

Rajab ‘Alī Tabrīzī’s Refutation of Ṣadrīan 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 ‘Abd 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 Sa‘īd 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 ‘Alī 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 Findiriskī (d. 1050

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¹ Some pertinent European-language scholarship on Lahiji includes Max Horten, ‘Die philosophischen und theologischen Ansichten von Lahigi (um 1670)’, in *Der Islam* 3 (1912), pp. 91–131; Henry Corbin, *La philosophie iranienne islamique aux XVII^e et XVIII^e siècles*, Paris, 1981, pp. 96–115; Leonard Lewisohn, ‘Sufism and the School of Iṣfahān’, in *The Heritage of Sufism*, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (vols. 1–3) and David Morgan (vol. 3), Oxford, 1999, vol. 3, pp. 101–12; Sajjad Rizvi, ‘A Sufi Theology Fit for a Shī‘ī King: The *Gawhar-i Murād* of ‘Abd al-Razzāq Lāhījī (d. 1072/1661–2)’, in *Sufism and Theology*, ed. Ayman Shihadeh, Edinburgh, 2007, pp. 83–100.

² For Fayḍ Kāshānī, see, inter alia, Rasūl Ja‘fariyān, *Dīn wa-siyāsāt dar dūra-yi ṣafawī*, Qum, 1991, pp. 148–292.

³ For this fascinating figure, see Corbin, *En islam iranien*, Paris, 1971–2, vol. 4, pp. 123–201; Corbin, *La philosophie*, pp. 245–91; Corbin with Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Osman Yahia, *Histoire de la philosophie islamique*, Paris, 1986, pp. 473–5; Rizvi, ‘(Neo)Platonism Revived in the Light of the Imams: Qāḍī Sa‘īd Qummī (d. AH 1107/AD 1696) and his Reception of the *Theologia Aristotelis*’, in *Classical Arabic Philosophy: Sources and Reception*, ed. Peter Adamson, London, 2007, pp. 177–207; Rizvi, ‘Time and Creation: The Contribution of Some Safavid Philosophies’, in *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 62 (2006), pp. 713–37 (particularly pp. 731–7); Rizvi, ‘“Seeking the Face of God”: The Safawid *Hikmat* Tradition’s Conceptualisation of *Walāya Takwīniyya*’, in *The Study of Shi‘i Islam*, ed. Farhad Daftary and Gurdofarid Miskinzoda, London, 2015, pp. 391–410 (pp. 402–3 in particular).

⁴ 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.

AH/1640),⁵ and at some point gained prominence as a major opponent of Mullā Ṣadrā and his followers. Mullā Rajab went on to train a generation of philosophers and theologians whose influence extended into the Qajar period. There is even some evidence to suggest that Mullā Rajab's radical apophatic theology may have had at least some role to play in the attack against Ṣadrā launched by the 'founder' of the Shaykhī school Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī (d. 1241 AH/1826).⁶

Mullā Rajab's thought has been variously characterized, with some degree of qualification, as being Peripatetic,⁷ or Ismaili (particularly in his ontology),⁸ or in some way Neoplatonic in inspiration (insofar as Ismaili 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 Qummī, who penned a highly interesting series of Shī'ī reflections upon the *Theologia* in the form of glosses (*ta'liqāt*),¹⁰ and Mullā Rajab's other student 'Alī Qulī 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 wājib* (*On the Necessary Being*), his dense Arabic work *al-Aṣl al-aṣīl* (*The Fundamental Principle*), (also known as the *al-Uṣūl al-Āṣafiyya*), 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 Findiriskī's thought can be found in Mahmoud Namazī Esfahani, 'Philosophical and Mystical Dimensions in the Thought and Writings of Mīr Findiriskī (ca. 970-1050/1560/1640): With Special Reference to his *Qaṣīda Hikmīya* (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 Hindu Texts Reconsidered', in *Studies in Religion* 43.3 (2014), pp. 390–410.

⁶ Cf. Corbin's note in Ṣadrā, *Le livre des pénétrations métaphysiques*, trans. Henry Corbin, Paris, 1988, p. 180. The classic inquiry into Shaykh Aḥmad's thought remains Corbin, *En islam iranien*, vol. 4, pp. 205–300. See also Juan Cole, 'Casting Away the Self: The Mysticism of Shaykh Aḥmad al-Aḥsā'ī', in *The Twelver Shia in Modern Times: Religious Culture and Political History*, ed. Rainer Brunner and Werner Ende, Leiden, 2001, pp. 25–37.

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 Ismaili influence in due course.

⁹ See Reza Pourjavady and Sabine Schmidtke, 'An Eastern Renaissance? Greek Philosophy Under the Safavids (16th–18th Centuries AD)', in *Intellectual History of the Islamicate World* 3 (2015), p. 267.

¹⁰ For a study of Qummī's glosses upon the *Theologia*, see Rizvi, '(Neo)Platonism Revived in the Light of the Imams'.

¹¹ Pourjavady and Schmidtke, 'An Eastern Renaissance?', p. 267.

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 'Alī al-Tabrizī*. The entire *Ithbāt* and key selections from the *Aṣl* are also available in Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshtiyānī and Henry Corbin (ed.), *Anthologie des philosophes iraniens depuis le XVII^e 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 wājib*) 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).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.¹⁵

In the *Ithbāt* and *Aṣl*, Mullā Rajab takes issue with the main elements of Ṣadrian metaphysics, offering a critical reading of every major Ṣadrian doctrine. Unlike Ghazālī (d. 505 AH/1111) in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifa*,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 Ṣadrā 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 Ṣadrian 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 Ṣadrian 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-ishtirāk al-maʿnawī*) and not homonymous (*al-ishtirāk 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.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 Ṣadrā’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

¹⁴ Rahimi-Riseh, ‘Late Safavid Philosophy’, sec. 2.3.

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 Āshtiyānī 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.

¹⁶ For which, see Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*, 2nd ed., trans. Michael Marmura, Provo, 2000.

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!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' (*wujūd*) and 'existent' (*mawjūd*) in a manner that is homonymous. Although he will attempt to refute Ṣadrā'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 *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 Shīʿī 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 Ṣadrian metaphysics. The first citation draws on the *Theologia*, the second a poem from the great Sufi metaphysician Maḥmūd Shabistārī (d. 720 AH/1320), and the third a famous saying of Imam Riḍāʾ (d. 203 AH/817), the eighth Shīʿī Imam:

If the meaning of [the term] '*wujūd*' with respect to God in His essence refers to the meaning of [the term] *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'.¹⁹ It is therefore necessary that His *wujūd* be other than the *wujūd* of things. If not, then He would be like them.²⁰

On the issue of God's transcendence (*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 Shabistārī spoken concerning this issue!²¹

His Essence is beyond quantity, quality, and modality.
Exalted is His Essence above what they say!²²

In *The Book of Divine Unity* [by Ibn Bābūyah (d. 381 AH/991)], it is reported that Imam Riḍāʾ said, 'Whoever likens God to His creatures assigns partners to Him'.²³

¹⁸ Mullā Rajab, *Ithbāt*, vol. 1, p. 220; *Necessary Being*, vol. 5, p. 285. The 'famous men' here is an obvious reference to Mullā Ṣadrā and his more noteworthy students.

¹⁹ Cf. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Badawī (ed.), *Iflūṭīn ʿinda al-ʿArab*, Kuwait, 1977, pp. 51, 160, 162. For a study of the *Theologia*, see Peter Adamson, *The Arabic Plotinus: A Philosophical Study of the 'Theology of Aristotle'*, London, 2002.

²⁰ Mullā Rajab, *Ithbāt*, vol. 1, pp. 223–4; *Necessary Being*, vol. 5, p. 287.

²¹ Mullā Rajab, *Ithbāt*, vol. 1, p. 226; *Necessary Being*, vol. 5, p. 287.

²² Shabistārī, *Gulshan-i rāz*, ed. Javad Nurbakhsh, Tehran, 1976, p. 10 (line 31). For a thorough study of Shabistārī's life and thought, see Lewisohn, *Beyond Faith and Infidelity: The Sufi Poetry and Teachings of Mahmud Shabistari*, 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 *tanẓīh* 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 *tanẓīh*. 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-aḥadiyya*) 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-wāḥidiyya*) 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

²³ Mullā Rajab, *Ithbāt*, vol. 1, p. 239; *Necessary Being*, vol. 5, p. 292. The statement is to be found, but as a saying of Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148 AH/765), in Ibn Bābūyah, *Al-Tawḥīd*, Najaf, 1966, p. 39.

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.

²⁵ See Mullā Rajab, *Ithbāt*, vol. 1, p. 226; *Necessary Being*, vol. 5, pp. 287–8. An excellent exposition of Qūnawī's teachings can be found in Richard Todd, *The Sufi Doctrine of Man: The Metaphysical Anthropology of Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī*, Leiden, 2014. For an appraisal of this work, see Rustom, 'Review of Richard Todd's *The Sufi Doctrine of Man*', in *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 18.1 (2016), in press.

²⁶ For the transcendence/immanence interplay in the writings of Ibn ʿArabī in particular, see William Chittick, *The Sufi Path of Knowledge: Ibn al-ʿArabī's Metaphysics of Imagination*, Albany, 1989.

²⁷ For a recent treatment of the fundamental distinction between *aḥadiyya* and *wāḥidiyya* and their implications vis-à-vis the God-world relationship, see Rustom, 'Philosophical Sufism', in *The Routledge Companion to Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Richard Taylor and Luis Xavier López-Farjeat, New York, 2016, pp. 399–411.

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 Shī‘ī 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. ‘Abd 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

²⁸ See Mullā Rajab, *Ithbāt*, vol. 1, pp. 236–42; *Necessary Being*, vol. 5, pp. 291–3.

²⁹ Corbin, *La philosophie*, pp. 83–6.

³⁰ Mullā Rajab, *Ithbāt*, vol. 1, pp. 242–3; *Necessary Being*, vol. 5, p. 293.

³¹ See, respectively, Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Knowledge and Liberation: A Treatise on Philosophical Theology*, trans. Faquir Hunzai, London, 1998, p. 42; Kirmānī, *Rāḥat al-‘aql*, ed. Muṣṭafā Ghālib, Beirut, 1983, pp. 152–3; Shahrastānī, *Struggling with the Philosopher: A Refutation of Avicenna’s Metaphysics*, trans. Wilferd Madelung and Toby Mayer, London, 2001, pp. 24–25, 50, 54. Thanks go to Khalil Andani for this point and its corresponding references.

is a self-evident concept, a contingent quality, and [that which] is dependent upon the essence of the contingent.³²

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' (*ṣifa*)³³ 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.³⁴

In (1), Mullā Rajab's argument mistakenly conflates the concept (*mafhūm*) 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 yaṣḍuru 'an al-wāḥid illā l-wāḥid*).³⁵ 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'akhhirūn*), namely that between the Necessary and the contingent '*wujūd* is synonymous.'³⁶

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 its 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 *Mashā'ir* § 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

³² Mullā Rajab, *Ithbāt*, vol. 1, pp. 232–3; *Necessary Being*, vol. 5, p. 290.

³³ Throughout the *Ithbāt*, Mullā Rajab employs the term *ṣifa* (lit. 'attribute') as a synonym for 'quality' (*kayf*).

³⁴ Mullā Rajab, *Ithbāt*, vol. 1, pp. 233–4; *Necessary Being*, vol. 5, p. 290.

³⁵ For this doctrine, see Avicenna, *Ilāhiyyāt* IX.4, §§ 5–10, translated in Avicenna, *The Metaphysics of the Healing*, trans. Michael Marmura, Provo, 2005, pp. 328–30. Cf. the related Neoplatonic idea in John Dillon and Lloyd Gerson (ed. and trans.), *Neoplatonic Philosophy: Introductory Readings*, Indianapolis, 2004, pp. 83–6, 264, 266–7.

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....[i]t is particularized through its own essence and is determined through itself....³⁷

In no uncertain terms, Ṣadrā 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 Ṣadrian 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' (*ṣifa*), 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, none 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'rāḍ*) 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, Ṣadrā 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 Ṣadrā emphatically

³⁷ Ṣadrā, *The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations*, translated by Seyyed Hossein Nasr; edited by Ibrahim Kalin, Provo, 2014, pp. 6–7.

³⁸ For useful treatments of this key Ṣadrian teaching, see Cécile Bonmariage, *Le Réel et les réalités: Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī et la structure de la réalité*, Paris, 2008, pt. 1; Ibrahim Kalin, *Mullā Ṣadrā*, New Delhi, 2014, pp. 94–7; Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā and Metaphysics: Modulation of Being*, Routledge, 2009, pp. 109–14. An extensive analysis of the problematic of *tashkīk* in Ṣadrā, including its historical background, can be found in 'Abd al-Rasūl 'Ubūdiyyat, *Niẓām-i Ṣadrā'i: tashkīk dar wujūd*, Qum, 2010, pp. 17–32, 55–97, 191–257.

³⁹ See Ṣadrā, *Al-Hikma al-muta'āliya fī l-asfār al-'aqliyya al-arba'a*, 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 'Asfār').

⁴⁰ Mullā Rajab, *Ithbāt*, vol. 1, pp. 242; *Necessary Being*, vol. 5, p. 290.

⁴¹ For the Aristotelian categories, see Aristotle, *Categories*, 1^a1–15^b32, in Aristotle, *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Princeton, NJ, 1984, vol. 1, pp. 2–27. For a discussion of Aristotle's theory of categories, see Paul Studtmann, 'Aristotle's Categorical Scheme', in *The Oxford Handbook of Aristotle*, ed. Christopher Shields, Oxford, 2012, pp. 63–80.

states that *wujūd* 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 *wujūd* be shared between the Necessary and the contingent in a univocal 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 *wujūd* as such is. Thus, the meaning of the term *wujūd* 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 *Ithbāt* renders his thinking somewhat more transparent:

[if the meaning of the term ‘*wujūd*’ is shared between the Necessary and the contingent,] then *wujūd* 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 *wujūd* is synonymous between the Necessary and the contingent, it would follow that *wujūd* 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 *wujūd*’s requiring accidents. In fact, it is not even clear what is meant for *wujūd* to ‘require accidents’ in the first place. If it refers to *wujūd*’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-‘awāriḍ al-dhātiyya*) or concomitant accidents (*al-‘awāriḍ al-lāzimiyya*). Without clarifying his terms, Mullā Rajab simply states that if *wujūd* ‘requires’ accidents then wherever it is found there will be accidents. Thus, if *wujūd* 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 ‘alā 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, *wujūd* and essence are distinct with respect to the Necessary. Earlier in the *Ithbāt*, he advances an argument to this effect:

It cannot be that *wujūd* 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 *wujūd* cannot be an accident of the essence of the Necessary Being because

⁴² See, *inter alia*, Ṣadrā’s well-known statement in *Mashā‘ir* § 12: ‘[t]he reality of *wujūd* is not a genus, nor a species, nor an accident, since it is not a natural universal (*kullī ṭabī‘ī*)’; *The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations*, p. 9. For Ṣadrā’s treatment of natural universals, see Muhammad Faruque, ‘Mullā Ṣadrā on the Problem of Natural Universals’, forthcoming; Toshihiko Izutsu, ‘The Problem of Quiddity and the Natural Universal in Islamic Metaphysics’, in *Études philosophiques offertes au Dr. Ibrahim Madkur*, ed. Osman Amin, Cairo, 1974, pp. 131–77.

⁴³ Mullā Rajab, *Ithbāt*, vol. 1, pp. 243; *Necessary Being*, vol. 5, p. 290. See also *Ithbāt*, 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 *wujūd* would either be the essence of the Necessary Being or other than the essence of the Necessary Being.⁴⁴

That is to say, if *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 '*wujūd*' of the Necessary is its 'very' essence.⁴⁵ 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 *wujūd*.

Furthering his argument against the synonymy of *wujūd*, Mullā Rajab affirms that *wujūd* cannot be the 'essence' of the Necessary because then it would lead to the latter's being both the cause and recipient of *wujūd*, which is inadmissible:

If *wujūd* is the essence of the Necessary Being, then it would follow that the latter is both the cause of this *wujūd* and receptive to this *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 *wujūd*. It would thus be contingent being, not the Necessary Being.⁴⁶

Mullā Rajab thus ignores the traditional 'proof of the veracious' (*burhān al-ṣiddiqīn*) 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.⁴⁷ According to this argument, the chain of contingency must necessarily end in an un-caused being, which is none other than the *wajīb al-wujūd*. From a Ṣadrian perspective, it would be fallacious to argue that the Necessary is both the cause and recipient of this *wujūd* because the Necessary is, by definition, un-caused (or the First Cause) and the very 'stuff' of *wujūd*.⁴⁸

III. The Primacy of Quiddity

Setting up a dichotomy between essence and *wujūd* also allows Mullā Rajab to venture into a defence of the 'primacy of quiddity' (*aṣālat al-māhiyya*) over and against the Ṣadrian standpoint on the primacy of *wujūd*. Before proceeding, however, it is important to briefly outline the senses in which quiddities may figure, namely its three modes.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Mullā Rajab, *Ithbāt*, vol. 1, pp. 234–5; *Necessary Being*, vol. 5, pp. 290–1.

⁴⁵ For this argument, see Avicenna, *Ilāhiyyāt* VIII.4, §§ 3–13, translated in Avicenna, *Metaphysics of the Healing*, pp. 328–30.

⁴⁶ Mullā Rajab, *Ithbāt*, vol. 1, p. 235; *Necessary Being*, vol. 5, p. 291.

⁴⁷ For this argument in Avicenna, see Toby Mayer, 'Ibn Sīnā's '*burhān al-ṣiddiqīn*'', in *Journal of Islamic Studies* 12.1 (2001), pp. 18–39; Jon McGinnis, *Avicenna*, New York, 2010, pp. 163–7.

⁴⁸ For helpful discussions of Ṣadrā's version of the *ṣiddiqīn* argument, see Hamidreza Ayatollahy, *The Existence of God: Mulla Sadra's Seddiqin Argument Versus Criticisms of Kant and Hume*, Tehran, 2005; Kalin, *Mullā Ṣadrā*, pp. 74–6; Sayeh Meisami, *Mulla Sadra*, Oxford, 2013, pp. 83–8; Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā and Metaphysics*, pp. 124–7.

⁴⁹ For some standard and more detailed discussions of the different modes of quiddities, see Mullā Hādī Sabziwārī, *Sharḥ-i Manẓūma*, ed. Mehdi Mohaghegh and Toshiko Izutsu, Tehran, 1969, pp. 132–3; Āqa 'Alī Mudarris Zunūzī, *Badā'ī' al-ḥikam*, Tehran, 1996, pp. 291–4, 371ff.

- (a) *al-māhiyya lā bi-shart*: 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-shart 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-shart shay'*: 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 (*ja'āl*) 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-maj'ūl 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

⁵⁰ Mullā Rajab, *Aṣl*, vol. 1, p. 257; *Fundamental Principle*, vol. 5, p. 299.

⁵¹ Mullā Rajab, *Aṣl*, vol. 1, p. 259; *Fundamental Principle*, vol. 5, p. 300.

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 (*nawʿ*) 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-awwalī al-dhātī*) and synthetic common predication (*al-ḥaml al-shāʿiʿ al-ṣanāʿiʿī*).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

⁵³ Mullā Rajab, *Aṣl*, vol. 1, pp. 262–3; *Fundamental Principle*, vol. 5, pp. 300–1.

⁵⁴ Mullā Rajab, *Aṣl*, vol. 1, p. 263; *Fundamental Principle*, vol. 5, p. 301.

⁵⁵ For these distinctions in Ṣadrā, see *Aṣfār*, 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 Ṣadrian 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 (*mabdaʿ*) from which motion emanates
- (2) The end towards which motion is directed
- (3) The moved (*mutaḥarrak*) subject
- (4) The mover (*mutaḥarrik*)
- (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

⁵⁶ Mullā Rajab, *Aṣl*, vol. 1, pp. 252–3; *Fundamental Principle*, vol. 5, pp. 297–8.

⁵⁷ Aristotle, *Physics*, 201^a11, 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.⁵⁸

In contra-distinction to Mullā Rajab’s position, Ṣadrā’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.⁵⁹ 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 nafsīhi*) whereas the latter is *wujūd*-for-itself (*al-wujūd li-nafsīhi*).

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 Ṣadrā, substantial motion also applies to the human soul as it takes on various forms in the various stages of its own life,

⁵⁸ Mullā Rajab, *Aṣl*, vol. 1, p. 254; *Fundamental Principle*, vol. 5, pp. 298–9.

⁵⁹ See Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār*, vol. 3, pp. 97–136. The relevant parts of Ṣadrā’s discussion on substantial motion in the *Aṣfār* 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 Ṣadrā*, trans. Jeff Fort, New York, 2006, 197–203; Kalin, ‘Between Physics and Metaphysics: Mullā Ṣadrā on Nature and Motion’, in *Islam & Science* 1.1 (2003), pp. 59–90; Eiyad Al-Kutubi, *Mullā Ṣadrā and Eschatology: Evolution of Being*, London, 2015, pp. 52–67; Meisami, *Mulla Sadra*, pp. 61–80.

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’ (*tabīʿa*), which remains stable but takes on an indefinite number of forms.⁶¹ Each new form is piled up on the other form (*al-labs baʿda 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 Tabrīzī 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 *Aṣl* 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 *Aṣl* 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 *Aṣl* 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.

⁶⁰ For the implications of substantial motion in terms of man’s final destiny, see, in particular, Chittick, *In Search of the Lost Heart: Explorations in Islamic Thought*, ed. Mohammed Rustom, Atif Khalil, and Kazuyo Murata, Albany, 2012, pp. 227–31; Al-Kutubi, *Mullā Ṣadrā and Eschatology*, pp. 104–125; Rustom, ‘Psychology, Eschatology, and Imagination in Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī’s Commentary on the *Ḥadīth* of Awakening’, in *Islam & Science* 5.1 (2007), pp. 9–22; Rustom, *The Triumph of Mercy: Philosophy and Scripture in Mullā Ṣadrā*, Albany, 2012, pp. 96, 101–4.

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.

⁶² See Ṣadrā, *Aṣfār*, vol. 3, pp. 93ff.

⁶³ See his extensive notes upon the *Ithbāt* and the *Aṣl* 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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