid) to them from the outside” (

‘L W_14’ which has been the main source of this misunderstanding. See Izutsu, “The Fundamental Structure ...” pp. 109-10. In section 6 of this work entitled “Is Existence an accident?” Izutsu has given an excellent summary of this question and the reason for the misunderstanding that followed Ibn Sina’s assertion of the “accidentality” of wujud.

then it could not possess any reality like that of wood which would later be painted red or green.

This type of interpretation of Ibn Sina, which would understand “accident” in the case of wujud to mean the same as the ordinary sense of the word ‘accident,” is due partly to the fact that Ibn Sina did not fully clarify the use of the term ‘arad used in relation to wujud in the *Shifa*. In his *Ta’liqat*, however, which, although not known in the Latin West, had a profound influence upon post-Avicennan philosophy in the Eastern lands of Islam and especially in Persia, Ibn Sina makes clear that by ‘arad as used in relation to wujud and mahiyah he does not mean accident in relation to substance as usually understood, and he asserts clearly that wujud is an ‘arad only in a very special sense. Ibn Sina writes,

The ‘existence’ of all ‘accidents’ in themselves is their ‘existence for their substrata’, except only one ‘accident’, which is ‘existence’. This difference is due to the fact that all other ‘accidents’, in order to become existent, need each a substratum (which is already existent by itself), while ‘existence’ does not require any ‘existence’ in order to become existent. Thus it is not proper to say that its ‘existence’ (i.e. the existence’ of this particular ‘accident’ called ‘existence’) in a substratum is its very existence’, meaning thereby that ‘existence’ has ‘existence’ (other than itself) in the same way as (an ‘accident’ like) whiteness has ‘existence’. (That which can properly be said about the ‘accident’ like) whiteness has ‘existence’.

(That which can properly be said about the ‘accident’-‘existence’) is, on the contrary, that its ‘existence in a substratum’ is the very ‘existence’ of that substratum. As for every ‘accident’ other than ‘existence’, its ‘existence in a substratum’ is the ‘existence’ of that ‘accident.’¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁶ Izutsu, “The Fundamental Structure....” pp. 110-11. It is interesting, as far as the later history of Islamic philosophy is concerned, to note that this very passage was quoted by Mullah Sadra in his *Kitab al-masha’ir*.

What is essential to note is that this whole analysis is conceptual and not based upon the external world where no mahiyyah is ever to be found without wujud. In contrast both to Latin interpreters of Ibn Sina and to such Muslim thinkers as Fakhr al-Din al-Razi and Ibn Rushd who misunderstood Ibn Sina on this point, Nasir al-Din al-Tusi was fully aware of Ibn Sina's intentions when he wrote, Quiddity can never be independent of 'existence' except in the intellect. This, however, should not be taken as meaning that 'quiddity' in the intellect is separated from 'existence', because 'being in the intellect' is itself a kind of 'existence', namely, 'mental existence' [wujud dhahni], just as 'being in the external world' is 'external existence' [wujud khari ji]. The above statement that mahiyyah is separated from wujud in the intellect (al-'aql) must be understood in the sense that the intellect is of such a nature that it can observe 'quiddity' alone without considering its 'existence'. Not considering something is not the same as considering it to be non-existent.¹⁵⁷

To understand the question of the accidentality of wujud as understood in the later tradition of Islamic philosophy which followed Ibn Sina's teachings, it must be remembered that in the "container of the mind," or as the intellect analyzes the nature of reality in itself and not in the external world, mahiyyah can be conceived purely as itself to which then wujud is "added" or "occurs" from the outside. In the outside world, however, it is in reality the mahiyyat which are added to" or "occur in" wujud, at least according to the school of the principality of wujud (asalat al-wujud) to which we shall soon turn. Mahiyyat (plural of mahiyyah) must be understood not as extrinsic limitations or determinations of wujud, but as intrinsic ones which are nothing in themselves and have a reality only in relation to wujud which alone possesses reality.

¹⁵⁷ From Tusi's *Sharh al-isharat*, trans. by Izutsu, p. 105. We have made a slight change by translating wujud dhahni by "mental existence" rather than "rational existence" which Prof. Izutsu prefers in the text although he refers to "mental existence" an alternative translation in one of his footnotes.

NECESSITY CONTINGENCY, IMPOSSIBILITY

One of the fundamental distinctions in the Islamic philosophy of being is that between necessity (wujud) contingency or possibility (imkan), and impossibility (imtina'). This distinction, which, again, was formulated in its perfected form for the first time by Ibn Sina and stated in many of his works,¹⁵⁸ is traditionally called "the three directions" (al-jahat al-thalathah) and is basic to the understanding of Islamic metaphysics. It possesses, in fact, at once a philosophical and a theological significance to the extent that the term wajib al-wujud, the Necessary Being, which is a philosophical term for God, has been used throughout the centuries extensively by theologians, Sufis, and even jurists and ordinary preachers.

If one were to consider a mahiyah in itself in the "container of the mind," one of three conditions would hold true:

1. It could exist or not exist. In either case there would be no logical contradiction.
2. It must exist 'because if it were not to exist, there would follow a logical contradiction.
3. It cannot exist because if it were to exist, there would follow a logical contradiction.

The first category is called mumkin, the second wajib, and the third mumtani'. The vast majority of mahiyat are mumkin, such as the mahiyah of man, horse, or star. Once one considers the mahiyah of man in itself in the mind, there is no logical contradiction, whether it possesses wujud or not. Everything in the created order in fact participates in the condition of

¹⁵⁸ See, for example, the *Ilahiyat of the Shifa'* (Tehran, 1305/1887), pp.597ff; and the *Najar* (Cairo, 1938), pp.224ff.

contingency so that the universe, or all that is other than God (ma siwa'Llah), is often called the world of contingencies ('alam al-mumkinat)¹⁵⁹

It is also possible for the mind (or strictly speaking al-'aql) to conceive of certain mahiyyat, the supposition of whose existence would involve a logical contradiction. In traditional Islamic thought the example usually given is shank al-bari', that is, a partner taken unto God. Such an example might not be so obvious to the modern mind, but numerous other examples could be given, such as a quantity which would be greater than the sum of its parts, for the supposition of that which is impossible in reality is no itself impossible.

Finally, the mind can conceive of a mahiyyah, which must possess wujud of necessity, that mahiyyah being one which is itself wujud. That Reality whose mahiyyah is wujud 'cannot' not be; it is called the Necessary Being or wajib al-wujud. Furthermore, numerous arguments have been provided to prove that there can be but one wajib al-wujud in harmony with the Quranic doctrine of the Oneness of God. The quality of necessity in the ultimate sense belongs to God alone, as does that of freedom. One of the great masters of traditional Islamic philosophy of the beginning of this century, who was devoted to the school of the "transcendent unity of being," in fact asserted that after a life time of study he had finally discovered that wujud or necessity is none other than wujud itself.

This analysis in the "container of the mind" might seem to be contradicted by the external world in which objects already possess wujud. Can one say in their case that they are still contingent? This question becomes particularly pertinent when one remembers that according to most

¹⁵⁹ Contingency or possibility also has another meaning which is related to potentiality which can become actualized and which refers to the potentialities latent in an existent. It is interesting to note that both potentiality and possibility are derived from the same Latin root posse, which, furthermore, bears the meaning of power. In this sense possibility is related to the latent creative power of the Divinity. For an indepth discussion of this basic metaphysical issue which cannot, however, be expanded here, see F.Schuon. From the Divine to the Human, "The Problem of Possibility," pp. 43-55.

schools of Islamic philosophy what exist must exist and ‘cannot’ not exist. Nasir al-Din al-Tusi summarizes this doctrine in his famous poem:

That which exists is as it should be,

That which should not exist will not do so.¹⁶⁰

The answer to this problem resides in the distinction between an object in its essence and as it exists in the external world. In itself as a mahiyyah, every object save God is contingent, a mumkin al-wujud. It has gained wujud, and so for it to exist necessarily requires the agency of reality other than itself. Existents are, therefore, wajib bi'l-ghayr. necessary through an agent other than them-selves. They are necessary as existents by the very fact that they possess wujud, but are contingent in their essence in contrast to the Necessary Being which is necessary in Its own Essence and not through an agent outside itself.

The distinction between necessity and contingency makes possible a vision of the universe in perfect accord with the Islamic perspective where to God alone belongs the power of creation and existention (ijad). It is He Who said “Be!” and it was. Everything in the universe is “poor” in the sense of not possessing any wujud of its own. It is the Necessary Being alone which bestows wujud upon the mahiyyat and brings them from the darkness of non-existence into the light of wujud, covering them with the robe of necessity while in themselves they remain forever in the nakedness of contingency.

THE CONCEPT AND REALITY OF WUJUD

هر چیز که هست آنچنان می باید¹⁶⁰

آن چیز که آنچنان می باید هست

Islamic philosophy followed a different course from Western philosophy in nearly ever domain despite their common roots and the considerable influence of Islamic philosophy upon Latin Scholasticism. In the subject of ontology most of the differences belong to later centuries when Islamic and Western thought had parted ways. One of these imporant differences concerns the distinction between the concept (mafhum) and reality (haqiqah) of wujud which is discussed in later Islamic metaphysics in a manner very different from that found in later Western thought.

There are some schools of Islamic philosophy similar to certain Western schools of philosophy, which consider wujud to be merely an abstraction not corresponding to any external reality which consists solely of existent. The most important school of Islamic philosophy, however, which flowered during the later centuries under the influence of Sadr-al-Din Shirazi distinguishes clearly between the concept of wujud”and the Reality to which it corresponds. The concepts “being” is the most universal and known of all concepts, while the Reality of wujud is the most inaccessible of all realities although it is the most manifest. In fact, it is the only Reality for those who possess the knowledge that results from illumination and “unveiling.”¹⁶¹

All later discussions of wujud and mahiyah must be understood in light of the distinction between the concept of wujud which exists in the “mind,” and the Reality of wujud, which exists externally and can be known and experienced provided mart is willing to conform himself to what Being demands of him. Here, philosophy and gnosis meet and the supreme

¹⁶¹ In one of the best known verses of the Sharh-i manzimah, Sabziwari says,

مفهومه، في اعرف الاشياء

وكهنه، في غايت الخفاء

Its notion is one of the best-known things. But its deepest reality (kunh) is in the extremity of hiddenness. The Metaphysics of Sabsavari, trans. M.Mohaghegh and T.Izutsu (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1977), p.31. The term (kunh) is used by Sabziwari as being synonymous with haqiqah.

experience made possible through spiritual practice becomes the ever present reality that underlies the conceptualizations of the philosophers.

It is also in the light of this experience of wujud that Islamic metaphysics has remained always aware of the distinction between ens and actu essendi and has seen things not merely as objects which exist but as acts of wujud, as esto. If Islamic philosophy did not move, as did Western philosophy, towards an ever greater concern with a world of solidified objects, or what certain French philosophers have called “la codification du monde,” it was because the experience of the Reality of Being as an ever present element has prevented the speculative mind of the majority of Muslim philosophers either from mistaking the act of wujud for the existent that appears to possess wujud on its own while being cut off from the Absolute Being, or from failing to distinguish between the concept of wujud and its blinding Reality.¹⁶²

THE UNITY, GRADATION, AND PRINCIPIALITY OF WUJUD

1. The Transcendent Unity of Being (wahdat al- wujud)

The crowning achievement of Islamic philosophy in the domain of metaphysics and especially in ontology is to be found in the later period in Persia in the school which, as already mentioned, has now come to be known as the School of Isfahan,¹⁶³ whose founder was Mir Damad and whose leading light was Sadr al-Din Shirazi. It is in the numerous writings of this veritable sage that the vigorous logical discussions of al- iambi and Ibn Sinn,

¹⁶² In his introduction to Mullah Sadra’s *Kitab al-ma.sha’ir*, besides dealing with the thought of Heidegger, Corbin provides an excellent comparison between the course of ontology in the history of Islamic thought and that of the West.

¹⁶³ During the past few years with the rise of interest in Shi’ism, a politicized usage of the term “School of Isfahan” has come into vogue employing the term originally coined by Corbin and myself, but in a very different context.

the critiques of al-Ghazzali and Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, the illuminative doctrines of Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi. and the supreme experiential knowledge of the Sufis as formulated by such masters of gnosis as Ibn 'Arabi and Sadr al -Din al-Qunwai became united in a vast synthesis whose unifying thread was the inner teachings of the Quran as well as the Hadith and the sayings of the Shi'ite Imams.¹⁶⁴ All of the discussions about wujud and mahiyyah which were going on for some seven centuries before the advent of the School of Isfahan in the tenth/sixteenth century (and which have been summarized above) are to be found in the grand synthesis of Sadr al-Din whose metaphysical doctrine is based upon the unity (wahdah). gradation (tashkik). and principiality (asalah) of wujud.

As far as the “transcendent unity of Being” or wahdat al-wujud is concerned. it must be said at the outset that this doctrine is not the result of ratiocination but of inner experience. If correctly understood, it stands at the heart of the basic message of Islam which is that of unity (a/-tawhid) and which is found expressed in the purest form in the testimony of Islam, La ilaha i//a'L lah, there is no divinity but Allah. This formula is the synthesis of all metaphysics and contains despite its brevity the whole doctrine of the Unity of the Divine Principle and the manifestation of multiplicity which cannot but issue from that Unity before whose blinding Reality it is nothing. The Sufis and also Shiite esoterieists and gnashes have asked what does divinity (i/ah) mean except reality or wujud By purifying themselves through spiritual practice, they have come to realize the full import of the testimony and have realized that Reality or wujud belongs ultimately to God alone, that not only is He One, but that He is the only ultimate Reality and the source of everything which appears, to possess wujud. All wujud belongs to God while Ile is transcendent vis-a-vis all existents. The Quran itself confirms this esoteric doctrine in many ways, such as when it assert that Gad is “the First

¹⁶⁴ On Sadr al-Din Shirazi (Mullah Sadra), see in addition to sources mentioned in footnote 11, Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. IV, pp.54-122; Nasr, “Sadr al-Din Shirazi” in Sharif, pp. 932-60; and J.Morris (trans.). *The Wisdom of the Throne. An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mullah Sadra* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981).

and the Last, the Outward and the Inward” (LIII;3) or when it says, “Whosoever ye turneth, there is the face of God.”¹⁶⁵

The experience of the “oneness of being” or the “transcendent unity of Being” is not meant for everyone. Rather, it is the crowning achievement of human existence, the supreme fruit and also goal of gnosis or divine knowledge attainable only through arduous spiritual practice and self-discipline to which must, of course, be added the grace of God and Ilk affirmation (ta’yid).¹⁶⁶ Yet, the possibility of this experience has always been present throughout the history of Islam. Its realization could not but have the deepest effect upon philosophy which must of necessity be related to and concerned with the fruits of experience. But how different are these fruits in a civilization such as that of the-modern West where experience is limited to what is derived from the external senses and based upon existents considered as mere objects or things, and in traditional Islamic civilization where the supreme experience has been not of existents but of Pure Being which can be reached through the inner faculty of the heart and whose act causes the existentionation of all quiddities.

Yet, because the doctrine of wahdat al-wujad is by nature an esoteric one reserved for the intellectual elite (al-khawas0, it has met opposition from within the ranks of exoteric ‘ulama’ throughout the history of Islam while encountering bewildering misunderstandings on the part of Western orientalists during the modern period. Some among the former have accused the followers of wandat al-wujud of incarnationism, lack of faith, infidelity

¹⁶⁵ On the doctrine of wahdat al-wujud, see M. Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century* (Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1971), chapter 5; T. Burkhardt, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, trans. D.M. Matheson (Wellingborough: D.M. Matheson, 1976), chapter seven; and T. Izutsu. “The Basic Structure of Metaphysical Thinking in Islam,” in M. Mohaghegh and H. Landolt (edd.). *Collected Papers on Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism* (Tehran: McGill Univ. Institute of Islamic Studies. Tehran Branch. 1971), pp. 39-72.

¹⁶⁶ There have been of course those who have* grasped the knowledge of wahdat al-wujud intuitively without the corresponding spiritual discipline, but they are the exceptions bound to be present, for the “spirit bloweth where it listeth.”

(kufr) and the like, while the latter have used their favourite pejorative categories such as pantheism, monism. and the like, used in a Western philosophical context and with all the theological anathema that is attached to such terms in Christian theology.

The early Sufis and gnostics spoke of *wahdat al-wujud* only through allusions or in daring theophanic locutions (*shath*)¹⁶⁷ Only from the sixth/twelfth and seventh thirteenth centuries with such figures as ‘Ayn al-Qudat Hamadani, Abu Hamid Muhammad al-Ghazzali, and especially Ibn ‘Arabi did this doctrine become more explicitly formulated, soon to become the dominant metaphysical doctrine in Sufism. Of course it was not accepted by all Sufis. Some simply remained silent on the subject and thought that the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* which is the fruit of “presential knowledge” (*al-‘ilm al-huduri*), of divine unveiling (*kashf*), and of illumination (*ishraq*), should not be expounded explicitly beyond a certain degree. Such an attitude is to be seen in some of the greatest masters of gnosis. such as Shaykh Abu’l-Hasan al-Shadhili, the founder of the Shadhiliyyah Sufi Order, which remains to this day one of the most important of Sufi orders from Morocco to the Yemen. Others, while being attached to a Sufi order, openly opposed the doctrine, one of the most famous examples being Taqi al-Din Ibn Taymiyyah who was a Qadiri Sufi yet strongly opposed Ibn ‘Arabi’s formulations.

There were also those who opposed the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* by substituting the pole of subject for the object, formulating the doctrine which is known as *wahdat al-shuhud* or “unity of consciousness.” This school, founded by ‘Ala’ al-Dawlah Simnani in the eight/fourteenth century, was to attract many followers in India including Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi who in the tenth/sixteenth century provided one of the most widely accepted formulations of *wahdat al-shuhud* in the Indian sub-continent. In fact, much of the intellectual history of Muslim India revolves around the debate between the doctrines of *wahdat al-wujud* and *wahdat al-shuhud* with

¹⁶⁷ See C. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985).

immense repercussions not only in the domain of religion but also in the social and political life of the I Jami community.¹⁶⁸

In the central lands of the Islamic world itself, the doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud* received extensive treatment in the hands of the later commentators of Ibn ‘Arabi and of his immediate student Sadr al-Din Qunawi, such figures as Mu’ayyid al-Din al-Jandi.¹⁶⁹ ‘Afif al-Din al-Tilimsani, Da’ud al-Qaysari, ‘Ahd al -Rahman Jami, and others.¹⁷⁰ This doctrine also began to attract the attention of philosophers and even theologians, especially ‘Shi’ite figures such as Sayyid Haydar Amuli¹⁷¹ a and Ibn Turkah Irfahani.¹⁷² In fact, as Islamic philosophy became ever more closely wedded to gnosis and the experiential knowledge associated with it.¹⁷³ Philosophical expositions of *wahdat al-wujud* became more prevalent until with Sadr al-Din Shirazi, *wahdat al-wujud* became the keystone of his whole metaphysics.

¹⁶⁸ On these two doctrines and an attempt at their synthesis, see Mir Validdin, “Reconciliation between Ibn Arabi’s *Wahdat al-Wujud* and the Mujaddid’s *Wahdat al-Shuhud*,” *Islamic Culture* 25 (1951), 43-51. This* attempt at reconciliation goes back to Shah Waliallah himself.

¹⁶⁹ See al-Jandi, *Sharh fusus al-hikam*, ed. S.H. Ashtiyani (Mashhad: Mashhad Univ. Press, 1361 [A.H. solar]/1983). Ashtiyani’s own work *Hasti az nazar-i falsafah wa’irfan* contains a fine summary of various view on *wahdat al- wujud* and demonstrates how much the issue has remained alive to this day.

¹⁷⁰ W.Chittick has devoted numerous studies to this school including his introduction to Jami’s *Naqd al-nusus fi sharh, naqsh al-fusus* (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977). See also his “Mysticism versus Philosophy in Earlier Islamic History: The al-Tusi, al-Qunawi Correspondence,” *Religious Studies* 17(1979), 87-104; also his “Ibn ‘Arabi and His School” in S.H. Nasr (ed.). *Islamic Spirituality*, vol.20 of *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest* (in press).

¹⁷¹ Himself a major commentator of Ibn ‘Arabi and his doctrine of *wahdat al-wujud*. See H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. III, pp. 149-213; and Corbin and O.Yahya (edd.), *La Philosophie shi’te* (Tehran/Paris: A. Maisonneuve, 1969), which contains the text of Amuli’s *Jami’ al-asrar* as well as his *Fi ma’rifat al-wujud* (On the Knowledge of Being).

¹⁷² His *Tamhid al-Qawa’id*, ed. S.H.Ashtiyani with Persian and English introductions by S.H.Nasr (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1976). shows clearly the philosophical concern for this gnostic doctrine.

¹⁷³ By gnosis is meant ‘irfan or ma’rifah, that is. that knowledge which transforms and illuminates, and not the sectarianism of the early history of Christianity.

There are, to be sure, several different interpretations of *wahdat al-wujud*. Nothing else even possesses *wujud* so that the question of how the *wujud* of a particular existent is related to Absolute Being does not arise. For Mullah Sadra and his followers. However, *wahdat- al-wujud* means that the Absolute Being bestows the effusion of *wujud* upon all *mahiyyat* in such a manner that all beings are like the rays of the Sun of Being and issue from It. Nothing possesses any *wujud* of its own. A vast and elaborate philosophical structure is created by Mullah Sadra to demonstrate *wahdat al-wujud*. But the aim of the sage is really to guide the mind and prepare it for a knowledge which ultimately could be grasped only intuitively. The role of philosophy is in a sense to prepare the mind to receive this illumination and to gain a knowledge which in itself is not the result of ratiocination (*hahth*) but of the “tasting” (*dhawq*) of the truth.

2. Gradation (*tashkik*)

As for gradation or *tashkik*, it is closely related to the Dadrrian interpretation of *wahdat al-wujud* and must be understood in its light although the doctrine itself had a long history before Mullah Sadra. The idea of gradation or the “chain of being” is already to be found in Greek thought, especially in Aristotle and his Alexandrian commentators, and has played a major role in the history of Western thought.¹⁷⁴ Western medieval and Renaissance philosophers and scientists envisaged a universe in which there was a hierarchy stretching from *materia prima* through the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms, man and the angelic realms, and leading finally to God, Each creature in the hierarchy was defined by its mode of being. the more perfect standing higher in the hierarchy.

¹⁷⁴ The history of this idea was treated in the famous work of A.Lovejoy, *Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1936).

This scheme, attributed in the West to Aristotle, v, as not in fact completed in its details until the time of Ibn Sina who in his *Shifa'* dealt for the first time with the whole hierarchy, encompassing all the three kingdoms together in a single work. The *De Mineralibus* attributed for centuries to Aristotle. a work which complemented the works of Aristotle and Theophrastus on animals and plants, respectively, was actually a translation' of Ibn Sina's chapter on minerals from the *Shifa'*. The idea of the hierarchy or "chain of being" (*maratib al-wujud*) was in fact central to his thought and to Islamic philosophy in general, the doctrine of the hierarchy of beings having its roots in the teachings of the Quran and Hadith.¹⁷⁵

In *al-Hikmat al-muta'aliyah* or the "transcendent theosophy" of Sadr al'Din Shirazi and later Islamic philosophy in general, this universally held doctrine of gradation gained a new meaning in light of the doctrine of the transcendent unity (*wandah*) and principiality ((*Isaiah*) of *wujud*. According to this school, not only is there a gradation of existents which stand in a vast hierarchy stretching from the "floor" (*farsh*) to the Divine Throne ('*arch*), to use a traditional metaphor, but the *wujud* of each existent *mahiyyah* is nothing but a grade of the single reality of *wujud* whose source is God, the Absolute Being (*al-wujud al-mutlaq*). The Absolute Being is like the sun and all existents like points on the rays of the sun. These points are all light and are distinguished from other lights not by a specific difference (*fasl*) as one would have in Aristotelian logic, but by nothing other than light itself. What distinguishes the *wujud* of various existents is nothing other than in different degrees of strength and weakness.¹⁷⁶ The universe is nothing but the

¹⁷⁵ On Ibn Sina's teachings concerning the "chain of being," see Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, pp.203 ff; see also pp.51 ff. of this work for the significance of this idea in the *Rasa'il* of the *Ikhwan al-Safa'*, Ibn Sina devoted numerous pages to this doctrine in many of his works and in addition wrote a treatise entitled *Risalahdar. haqiaqat wa kayfiyyat-i silsila-yi mawjudat wa tasalsul asbab wa musabbabat* (Tehran Univ. Press, 1952).

¹⁷⁶ The Sadrian exposition of this doctrine is very similar to what Suhrawardi states concerning the nature of light. The light of the sun and a candle are distinguished from each

gradation (tashkik) of the single reality of wujud in innumerable degrees of strength and weakness stretching from the intense degree of wujud of the archangelic realities to the dim wujud of the lowly dust from which Adam was made. Gradation is characteristic of wujud while mahiyyah cannot accept gradation. To understand the meaning of gradation as it pertains to wujud is to gain the key to the comprehension of that reality which is at once one and many, which is Unity and at the same time the multiplicity that issues from and returns to that Unity.

3. Principality of Wujud (Asa/at al-Wujud)

From the time of Mullah Sadra, Islamic philosophers have been deeply concerned with the question of the principality of wujud or mahiyyah and in fact have carried this debate backwards to embrace the whole of the history of Islamic philosophy. The basic question asked by later Islamic philosophies is the following: Granted that there is a basic distinction between the concepts of wujud and mahiyyah, which of these concepts is real in the sense of corresponding to what is real in the concrete object that exists in the external world? The answer to this question is not as simple as it might at first appear, for not only is there the question of wujud and mahiyyah, but also of the existent or mawjud and the central problem of the relation between the wujud of various existents.

The whole of Islamic philosophy has been divided into two schools on the basis of this distinction. and numerous treatises have been written by the champions of asalat al-wujud against asalat al-mahiyyah and vice versa. The great champions of asalat al-mahiyya are usually considered to be Suhrawardi and Mir Damad who hold that the mahiyyat are real and wujud is merely posited mentally (i tibari); Mullah Sadra and Ibn Sina, along with his followers

other by nothing other than light. What unites them is the same as what distinguishes them from each other.

such as Nasir al-Din al-Tusi, have been considered to be followers of *asalat al-wujud*. because Ibn Sina did not accept the unity and gradation of *wujud* in the Sadrian sense, however, his *asalat al-wujud* is in a sense similar to *asalat al-mahiyah*. Mullah Sadra himself wrote that at the beginning of his life as a philosopher he was also a follower of the school of *asalat al-mahiyah* and that only after receiving special divine guidance and inspiration did he come to see the truth of the position of *asalat al-wujud*.¹⁷⁷ Thus it might be said that there are two grand versions of Islamic metaphysics, one “essentialistic” or based on *asalat al-mahiyah* and identified mostly with the name of Suhrawardi, and one “existentialistic” or based on *asalat al-wujud* and associated with the name of Mullah Sadra. Needless to say, both owe a very great deal to the basic works of al-Farabi and especially Ibn Sina.¹⁷⁸

Suhrawardi, while interpreting Ibn Sina’s thesis that *wujud* is an “accident (*‘arid*), considers it to be merely posited in the mind (*i tibari*) without corresponding to any reality in the external world; hence his defense of the correspondence of the concept of *mahiyah* to the reality of an object. Mullah Sadra, on the contrary, after his conversion to the truth of the

¹⁷⁷ “In the earlier days I used to be a passionate defender of the thesis that the ‘quiddities’ are *asil* and ‘existence’ is *i’tibari*, until my Lord gave me guidance and let me see His demonstration. All of a sudden my spiritual eyes were opened and I saw with utmost clarity that the truth was just the contrary of what the philosophers in general had held. Praise be to God who, by the light of intuition, led me out of the darkness of the groundless idea and firmly established me upon the thesis which would never change in the present world and the Hereafter.... As a result (I now hold that) the ‘existences’ (*wujuddat*) are primary ‘realities’, while the quiddities ‘are the ‘permanent archetypes’ (*a’yan thabitah*) that have never smelt the fragrance of ‘existence’. The ‘existences’ are nothing but beams of light radiated by the true Light which is the absolutely self-subsistent Existence., except that each of them is characterized by a number of essential properties and intelligible qualities. These later are the things that are known as ‘quiddities,’ “(Izutsu, “The Fundamental Structure....”pp77- 78).

¹⁷⁸ There have been a few men such as Shaykh Ahmad Ahs’i who have sought to accept the views of both schools as being valid, but their claims have not been intellectually satisfactory and have not been favourably received by the most eminent representatives of the various schools of *hikmat-i ilahi*.

doctrine of *asalat al-wujud*, raised this principle to the very center of his metaphysical teachings, bringing about a profound transformation in Islamic philosophy which H. Corbin has called a revolution in Islamic thought. In the *Asfar* he takes the followers of *asalat al-mahiyah* to task and provides numerous arguments to prove his position, some of the most important being based on the unity of the external object and the impossibility of gradation in the *mahiyat*. Some of the arguments were later summarized by Sabziwari in rhyming couplets in his *Sharh-i manzumah* and have become common knowledge among students of traditional Islamic philosophy in Persia.¹⁷⁹ basis of acceptance of *asalat al-wujud* by Mullah Sadra, Sabziwari, and other masters of this school resides, however, not in rational arguments but in the experience of the Reality of *wujud* in which the intellect itself functions on a level other than that of ordinary life, even if it be the life of a philosopher of great rational powers and analytical acumen.

The acceptance of the unity, gradation, and principiality of *wujud* together constitutes a veritable transformation of earlier schools of Islamic thought. Associated with the name of Mullah Sadra, this perspective in which *wujud* is seen as the single reality possessing grades and modes from which the *mahiyat* are abstracted has also come to be identified with the Khusrawani or Pahlawi sages and philosophers (*khusrawaniyyun* and *pahlawiyyun* in Arabic). These terms refer to the ancient sages of Persia and are derived from the writings of Suhrawardi who saw in their teachings the perfect combination of rational and intuitive knowledge which he identified with the theosophers (*sing ha/am muta'allih*).¹⁸⁰ It might appear paradoxical that, although Suhrawardi is identified with the School of *asalat al-mahiyah* the followers of *asalat al-wujud* should be called the Pahlawi sages, using the terminology of the master of the School of Illumination. This paradox

¹⁷⁹ See Sabziwari, *The Metaphysics of Sabzavari*, edd. M.Mohaghegh and T. Izutsu, pp.32ff Two of these arguments have been summarized by Izutsu in his "The Fundamental Structure..." pp.80ff.

¹⁸⁰ It must not be forgotten that one of the titles of Mullah Sadra was *Sadr al-muta'allihin*, literally foremost among the theosophies.

disappears, however, if one remembers that although Suhrawardi considered wujud to be merely “mentally posited” (i tibari), he bestowed all the attributes of wujud upon light (al-nur), while Mullah Sadra and other later philosophers of his school who accepted the unity, gradation, and principiality of wujud often identified wujud with light and in fact used the term kathrah muraniyyah (luminous multiplicity) when they referred to the multiplicity resulting from the gradation, of wujud.

THE STRUCTURE OF REALITY

The analysis of the previous pages can be summarized as follows: External reality appears as one ontological block as it presents itself to man through his immediate experience but can be conceptually analyzed into wujud and mahiyyah. As far as wujud is concerned, one can distinguish between the concept of wujud and its reality.¹⁸¹ Furthermore, the concept or notion of wujud is either of absolute wujud or of a particular mode of existence called portion (hissah) of wujud in Islamic philosophy. As for the reality of wujud, it refers either to the all-embracing and general Reality of wujud (fard ‘amm) or to particular “units” of the reality of wujud (fard khass).

The structure of reality is envisaged differently by different schools of Islamic thought depending on how they conceive of these four stages or meanings of wujud. The Ash’arite theologians simply refuse to accept these distinctions, whether they be conceptual or belonging to the external world. The school of Mullah Sadra, at the other end of the spectrum of Islamic thought, makes a clear distinction between all four meanings of wujud. Certain philosophers accept only the concept of wujud and deny its reality, while certain Peripatetics accept the reality of wujud but identify the multiplicity in the external world not with the multiplicity of existents but

¹⁸¹ See the masterly analysis of Izutsu in his “The Fundamental Structure”section 7.

with that of wujud itself so that they identify wujud not with a single reality with grades but with realities (haqa'iq). Then there are those thinkers identified with the "tasting of theosophy" (dhawq al-ta'alluh), especially Jalal al-Din Dawani, who believe that there is only one reality in the external world to which wujud refers and that reality is God. There are no other realities to which wujud refers. Finally, there are several schools of Sufism with their own doctrines concerning the relation between the concept and reality of wujud. The most metaphysical of these views sees wujud as the absolute, single Reality beside which there is no other reality; yet there "are" other realities which, although nothing in themselves, appear to exist because they are theophanies of the single Reality which alone is as the absolutely unconditioned wujud.

Later Islamic philosophy, following upon the wake of the teachings of Ibn Sina, displays a remarkable richness of metaphysical, philosophical, and theological teachings concerning the structure of reality, the rapport between unity and multiplicity, and the relation between wujud and mahiyah. All of these schools have sought to demonstrate the unity of the Divine Principle, and the relation of the world of multiplicity to that Principle.¹⁸² Among these schools, which include not only the Ash'arites and the Peripatetic but also Isma'ili philosophers and theologians, ishraqi theosophies, and the various schools of Sufism the "transcendent theosophy" associated with Mullah Sadra represents a particularly significant synthesis of vast proportions. Therein one finds the echo of centuries of debate and analysis concerning wujud and mahiyah and the fruit of nearly a millenium of both the thought and spiritual experience of Muslim philosophers and gnostics.

¹⁸² See S.H. Nasr, "Post-Avicennan Islamic Philosophy and the Study of Being," in P. Morewedge (ed.). *Philosophies of Existence* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 1982), pp. 337-42. See also R.M. Frank, "Attribute, Attribution, and Being: Three Islamic Views," pp.258-78, and P. Morewedge, "Greek Sources of Some Near Eastern Philosophies of Being and Existence," pp.285-336, in the same volume.

In this school there is but one Reality, that of wujud. There are not existing objects related to other existing objects.

The very existence of objects is their relation to that one wujud which partakes of modes and gradation as do rays of light, modes and gradation from which the mind abstracts the mahiyyat. There is in the universe nothing but the Reality of wujud.

It might of course be asked how in such a perspective one can avoid identifying the world with God and what happens to the central thesis of the transcendence of God emphasized so much by Islam. The answer is provided by the distinction that the “Pahlawi sages” make between the “negatively conditioned” (bi-shar la), “non-conditioned” (la bi-shar!), and “conditioned by something” (bi-shar-shay’) stages of wujud. These aspects were originally applied by Nasir al-Din al-Tusi to mahiyyah which can be considered as “negatively conditioned.” that is. in a complete purity in itself, or as “non-conditioned.” as indeterminate in the sense that it can or cannot be associated with something, or as “conditioned by something,” that is, associated with some other concept.¹⁸³

These distinctions have been applied by the “Pahlawi philosopher” to wujud. Considered as such, “negatively conditioned” wujud is the Absolute, Pure, and Transcendent being ‘of God. “Non-conditioned” wujud is the expansive mode of wujud which is indeterminate and can determine itself into various forms. It is identified with the act of existention and the “Breath of the Compassionate” (nafas al-rahman) of the Sufis and is sometimes called the expansive wujud (al-wujud al-numbast!). Finally, as “conditioned by something,” wujud refers to the actual stages and levels of wujud in particular existents. Moreover, these three levels of wujud are hierarchical. “Negatively conditioned” wujud is the Source and Origin of the Universe, the Reality that is transcendent and yet from which everything issues. “Non-Conditioned” wujud stands below that supreme source and is

¹⁸³ See Izutsu, “The Fundamental Structure”pp.143-44.

itself the immediate source for the wujud of the existentiated order. Finally, wujud “conditioned by something” comprises the whole “chain of being” from the angels to the pebbles along the seashore.

The Sufi metaphysicians have gone a step beyond the “Pahlawi sages” and criticized them for identifying “negatively conditioned” wujud with God since negatively conditioned still implies a limitation and a condition. The Absolute Being cannot be conditioned or limited in any way even by the condition of being negatively conditioned. They identify, therefore, not “negatively conditioned” but “non-conditioned” wujud with God. Herein lies a major distinction between the metaphysics of the Sufis and of the later philosophers. Nevertheless, the basic structure of reality envisaged by them is the same in that both see beyond the multiplicity of the world a unity which transcends yet determines that multiplicity and in fact is that multiplicity in a coincidentia oppositorum that can be grasped only by that intellectual intuition which provides the immediate knowledge granted only to those whom the traditional Islamic sources, following the terminology of the Quran, call people of vision (ahl al-basirah), those who in the words of the Quran are “deeply versed in knowledge.”

THE EXPERIENCE OF WUJUD

Man lives in the world of multiplicity; his immediate experience is of objects and forms, of existents. Yet he yearns for unity, for the Reality which stands beyond and behind this veil of the manifold. One might say that the mahiyyah of man is such that he yearns for the experience of wujud. It is in the nature of man, and in this realm of terrestrial existence of man alone, to seek to transcend himself and to go beyond what he “is” in order to become what he really is. Man’s mode of existence, his acts, his way of living his life, his inner discipline, his attainment of knowledge, and his living according to the dictates of Being, affect his own mode of being. Man can perfect himself in such a manner that the act of wujud in him is intensified until he ceases to

exist as a separate ego and experiences the Supreme Being, becoming completely drowned in the ocean of the Reality of wujud.

Man's spiritual progress from the experience of existents to that of the Absolute Reality of wujud can be compared to seeing objects around a room whose walls are covered with mirrors. Soon the observer looking at the walls realizes that the walls are mirrors and he sees nothing but the mirrors. Finally he sees the objects, yet no longer as independent objects but as reflections in the mirror. In the ascent towards the experience of wujud, man first realizes that objects do not have a wujud or reality, of their own. Then he experiences wujud in its Absoluteness and realizes that he and everything else in the universe are literally "no-thing" and have no reality of their own.

Finally, he realizes that all things are "plunged in God," that the "transcendent unity of Being" means that wujud is one yet manifests a world of multiplicity which does not violate its sacred unity.

The vast metaphysical synthesis of Islamic sages and philosophers has for its aim the opening of the mind to the awareness of that reality which can only be experienced by the whole of man's being and not by the mind alone. Yet, the doctrines in their diverse forms serve to prepare the mind for that intellection which is supra-rational and to enable the mind to become integrated into the whole of man's being whose center is the heart. Only the person who is whole can experience that wholeness which belongs to the One, to wujud in its Absoluteness.

These Islamic doctrines have also created a philosophical universe of discourse in which the inner dimension of things has never been forgotten, where the act of wujud has been an ever present reality, preventing the reduction of the world to objects and things divorced from the inner dimension as has happened with postmedieval philosophy in the West leading to dire consequences for the human condition. The message of Islamic philosophy, as it concerns the study of wujud and mahiyyah, is therefore of great significance for the contemporary world which is

suffocating in an environment of things and objects which have overwhelmed the human spirit. This philosophy is also of great significance for a world which lives intensely on the mental plane at the expense of other dimensions of human existence, for although this philosophy speaks to the mind it draws the mind once again to the heart. The heart is the center of the human being and seat of the intellect, where man is able to know experientially that Reality of wujud which determines what we are, from which we issue, and to whose embrace we finally return. It is only in experiencing wujud, not this or that wujud but wujud in its pure inviolability, in its absoluteness and infinity, that man is fully man and fulfills the purpose for which he was drawn from the bosom of wujud to embark upon this short terrestrial journey, only to return finally to that One and Unique wujud from which in reality nothing ever departs.