



## A Critical Examination of Mullā Sadrā's Theory of the Correspondence of Existential Realms within the Framework of the Epistemological Correspondence Theory of Truth

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### Abstract

Original Research



Mullā Sadrā interprets “correspondence” in the correspondence theory of truth as the identity of quiddity (‘ayniyyat-e māhūwī) between mental existence (wujūd-i dhihnī) and external existence (wujūd-i khārijī) of a known object. However, this view conflicts with his principle of the primacy of existence (aṣālat al-wujūd), which posits that mental and external existences occupy distinct existential ranks, making identical quiddities impossible. To resolve this, Sadrā proposes the theory of correspondence of existential realms (tatābuq-i ‘awālīm-i wujūdī), arguing that the quiddity of external existence is identical to that of mental existence, and their correspondence arises from the identity of their higher and specific existences. This article argues that while Sadrā clearly explains the identity of quiddity, his theory of existential correspondence fails to resolve the inconsistency. For true knowledge of an external object, the mental form must distinguish it from other objects in a conditioned (bi shart-i lā) manner, not merely through indeterminate, unconditioned (lā bi shart) knowledge of its qualities. Thus, knowing an object’s qualities abstractly does not equate to knowing the object itself, as distinguishing it requires specific, conditioned knowledge, undermining Sadrā’s resolution of the conflict between his theories.

### Keywords

Mullā Sadrā, Correspondence Theory of Truth, Mental Existence, External Existence.

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## Introduction

Among the theories presented regarding the nature of truth, the correspondence theory of truth is the oldest and most well-known theory. The theory of correspondence consists of three main components: 1) the bearer of truth (the corresponding element), 2) the reality (the correspondent or truth-maker), and 3) the relation of correspondence.

In concepts (*mafāhīm*), the bearer of truth (the corresponding element) is the mental image, and in affirmations (*tasdīqāt*) it is the proposition, and the correspondent or truth-maker in both (concepts and affirmations) is the external object. However, the question of what the relation of “correspondence” is and what it means, and how the mental image or proposition should be to correspond with reality, remains an area of ambiguity and disagreement. Philosophers, based on their ontological and epistemological foundations, have addressed this issue. This ambiguity in the concept of correspondence has been the source of criticism against this theory and the shift toward rival theories.

This article explains, critiques, and examines a theory that some contemporary commentators of Sadrian philosophy, such as Morteza Motahhari and Abdolrasoul Ubudiyat, have expressed as the preferred view of Mullā Sadrā on the correspondence between the mind and the external world. This theory is known as “the theory of the correspondence of existential realms.” Since we consider this theory to be the best explanation of Mullā Sadrā’s final view on the issue of correspondence, we intend to first provide a faithful and thoughtful interpretation of this theory and then critically point out its shortcomings.

Prior to this research, several authors have also explored the epistemological role of the theory of the correspondence of existential realms in Mullā Sadrā’s philosophy. For instance, the dissertation, *Examining the role of the correspondence of existential realms in the epistemology of Sadr al-Muta’allihin* was written by Ghafari Qarah Bagh. Similarly, Imanpour, in the article “The issue of the correspondence between mind and reality in Peripatetic philosophy and Transcendent Wisdom”, Dehbashi and Babapour in “Existential correspondence between mind and reality in the epistemology of Mullā Sadrā”, and Shayyanfar in “The issue of correspondence in Mullā Sadrā’s existential epistemology”, have addressed Mullā Sadrā’s perspective on the correspondence of existential realms and the epistemological role of this theory in his philosophical system. However, none of these studies have focused on the issue we are investigating, namely, the inconsistency between the identity of the quiddity of mental and external existence with the theory of the primacy of existence, and a critical examination

of Mullā Sadrā's response to this inconsistency from the perspective of the theory of the correspondence of existential realms.

### **Reasons for Proposing the Theory of the Correspondence of Existential Realms**

First and foremost, it is essential to examine the reasons that led Mullā Sadrā to propose the theory of the correspondence of existential realms. To do so, we must first look at the philosophical background preceding Mullā Sadrā and the perspectives on correspondence that were articulated by earlier philosophers. In the tradition of Islamic philosophy, views on correspondence and its nature can be categorized under two main theories: The theory of the identity of quiddity and the phantom theory (*shabah*). According to the theory of identity of quiddity, when perceiving objects, the quiddity of these objects comes into existence in the mind as a mental entity. This perspective holds that quiddity has two modes of realization: a) external quiddity, which possesses causal effects, and b) mental quiddity, which lacks such effects. These external and mental quiddities share the same quiddity in their fundamental nature, differing only in their ability to produce effects. This shared quiddity is what guarantees the truth of our perceptions. Therefore, the theory of identity of quiddity posits two claims: 1) The quiddity exists as an objective reality in the external world and has causal effects, while in the mind, it exists as a mental entity and lacks such effects; 2) the quiddity identity between the mind and the external world is the criterion for the truth of perceptions. The first claim is ontological, and the second is epistemological. It is clear that this theory interprets correspondence as the identity of quiddity. The theory of quiddity identity is also widely known as the theory of mental existence.

However, according to the phantom theory, when the form of an external object is created in the mind, this form is "similar" (*mushābih*) and "analogous" (*mumāthil*) to the external thing, rather than identical to it. Thus, the very nature of the external quiddity does not enter the mind; rather, it is an image or phantom of it that becomes realized in the mind. According to this view, correspondence is interpreted as similarity (*mushābehah*) and analogy (*mumāthilat*). This is a view that many earlier philosophers adhered to, and philosophers such as Farābī, Ibn Sinā, and Suhrawardī also affirmed it in some of their works.

Farābī states that perception is akin to impression (*intiqāsh*) (1984, p. 75). He also says: "The eye is like a mirror, and as long as it is opposite something, the image of the object being observed is reflected within it. When the eye looks at

the sun, the image of the sun appears within it” (1984, p. 77). Ibn Sīnā likewise states: “Sight receives an image from the thing observed that resembles the form it has but is not the form itself” (1983b, vol. 2, p. 124). Suhrawardī further explains: “When you perceive something absent from you, this perception is... by obtaining a likeness of its reality within you” (1994, p. 15). As is clear, these philosophers speak of the similarity and analogy between the mental form and the external thing, not of an identity between the two.

There are two interpretations among scholars regarding the intention behind these philosophers’ expressions. The first interpretation holds that these expressions should be understood literally, meaning that, when encountering the external world, only a similar and analogous image of the external object is produced in the mind. According to Morteza Motahhari, thinkers such as Qāzī Naṣīr al-Dīn Baydāwī in *Tawāli‘ al-anwār* and Sa‘d al-Dīn Taftāzānī in *Sharḥ al-maqāṣid* have indicated that the ancient philosophers subscribed to the shadow theory (Motahhari, 2002, p. 220). Conversely, a second interpretation argues that these expressions imply the realization of the essence and quiddity of objects in the mind, and terms such as “phantom” and “image” are merely metaphors indicating that the quiddity present in the mind is devoid of the causal effects of the external quiddity, just as an image of an object lacks its effects. One proponent of this interpretation is Muḥaqqiq Lāhijī, who explains: Since the quiddities of objects in the mind lack their [external] effects and attributes, the ancients used the term “phantom” for mental quiddities, as the phantom of an object does not produce that object’s effects; this does not imply that they believed in the realization of an object’s phantom in the mind (Lahiji, 2006, p. 218). This disagreement is also observed among contemporary scholars. For example, regarding Ibn Sīnā’s view on correspondence, some researchers, such as Motahhari, regard his view as one of the identity of quiddity (Motahhari, 2002, p. 219), while others, like Gholāmrezā Fayyāzi, consider Ibn Sīnā a proponent of the phantom theory (Fayyazi, 2007, pp. 18-19).

Here, we do not intend to judge between these two interpretations, as this issue requires independent research. What is important for this study is that Mullā Sadrā disagrees with the phantom theory and, while agreeing with the theory of identity of the quiddity, believes it requires revision and reconstruction due to certain issues. The explanation is that Mullā Sadrā opposes the phantom theory because he considers the nature of correspondence to be “identity” between the mental form and the external object. He has emphasized the necessity of identity between the mental form and the external reality in several instances. For example, in *Al-Asfar* he states: “...but the truth is that the rational forms of the existing substances in the external world are in themselves the very meanings of those realities and their real essences...” (Mulla Sadra, 1981a, vol. 3, p. 243).

Additionally, in his *Sharḥ ilāhiyyāt-i shifā'* (commentary on the Book of Healing), he says:

“Knowledge of anything is the acquisition of its quiddity in our souls in a form abstracted from external materials, and knowledge of any quiddity is identical to that quiddity, and knowledge of any category is identical to that category. Thus, knowledge of a substance is substance, just as knowledge of an accident is an accident.” (Mulla Sadra, n.d., p. 126).

Mullā Sadrā believes that the perception of the phantom of an external object does not actually constitute the direct perception of that object (Mulla Sadra, n.d., p. 37). On the other hand, Mullā Sadrā also considers the theory of identity of quiddity to have shortcomings that must be corrected. This correction is achieved through the “theory of the correspondence of existential realms.” The shortcomings that the theory of mental existence faces, according to Mullā Sadrā, are as follows:

The first objection is that those who advocate for this theory have based it on the primacy of quiddity (*aṣālat al-māhiyyah*), and this interpretation is incompatible with the theory of the primacy of existence (*aṣālat al-wujūd*). The explanation is that the foundation and basis of the theory of mental existence is the identity of the quiddities of the mental form and the external object. However, according to the well-known interpretation of the theory of the primacy of existence, quiddity does not have external existence, so the mental form cannot correspond to it. What fills the external world is only existence, which is identical to externality and can never be transferred to the mind. In contrast, quiddity, according to the proponents of the theory of the primacy of quiddity, can have existence in both realms. Therefore, Mullā Sadrā seeks to present the theory of identity of the quiddity in a way that aligns with the theory of the primacy of existence. Even if one accepts the secondary realization (*taḥaqquq taba'ī*) of quiddity in the external world (the less common interpretation of the theory of the primacy of existence), since quiddity has a secondary existence, due to its secondary existence, it borrows all its attributes and characteristics from existence, and all the qualities that quiddity possesses are primarily and essentially from existence, while quiddity acquires those attributes secondarily and incidentally. Thus, if identity of quiddity is to be the basis of the correspondence between mind and reality, it is necessary that the existential identity between the mind and reality is established first, so that, in turn, the identity of quiddity between mind and reality can be established.

The second objection is that proponents of this theory have been unable to answer the problems raised about the identity of quiddities between the mind and

the external object and have not been able to precisely explain this identity. There are several issues with the theory of the mental existence, the most important of which are: the necessity of the conjunction of substance and accident, and the necessity of including all categories under the category of quality.

The first issue arises when imagining a substance like a tree. Due to the unity of quiddity between the mind and the external object, the mental image of the tree should be of the category of substance, since the external tree is in the category of substance. On the other hand, the mental image is in the soul and the soul is its subject, so it must be under the category of accident. Therefore, the consequence of the theory of mental existence is that a single object should be both a substance and an accident, which is impossible.

The second issue is that the mental image of substances, due to the unity of quiddity between the mind and the external object, must be included in the category of substance. On the other hand, the mental image, because it is an accident residing in the soul, must be a mental quality and included in the category of quality. Similarly, the mental image of quantities is included both in the category of quantity and in the category of quality, leading to the absurdity of a single quiddity having two categories, which is impossible.

These two objections present a significant problem for philosophers, and various responses have been given to resolve them. However, Mullā Sadrā believes that none of these responses can solve the issues. Even the response given by Ibn Sīnā, which was accepted by many philosophers, has its own problems. Moreover, Mullā Sadrā believes that Ibn Sīnā's ultimate answer would be nothing but an endorsement of the theory of "phantoms" (Mulla Sadra, 1981a, vol. 3, p. 243).

It should be noted that Mullā Sadrā's answer, based on the distinction between primary essential predication (*ḥaml-i awwalī-yi dhātī*) and common technical predication (*ḥaml-i shāyī-i sanā'i*), is not his final answer to the problem of mental existence. It is a response that Mullā Sadrā formulated to align with the principles of his school of thought. Furthermore, this answer and the distinction between the two types of predications also have their own problems, and the result is no different from the phantom theory (see Ghaffari, 2017, p. 177). Mullā Sadrā's final response to the problem of mental existence is based on his theory of the unity of the knower and the known (*ittiḥād 'āqil wa ma'qūl*) and the correspondence of the realms of existence. Hence, after critiquing the responses provided by earlier philosophers to address the problems of mental existence, he states that the reason for their confusion and inability to explain the identity of the mental form with external existence lies in their overlooking the existential nature of knowledge and its unity with the knower. Mullā Sadrā states in this regard:

“People have fallen into such difficulties because they assumed that the existence of intelligible forms (*ṣuwar-i ma'qūlah*) in the soul is like the existence of accidents (*a'rāḍ*) in their subjects, and thus they denied the idea of the union of the intellect and the intelligible. As a result, they could not escape the problem of how something could be both a substance and an accident when the soul perceives essences” (1981a, vol. 3, p. 309).

In light of these considerations, Mullā Sadrā seeks to develop a framework for the issue of correspondence that possesses the following three features: 1) It should align with the principle of identity of quiddity, which is his chosen view on correspondence. 2) It should be in harmony with the doctrine of the primacy of existence. 3) It should be free from the objections raised against the theory of mental existence.

The framework Mullā Sadrā establishes for this purpose is the theory of the correspondence of the existential realms and the existential correspondence between mind and reality. This theory is based on the gradational unity of existence, asserting that knowledge is an existential reality that, in the hierarchical series of existence, holds a higher level than the external existence of the known. Since it has an existential union with the knowing soul, which is an immaterial being, it is a more abstract and complete reality than the external known. Therefore, it encompasses all the perfections of the external known and, consequently, can be predicated to it in both “real and attenuated predication (*ḥaml-i ḥaqīqah wa raqīqah*)<sup>1</sup>”, corresponding to it fully.

Here, however, there is another significant issue that plays a key role in the formulation of the theory of the correspondence of realms. Although Mullā Sadrā does not explicitly mention it, it seems that he held this issue in mind as an anticipated objection he aimed to address. According to the doctrine of the primacy of existence, quiddity is either the boundary of existence or exists by virtue of existence and has a secondary existence. In any case, quiddity is subordinate to existence.

Now, in the matter of mental existence, we are dealing with two different existences: one external and the other mental. It is claimed that these two existences are essentially identical. However, based on the primacy of existence,

1. In this predication (which, like primary and common predication, pertains to the mind and is mentally constructed), the subject and predicate fundamentally share existence (i.e., the commonality between *ḥaqīqa* and *raqīqa* lies in pure existence itself. Their difference is one of existential intensity and weakness). Their distinction is one of perfection and deficiency. When deficient existence (*raqīqa*) is predicated of perfect existence (*ḥaqīqa*), the deficient existence is predicated only insofar as it possesses a degree of perfection, and it inheres in the subject through its existential dimension([https://fa.wikifeqh.ir/تحمل\\_حقیقت\\_و\\_رقیقت](https://fa.wikifeqh.ir/تحمل_حقیقت_و_رقیقت))

two distinct existences cannot have the same quiddity. Therefore, Mullā Sadrā addresses this anticipated objection by proposing the theory of the correspondence of existential realms.

Morteza Motahhari explains this objection as follows: “Another question arises here: ... How could quiddity be separated from existence? You yourself say that quiddity is a necessary attribute of different kinds of existence, or you say that it is the boundary of existence that aligns with that specific external existence and quiddity. If something’s existence is the existence of knowledge, then quiddity should not apply to it primarily. So, what relevance does it have if the quiddity of this entity, even primarily, exists in another existence? This implies that the quiddity remains the same, but the existence is different. For instance, it would be like saying that the quiddity of humanity exists in humans as human existence, and the same quiddity exists in a tree as tree existence. That is, the quiddity of humanity remains the same but exists through the existence of a tree. How could the quiddity of one entity exist through the existence of another? Is it possible to separate existence from quiddity?” (Motahhari, 2002, p. 315).

From Mottahari’s perspective, with the theory of the correspondence of realms, this issue finds a suitable answer. It asserts that in contingent beings existing on the same level (horizontal existences), it is impossible for two different existences to share the same quiddity. However, in beings existing in a hierarchical order (vertical existences), a being on a higher level of completeness can manifest the quiddity of a being on a lower level. In other words, the complete can represent the incomplete.

### **Epistemological Foundations of the Theory of the Correspondence of Existential Realms**

Before explaining the theory of the correspondence of existential realms, it is essential to clarify the epistemological foundations on which this theory is based. A core element in the theory of correspondence of existential realms is the gradation of existence (*tashkīk-i wujūd*) and the acceptance of hierarchical (vertical) existences. Thus, Mullā Sadrā, with his unique epistemological principles, seeks to demonstrate that knowledge has a reality superior to the mere external existence of the known object. In Mullā Sadrā’s epistemology, we encounter several key elements through which he explains the higher existence of knowledge and, subsequently, the correspondence of mind and reality. These elements are: 1) the existential nature of knowledge; 2) the emanative (*ṣudurī*) nature of human perceptions; and 3) the unity of the intellect and the intelligible.

According to Mullā Sadrā, knowledge is an existential reality that first, has an emanative relationship with the self and second, unites with the being of the knower, rather than merely being an incidental attribute imposed upon the self. He believes that the correspondence of mind and reality should be referred to the existential reality of knowledge, and the origin of this correspondence should be investigated in the nature of the existence of knowledge itself. Mullā Sadrā attributes the philosophers' confusion about the nature of knowledge to their lack of attention to the emanative relationship of intellectual forms with the self (1981a, vol. 3, p. 309). This confusion arises because philosophers before Mullā Sadrā regarded a large portion of perceptions, namely, sensory and imaginative perceptions, as material, and even intellectual perceptions, which they considered immaterial, were still viewed as attributes incident upon the self, possessing a receptive relationship with it. However, from Mullā Sadrā's perspective, perceptions emanate from the self and have an emanative relationship with it (Javadi Amoli, 2016, p. 270). From the perspective of earlier philosophers, mental existence is a form imprinted upon the mind by an external object, with the self being passive in perception and serving as a repository for mental forms. In contrast, Mullā Sadrā views perceptions as creations of the self, making the self the agent rather than a passive recipient. Since creation and emanation are connected to existence, human perceptions (knowledge) possess an existential aspect.

The belief in the emanative nature of perceptions from the self plays a significant role in Mullā Sadrā's epistemological framework. He begins his discussion on mental existence in both of his major works, *Al-Asfār* and *Ial-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyyah*, emphasizing the creative power of the human self. However, there is some disagreement in Mullā Sadrā's writings on whether all perceptions are creations of the self or only sensory and imaginative perceptions. In certain passages, he states that all sensory, imaginative, and intellectual forms are generated by the self and have an emanative relationship with it (Mulla Sadra, 2008, p. 221). In other passages, however, he differentiates between sensory and imaginative forms and intellectual forms, viewing the self as the manifestation (*maẓhar*) of intellectual forms rather than their source (*maṣdar*) (Mulla Sadra, 1981a, vol. 1, p. 288; 1981b, pp. 31–32). Mullā Sadrā's interpreters have attributed this difference in his language to the various stages of the self's substantial motion (*ḥarakat-i jawharī*), suggesting that the self is weak at the beginning of its substantial motion, requiring the Active Intellect to bestow intellectual forms upon it. As the self continues its substantial motion, it gains existential elevation, ultimately attaining a faculty to turn to the Active Intellect and subsequently gaining the ability to generate intellectual forms (see Obudiyyat, 2007, pp. 92–95; Javadi Amoli, 2007, pp. 168–167, & 367). It is worth noting that this interpretation is also confirmed by Mullā Sadrā's own

statements (Mulla Sadra, 2010, vol. 8, p. 259).

In any case, according to the theory of the unity of the intellect and the intelligible, all perceptual forms—sensory, imaginative, and intellectual—are united with the self, whether the self is their manifestation or source. Contrary to the view of earlier philosophers, these forms are not merely attributes located in the self; rather, they are united with it, existing on the same level as the self, and are considered immaterial.

Mullā Sadrā briefly and indirectly addresses the existential nature of knowledge in his works, which has led to some misunderstandings. Some researchers have objected to Mullā Sadrā's view that knowledge lies beyond categories, arguing that excluding a contingent being from categorical domains contradicts accepted philosophical principles, including those of Mullā Sadrā himself (see Taheri, 2004, pp. 38–50). According to the principle, “every contingent being has a composite structure of quiddity and existence”, any contingent being, regardless of the form of its existence, falls within one of the essential categories due to its limited existence. Essentially, the quiddity aspect is a necessary component of the specific existence of any contingent being. Only God, as the Simple Reality, free of any composition, is excluded from this principle (Dinani, 2001, pp. 355–358). Even if, as Mullā Sadrā suggests, knowledge is existential, it is still a limited being and thus falls within the categories. It is evident that knowledge, in any form of existence, is a state that manifests within the human self, and, as such, it falls within the category of mental qualities (*kayf-i nafsānī*). Therefore, recognizing the existential nature of knowledge does not separate it from its quiddity aspect.

However, this objection arises from a misunderstanding of Mullā Sadrā's concept of the trans-categorical nature of knowledge. Mullā Sadrā indeed removes knowledge entirely from the realm of categories, explaining that “perhaps one can say that knowledge belongs to those realities whose existence is identical to their quiddity” (1981a, vol. 3, p. 278). By this, Mullā Sadrā means that only the reality which serves as a basis for disclosure from the external world is considered knowledge, not its quiddity. In Mullā Sadrā's view, among entities that exist and have various quiddities, some possess an existence in a manner that they are manifest either to themselves or to another. He refers to such realities, given this mode of existence, as known (*ma'lūm*) and describes their mode of existence, which serves as the basis for self- or other-disclosure, as knowledge (*ilm*). Accordingly, knowledge is always accompanied by the existence of another being and is a mode of the existence of another being. Thus, knowledge is not a quiddity but always exists alongside and in conjunction with a quiddity (for more information, see Obudiyyat, 2007, pp. 38–41). Mullā Sadrā himself explicitly states this: “Knowledge returns to a mode of existence... and

every existence is accompanied by a universal quiddity” (1981a, vol. 1, p. 290).

### **The Correspondence of Existential Realms and the Explanation of the Correspondence Between Mind and Reality**

Given the preliminary discussion, we must now examine how Mullā Sadrā constructs his epistemological theory using these foundational principles. According to Sadra's view, the correspondence between the mind and reality must be rooted in the existential reality of knowledge, and the origin of this correspondence should be sought in the nature of the existence of knowledge itself. Mullā Sadrā believes that the essence of correspondence lies in the gradational unity (*waḥdat-i tashkīkī*) of existence, where existence, which is superior to quiddity, is identical yet distinct in degree. In the gradational hierarchy (*selselah-i tashkīkī*) of existence, each higher degree aligns with and encompasses the lower, more incomplete levels. This alignment and objective identity are then reflected in the mind as quiddity correspondence (*inṭibāq-i māhūwī*).

Mullā Sadrā asserts that each specific quiddity, besides its individual existence in the external world, possesses collective forms of existence. These existences are in a hierarchical order, occupying specific ranks within the gradational scale of existence. As Sadra explains:

“Quiddity has various modes of existence, some stronger and more complete than others... In other words, a thing may exist in a way that encompasses both itself and others” (Mulla Sadra, 2004, vol. 3, pp. 205-206).

In contrast, philosophers before Sadra believed that each quiddity could only be actualized through a single type of existence. For example, the quiddity of a tree could only manifest through individual trees and the quiddity of humanity through individual humans. However, Mullā Sadrā argues that each quiddity can manifest through multiple modes of existence: both through its particular existence and through another, higher form of existence than its own. According to his theory of the gradation of existence (*tashkīk-i wujūd*), the external reality is a unified, multi-leveled truth. The lowest level is prime matter (*māddah-i ūlā*), and the highest level is the Necessary Existent (God), with countless degrees of existence in between. In this gradational hierarchy, every existential truth above a specific rank is superior to the quiddities below it. Thus, each quiddity in the natural world exists in four modes: natural, imaginal, intellectual, and divine existence. As Mullā Sadrā states in his *Sharḥ uṣūl al-kāfī* (commentary on Uṣūl al-Kāfī):

“Things have different existences and multiple realms, possessing a worldly existence, a mental existence, an intellectual existence, and a divine existence” (2004, vol. 3, p. 214).

Elsewhere he also states: “For specific entities and limited concepts such as human beings, the heavens, the earth, water, etc., there are various modes of realization ... some of them have natural existence, others have mental existence, others have intellectual existence, and others have divine existence. When you imagine or reason about the sky, in your intellect, the intellectual sky, and in your imagination, the imaginal sky takes shape, and each of these has a true, not metaphorical, reality of being in the sky... However, the imaginal and intellectual forms of the sky have priority over the external sky in terms of their existence in the sky. Because these two are the intellectual existences of the sky, which are superior and more exalted than the external sky” (Mulla Sadra, 1981a, vol. 8, p. 369).

The specific existence of any quiddity possesses only the perfections of that particular quiddity and lacks the perfections of other quiddities. The specific existence of any quiddity is called its “detailed existence (*wujūd-i tafṣīlī*)” or “individual existence (*wujūd-i fardī*)”. In contrast, the collective existence (*wujūd-i jam‘ī*) of a quiddity, in addition to possessing all the perfections inherent in the complete form of that quiddity, also possesses the perfections of other quiddities. Just as the specific existence of any number is the collective existence of all the numbers smaller than it. The collective existence is also called “general/comprehensive existence (*wujūd-i ijmālī*).” Therefore, multiple quiddities can exist through a single collective existence. According to Mullā Sadrā, since this collective existence exists at a higher level in the gradational hierarchy of existence, and it is the superior existence of the quiddity, the effects and perfections found in the specific existence of the quiddity are not found in the collective existence in the same way. Rather, they are found in a higher and more exalted form within the collective existence. For example, the specific existence of a body is a reality with three dimensions and occupies space, but the intellectual or divine existence of the body, which possesses all the perfections of the body in a superior and more exalted manner, cannot have three dimensions or occupy space. It is a reality that, if it were to descend, would possess these characteristics. Thus, the superior existence of a quiddity can be attributed to its specific existence but not in the ordinary sense of predication, known as “common technical predication,” rather, in a different kind of predication called “real and attenuated predication.” In common technical predication, the predicate is both affirmatively and negatively applied to the subject, whereas in real and attenuated predication, the predicate is only applied in an affirmative sense.

From the perspective of philosophers before Mullā Sadrā, for there to be a correspondence between two realities, the existence of a common factor between them, which is the shared quiddity, was considered necessary. According to their view, shared quiddity was both a necessary and sufficient condition for the correspondence between two realities. However, from the perspective of Sadrā, mere shared quiddity is not enough for correspondence. In addition to this, differentiation (*tafāḍul*) is also a condition for correspondence (Ubudiyat, 2006, p. 177). The unity of quiddity between two things only necessitates their correspondence if one of them exists in a higher rank in the gradational hierarchy of existence.

From the perspective of philosophers before Mullā Sadrā, when acquiring knowledge (*‘ilm-i ḥuṣūlī*) of the external world, for example, knowledge of a tree, a reality occurs in our soul, which is the external existence of knowledge (*‘ilm*) and the mental existence of the tree. However, they did not provide any explanation or reasoning on how it is possible for the quiddity of the tree to coincide with a reality that is the source of the effects of knowledge, rather than the effects of the external tree. However, Mullā Sadrā, through his theory of the correspondence of existential realms, resolves this issue, arguing that the reality of knowledge is a separate reality that exists in a higher level of the gradational chain of existence than the physical tree. This separate reality, which is the specific existential reality of knowledge, is also the superior existence of the quiddity of the tree. Moreover, this superior existence is, in some sense, the mental existence of the external object as well. The conclusion is that, for the philosophers before Mullā Sadrā, the correspondence between the mind and the external world, and the mind's representation of the external world, was based on the unity and shared quiddity between the mind and the external world. However, from Mullā Sadrā's perspective, this unity and shared quiddity between knowledge and the known is actually caused by the objective unity of the reality of knowledge and the reality of the known. The correspondence between the mind and the external world, according to earlier philosophers, stems from the unity of quiddity, whereas according to Mullā Sadrā, it stems from the objective unity of the gradational existences of these distinct realities. It is clear that Mullā Sadrā's approach stems from his theory of the primacy of existence and his existential view on philosophical issues. In fact, if quiddity is mentally posited (*i‘tibārī*) and derives its truth and essence from existence, then in all its judgments (*aḥkām*), it also follows existence. Thus, the unity of quiddity between the mind and the external world also originates from the objective unity of the distinct realities of knowledge and the known (but this type of unity appears in the mind as a unity of quiddity, which may give the impression that the origin of the correspondence is the unity of quiddity). (Ubudiyat, vol. 1, pp. 180-183).

From the perspective of Motahhari, only through this theory can one claim truthfully and non-metaphorically that a person, through knowledge of the quiddity of things, attains a world similar to the external world. Furthermore, realism is solely dependent on the quiddity relationship and the theory of mental existence. However, this theory of identity of quiddity can only be justified with the correspondence of the existential worlds, and the problems of mental existence can only be resolved through this theory (Motahhari, 2009, pp. 265-269).

### **The Strengths of Mullā Sadrā's Views on Correspondence Theory**

In explaining correspondence, Mullā Sadrā introduces the concept of the identity between mental form and external reality, asserting that for true correspondence, the mental form must be identical to the external reality. Mullā Sadrā's precision in this regard is a significant step towards uncovering the truth of the correspondence theory, as the essence of correspondence can be nothing other than the identity of the mental known with the external reality. This viewpoint and attention to the issue of identity are notable achievements of Mullā Sadrā, especially given that few philosophers before him had paid attention to this critical point. Most philosophers, despite claiming correspondence, spoke of the conformity (*mushākalah*), similarity (*mushābehah*), and resemblance (*mumāthilah*) of the mental form to the external quiddity (for example, see Suhrawardī, 1994, p.15). To clarify Mullā Sadrā's precision, it is necessary to analyze the phantom theory and to show how it leads to sophistry and the denial of knowledge.

The fundamental question and objection in the phantom theory lie in the semantic ambiguity of terms like similarity, resemblance, and the like; it is not precisely clear what is meant by these concepts. Do they imply identity, or something else? Perhaps it is due to this semantic ambiguity in terms like similarity and resemblance that interpreters of the philosophers who used these terms have differed in their explanations. Some have interpreted the intention of earlier philosophers regarding these terms as advocating the theory of identity of quiddity, while others interpret it as supporting the phantom theory. In any case, if these terms imply identity, then the difference between proponents of mental existence and the phantom theory is merely verbal, and proponents of the phantom theory also intend identity of quiddity. However, if their intended meaning is a lack of identity between the external entity and the mental form in terms of quiddity, then the phantom theory would be incapable of explaining correspondence, as two non-identical entities cannot correspond with each other. It is evident that there is no third option between identity and non-identity for the phantom theory to refer to.

Another question that arises for the proponents of the phantom theory is that according to their claim, what factors cause the mental form to resemble the external object? Undoubtedly, it must be said that there are common points between the two that create resemblance and enable the mental form to represent the external world. Just as an image of a horse shares common features with an actual horse, these shared features form the foundation of the image's representational quality. Of course, this image also has differences from the real horse, and these differences prevent the acceptance of the theory of identity of quiddity from the perspective of the phantom proponent. Now, let us focus on these common points and ask: In these common points, does the mental concept correspond (has identity) with the external reality, or is it still merely similar? If it is said to correspond, this is the view of identity; if it is said to be similar, then we ask again: What causes this similarity? It must be because of shared elements. Once again, we direct the question to these shared elements and ask whether these shared elements correspond (have identity) or resemble each other. This process ultimately either leads to identity or ends in complete divergence; since something entirely divergent has no relation to something else, it cannot represent that thing. Therefore, under the theory of resemblance, mental forms would lose their representational function (Amini Nejad, 2020, p. 81).

For this reason, Allamah Tabatabai considers the logical outcome of the phantom theory to be sophistry, leading knowledge to revert to ignorance (Tabatabai, 2006, vol. 1, p. 150). Based on what has been stated, it becomes clear that even the concept of "relative correspondence" is a contradictory concept. If correspondence is achieved, it is no longer relative; if it is relative, then there is no correspondence. If you are told that the sensory image you have of the scene before you is somewhat in line with reality, the result will be that you can never determine what aspects this image shows accurately and what it shows inaccurately. Moreover, claiming relative correspondence inherently implies acceptance of correspondence and access to the external world. For example, if I show you a photograph and ask, "To what extent does this photo resemble my friend?" If you have never seen my friend, you cannot determine the degree of resemblance between the photo and my friend. However, if someone knows my friend, they can assess the degree of similarity between the photo and my friend. Therefore, to judge the degree of correspondence, the evaluators must somehow have seen both sides of the comparison. Thus, judging the degree of realism in one's perceptions relies on accepting some perceptions as corresponding with reality (Ghaffari, 2017, pp. 157-158).

Therefore, the relationship between mental forms and their external referents is only one of two possibilities: Either it shares quiddity identity with reality and represents it, or it diverges and cannot represent or correspond to it. Any other

claimed relationship, such as similarity, appropriateness, and so on, ultimately comes down to one of these two. Therefore, the representation of mental forms by external reality necessitates their identity with the referent. This is why correspondence can only be explained by identity.

In other words, it can be said that the very analysis of the concept of correspondence leads us to the foundation of identity, because the necessity for correspondence between two things is the existence of something shared between them, and this shared thing can only exist if it is the same (identity) between them. For example, consider two banknotes. We are certain of the authenticity of one banknote but are doubtful about the authenticity of the other. When can we be sure that the second banknote is authentic? Only when we establish the correspondence of the second banknote with the authentic one. The condition for this verification is that the second banknote must share all characteristics and be identical to the first banknote. It is clear that no matter how similar the second banknote is to the first, it cannot be considered to correspond unless there is full identity in all features. Although, in terms of existence and essence (*dhāt*), the two objects are distinct from one another. In the same way, in our knowledge of the external world, the part of the world that is captured by human cognitive faculties must be identical with the external reality in order for correspondence and representation to occur, even though the mental image and the external object are distinct from one another. Therefore, the essence of correspondence returns to identity and identity predication (*haml-i hū hū*), while resemblance conflicts with identity and cannot justify 'identity.'

In regard to the representation of mental images from the outside, if something is to represent and correspond to something else, it must share something in common with the referent. An entity that is completely different and non-shared with something cannot represent it. Therefore, for correspondence between the mind and the external world, something shared and identical between them is necessary. According to philosophers, the only shared thing between the mind and the external world is quiddity. For this reason, only the theory of identity of quiddity can explain correspondence.

Another important point to note here is that when we say a mental form is identical with the quiddity and external reality, the term 'identity' should not give rise to the misconception that the mental quiddity of the external object is identical in all respects and aspects, leaving no room for certain aspects of it to remain anonymous. This is because, in addition to being contrary to our intuition, it also contradicts the claim of the philosophers who advocate this identity. Allamah Tabatabai, while supporting the theory of identity of quiddity, states that the presence of the quiddity of things in the mind during knowledge does not mean detailed knowledge of the essence of things or a complete

understanding of all their essential and accidental qualities. It only means general knowledge (*'ilm-i ijmālī*) of the essence of things (Tabatabai, 1981, vol. 1, p. 391). Thus, in the issue of quiddity identity, contrary to the belief of some researchers, the issue is not the number of characteristics transferred to the mind. Some have mistakenly assumed that the claim of the theory of mental existence and identity of quiddity is that all the essential and accidental qualities of the external object are transferred to the mind, while the phantom theory claims that only a few accidental characteristics become apparent to the mind. However, the debate is not about whether all or some characteristics are transferred, but about whether the characteristics that are revealed to the mind, even if they are only one, are, in regard to its essence being identical to the external quiddity or merely similar to it. Advocates of the theory of mental existence believe that any characteristic revealed to the mind is identical to the external characteristic, while proponents of the phantom theory believe that any characteristic revealed to the mind is only similar to the external characteristic. For this reason, Ibn Sīnā, who some philosophers consider a proponent of the phantom theory, states in his *Al-Ta'liqāt* that after affirming that human beings are incapable of knowing the real nature of things and only know their properties, accessories, and accidents, even the real nature of accidents is hidden from us (Ibn Sina, 1983a, p. 34).

Therefore, the concept of identity of quiddity between the mind and the external world means that quiddities, in their nature, are not prevented from being realized in a mental or conceptual form. Thus, as much of a quiddity we recognize, that same amount is the very quiddity of the external reality, and any amount of the external quiddity that remains unknown to us is because that amount has not been realized in the mind. It is clear that whatever has not been realized in the mind cannot be subject to the discussion of identity or non-identity. Therefore, the perceiving agent, to the extent that they recognize the quiddity and accidental qualities of a quiddity, knows them as the very quiddity and not as a phantom or resemblance of that quiddity (see: Amini Nejad, 2020, p. 77).

The second strength of Mullā Sadrā's theory is that, in addition to recognizing the necessity of the identity between the mental known and the external reality for the realization of correspondence, he has also made an effort to explain this correspondence using his own unique philosophical principles. We do not observe such an effort among philosophers before him. Proponents of the theory of mental existence, although they considered the identity of quiddity between the mental image and the external essence as necessary for knowledge, did not provide any argument or explanation for the existence of this identity. All the arguments for mental existence put forward by its proponents only support the first part of the theory's claim (the existence of forms in the mind) and only refute the addition (*iḍāfah*) theory, but none prove the second part of the theory, which is the identity of quiddity between the mental image and the external

reality. In fact, it seems that the proponents of the theory of mental existence took the correspondence between mind and external reality for granted and considered denying it as equivalent to denying knowledge and falling into the realm of skepticism. According to some scholars, proving the correspondence between mental existence and external reality has been a topic of significant debate among Western philosophers but has not yet found its place in Islamic philosophy (Misbah Yazdi, 1988, no. 44). However, Mullā Sadrā has made an effort to prove the identity of quiddity of knowledge and the known in itself (*ma'lūm bi-l-dhāt*) by using the principles of his philosophical system, namely the primacy of existence, gradation in existence, the substantial motion of the soul, and the unity of the knower and the known, and by extension, the quiddity identity of knowledge and the external known (*ma'lūm bi-l-'araḍ*).

### **Shortcomings of the Theory of Correspondence of Existential Realms in Explaining Correspondence between the Mind and External Reality**

It appears that, for the following reasons, the theory of the correspondence of existential realms and the alignment of higher existence with its lower levels is unable to effectively explain the correspondence between mind and external reality.

1) Knowledge and recognition are achieved when we have a clear and distinct awareness of an external object, allowing us to differentiate it from other objects. Simply understanding an object in terms of its shared aspects with other entities does not constitute genuine knowledge of that object. Assuming that mental existence represents a higher existence of the external object and encompasses all its perfections, what we ultimately acquire is unconditioned (*lā bi shart*) knowledge. However, for genuine knowledge, we need knowledge conditioned by distinction from others (*bi shart-i lā*). Hence, when we speak of the correspondence of mental representation with the external world, we expect the mental image to reflect this distinctiveness from others, just as the external existence of the object is distinguished from other objects. Intuitively, it is evident that merely knowing all the perfections of an external object in an unconditioned manner does not justify my knowledge of that specific external object. Real knowledge arises when I can distinguish it from other objects, which requires conditional knowledge that is exclusive of others. In Mullā Sadrā's approach, it seems that the matter of correspondence has been examined more within an ontological framework rather than an epistemological one. The mere presence of the object's perfections within the knower is assumed sufficient for mental-object correspondence, though this assumption does not

align with the common, intuitive sense of knowledge. Mullā Sadrā himself refers to this intuitive understanding in certain passages, noting:

It must be understood that multiple things can exist as one unified, simple existence, or they can exist in a differentiated manner according to specific, individuated concepts. When it is said that a certain thing exists externally or mentally, what is meant is the detailed existence of that thing, as it is in its own nature, distinct from others and not united with anything else. Thus, when one says 'the existence of a horse,' one is referring to an existence in which the horse is distinct from humans, elephants, cows, etc. However, a simple, undifferentiated existence in which the concepts of all such types are theoretically applicable does not belong to any of those meanings or concepts. This is because common understanding holds that when we say 'the existence of a particular thing,' it refers to the detailed existence of the thing, one that no other shares in. (Mulla Sadra, 1981a, vol. 6, pp. 186–187)

2) Before presenting the second critique, it is necessary to clarify the distinction between existential determination (*taḥaṣṣul-i wujūdī*) and conceptual determination (*taḥaṣṣul-i maḥmūdī*). If we examine the difference between animate and inanimate objects or between physical bodies and lifeless objects, we find, for example, that the body (*jism*) is a concept that takes form in the mind and is understood as a higher type, remaining unconditioned (*lā bi shart*) to distinctions beyond itself. However, an inanimate object (*jamād*) possesses existential determination, distinguishing it from other types as a conditional concept (*bi shart-i lā*).

Therefore, if an object possesses growth and development in addition to corporeality, it cannot be regarded as inanimate, though it may still be considered a body. Similarly, if a corporeal object attains existential form in the external world and possesses nothing beyond its corporeal and specific forms—such as a stone—it can be classified both as a body and an inanimate object. But if an entity has growth, such as a human, it cannot be categorized as inanimate, even though it still qualifies as a body. Thus, the concept of “body” is unconditional and applies to various entities on different levels, whereas the concept of “inanimate” is conditional and only applicable to certain types of bodies. Consequently, the statement “Man is inanimate” is false, while the statement “Man is a body” is true. In a similar way, animate (*nāmi*) and plant (*nabāt*) differ: A human being is not a plant but is animate. This difference arises from the fact that the animate is distinguished conceptually, becoming an intermediate type, whereas the plant has both conceptual and existential determination, making it a true type where each subtype is distinct from the others. Therefore, types with existential determination do not serve as subject

and predicate for one another, while conceptually determined types like animal or animate body, though conceptually clear, lack existential determination and remain open to further existential qualities, remaining indifferent to them. Thus, when additional qualities are attributed to them, the terms body and animate remain applicable. The classification of types with determination thus falls into two categories: a) Those that, when enhanced with higher qualities, allow their original type to still apply to them, and b) those that, when augmented with higher existential qualities, no longer allow the original type to apply. The distinction here lies in the fact that conceptually determined types are unconditional, while existentially determined types are conditional. In our discussion on the representational power of perceptual forms in relation to the external world, what we refer to is the existential determination of meanings and types. As Mullā Sadrā himself notes in some of his writings, if an entity theoretically encompasses qualities of both the human form and those of a horse or celestial body, it would no longer be classified as human but as something else entirely—a more complete being than a human. He states:

Suppose there exists a determined type (*al-naw‘ al-muḥaṣṣal*) in the world, encompassing, in essence, both human qualities and those of a horse or celestial being; that type would not be human but something else, with a more complete existence. By ‘determined type,’ we mean one with existential determination, not merely conceptual or definitional determination. (Mulla Sadra, 1981a, vol. 6, p. 115).

Therefore, if we attain knowledge of a more complete existence, we cannot claim to know a lesser existence by extension, for possessing higher qualities in a given existential degree does not substantiate knowledge of lesser degrees. These lower degrees, realized in the external world, are types with distinct existential determination/conditionality specific to each. Knowledge of them, without recognizing their distinction from other types, cannot be considered genuine knowledge of those types (Rahimian, 2010, pp. 99-102).

## Conclusion

Mullā Sadrā’s theory of the correspondence of existential realms has mostly been examined from an ontological perspective, with few commentators on Sadrian philosophy addressing its epistemological role within his system. However, Mullā Sadrā’s foundational theory for solving epistemological problems is built upon this very theory. Mullā Sadrā considers the essence of correspondence to be the identity of the mental representation (*ṣūrat-i dhihnī*) and the external reality. However, the challenge he faces is that his special

philosophical foundations, derived from his theory of the primacy of existence, do not allow him to claim an identity of quiddity between the mental form and the external reality. Mullā Sadrā resolves this issue by using another of his philosophical principles: the theory of the gradation of existence.

According to this theory, entities have hierarchical existences, and higher levels of existence encompass the full perfection of lower levels of existence. Therefore, higher levels of existence can also manifest and reflect the essence of their lower levels. Since, in Mullā Sadrā's view, knowledge is an existential entity and is united with the soul, its existential nature, due to its immateriality, exists at a higher level than the external known, and thus, by possessing all the perfections of external reality, it is also considered its manifestation and appearance. Consequently, it can be predicated on it in both real and attenuated predication (*ḥaml ḥaqīqah wa raqīqah*). However, the main issue with this theory in explaining the correspondence between mind and reality lies in the failure to consider the nature of the subjective considerations of quiddity (*i'tibārāt-i māhīyat*) in the correspondence of existential worlds.

#### ▣ **Conflict of Interests**

- ▣ The authors declare no competing interests.

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