Rajab ‘Alī Tabrīzī’s Refutation of Ṣadriān Metaphysics*

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I. Introduction

Amongst the most formidable opponents of the metaphysics of Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1050 AH/1640) during the Safavid period was his student and son-in-law ʿAbd al-Razzāq Lāhījī (d. 1071 AH/1661-2).¹ Unlike Muḥsin Fayḍ Kāshānī (d. 1091 AH/1680),² Ṣadrā’s other son-in-law and student, Lāhījī’s writings were primarily within the tradition of post-Avicennian Islamic philosophical theology. This is best evidenced in his critique of Ṣadrā’s principal and innovative doctrine of substantial motion (al-ḥaraka al-jawhariyya). One of Fayḍ and Lāhījī’s disciples, the major Safavid philosopher and mystic Qāḍī Saʿīd Qummī (d. 1107 AH/1696),³ in turn wrote at least two treatises critiquing Ṣadrā’s ontology.

There is no doubt that Qummī’s critical attitude towards Ṣadrā was shaped by Lāhījī. But the other and perhaps even greater influence upon Qummī in this regard was his teacher Rajab ʿAlī Tabrīzī (henceforth ‘Mullā Rajab’) (d. 1080 AH/1669).⁴ We know very little of Mullā Rajab’s life, apart from the fact that he may have studied with Mīr Fīndirīskī (d. 1050 AH/1640) during the Safavid period.⁵

¹ We are grateful to Ahmad-Reza Rahimi-Riseh for sharing with us the relevant parts of his ground-breaking research on Mullā Rajab: ‘Late Safavid Philosophy: Rajab ‘Alī al-Tabrīzī (d. 1080/1669) and His Students’, PhD diss., Institut für Islamwissenschaft, Freie Universität Berlin, 2015.
³ For Fayḍ Kāshānī, see, inter alia, Rasūl Jaʿfariyān, Dīn wa-siyāsat dar dārā-yi ṣafavī, Qum, 1991, pp. 148–292.
⁵ For Mullā Rajab’s life, works, and influence, see Rahimi-Riseh, ‘Late Safavid Philosophy’. See also Corbin, En islam iranien, s.v. Index, ‘Rajab ’Alī Tabrīzī’; Corbin, La philosophie, pp. 83–96; Corbin with Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Osman Yahia, Histoire, pp. 472–3.
Mullā Rajab’s thought has been variously characterized, with some degree of qualification, as being Peripatetic, 7 or Isma‘ili (particularly in his ontology), 8 or in some way Neoplatonic in inspiration (insofar as Isma‘ili thought and Neoplatonism are separable). To be sure, Reza Pourjavady and Sabine Schmidtke have noted that, in the Safavid period, the 'most significant impact' of the so-called Theologia Aristotelis is to be found in the writings of Mullā Rajab and his students. 9 This statement holds particularly true for Qumnī, who penned a highly interesting series of Shi‘ī reflections upon the Theologia in the form of glosses (ta‘liqāt), 10 and Mullā Rajab’s other student ʿAlī Quli Khān (d. c. 1091 AH/1680), who wrote a commentary upon the Theologia in Persian. 11 When we come to Mullā Rajab in particular, he was undoubtedly familiar with the Theologia, although the extent of the influence of this work upon his thought is yet to be examined in detail. 12

The only works of Mullā Rajab to have survived are his Persian treatise Ithbāt-i wājīb (On the Necessary Being), his dense Arabic work al-Aṣl al-aṣīl (The Fundamental Principle), (also known as the al-Uṣūl al-Āṣāfiyya), a collection of his poetry, his glosses on a certain text in logic, and a compendium of his teachings put together by one of his students. 13 The Ithbāt and Aṣl were seen as important works from the time they made their first appearance in Safavid scholarly circles. This is evidenced by the fact that, even during Mullā Rajab’s lifetime, the Ithbāt had already been the subject of at least more than one refutation, and both the Aṣl and the

5 Corbin, La philosophie, p. 83. A study of Mīr Fīndiriskī’s thought can be found in Mahmoud Namazi Esfahani, ‘Philosophical and Mystical Dimensions in the Thought and Writings of Mīr Fīndiriskī (ca. 970-1050/1560/1640): With Special Reference to his Qaṣīda Hiknīya (Philosophical Ode)’, PhD diss., Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, 2003. See also Shankar Nair, ‘Sufism as Medium and Method of Translation: Mughal Translations of Philosophical and Mystical Dimensions in the Thought and Writings of Mīr Fīndiriskī (ca. 970-1241 AH/1640/1826).’


7 See Corbin, La philosophie, p. 83.

8 Corbin, La philosophie, p. 84. We shall return to the question of Mullā Rajab’s ontology and its putative Isma‘ili influence in due course.


10 For a study of Qumnī’s glosses upon the Theologia, see Rizvi, ‘(Neo)Platonism Revived in the Light of the Īmāms’.


12 See the observations in Rahimi-Riseh, ‘Late Safavid Philosophy’, sec. 2.3.

13 Rahimi-Riseh, ‘Late Safavid Philosophy’, sec. 2.3. Although the Ithbāt and the Aṣl have been published, modern critical editions of these works are currently being prepared by Rahimi-Riseh under the title, Opera Omnia: Collected Works of Rajab ʿAllī al-Ṭabarzī. The entire Ithbāt and key selections from the Aṣl are also available in Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Ashtīyānī and Henry Corbin (ed.), Anthologie des philosophes iraniens depuis le XVIIe siècle jusqu’à nos jours, Tehran, 1972–5, vol. 1, pp. 220–71. These texts have been translated by Mohammed Rustom as On the Necessary Being (Ithbāt-i wājīb) and The Fundamental Principle (al-Aṣl al-aṣīl), in An Anthology of Philosophy in Persia, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Mehdi Aminrazavi, London, 2008–15, vol. 5, pp. 285–304.
Ithbāt were translated (the Aṣl into Persian and the Ithbāt into Arabic by Qummī himself).\textsuperscript{14} Given the importance of the Ithbāt and Aṣl in Mullā Rajab’s oeuvre, therefore, these two works will be the focus of the present investigation.\textsuperscript{15}

In the Ithbāt and Aṣl, Mullā Rajab takes issue with the main elements of Šadrīan metaphysics, offering a critical reading of every major Šadrīan doctrine. Unlike Ghazālī (d. 505 AH/1111) in his Tahāfut al-falāsifā,\textsuperscript{16} in these texts Mullā Rajab does not attempt to first demonstrate an intimate familiarity with the positions of his adversaries and then, on that basis, provide his responses. When he does present the positions of Šadrā and his followers, it is always in a partial and incorrect light. In other instances, their views are not taken into account at all, and instead the author simply jumps straight into his own counter arguments. We thus walk away from these texts with not so much an actual refutation of Šadrīan metaphysics as a polemic—motivated by different factors—in the form of a philosophical response.

II. The Primacy of Being

Mullā Rajab’s Ithbāt-i wājib is largely dedicated to a critique of the linchpin of Šadrīan metaphysics, namely the doctrine of the ‘primacy of being’ (aṣālat al-wujūd). This position is premised on the view that the term wujūd (‘being’ or ‘existence’) is synonymous (al-ī abide al-ma’navī) and not homonymous (al-ī abide al-lafẓī). In general, ‘homonymy’ refers to those instances in which different meanings are predicated of the same term. Take, for example, the word ‘table’. On the one hand, it can refer to a piece of furniture used for various purposes; on the other hand, it can also refer to a graph used as a statistical tool for quantification and analysis. In contrast to homonymy, ‘synonymy’ refers to those instances in which the same meanings are predicated of the same term. Consider the case of the word ‘animal’; it is an instance of synonymy because its meaning remains the same whether it is predicated of a giraffe, cow, or lion.\textsuperscript{17}

Towards the beginning of the Ithbāt Mullā Rajab tells us that most of the philosophers in his day were against the notion that wujūd was homonymous, which is a clear indication that Šadrā’s teachings had gained prominence in Safavid intellectual circles at least shortly after his own death:

Up to now, the opinion of the majority of people has been that nobody would adhere to this [position concerning the homonymous nature of wujūd], and if

\textsuperscript{14} Rahimi-Riseh, ‘Late Safavid Philosophy’, sec. 2.3.
\textsuperscript{15} It should here be noted that citations from the Ithbāt and Aṣl in this article will refer to the texts as edited and presented in Āṣhtīyānī and Corbin (ed.), Anthologie. Translations of these works, with slight modifications, are from the Rustom translation in Nasr and Aminrazavi (ed.), An Anthology. Therefore, in this article the Ithbāt and Aṣl will be cited as follows: Mullā Rajab, Arabic/Persian text title, volume and page number(s) from the Anthologie; English translation of text title, volume and page number(s) from An Anthology. For example: Mullā Rajab, Ithbāt, vol. 1, p. 222; Necessary Being, vol. 5, p. 286.
\textsuperscript{17} To further complicate matters, a number of terms also retain features of both synonymy and homonymy. The Persian word shīr, for example, means both ‘lion’ and ‘milk’, thereby rendering it as a homonym. However, when we consider shīr qua milk, we notice that it functions as a synonym since there are multiple reference points for the various kinds of milk, which nevertheless retains its meaning throughout each particular and different instance, namely cow-milk, camel-milk, goat-milk, etc.
there were such a person, his name would not be recorded amongst the famous
scholars because of the weakness—according to them—of this position. They
have spoken vulgarities, since the foundations of religion and belief are based
upon proofs, not by following famous men!\(^\text{18}\)

Mullā Rajab’s central argument is that the doctrine of the primacy of being is false because
the Necessary Being and contingent beings can only share terms like ‘existence’ (\textit{wujūd}) and
‘existential’ (\textit{mawjūd}) in a manner that is homonymous. Although he will attempt to refute Şadrā’s
metaphysics on philosophical grounds, it seems that his perspective is informed, in the first
instance, by religious and dogmatic considerations. This explains why his main line of
argumentation in the \textit{Ithbāt} is sandwiched between a string of citations, often employed quite
selectively, from various authorities ranging from Plotinus, al-Fārābī (d. 339 AH/950), Sufis
belonging to the ‘school’ of Ibn ʿArabī (d. 638 AH/1240), and the ‘philosophers of India’ on the
one hand, and several Twelver Shi‘ī Imams on the other.

Some examples of these citations are in order, as they will help set the stage for our analysis
of Mullā Rajab’s polemic against Ṣadrīan metaphysics. The first citation draws on the \textit{Theologia},
the second a poem from the great Sufi metaphysician Mahmūd Shabistarī (d. 720 AH/1320), and
the third a famous saying of Imam Riḍā (d. 203 AH/817), the eighth Shi‘ī Imam:

If the meaning of [the term] ‘\textit{wujūd}’ with respect to God in His essence refers
to the meaning of [the term] \textit{wujūd} that is to be found in contingent things, it
would follow that He too is created. Aristotle [i.e., Plotinus] says, ‘The Pure
One is the cause of all things, but is not like the things’.\(^\text{19}\) It is therefore
necessary that His \textit{wujūd} be other than the \textit{wujūd} of things. If not, then He
would be like them.\(^\text{20}\)

On the issue of God’s transcendence (\textit{tanzīh}), the Sufis have not even allowed
[for God] to be named. This is what they say, ‘[He is] nameless, traceless,
indescribable, and characterless’. How beautifully has the gnostic Shabistarī
spoken concerning this issue!\(^\text{21}\)

\begin{center}
\textbf{His Essence is beyond quantity, quality, and modality.}
\textbf{Exalted is His Essence above what they say!}\(^\text{22}\)
\end{center}

In \textit{The Book of Divine Unity} [by Ibn Bābūyah (d. 381 AH/991)], it is reported
that Imam Riḍā said, ‘Whoever likens God to His creatures assigns partners to
Him’.\(^\text{23}\)

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reference to Mullā Şadrā and his more noteworthy students.

\(^\text{19}\) Cf. ʿAbd al-Rahmān Badawī (ed.), \textit{Iflūṭīn ʿinda al-ʿArab}, Kuwait, 1977, pp. 51, 160, 162. For a study of the
\textit{Theologia}, see Peter Adamson, \textit{The Arabic Plotinus: A Philosophical Study of the ‘Theology of Aristotle’}, London,
2002.


life and thought, see Lewisohn, \textit{Beyond Faith and Infidelity: The Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Mahmud Shabistarī},
Richmond, 1995.
In citing the great authorities of the past, Mullā Rajab would like to safeguard what he feels are serious compromises to God’s transcendence inherent in Ṣadrian ontology, namely that if the term wujūd is synonymous between the Necessary and the contingent, it would lead to the latter’s equivalence to the former at least in some respect, and this would undermine God’s transcendence and hence compromise the doctrine of divine oneness (tawḥīd) so foundational to all of Islamic thinking.²⁴

At the same time, it will be recalled that we characterized Mullā Rajab’s use of quotes from past authorities to help bolster his claim as ‘selective’, and this for good reason. One example here shall suffice. In the second citation just provided, we see Mullā Rajab put forward the notion that the Sufis have emphasized God’s radical transcendence or tanzīḥ to such an extent that God could not even be named. To this effect, he provides a verse from Shabistarī’s masterpiece of Sufi doctrine the Gulshan-i rāz (The Rosegarden of Mystery) in which the author maintains that God is beyond name, trace, quality, and characterization. By ‘Sufis’ Mullā Rajab means followers of Ibn ʿArabī, as is clear from his drawing on Shabistarī and his subsequent citation from Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673 AH/1274).²⁵ Mullā Rajab is correct to assert that the Sufis in question adhere to the basic doctrine of God’s transcendence. Yet, he only gives us one part of the equation. It is well-known that a key component of Akbarian metaphysics is that the simultaneous affirmation of God’s transcendence and immanence (tashbīh) with respect to the manifold ways in which God reveals Himself to the cosmos through His self-disclosures (tajalliyāt).²⁶

Even in his treatment of the Akbarian perspective on God’s transcendence, Mullā Rajab leaves out some key distinctions which really defy his cut-and-dry presentation of the issue. In particular, it can be noted that, from Ibn ʿArabī onward, his followers have always adhered to a position of God’s transcendence which is quite unlike the usual theological assertion of God’s tanzīḥ. This is best seen in the basic Akbarian notion of the two-fold nature of the divine Essence (dhāt). In this teaching, God qua unmanifest Essence or Essence of exclusive oneness (al-dhāt al-ahādiyya) is conceived as being only knowable and accessible to Himself. At the same time, God qua manifest Essence or Essence of inclusive oneness (al-dhāt al-wāhidiyya) comes into the purview of human knowability and accessibility and therefore corresponds to what we normally refer to as ‘God’ in common theological language.²⁷


²⁴ Once tawḥīd is compromised, we enter into the murky waters of shirk or associating partners with God. This explains why, after the opening benedictions which customarily accompany Islamicate texts, Mullā Rajab begins the Ithbāt with a partial quote from Q.4:48 and Q.4:116: Truly God forgives not that any partner be ascribed unto Him, but He forgives what is less than.... To drive his point home further, the treatise ends with a quote from Q.37:180–2, a part of which reads: Glory be to thy Lord, the Lord of Might, above that which they ascribe.... These translations are taken from Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Caner Dagli, Maria Dakake, Joseph Lumbard, and Mohammed Rustom (ed.), The Study Quran: A New Translation and Commentary, New York, 2015.


Mullā Rajab’s emphasis upon such teachings as the Akbarian doctrine of God’s radical transcendence therefore conveniently dovetails with his exposition at the end of the Ithbāt where he seeks to affirm, through the sayings of the Shiʿī Imams, the completely unknowable, unqualifiable, and attribute-less nature of God.28 This also explains why Mullā Rajab’s ontology has been characterized by Henry Corbin as being inspired by Ismaili notions of God’s radical transcendence.29 Indeed, Mullā Rajab’s approach here seems to be coloured by a general view concerning God’s attributes which can only be negatively ‘affirmed’, that is, by means of the via negativa:

The qualities of perfection are affirmed by negating their opposites, which lie on the side of imperfection. The early philosophers held this position, saying that every quality of perfection that can be attributed to the essence of God—even the necessity of wujūd [itself]—returns to a negation of the [qualities] which lie on the side of imperfection. Thus, the attribution of ‘existent’ to God carries this sense, since it is not ‘contingent’, neither in the sense that necessity and wujūd are accidents of the essence of God and are subsistent such that the essence of God [comes to] carry the meaning of ‘wujūd’ [and] ‘existent’, nor in the sense of ‘necessity’ in the way that it applies to contingent things.30

There might indeed be some clear links with earlier Ismaili thought and Mullā Rajab’s ontology in particular. We know, for example, that three major Ismaili thinkers, namely Ḥamīd al-Dīn Kirmānī (d. ca. 411 AH/1020), Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. ca. 462 AH/1070), and Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 548 AH/1153) were all of the view that wujūd is a kind of super-genus. For Kirmānī and Khusraw, this meant that it is incorrect to attribute wujūd to God, while for Shahrastānī in particular (and to some extent perhaps Kirmānī), it meant that wujūd can be applied to God, but in an equivocal or homonymous manner.31

For his part, Mullā Rajab seems to take up Shahrastānī’s position, with an accent on the view that if the term wujūd refers to the same meaning in both the Necessary and the contingent, a kind of congruence (sinkhiyya) would be implied between them. This would be a clear error since the Necessary is, by definition, other than the contingent. As Mullā Rajab puts it:

Sharing of [the terms] ‘wujūd’ and ‘existent’ (mawjūd) between the Necessary and the contingent is homonymous, not synonymous, for if the meaning of wujūd and existent—which are self-evident concepts—were common between the Necessary and the contingent, that meaning would apply to the Necessary Being itself, or part of its essence, or an accident of its wujūd. Thus, we say that the Necessary Being itself cannot, [at the same time,] be that wujūd which

29 Corbin, La philosophie, pp. 83–6.
is a self-evident concept, a contingent quality, and [that which] is dependent upon the essence of the contingent.\(^3\)

Here, Mullā Rajab argues that if the meaning of \(wujūd\) were to apply or synonymously to the Necessary and the contingent, it would apply to: (1) the Necessary itself, or (2) a part of the Necessary’s essence, or (3) an accident of the Necessary’s essence. He goes on to state that (1) is impossible because, unlike the concept of \(wujūd\), the essence of the Necessary is not self-evident. At the same time, (2) is impossible because \(wujūd\) is a ‘quality’ (\(ṣifā\)) whereas the Necessary Being \(qua\) essence cannot be qualified (\(mawṣūf\)). As for (3), it too is impossible because \(wujūd\) is contingent while the Necessary Being \(qua\) essence is not contingent.\(^4\)

In (1), Mullā Rajab’s argument mistakenly conflates the concept (\(maḥfūm\)) of \(wujūd\) with its referent (\(miṣdāq\)). In his view, if the concept of \(wujūd\) is synonymous between the Necessary and the contingent which is a product of mental analysis, it would lead to supposing that both the former and the latter share the same structure of reality in the extra-mental world. As he makes clear in the \(Aṣl\), Mullā Rajab’s view is entirely informed by the principle (which has its roots in Neoplatonism) to the effect that none can proceed from the One but the one (\(lā yaṣduru ‘an al-wāḥid illā l-wāḥid\)).\(^5\) One of the major implications of this position is that since God is the efficient cause \(wujūd\), He cannot be coloured by \(wujūd\):

Necessary Being cannot be described by that general, self-evident type of \(wujūd\) (\(al-wujūd al-‘āmm al-badīhī\)) which is predicated of things because He is the efficient cause of this \(wujūd\). And it is impossible for the efficient cause of something to be receptive to that thing. With this in mind, what becomes apparent is the falsity of the position of the later philosophers (\(al-muta’akhkirūn\)), namely that between the Necessary and the contingent ‘\(wujūd\) is synonymous.’\(^6\)

\(Ṣadrā\) for his part clearly draws a distinction between the concept of \(wujūd\) and its referent on the one hand, and the concept of \(wujūd\) and it reality (\(ḥaqīqa\)) or identity (\(anniyya\)) on the other. This point is essential to \(Ṣadrā’s\) metaphysics, since it accounts for the fundamental features of his ontology wherein \(wujūd\) is both the ground for all unity and multiplicity, or, put differently, all identity and difference. Consider the well-known passage from \(Mashāʾir\ § 5:\)

The reality of \(wujūd\) is the most manifest of all things through presence and unveiling, and its quiddity is the most hidden among things conceptually and in its inner reality. Of all things, its concept is the least in need of definition because of its manifestness and clarity and its being the most general among all concepts in its comprehensiveness. Its identity is the most particular of all

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\(^{32}\) Mullā Rajab, \(Ithbāt\), vol. 1, pp. 232–3; \(Necessary Being\), vol. 5, p. 290.

\(^{33}\) Throughout the \(Ithbāt\), Mullā Rajab employs the term \(ṣifā\) (lit. ‘attribute’) as a synonym for ‘quality’ (\(kayf\)).

\(^{34}\) Mullā Rajab, \(Ithbāt\), vol. 1, pp. 233–4; \(Necessary Being\), vol. 5, p. 290.


\(^{36}\) Mullā Rajab, \(Aṣl\), vol. 1, p. 248; \(Fundamental Principle\), vol. 5, p. 296. The ‘later philosophers’ of course being none other than \(Ṣadrā\) and his followers.
particular things, in both its determination and concreteness, because through it
is made concrete all that is concrete, is realized all that is realized, and is
determined all that is determined and particularized…[it] is particularized
through its own essence and is determined through itself…. 37

In no uncertain terms, Şadrā tells us that, although the referent of the concept of wujūd is
both the Necessary and the contingent, the wujūd of the Necessary, based on the primacy and
gradation (tashkīk) of wujūd, is infinitely perfect and most intense upon the scale of wujūd, while the wujūd of each contingent thing is entirely coloured by imperfection and deficiency upon that
same scale. 38 In short, the difference between the Necessary and the contingent lies in their respective degrees of intensity and weakness or the respective levels of perfection and
imperfection in the structure of wujūd itself. With this point in mind, it is clear that Mullā Rajab
glosses over these important distinctions in Şadrīan metaphysics and thereby fails to address
Ṣadrā’s emphasis upon such key notions as the relationship between the concept and reality of
wujūd, the gradational nature of wujūd, univocal predication (al-ḥaml al-muṭawāṭi’), gradational
predication (al-ḥaml al-tashkīkī), etc. 39

Let us now turn to (2), which in many ways also informs (3). In order to understand what
Mullā Rajab is getting at when he refers to wujūd as a ‘quality’ (ṣifā), it is apt to cite his
definition of quality vis-à-vis the essence of the Necessary Being in the Ithbāt:

A quality is a thing which, in its own essence and quiddity, is contingent upon
and inheres in that which is qualified. It is not possible for something which is
contingent upon something [else] in its own essence and quiddity and in which
it inheres to be the essence of that thing. Therefore, the essence of the
Necessary Being cannot be qualified. 40

The fundamental problem here is with Mullā Rajab’s definition of ‘quality’. Contra Mullā Rajab,
one of the philosophers speak of quality as a ‘thing’ on account of the simple fact that quality is
one of the nine Aristotelian categories pertaining to accidents (a’rād) which, by definition, are
not ‘things’. 41 In (2), therefore, Mullā Rajab introduces a category mistake by reducing wujūd to
a ‘thing’, namely a kind of ‘accident’ (i.e., quality). To be sure, Sadrā and his predecessors all
concur that wujūd does not fall into one of the Aristotelian categories because its meaning/sense
is more general and universal than anyone of the categories. This is why Sadrā emphatically

37 Şadrā, The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations, translated by Seyyed Hossein Nasr; edited by Ibrahim Kalin,
38 For useful treatments of this key Şadrīan teaching, see Cécile Bonmariage, Le Réel et les réalités: Mullā Şadrā
the problematic of tashkīk in Şadrā, including its historical background, can be found in “Abd al-Rasūl ‘Ubūdiyyat,
39 See Şadrā, Al-Ḥikma al-mutaʿāliya fi l-ʿaṣfār al-ʿaqliyya al-arba’ā, ed. Gholamreza Aavani et al., Tehran, 2001–4,
vol. 1, pp. 41, 71, 140–1, 303, 308, 481–3, 511, 515, 526–7 (henceforth, this work shall be cited as ‘Aṣfār’).
41 For the Aristotelian categories, see Aristotle, Categories, 1a1–15532, in Aristotle, The Complete Works of Aristotle:
Aristotle’s theory of categories, see Paul Studmann, ‘Aristotle’s Categorial Scheme’, in The Oxford Handbook of
states that *wuṣūd* has neither genus (*jins*) nor differentia (*faṣl*), as these are properties of universal concepts and quiddities.\(^{42}\)

It will be recalled that in (3) Mullā Rajab maintains that if the meaning of *wuṣūd* be shared between the Necessary and the contingent in a univoval sense, it would pertain to an accident of the essence of the Necessary. This, Mullā Rajab argues, is not possible, since the essence of the Necessary is not contingent whereas *wuṣūd* as such is. Thus, the meaning of the term *wuṣūd* cannot in any way univocally apply to both that which is contingent and that which is not contingent. The reasoning here is not all together clear. But another passage in the *Iḥṭbāt* renders his thinking somewhat more transparent:

> [if the meaning of the term ‘*wuṣūd*’ is shared between the Necessary and the contingent,] then *wuṣūd* would require accidents, or not require them since it is self-subsistent, or require nothing. If it would require accidents, then wherever it is to be found, there would be accidents. It would therefore follow that the essence of God is accidental, which is impossible.\(^{43}\)

Mullā Rajab thus contends that if *wuṣūd* is synonymous between the Necessary and the contingent, it would follow that *wuṣūd* would require either accidents or not require them as it is self-subsistent, or require nothing. This is an arbitrary set up of three positons for which no initial clarification is offered. We are not told why and how synonymity between the Necessary and the contingent would lead to *wuṣūd*’s requiring accidents. In fact, it is not even clear what is meant for *wuṣūd* to ‘require accidents’ in the first place. If it refers to *wuṣūd*’s ‘having’ accidents, then Mullā Rajab would need to explain what these ‘accidents’ are and what kind of accidents they are, that is, essential accidents (*al-ʿawārīd al-dhātiyya*) or concomitant accidents (*al-ʿawārīd al-lāzimiyya*). Without clarifying his terms, Mullā Rajab simply states that if *wuṣūd* ‘requires’ accidents then wherever it is found there will be accidents. Thus, if *wuṣūd* is found in the Necessary then its essence would also be ‘accidental’, which is impossible. Such a line of reasoning is indeed self-defeating, and amounts to an instance of ‘pre-positing the conclusion before its being proven’ (*al-muṣādira ʿalā l-maṭlūb*).

How does Mullā Rajab not see the problematic nature of his assertions in this regard? The answer lies in the fact that, for Mullā Rajab, *wuṣūd* and essence are distinct with respect to the Necessary. Earlier in the *Iḥṭbāt*, he advances an argument to this effect:

> It cannot be that *wuṣūd* is a part of the essence of the Necessary Being because, as a corollary to this false position, it would follow that it is also compounded. But *wuṣūd* cannot be an accident of the essence of the Necessary Being because

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\(^{43}\) Mullā Rajab, *Iḥṭbāt*, vol. 1, pp. 243; *Necessary Being*, vol. 5, p. 290. See also *Iḥṭbāt*, vol. 1, pp. 223; *Necessary Being*, vol. 5, pp. 286–7: ‘God originates the existence of things and their forms such that their existence and quiddities exist simultaneously. It is therefore known that the existence of things and their quiddities are both caused and created by God. If the meaning of [the term] ‘existence’ with respect to God in His essence refers to the meaning of [the term] ‘existence’ that is to be found in contingent things, it would follow that He too is created’.
the cause of this \textit{wujūd} would either be the essence of the Necessary Being or other than the essence of the Necessary Being.\footnote{Mullā Rajab, \textit{Ithbāt}, vol. 1, pp. 234–5; \textit{Necessary Being}, vol. 5, pp. 290–1.}

That is to say, if \textit{wujūd} is part of the essence of the Necessary, it would follow that the latter is compounded, which is untenable. This position is based on yet another incorrect reading of Ṣadrā’s position, who, alongside Avicenna (d. 428 AH/1037) and many other philosophers in the Islamic intellectual tradition, state that the ‘\textit{wujūd}’ of the Necessary is its ‘very’ essence.\footnote{For this argument, see Avicenna, \textit{Ilahiyyāt} VIII.4, §§ 3–13, translated in Avicenna, \textit{Metaphysics of the Healing}, pp. 328–30.} This stands in stark contrast to what is traditionally referred to as ‘everything other than God’ (mā siwā-llāh), which is absolutely composite in terms of its essence and \textit{wujūd}.

Furthering his argument against the synonymity of \textit{wujūd}, Mullā Rajab affirms that \textit{wujūd} cannot be the ‘essence’ of the Necessary because then it would lead to the latter’s being both the cause and recipient of \textit{wujūd}, which is inadmissible:

\begin{quote}
If \textit{wujūd} is the essence of the Necessary Being, then it would follow that the latter is both the cause of this \textit{wujūd} and receptive to this \textit{wujūd}, which is impossible. If it is other than the essence of the Necessary Being, then it would follow that the Necessary Being is contingent upon another for \textit{wujūd}. It would thus be contingent being, not the Necessary Being.\footnote{Mullā Rajab, \textit{Ithbāt}, vol. 1, p. 235; \textit{Necessary Being}, vol. 5, p. 291.}
\end{quote}

Mullā Rajab thus ignores the traditional ‘proof of the veracious’ (\textit{burhān al-ṣiddīqīn}) for the Necessary, which was made popular by Avicenna and has been drawn upon by a variety of thinkers in the Islamic and cognate traditions ever since.\footnote{For this argument in Avicenna, see Toby Mayer, ‘Ibn Sinā’s \textit{burhān al-ṣiddīqīn}’, in \textit{Journal of Islamic Studies} 12.1 (2001), pp. 18–39; Jon McGinnis, \textit{Avicenna}, New York, 2010, pp. 163–7.} According to this argument, the chain of contingency must necessarily end in an un-caused being, which is none other than the \textit{wajīb al-wujūd}. From a Ṣadrian perspective, it would be fallacious to argue that the Necessary is both the cause and recipient of this \textit{wujūd} because the Necessary is, by definition, un-caused (or the First Cause) and the very ‘stuff’ of \textit{wujūd}.\footnote{For helpful discussions of Ṣadrā’s version of the \textit{ṣiddīqīn} argument, see Hamidreza Ayatollahy, \textit{The Existence of God: Mulla Sadra’s \textit{Seddīqīn} Argument Versus Criticisms of Kant and Hume}, Tehran, 2005; Kalin, \textit{Mullā Ṣadrā}, pp. 74–6; Sayeh Meisami, \textit{Mulla Sadra}, Oxford, 2013, pp. 83–8; Rizvi, \textit{Mullā Ṣadrā and Metaphysics}, pp. 124–7.}

\section*{III. The Primacy of Quiddity}

Setting up a dichotomy between essence and \textit{wujūd} also allows Mullā Rajab to venture into a defence of the ‘primacy of quiddity’ (\textit{aṣālat al-māhiyya}) over and against the Ṣadrian standpoint on the primacy of \textit{wujūd}. Before proceeding, however, it is important to briefly outline the senses in which quiddities may figure, namely its three modes.\footnote{For some standard and more detailed discussions of the different modes of quiddities, see Mullā Ḥādi Sabziwārī, \textit{Sharḥ-i Manẓūma}, ed. Mehdī Mohaghegh and Toshikiko Izutsu, Tehran, 1969, pp. 132–3; Āqa ‘Ali Mudarris Zunūzī, \textit{Badāʾī al-ḥikam}, Tehran, 1996, pp. 291–4, 371ff.}
(a) *al-māhiyya lā bi-sharṭ*: unconditioned quiddities or natural universals, which are considered in an absolute indeterminate manner and are not in any way delimited by either positively conditioned or negatively conditioned factors. As such, they are neither existent nor non-existent.

(b) *al-māhiyya bi-sharṭ lā*: negatively conditioned quiddities, which are still devoid of any individuation or determination, and can thus only exist in the mind.

(c) *al-māhiyya bi-sharṭ shayʾ*: quiddities positively conditioned by particular accidents and which therefore exist extra-mentally.

In the *Aṣl*, Mullā Rajab presents the problem as follows:

Know that quiddity qua itself is nothing but itself…. If quiddity qua itself is nothing but itself, then an extra-mentally existent quiddity is either an extra-mental quiddity only, or it is a quiddity accompanied by extra-mental *wujūd*. If it is an extra-mental quiddity only, it cannot be existent because quiddity qua itself is nothing but itself, as you know. Yet here we suppose it to be existent, which would entail absurdity.50

Mullā Rajab consequently approaches the question of quiddities without explaining their three different modes. He takes it for granted that a ‘quiddity’ can be extra-mentally existent (c) on the grounds that, since ‘quiddity qua quiddity is nothing but itself’ (a) and has no kind of *wujūd*, only quiddities that do exist extra-mentally can be taken into serious consideration. Seemingly unaware of the status of quiddities in their negatively conditioned state (b), Mullā Rajab fails to recognize that, from the Ṣadrian perspective, ‘extra-mental’ quiddities (c) are, by definition, not quiddities *qua* quiddities (a). Without taking account of this important point, he then explains in rather straight-forward fashion that, extra-mentally speaking, *wujūd* is a concomitant of quiddity:

If it is affirmed that *wujūd* accompanies quiddity extra-mentally, then it is affirmed that *wujūd* be concomitant with quiddity extra-mentally in the sense that it is posterior to quiddity because the *wujūd* of a thing is a corollary of the thing and necessarily follows it. If *wujūd* follows quiddity and is its corollary, the instantiating action (*jaʿl*) of the agent must attach to quiddity firstly and essentially, and then *wujūd* can be concomitant with quiddity because it is self-evidently impossible for the agent to first cause the corollary of a thing and its concomitant, and then [to cause] its basis and that with which the thing is concomitant.51

Informed by his failure to distinguish between the three modes of quiddity (a, b, c), Mullā Rajab also does not attempt to engage with the complexity of the Ṣadrian notion that the instantiated agent (*al-majʿūl bi-l-dhāt*) is none other than *wujūd* itself, and not quiddity as such.52 Mullā Rajab thus presents us with what, on the surface of things, seems like a competing picture over the essence/ *wujūd* problem posited against Ṣadrian ontology, but not an actual response to the substance of Ṣadrian metaphysics concerning the oneness and primacy of *wujūd*, and, by

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52 See, for example, the discussion in Ṣadrā, *Asfār*, vol. 1, p. 488; vol. 2, pp. 3–5, 335, 406.
extension, the place of ‘quiddities’ in *wujūd*’s inherent centripetal and centrifugal dynamism. Nevertheless, the implications of some of Mullā Rajab’s views on the primacy of quiddity—problematic as they may be—are thrown into greater relief when we examine how he tackles the question of ‘mental existence’ (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*), to which we shall now turn.

**IV. Mental Existence**

In the *Aṣl*, Mullā Rajab presents two premises in order to demonstrate the falsity of mental existence.

This demonstration [proving the falsity of *al-wujūd al-dhihnī*] rests on two premises. One of them is self-evident, namely that when there is knowledge by way of the apprehension of a form in the mind—as is the later philosophers’ position—it must be a knowable mental form derived from something [external] which belongs to the species of this thing. For example, if we sought to obtain knowledge of a certain species of a substance, its form would necessarily have to be knowable from this species because of the impossibility of knowing a substance from its accident, or of the form ‘man’ from the form ‘horse’…. The second premise … results in the necessity that for every material form there be a specified matter disposed towards it, and that it is not possible for the form to inhere in other than it.53

The phrase ‘certain species of a substance’ is considerably vague since species (*naw*’) is related to its genus (*jins*), and not to substance (*jawhar*). It is also quite unclear how ‘knowledge by way of the apprehension of a form in the mind’ is self-evident. What Mullā Rajab seems to be suggesting is that we cannot know a substance from its accidents. According to him, Ṣadrā and his followers state that since we apprehend mental forms, these forms must derive from some species existing in the external world. With respect to the second premise, Mullā Rajab contends that for every ‘material form’ there is a specified matter that becomes united with it. But, since matter is pure potency, it is form that actualizes matter and not vice versa.

Based on two premises which are problematic to begin with, Mullā Rajab goes on to ask why the mind is not set aflame when the form of fire is said to ‘exist’ in the mind.54 In other words, he argues that if the form of fire in the extra-mental world burns, then it should also do the same for the ‘mental’ existence of fire. He therefore wrongly assumes that no change is supposed to take place between the mental and extra-mental forms of fire on the one hand, and that the concomitants of quiddity cannot be separated from quiddity on the other.

Ṣadrā’s treatment of *al-wujūd al-dhihnī* easily provides answers to these kinds of objections in his analysis of the differences between primary essential predication (*al-ḥaml al-awwali al-dhātī*) and synthetic common predication (*al-ḥaml al-shāʾīʾ al-ṣanāʾīʾiʾī*).55 According to Ṣadrā, extra-mental fire does not burn when existing in the mind because it is the quiddity of fire which is present in the mind, not ‘its external properties’. In other words, the quiddity of fire remains the same in both its mental and extra-mental modes of *wujūd*, and this *wujūd* takes on different

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55 For these distinctions in Ṣadrā, see *Asfār*, vol. 1, pp. 344–63. See also, Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā and Metaphysics*, pp. 66–7.
modes and assumes different forms in different cases. Thus the external wujūd of fire necessitates its properties being present with it while the mental wujūd of fire is devoid of any such properties.

**V. Substantial Motion**

In his attempt to refute the key Šādrian doctrine of ‘substantial motion’ (al-ḥaraka al-jawhariyya), Mullā Rajab commits himself to a definition of motion proper that is ultimately confined to what is known as ‘traversing motion’ (al-ḥaraka al-qatʿiyya), which takes place as a gradual transition from potentiality to actuality:

According to the correct opinion, motion is the quality of change amongst mutable things (mutaghayyarāt). Change takes place in two ways: (1) simultaneously, as occurs in generation and corruption, and (2) gradually, which is motion [proper]…. Motion is an accident for something when that thing has potentiality. But when a thing’s potentiality ceases—for example the intellect—transitive motion is not possible for it, just as it is impossible for a body which we deem perfect in every respect.56

Mullā Rajab’s claim that change also takes place simultaneously as in generation and corruption is misplaced since generation and corruption refer to the process whereby bodies abruptly lose their ‘form’ and acquire a new one. Also problematic is his definition of motion which states that ‘motion is the quality of change amongst mutable things’ since motion is a gradual change of things, which does not involve the category of ‘quality’ as such. While it is correct to say that motion occurs in ‘quality’ alongside other categories, it is incorrect, according to the Aristotelian definition of motion, to say that it is an ‘accident for something’.

The gist of Mullā Rajab’s argument against substantial motion is that for the definition of motion to obtain we need to have a ‘fixed subject’ because motion is defined according to Aristotle as ‘the first perfection for that which is in a state of potentiality qua something in potentiality’.57 Hence we need a subject in order to claim that ‘it’ has acquired ‘perfection’ by moving from potentiality to actuality. Thus, the actualization of motion depends on six things:

1. The origin (mabda’) from which motion emanates
2. The end towards which motion is directed
3. The moved (mutaharrak) subject
4. The mover (mutaharrik)
5. The course of motion
6. The time to which motion corresponds

As Mullā Rajab argues, motion can only be said to have taken place when there is a fixed subject for which motion occurs. And if that fixed subject or ‘substance’ itself changes in the

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57 Aristotle, *Physics*, 201*’*11, in Aristotle, *Complete Works*, vol. 1, p. 343. For Mullā Rajab’s citation of Aristotle’s definition of motion, which varies slightly in wording given the carry-over from Greek into Arabic, see *Aṣl*, vol. 1, p. 252; *Fundamental Principle*, vol. 5, p. 297.
course of its motion then ‘nothing’ would be left in the end for which motion is said to have occurred. In other words, if there is motion in substance and the ‘subject of motion’ changes at each moment and becomes a new substance, how then can we claim that such a substance has ‘moved’ from this moment to that moment since that very ‘substance’ is now no longer existent? It therefore necessarily follows that if the substance in question has not ‘moved’, no ‘motion’ has occurred in reality. But it is common knowledge that we do observe motion in the external world. Therefore, motion has occurred in something (namely the categories of place, quality, quantity and position) other than substance:

If we suppose something to be in a state of substantial motion from a fixed beginning to a specific end, these two points would have to exist between finite motions. The moving object would therefore emerge in the end, since in the beginning of its motion it would not have subsisted as an individual entity or anything else. If in the end it subsists as an individual entity or something else, just as it was in the beginning, then it will not have been in a state of motion. Rather, it will have been in a state of rest. Yet we have supposed it to be in a state of motion, which would entail absurdity….

From another perspective… if we suppose something to be in motion in its substance, its substance will have to be other than its substance in order for the moving object to be in a state of substantial motion. This is because whatever is in a state of motion must be other than the moving object, just as it was in its [initial state]. This would also require that the moving object be both subsistent and non-subsistent as an individual entity.\footnote{Mullā Rajab, Aṣl, vol. 1, p. 254; Fundamental Principle, vol. 5, pp. 298–9.}

In contra-distinction to Mullā Rajab’s position, Şadrā’s most important argument in favour of substantial motion is the one that takes the primacy and gradation of wujūd as its starting point, situating his discussion in the context of the all-expansive reality of wujūd (al-wujūd al-‘āmm al-munbasit) that underlies all substantial change.\footnote{See Şadrā, Asfār, vol. 3, pp. 97–136. The relevant parts of Şadrā’s discussion on substantial motion in the Asfār are now available in English translation as Transubstantial Motion and the Natural World, trans. Mahdi Dehbashi, London, 2010. For useful analyses of this doctrine, see Christian Jambet, The Act of Being: The Philosophy of Revelation in Mullā Şadrā, trans. Jeff Fort, New York, 2006, 197–203; Kalin, ‘Between Physics and Metaphysics: Mullā Şadrā on Nature and Motion’, in Islam & Science 1.1 (2003), pp. 59–90; Eiyad Al-Kutubi, Mullā Şadrā and Eschatology: Evolution of Being, London, 2015, pp. 52–67; Meisami, Mulla Sadra, pp. 61–80.} If in the order of reality, wujūd is fundamental, it follows that the categories ‘substance’ and ‘accident’ are nothing but the different modes of the self-same wujūd. That is to say, substance and accident do not form two distinct orders of reality; rather, they are two different ‘degrees’ of wujūd. And, while an accident ineluctably inheres in its underlying subject, namely is substance, the wujūd of an accident depends on the wujūd of substance since the former is wujūd-in-itself (al-wujūd fī nafsihi) whereas the latter is wujūd-for-itself (al-wujūd li-nafsihi).

If both substance and accidents conform to the same order/plane of wujūd, it follows that ‘change’ in accidents will necessarily generate change in the substance with the net effect that substantial motion would be tenable, since motion or change in accidents cannot occur independent of their substrata, i.e. substances. Of course, for Şadrā, substantial motion also applies to the human soul as it takes on various forms in the various stages of its own life,
moving from the embryonic (fetal), to the vegetal, to the animal, to the human, and finally to the spiritually subsistent.\(^{60}\) In all these stages, the unity of the changing form is preserved through the underlying ‘matter’ or stuff of the soul, which remains unchanged in the process.

The subject of substantial motion is *hyle* or what Ṣadrā also simply refers to as a thing’s ‘nature’ (*ṭabī‘a*), which remains stable but takes on an indefinite number of forms.\(^{61}\) Each new form is piled up on the other form (*al-labs ba‘da al-labs*) as the stable nature of the entity subsists. Ṣadrā gives the standard example of water: it may change into ice or vapor, but its ‘matter’ remains the same although the ‘form’ of ‘water’ changes in accordance with the various conditioning factors which impose themselves upon its stable nature.\(^{62}\) Here again in Mullā Rajab we therefore see a much more complicated Ṣadrian doctrine presented in a rather simple and incorrect manner, and then rejected on those grounds.

**VI. Conclusion**

Mullā Rajab ʿAlī Tabrizī has long been recognized as one of the leading Safavid intellectual figures who opposed the teachings of Mullā Ṣadrā and his school. He trained a generation of students who would go on to make their own distinctive contributions to Islamic philosophy, although it seems quite unlikely that anyone took up his exact line of argumentation. This is likely because, as our preliminary study of the *Ithbāt* and *Asl* reveal, Mullā Rajab was unable to provide a clear philosophical response to Ṣadrian metaphysics, much less a compelling philosophical alternative. This might also explain the tone of frustration one clearly detects in Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āsthiyānī’s (d. 1426 AH/2005) learned glosses upon Mullā Rajab’s writings.\(^{63}\)

On a very generous reading, we could entertain the possibility that Mullā Rajab’s *Ithbāt* and *Asl* were written for his highly qualified students, who would presumably have already known the details of Ṣadrian metaphysics. In that case, these texts would have been mainly used for purposes of instruction, with the gaps filled in by Mullā Rajab in the form of an oral commentary. That would seem to match up with at least some of the evidence. We know, for example, that Mullā Rajab was more of a teacher and instructor than he was a writer.\(^{64}\) While this kind of a hypothesis might account for at least some of the instances in the *Ithbāt* and *Asl* where the author refuses to directly engage the views of Mullā Ṣadrā and his followers, it would not explain the clear-cut cases where he fails to offer compelling philosophical alternatives to their central teachings.

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\(^{61}\) A useful inquiry into this and related points can be found in Yanis Eshots, ‘“Substantial Motion” and “New Creation” in Comparative Context’, in *Journal of Islamic Philosophy* 6 (2010), pp. 79–92.


\(^{63}\) See his extensive notes upon the *Ithbāt* and the *Asl* in Āsthiyānī and Corbin (ed.), *Anthologie*. See also Rahimi-Riseh, ‘Late Safavid Philosophy’, sec. 2.3, where the author notes the manner in which Āsthiyānī inveighs against Mullā Rajab’s arguments.

\(^{64}\) Rahimi-Riseh, ‘Late Safavid Philosophy’, sec. 2.3.
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