Chapter 7

Rajab ‘Alī Tabrizī’s ‘Refutation’ of Šadrāni Metaphysics

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1 Introduction

Amongst the most formidable opponents of the metaphysics of Mullā Šadrā (d. 1045 AH/1636 or 1050 AH/1640) during the Safavid period was his student and son-in-law ‘Abd al-Razzaq Lāhijī (d. 1071 AH/1661–2). Unlike Muḥsin Fāyḍ Kāshānī (d. 1091 AH/1680), Šadrā’s other son-in-law and student, Lāhijī’s writings were primarily within the tradition of post-Avicennian Islamic philosophical theology. This is best evidenced in his critique of Šadrā’s principal and innovative doctrine of substantial motion (al-ḥarakah al-jawhariyyah). One of Fāyḍ and Lāhijī’s disciples, the major Safavid philosopher and mystic Qāḍī Sa’īd Qummī (d. 1107 AH/1696), in turn wrote at least two treatises critiquing Šadrā’s ontology.

There is no doubt that al-Qummī’s critical attitude towards Šadrā was shaped by Lāhijī. But the other, and perhaps even greater, influence upon al-Qummī in this regard was his teacher Rajab ‘Alī Tabrizī (henceforth ‘Mullā Rajab’) (d. 1080 AH/1669). We know very little of Mullā Rajab’s life, apart from the fact that he may have studied with Mīr Findiriskī (d. 1050 AH/1640), and at some point gained prominence as a major opponent of Mullā Šadrā 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 Šadrā.


For Mullā Rajab’s life, works, and influence, see Rahimi-Riśē, ‘Late Safavid Philosophy’. See also Corbin, En islam iranien, s.v. Index, ‘Rajab `Alī Tabrizī’; Corbin, La philosophie, pp. 83–96; Corbin with Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Osman Tahia, Histoire, pp. 473–7.

launched by the 'founder' of the Shaykhī school Shaykh Ahmad Aḥsāʾī (d. 1241 AH/1826).\(^7\)

Mullā Rajab's thought has been variously characterised, with some degree of qualification, as Peripatetic,\(^8\) Ismāʿīlī (particularly in his ontology),\(^9\) or in some way Neoplatonic in inspiration (insofar as Ismāʿīlī 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.\(^10\) This statement holds particularly true for al-Qummi, who penned a highly interesting series of Shi'i reflections upon the *Theologia* in the form of glosses (taʾliqāt),\(^11\) and Mullā Rajab's other student 'Alī Quli Khān (d. c. 1091 AH/1680), who wrote a commentary upon the *Theologia* in Persian.\(^12\) Mullā Rajab in particular was familiar with the *Theologia*, although the extent of the influence of this work upon his thought is yet to be examined in detail.

The only works of Mullā Rajab to have survived are his Persian treatise *Iḥbāt-i wājjih* (On the Necessary Being), his dense Arabic work *al-ʿAṣl al-āṣil* (The Fundamental Principle) (also known as *al-ʿUṣāl al-ṣifāyya*),\(^13\) 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.\(^14\) The *Iḥbāt* 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 *Iḥbāt* had already been the subject of at least more than one refutation, and both the *Iḥbāt* and *Aṣl* were translated (the *Aṣl* into Persian and the *Iḥbāt* into Arabic by al-Qummi himself).\(^15\) Given the importance of the *Iḥbāt* and *Aṣl* in Mullā Rajab's oeuvre, therefore, these two works will be the focus of the present investigation.\(^16\)

In the *Iḥbāt* and *Aṣl* Mullā Rajab takes issue with the main elements of Ṣādrian metaphysics, offering a critical reading of every major Ṣādrian doctrine. Unlike al-Ghazālī (d. 505 AH/1111 CE) in his *Tahāfut al-falāsifah* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers)\(^17\) 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 to these. When he does present the positions of Ṣārā and his followers, it is always in a partial and incorrect light.

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\(^8\) See Corbin, *La philosophie*, p. 83.

\(^9\) Corbin, *La philosophie*, p. 84. We shall return to the question of Mullā Rajab's ontology and its putative Ismāʿīlī influence in due course.


\(^11\) For a study of al-Qummi's glosses upon the *Theologia*, see Rizvi, '(Neo)Platonism Revived in the Light of the Imāma'.

\(^12\) Pourjavady and Schmidtke, *An Eastern Renaissance?*, p. 267.

\(^13\) This alternative title alludes to a certain Aṣīr b. Bakhlūyā, a sage and companion of the prophet Solomon who some believe is alluded to in Q. 27:40 as possessing 'knowledge of the Book'. See Corbin, *La philosophie*, p. 85 and the commentary upon Q. 27:40 in Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Caner Dagli, Maria Dakake, Joseph Lombard, and

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15 Rahimi-Riseh, 'Late Safavid Philosophy', sec. 2.3.

16 It should hence be noted that citations from the *Iḥbāt* and *Aṣl* in this article will refer to the texts as edited and presented in Ashtiyānī 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 *Iḥbāt* 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, *Iḥbāt*, vol. I, p. 222; *Necessary Being*, vol. V, p. 286.

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 a refutation of Șadrīan metaphysics as a polemic—likely motivated by an uncompromising form of Shi‘ī piety—in the garb of a philosophical response.

2 The Primacy of Being

Mullā Rajab’s Ithbāt-i wujūd is largely dedicated to a critique of the linchpin of Șadrīan 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-istirāk al-ma‘nawī) and not homonymous (al-istirāk 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.18

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 might suggest that Șadrī’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 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.19

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’ (ma‘wūd) in a manner that is homonymous. Although he will attempt to refute Șadrī’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 CE), Șūfīs belonging to the ‘school’ of Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638 AH/1240 CE), and the ‘philosophers of India’ on the one hand, and several Shi‘ī Imāms 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 Șadrīan metaphysics. The first citation draws on the Theologia, the second a poem from the great Șūfī metaphysician Maḥmūd Shabistārī (d. 720 AH/1320 CE), and the third a famous saying of Imām al-Riḍā (d. 203 AH/817 CE), the eighth Shi‘ī Imām:

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”.20 It is therefore necessary that

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18 To further complicate matters, a number of terms also retain features of both synonymy and homonymy. The Persian word shir, for example, means both ‘lion’ and ‘milk’, thereby rendering it as a homonym. However, when we consider shir qua milk, we notice that it functions as a synonym since there are multiple reference points for various kinds of milk, namely cow-milk, camel-milk, goat-milk, etc.


His *wujūd* be other than the *wujūd* of things. If not, ther. He would be like them.  

On the issue of God’s transcendence (*tanzīh*), the Sūfis 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 Shabistari spoken concerning this issue!  

His Essence is beyond quantity, quality, and modality.  

Exalted is His Essence above what they say.  

In *The Book of Divine Unity* [by Ibn Bābūyah (d. 381 AH/991 CE)], it is reported that Imām al-Riḍā’ said, ‘Whoever likens God to His creatures assigns partners to Him’.  

In citing the great authorities of the past, Mullā Ῥaḍjb would like to safeguard what he feels are serious compromises to God’s transcendence inherent in Ṣadrīan 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 unity (*tawḥīd*) so foundational to all of Islamic thinking.

At the same time, it will be recalled that we characterised Mullā Ῥaḍjb’s use of quotations 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 Ῥaḍjb put forward the notion that the Sūfis have emphasised God’s radical transcendence or *tanzih* to such an extent that God could not even be named. To this effect, he provides a verse from Shabistari’s masterpiece of Sūfi doctrine the *Gulshan-i rāz* (*The Rosegarden of Mystery*) in which the author maintains that God is beyond name, trace, quality, and characterisation. By ‘Sūfis’ Mullā Ῥaḍjb means followers of Ibn ‘Arabi, as is clear from his drawing on Shabistari and his subsequent citation from Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. 673 AH/1274 CE). Mullā Ῥaḍjb is correct to assert that the Sūfis 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 of 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*).  

Even in his treatment of the Akbarian perspective on God’s transcendence, Mullā Ῥaḍjb 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 ‘Arabi onward, his followers have always adhered to a position of God’s transcendence which is quite unlike the usual theological assertion of God’s *tanzih*. 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-ahadīyyah*) is conceived as such which they ascribe ... These translations are taken from Nasr et al. (ed.), *The Study Quran*.  

25 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 Ῥaḍjb begins the *Ithbāt* with a partial quote from Q. 4.48 and Q. 4.416: *Truly God forgives not that any partner be ascribed unto Him ... To drive his point home further, the treatise ends with a quote from Q. 37:80–83, a part of which reads: Glory be to thy Lord, the Lord of Might, above that  
being only knowable and accessible to Himself. At the same time, God qua manifest Essence or Essence of inclusive oneness (al-dhāt al wāḥidīyyah) comes into the purview of human knowability and accessibility and therefore corresponds to what we normally refer to as 'God' in common theological language.  

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 I'thbāt where he seeks to affirm, through the sayings of the Shi‘ī Imāms, the completely unknowable, unqualifiable, and attribute-less nature of God. 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 way 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 'existential' 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] 'existential', nor in the sense of 'necessity' in the way that it applies to contingent things.  

There might indeed be some clear links with earlier Fatimid thought and Mullā Rajab's ontology in particular. We know, for example, that three major Fatimid thinkers, namely Hamīd al-Dīn Kirmānī (d. ca. 411 AH/1020 CE), Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. ca. 462 AH/1070 CE), and Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Karīm al-Shahrastānī (d. 548 AH/1153 CE) were all of the view  


that wujūd is a kind of super-genus and hence inapplicable to God. For Kirmānī and Khusraw, this meant that it is incorrect to attribute wujūd to God, while for Shahristānī in particular (and to some extent perhaps Kirmānī), it meant that wujūd can be applied to God, but in an equivocal or homonymous manner.  

For his part, Mullā Rajab seems to take up Shahristānī'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 (sīkhīyāth) 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 'existential' (mawjud) between the necessary and the contingent is homonymous, not synonymous, for if the meaning of wujūd and 'existential'—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 is a self-evident concept, a contingent quality, and [that which] is dependent upon the essence of the contingent.  

Here, Mullā Rajab argues that if the meaning of wujūd were to apply 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 (badīth). At the same time, (2) is impossible because wujūd is a 'quality' (ṣīlah) whereas the Necessary Being qua essence cannot be qualified (mawṣūf). As for (3), too, it is impossible.

33 Throughout the Ithbāt, Mullā Rajab employs the term sīlah (lit. 'attribute') as a synonym for 'quality' (kayfi).
because \( wujūd \) is contingent while the Necessary Being \( \textit{qua} \) essence is not contingent.\(^{34}\)

In (i), Mullā Rajab’s argument mistakenly confounds 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, 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 proceeds from the One but the one (\( lā ṣadurū ‘an al-wāḥid illā al-wāḥid \)).\(^{35}\) One of the major implications of this position is that since God is the efficient cause of \( wujūd \), He cannot be coloured by \( wujūd \):

Necessary Being cannot be described by that general, self-evident type of \( wujūd \) (\( al-wujūd al-‘āmm al-badi‘iḥi \) which is predicatic 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 (\( al-muta‘akkhirūn \)), namely that between the necessary and the contingent \( wujūd \) is synonymous.\(^{36}\)

\( Şadrā \) 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 (\( haqiqah \) or identity (\( inniyyah \)) on the other. This point is essential to \( Şadrā \)’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 this well-known statement by \( Şadrā \):

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 particular things, in both its determination and concreteness, because through it is made concrete all that is concrete, is realised all that is realised, and is determined all that is determined and particularised.\(^{37}\)

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 \( Şadrā \)ian metaphysics and thereby fails to address \( Şadrā \)’s emphasis upon such key notions as the relationship between the concept and reality of \( wujūd \), the gradational nature of \( wujūd \), univocal predication (\( al-ḥaml al-muṭawwāt \)), gradational predication (\( al-ḥaml al-tashkīk \)), etc.\(^{39}\)

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\(^{36}\) Mullā Rajab, \( Aṣl \), vol. 1, p. 248; \( Fundamental Principle \), vol. V, p. 296. The ‘later philosophers’ of course being none other than \( Şadrā \) and his followers.

\(^{37}\) \( Şadrā \), \( The Book of Metaphysical Penetrations \), tr. Seyyed Hossein Nasi; edited by Ibrahim Kalin, Provo, 2016, pp. 6–7.

\(^{38}\) For useful treatments of this key \( Şadrā \)ian teaching, see Cécile Bonmariage, \( Le Réel et les réalités: Mullā Şadrā Shirāzī et la structure de la réalité \), Paris, 2008, pp. 1–11; Ibrahim Kalin, \( Mullā Şadrā \), New Delhi, 2014, pp. 94–7; Rizvi, \( Mullā Şadrā and Metaphysics: Modulation of Being \), Routledge, 2009, pp. 109–14. An extensive analysis of the problematic of \( tashkīk \) in \( Şadrā \) can be found in Abd al-Rasūl ‘Ubdūdiyyah, \( Niẓām-i Şadrā’ī tashkīk dar \( wujūd \), Qum, 2010, pp. 17–32, 55–97, 191–257.

Let us now turn to (2), which in many ways also informs (3). In order to understand what Mulla Rajab is getting at when he refers to *wujuḍ* as a 'quality' (*ṣifah*), it is apt to cite his definition of quality vis-à-vis the essence of the Necessary Being in the *Iḥbāṭ*:

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 Mulla Rajab's definition of 'quality'. Contra Mulla 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 (*aʿrâḍ*) which, by definition, are not 'things'.\(^{41}\) In (2), therefore, Mulla Rajab introduces a category mistake by reducing *wujuḍ* to a 'thing', namely a kind of 'accident' (i.e., quality). To be sure, Ṣadrā and his predecessors all concur that *wujuḍ* does not fall into one of the Aristotelian categories because its meaning/sense is more general and universal than any one of the categories. This is why Ṣadrā emphatically states that *wujuḍ* has neither genus (*jīn*) nor differentia (*fasāl*), as these are properties of universal concepts and quiddities.\(^{42}\)

It will be recalled that in (3) Mulla Rajab maintains that if the meaning of *wujuḍ* is shared between the necessary and the contingent in a univocal sense, it would pertain to an accident of the essence of the necessary. This, Mulla Rajab argues, is not possible, since the essence of the necessary is not contingent whereas *wujuḍ* as such is. Thus, the meaning of the term *wujuḍ* 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 *Iḥbāṭ* renders his thinking somewhat more transparent:

> [if the meaning of the term *wujuḍ* is shared between the necessary and the contingent,] then *wujuḍ* 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.\(^{43}\)

Mulla Rajab here presents us with an arbitrary set up of three positions for which no initial clarification is offered. We are not told why and how synonymy between the necessary and the contingent would lead to *wujuḍ*'s requiring accidents. In fact, it is not even clear what is meant for *wujuḍ* to 'require accidents' in the first place. If it refers to *wujuḍ*'s 'having' accidents, then Mulla Rajab would need to explain what these 'accidents' are and what kind of accidents they are, that is, essential accidents (*al-ʿawārid al-dhātīyyah*) or concomitant accidents (*al-ʿawārid al-lāzimīyyah*). Without clarifying his terms, Mulla Rajab simply states that if *wujuḍ* 'requires' accidents then wherever it is found there will be accidents. Thus, if *wujuḍ* 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

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\(^{42}\) See, inter alia, Ṣadrā's well-known statement in *Mashʿār* 5:12: '[the reality of *wujuḍ* is not a genus, nor a species, nor an accident, since it is not a universal (kulli ṣabāṭ)]' (tr. in Ṣadrā, *Metaphysical Penetrations*, p. 9). For Ṣadrā's treatment of natural universals, see Muhammad Faruque, 'Mulla Ṣadrā on the Problem of Natural Universals', in *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 27, 2, (2017), pp. 269-302; Toshikiko Izutu, '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.

\(^{43}\) Mulla Rajab, *Iḥbāṭ*, vol. 1, p. 243; *Necessary Being*, vol. V, p. 290. See also *Iḥbāṭ*, vol. 1, p. 223; *Necessary Being*, vol. V, 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'.
of ‘pre-positing the conclusion before its being proven’ (al-muṣādirah ala al-maṭṭāb).

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

It cannot be that wujûd 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 wujûd cannot be an accident of the essence of the Necessary Being because the cause of this wujûd would either be the essence of the Necessary Being or other than the essence of the Necessary Being.⁴⁴

That is to say, if wujûd 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 Ṣadrâ’s position, who, alongside Aviceena (d. 428 AH/1037 CE) and many other philosophers in the Islamic intellectual tradition, states that the wujûd of the necessary is its ‘very’ essence.⁴⁵ This stands in stark contrast to ‘what is other than God’ (mâ siwâ allâh), which is absolutely composite in terms of its essence and wujûd.

Furthering his argument against the synonymy of wujûd, Mullâ Rajab affirms that wujûd cannot be the ‘essence’ of the necessary because it would then lead to the latter’s being both the cause and recipient of wujûd, which is inadmissible:

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

Rajab ‘Alî Tabrizi’s ‘Refutation’ of Ṣadrîan Metaphysics

Mullâ Rajab thus ignores the traditional ‘proof of the veracious’ (burhân al-siddîqîn) for the necessary, which was made popular by Aviceena 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 wajîb al-wujûd. From a Ṣadrîan perspective, it would be fallacious to argue that the necessary is both the cause and recipient of this wujûd because the necessary is, by definition, un-caused (or the First Cause) and the very ‘stuff’ of wujûd.⁴⁸

3 The Primacy of Quiddity

Setting up a dichotomy between essence and wujûd also allows Mullâ Rajab to venture into a defence of the ‘primacy of quiddity’ (asaâlat al-mâhiyyah) over and against the Ṣadrîan standpoint on the primacy of wujûd. Before proceeding, however, it is important to briefly outline quiddity’s three modes.⁴⁹

a) al-mâhiyyah là bi shart: an unconditioned quiddity or natural universal, which is considered in an absolute, indeterminate manner and is not in any way delimited by either positively conditioned or negatively conditioned factors. As such, it is neither existent nor non-existent.

b) al-mâhiyyah bi shart là: a negatively conditioned quiddity, which is still devoid of any individuation or determination, and can thus only exist in the mind.

c) *al-māhiyyah bi sharṣ shayː* a positively conditioned quiddity, which is conditioned by particular accidents and therefore exists extra-mentally.

In the *Ašl*, 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 recognise that, from the Şādrian 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 straightforward 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‘*l) 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 Şādrian notion that the instantiated agent (*al-maj‘ul bi al-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 Şādrian ontology, but not an actual response to the substance of Şādrian metaphysics concerning the oneness and primacy of *wujūd*, and, by 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-dhihiḵ*), to which we shall now turn.

### 4 Mental Existence

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

This demonstration [proving the falsity of *al-wujūd al-dhihiḵ*] 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...

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⁵¹ See, for example, the discussion in Şadrā, *Asfār*, vol. 1, p. 488; vol. 11, pp. 3–5, 335, 406.
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.\textsuperscript{23}

The phrase 'certain species of a substance' is considerably vague, since species (nau\textsuperscript{r}) 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 Mullâ Rajab seems to be suggesting is that we cannot know a substance from its accidents. According to him, Şadrâ 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, Mullâ 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 actualises matter and not vice versa.

Based on two premises which are problematic to begin with, Mullâ Rajab goes on to ask why the mind is not set aflame when the form of fire is said to 'exist' in the mind.\textsuperscript{24} 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.

Şadrâ’s treatment of al-wujûd al-dhinnî easily provides answers to these kinds of objections in his analysis of the differences between primary essential predication (al-ḥamîl al-aqwâlî al-dâhî) and synthetic common predication (al-ḥamîl al-shâ‘î al-ṣanâ‘î).\textsuperscript{55} According to Şadrâ, 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 wujûd, and this wujûd takes on different modes and assumes different forms in different cases. Thus the external wujûd of fire necessitates its properties


\textsuperscript{24} Mullâ Rajab, \textit{Aṣfîr}, vol. 1, p. 263; \textit{Fundamental Principle}, vol. v, p. 301.

\textsuperscript{55} For these distinctions in Şadrâ, see \textit{Aṣfîr}, vol. 1, pp. 344–63. See also, Rizvî, Mullâ Şadrâ and \textit{Metaphysics}, pp. 66–7.

being present with it while the mental wujûd of fire is devoid of any such properties.

5 Substantial Motion

In his attempt to refute the key Şadrian doctrine of 'substantial motion' (al-ḥarakah al-jawhariyyah), Mullâ Rajab commits himself to a definition of motion proper that is ultimately confined to what is known as 'transitive motion' (al-ḥarakah al-qat‘îyyah), 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 (\textit{mutaghayyirât}). 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.\textsuperscript{56}

Mullâ 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 Mullâ 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 \textit{qua} something in

potentiality'. 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 (muta'harrak)
4) The mover (muta'harrik)
5) The course of motion
6) The time to which motion corresponds

As Mullâ 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 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 can we then 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-substantial as an individual entity.58

In contra-distinction to Mullâ Rajab’s position, Șadrî’s most important argument in favour of substantial motion is the one that takes the primacy and gradation of wujûd as its starting point, situating his discussion in the context of the all-expansive reality of wujûd (al-wujûd al-zimm al-manbasîf) that underlies all substantial change.59 If in the order of reality, wujûd is fundamental, it follows that the categories of ‘substance’ and ‘accident’ are nothing but the different modes of the self-same wujûd. That is to say, substance and accident do not form two distinct orders of reality; rather, they are two different ‘degrees’ of wujûd. And, while an accident ineluctably inheres in its underlying subject, namely its substance, the wujûd of an accident depends on the wujûd of substance since the former is wujûd-in-itself (al-wujûd fi nafsihi) whereas the latter is wujûd-for-itself (al-wujûd li nafsihi). If both substance and accidents conform to the same order/plane of wujûd, 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 Șadrî,

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57 Aristotel, Physics, 2011a, in Aristotle, Complete Works, vol. 1, p. 343. For Mullâ Rajab’s citation of Aristotel’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. v, p. 297.


substantial motion also applies to the human soul as it takes on different 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.\textsuperscript{40} 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 \textit{hyle} or what: \textquoteleft Sadr\textacute{a} also simply refers to as a thing’s ‘nature’ (\textit{tabi\’ah}), which remains stable but takes on an indefinite number of forms.\textsuperscript{41} Each new form is piled up on the other form (\textit{al-labs ba\’da al-labs}) as the stable nature of the entity subsists. \textquoteleft Sadr\textacute{a} gives the standard example of water: it may change into ice or vapour, 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.\textsuperscript{42} Thus for \textquoteleft Sadr\textacute{a}, the identity of water resides in its matter. Here again in Mullà Rajab we see a much more complicated \textquoteleft Sadr\textacute{a} doctrine presented in a rather simple and incorrect manner, and then rejected on those grounds.

6 Conclusion

Mullà Rajab ‘Ali Tabrīzī has long been recognised as one of the leading Safavid intellectual figures who opposed the teachings of Mullà \textquoteleft Sadr\textacute{a} 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 \textit{Ithbāt} and \textit{Aṣl} reveal, Mullà Rajab was unable to provide a clear philosophical response to \textquoteleft Sadr\textacute{a} metaphysics, much less a compelling philosophical alternative. This might also explain the tone of frustration one clearly detects in Sayyid Jalāl al-Dīn Āshīyānī’s (d. 1426 AH/2005) learned glosses upon Mullà Rajab’s writings.\textsuperscript{63}

On a very generous reading, we could entertain the possibility that Mullà Rajab’s \textit{Ithbāt} and \textit{Aṣl} were written for his highly qualified students, who would presumably have already known the details of \textquoteleft Sadr\textacute{a} metaphysics. In that case, these texts would have been mainly used for purposes of instruction, with the gaps filled in by Mullà 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 Mullà Rajab was more of a teacher and instructor than he was a writer.\textsuperscript{64} While this kind of a hypothesis might account for at least some of the instances in the \textit{Ithbāt} and \textit{Aṣl} where the author refuses to directly engage the views of Mullà \textquoteleft Sadr\textacute{a} and his followers, it would not explain the clear-cut cases where he fails to offer compelling philosophical alternatives to their central teachings.

\textsuperscript{41} A useful inquiry into this and related points can be found in Yanis Eshots, “Substantial Motion” and “New Creation” in Comparative Context, in \textit{Journal of Islamic Philosophy} 6 (2010), pp. 79–92.
\textsuperscript{42} See \textquoteleft Sadrā, \textit{Asfār}, vol. 111, pp. 93ff.
\textsuperscript{43} See his extensive notes upon the \textit{Ithbāt} and \textit{Aṣl} in Āshīyānī and Corbin (ed.), \textit{Anthologie}. See also Rahimi-Riseh, \textit{Late Safavid Philosophy}, sec. 2.3, where the author notes the manner in which Āshīyānī inveighs against Mullà Rajab’s arguments.
\textsuperscript{44} Rahimi-Riseh, \textit{Late Safavid Philosophy}, sec. 2.3.
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