MULLA SADRA'S CRITICISM OF IBN SINA AND AL-SUHRAWARDI ON THE PROBLEM OF GOD'S KNOWLEDGE

Molla Sadra'nın, İbn Sina ve Suhraverdi'yi
Allah'ın Tikelleri Bilmesi Konusundaki Eleştirisi

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ÖZET

İnsanın bilgi elde etme süreci hissenin hala fel-
sefenin öne konulmadan biri için tıkemandır. 
İslam felsefesinde İbn Sina gibi Meşaf filozoflar, bilgi 
stočini, "soyulama kuramı" adını verebileceğini bir 
anlayışa açıktan dolayı çalışmışlardır. Soyulama 
kuramına göre, tümeller insanın bilgi elde etmesinde en 
öne çar alıyor. Dünyaktadır. Fümin, ticketlen an 
aksasında soyulananak elde edilmiş ve böylece tekrar 
tikellerdeki veya olay ve olgulara soyulunanak bilgi elde et-
memizi sağlar. Gördüğü gibi soyulama kuramı, 
bilgi stoçu tümellerin elde edilme stoçunu indir-
gemektedir. Aynı kuramın, Allah'ın bilgisi sorununa 
çözüm getirmek için kullanılabileceğini, İslam felsefesinde 
Allah'ın tikelleri bilmesi sorununa doğruymıştır. Bilin-
diği gibi, İbn Sina gibi Meşafiler, Allah'ın tikelleri 
tüm bir şekilde bildirilirleri ileri sürmektedir. Gazili ise, 
bunun aslında Allah'ın bilgisini inkar eyme anlamına 
geldiğini belirtmek bu görüşün Allah'ın nası̇l bildirilirini 
açıklamada yetersiz kaldığını savunmuştur. Burada İbn 
Sina'nın dayandığı temasleri tartışarkan, Suhraverdi'nin 
bunun nasıl yalanıştığı inceleyeceğiz ve Sadra'nın 
bunlara getirdiği eleştirileri bunlara çalışacağız.

INTRODUCTION

The process of knowing still remains as a controver-
sial problem in philosophy. The Muslim Peripatetics, fol-
lowing Aristotle, tried to solve this problem by a theory 
which can be called "doctrine of abstraction". According 
to this doctrine universals play the major role in the 
process of knowing. In this case, they inevitably reduce 
this process to the acquisition of universals. For if one 
explains how universals are acquired by the intellect, then 
one has also explained adequately the process of know-
ing. According to the same doctrine, universals are ac-
quired by abstracting the form from the very existent 
beings. The universals, acquired in this manner, are then 
offered to individual things and phenomena in a process, 
which in the end yields knowledge. The doctrine of Mus-
lm Peripatetics, such as Ibn Sina and al-Farabi, thus 
sketched in a broad and rough outline, yields another 
controversial issue in Islamic philosophy when it is ap-
plied to explaining God's knowledge of the world. It is 
the purpose of this paper to examine a dimension of this 
issue as reflected in Sadra's critique of Ibn Sina and al-
Suhrawardi, two prominent philosophers who belong to 
different schools of thought in Islamic philosophy; Mash-
sha't and Ishراقi respectively.

As is well known, the best authentic study can be 
carried out only by a thorough and careful examination 
that covers the whole available data. In the present 
study, however, we cannot claim that we have done jus-
tice to the whole set of writings of our figure, Mulla 
Sadra. This would have been very difficult for us to do, 
because of a few obvious reasons. First of all, Sadra's 
own method in exposing his doctrines, which takes 
various forms in various places, prevented us from cap-
turing a full picture of his own views. It is the very charac-
teristic of Sadra to involve himself predominantly with 
making critiques of his predecessors in exposing his 
ideas. Therefore one would fail to grasp his original views 
unless he or she has made a thorough study of his writ-
ings. In his Magnum Opus, for instance, al-Asfar al-
Arba'a, which we have mainly referred to in this paper,
he rather criticized the previous doctrines in regard to God's knowledge and therefore did not put forward his own theory as decisively as he did in his Kūtab al-Mašhā'īr, which is more precise but much shorter than the former.

Another reason for the difficulty of the present research is that the topic itself, viz. Sadra's theory of God's Knowledge, due to the large amount of material, deserves an independent dissertation rather than a brief paper like the present one. Since the topic is very broad, here I have preferred to concentrate exclusively on only two schools of Muslim philosophy, not even schools, but simply the founders of them: namely Ibn Sina and al-Suhrawardi.

The method which I have followed is not critical-analytical, but mostly analytical-expository. The primary reason for this is that the intention is only to grasp the theory of Sadra in respect to God's knowledge as accurately and adequately as possible for us. That is why here we have been satisfied to introduce his ideas by extracting them primarily from the two works mentioned above. Nonetheless, we have occasionally used a comparative approach particularly when treating the other philosophers besides Sadra.

I. Mulla Sadra's Theory of God's Knowledge

Sadr al-Dīn Muhammad al-Shirāzī (979-1050/1571-1640) as a Muslim existentialist philosopher and theosopher seems to have based his doctrine of God's knowledge on a critical coordination of the rational and gnostic arguments, the roots of which might be traced to the philosophers prior to him. The task of presenting Sadra's theory of God's knowledge and putting it in a systematic form is, as cited in the introduction, extremely complicated owing to the basic characteristic of Sadra's philosophy that seems to have been based upon modifying previous traditions by refutation, criticism and appraisal.

In his Kūtab al-Asfār al-Arba'a (the Four Journeys) Sadra appears to have fully elaborated his philosophical as well as theosophical views. Therefore, this book takes priority over his other works. In this book he begins to enumerate the previous philosophers' arguments on God's knowledge and puts them in seven different categories each of which he either acknowledges or modifies partially or rejects completely. These seven various views could be summarized as follows:

1. The view of the adherents of the Peripatetic School, like two Muslim masters, Abū Nasr al-Fārābī and Abū 'All al-Husayn Ibn Sinā, and Bāhmanārāy, and Abū al-'Abbās al-Lawārī and so on. According to this school, the forms of the contingents are imprinted (/irāṭ) in God's Essence, and they are mentally actualized in His Essence in a universal way.\(^1\)

2. The existence (wujūd) of the things in external reality, whether they be separate from matter or be matter or composite or simple, is the basis of His knowledge. This is the view of the followers of the Stoic School, like Shihāb al-Dīn al-Maqūlī al-Suhrawardī, Nasir al-Dīn al-Tūsī, Ibn Kūmānā, al-'Alāma Qutb al-Dīn al-Shirāzī, and Muḥammad Shahrazūrī.\(^2\)

3. In the third category, Sadra enunciates the view attributed to Porphyry by Ibn Sinā and al-Suhrawardī, which admits that God's being is unified with intelligible forms.\(^3\)

4. Here comes Plato's theory of ideas. Molla Sadra articulates this view as: “The postulate of the separate forms and intelligible images, these are the knowledge of the Divinity, and God knows all the existing things by virtue of these forms and images.”\(^4\)

5. In this place, our philosopher Mulla Sadra puts Mu'tazilites' opinion claiming that the non-existent contingents have some sort of existence before their actual existence. In other words, the Mu'tazilites hold that God knows the things by reason of the subsistence of the non-existent things in eternity. Since this view, says Sadra, attributes existence to the absent contingents, it draws near to that of Sufis who proclaim that these contingent things, before their actual existence, subsist intelligibly, though not concretely as the Mu'tazilites held.\(^5\)

6. In the sixth and seventh section, Mulla Sadra presents the views of the two unqualified groups of philosophers. According to some philosophers, God's essence is universal knowledge of all the contingents. As God apprehends His essence, He accordingly apprehends all the things in one knowledge. Furthermore, the late philosophers of this school accept that God as a Necessary Existent has two kinds of knowledge: (a) Universal knowledge ('ilm ījtimī) that precedes its objects, and (b) detailed knowledge or particular knowledge ('ilm ta'fīlī) that corresponds to them.\(^6\)

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1. Sadra, Al-Asfār, vol. III, the Third Mawqif, the Fourth Fast, ls. 2-3.
2. In the printed text of al-Asfār, there seems to have been written mistakenly al-Shāhrūsī, since the work, Kūtab al-Shajūra cited therein by Sadra Belongs to the latter. See, Henry Corbin, Le Livre De La Sagesse Orientale, 1986, pp. 59-60. In regard to the second view, Sadra's original expression is: "in connection with the term "universal knowledge" of the latter. ibid., ls. 3-4.
3. Ibid., 15.
4. Ibid., ls. 6-7.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Some other philosophers, Sadra proceeds, claim that God's essence is the detailed knowledge of the first caused; and the essence of the first caused is the detailed knowledge of the second caused and the universal knowledge of that which is other than the second caused, and so this goes on successively to the other existent things.\(^7\)

Having classified the various views, Sadra focuses on his major concern, the question of whether or not God's knowledge is identical with God, a question which is also intrinsically related to the attributes of God. In this context, the view of the Mu'tazilites first has undergone the severe attack of Sadra on two grounds. Firstly, in contrast to the assertion of the Mu'tazila School, the non-existent things, according to him, cannot exist at all unless they are endowed with real existence. Secondly, these non-existent things, even though they are considered to subsist before their coming into real existence, cannot be separate from God Himself.\(^8\) In other words, the problem of God's knowledge in the hands of the Mu'tazila School turns out to be of a two-fold operation; one is concerned with "God's knowledge", the other with "separation of knowledge from God Himself". To the first question, their response that God knows the things before their actual existence, namely in the state of "substance", is invalid, since, a view as such, according to Sadra, would necessarily entail that God's objects of knowledge are simply the essences which are found in the position of "substance" (hubut). However, this is unacceptable, because essences, in his view, have no reality on their own part. On the other hand, Sadra rejects the Mu'tazila's view that God's knowledge is apart from God Himself, saying that, on the contrary, God's knowledge is identical with Him. So, according to him, "the position of the Mu'tazilites is mistaken, because non-existent things (a "square circle" and the like, which they considered actually subsist in God's Knowledge) do not exist at all (in the way they had posted)."\(^9\)

In this paper, since we are concerned primarily to set out Sadra's own view of God's knowledge in connection with the views of his two predecessors, Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi, we shall focus on the first two views, leaving aside the rest of them.

II. Ibn Sina and The Simple Being

Among the seven various views enumerated above, the first one that all the contingent forms are inscribed in God's essence and known to Him intelligibly in a universal manner has been ascribed by Mullâ Sadra to the Peripatetics and particularly to al-Fârâbî and Ibn Sina. Therein he makes no criticism nor justification of this point. However, when he later begins to examine each view separately and at length, he relates to a greater or lesser extent the quotations from the eminent works of the representatives of this view. As far as Ibn Sina's theory of God's knowledge is concerned, Sadra first deals with the distinction between intellect and intelligible, and how they are related to each other. From there on, he moves to the Platonic Forms which have been somewhat misunderstood by Ibn Sina and greatly misinterpreted by his disciple, Bahmanyâr.

As has been just pointed out above, Sadra's first aim is to elucidate the interconnected relationship between the knower and the object known, which has been considered by Ibn Sina as distinct; whereas, according to Mullâ Sadra, they are absolutely unified and indistinguishable.

In the very beginning of his discussion concerning the "imprint of the forms of the things in God Himself", Sadra refers us to Ibn Sina's way of getting knowledge. It seems that according to Ibn Sina there are two ways to acquire intelligible forms. An intelligible from Ibn Sina says, is derived either from the external form, like, for instance, the form "sky" is acquired from the sky in reality, or it is derived not from the external existent but rather vice-versa. Namely, the intelligible form first occurs to the intellectual power and then establishes it. In other words, while in the former the form of a thing is dependent entirely on the concrete existent, in the latter, however, it exists first in the mind and then in the reality. God's knowledge, says Ibn Sina, is of the second manner, namely that is what makes things exist is God's knowledge of them.\(^10\) To put it in another way, for Ibn Sina, God's knowledge is active (fi'î), in which the form initiates and causes things to exist, whereas man's knowledge is passive (infi'dil), in which the form is abstracted from the very existent beings.\(^11\) In the active position, the forms would be the cause for the existence of the known in reality; while, in the passive one, they would be based on the real existing things.

In referring once again to the example of the house, Sadra objects to Ibn Sina, saying that the builder's knowledge of the house seems to afford no complete and
necessary cause of the actual existence of the house, since, in order to build it outside, we still need some supplements such as instrument, definite location, specific time and other similar conditions. This example, therefore, according to Sadra, even though it points to the active aspect of God’s knowledge, cannot be used for this purpose, just because it falls short of reflecting His full creative knowledge. So Sadra replaces it by his own example in drawing an analogy between “God and His knowledge” and actor and his act. He thus maintains that “the relation of all things in this world to God Himself is just like the relation of the act of the free actor to the actor himself, or the relation of the compilation of the book of wisdom to the author himself...” In these two similitudes, there seems only one active figure; hence in case of the action there is the actor, and in relation to the book we have the author. Neither actor nor author do need any accidental instrument to carry out their activities.

On the other hand, Sadra opposes to the establishment of a relationship between God and man in any respect, and particularly in the subject of their distinct knowledge. In his view, if we accept that God’s knowledge of things is similar to our knowledge on the ground that man, like God, first thinks up an image in his mind and then actualizes it outside, and so man’s knowledge as such, as God’s knowledge, is the cause of the thing outside, in that case we would be mistaken for reducing God’s pure knowledge to man’s mixed knowledge. Nevertheless, man, Sadra argues, can acquire the image of something only after having performed some necessary procedures such as thinking and imagining, and so on. Besides, he also needs some other necessary materials to bring into reality the plan he possesses; whereas God, owing to His complete Being, needs nothing to create a thing, as expressed in this verse: “When His command wills something, He says to it, be! and it is.”

Sadra’s attack against Ibn Sina on the example of “house” seems to be convincing only when God’s knowledge is considered to be entirely different from that of man. However, when referring to Ibn Sina’s own works for the sake of clarity of the issue at hand, it is realized easily that Ibn Sina’s intention is not to make God resemble man, but most likely to point out the transcendental aspect of God. Then it seems that Ibn Sina has exploited that example symbolically for the following possible reasons: 1. To note that God’s knowledge precedes the existence of things and hence does not depend on them, 2. to depict that God’s knowledge is active and creative, and 3. to show that God’s knowledge is simple and pure. I could find Ibn Sina’s example of “house” only in his work, Dānish Nāma-i ʿalāʾi (The Book of Scientific Knowledge), in which he argues:

All things are known to It, then, due to its own essence. It does not become a knower of things because It is caused by them, but on the contrary, Its knowledge is the cause for the existence of all things. Similar to such knowledge is the (scientific) knowledge of the builder with regard to the form of the house he has received. His conception of the form of the house is the cause of this form in the external reality, which is the cause of the builder’s knowledge. But the form of the heavens is the cause of the form of our knowledge because the heavens exist.

In al-Ishārāt, however, Ibn Sina proclaims that the intelligible forms are acquired in two ways:

The intelligible forms are derived from the external forms, like the form “sky” that is derived from the sky itself. But they also might come first to the intellectual power and then gain existence in the reality, like for instance, you first conceive a shape (sha‘a’u) and then give it existence. And It is necessary for the Necessary Existent to conceive all (al-kull) according to the second way.

The commentator of al-Ishārāt, Nasir al-Dīn al-Tūsī, while interpreting the text above, turns his attention to the distinction of knowledge as “active” (fi’il) and “passive” (infīlāt). For him, although Ibn Sina seems not to have made any explicit separation of knowledge as such, he, however, has implied it by his distinction of the forms. It is for this reason that our philosopher Sadra as indicated earlier, attributed this distinction to Ibn Sina and thereby criticized his example of “house” which was given by the latter to reflect the creative and active aspects of God’s knowledge. It should be noted that al-Tūsī, unlike Ibn Sina, and like Sadra, avoids applying the distinction of this sort to the knowledge of God. In his famous treatise of knowledge, he articulates that “God’s knowledge is neither of them (viz. fi’il and infīlāt); so the statement that God’s whole knowledge is active (fi’il) is not true at all.” By the expression “the statement that
God's whole knowledge is active and not true, al-Tūsī intends possibly to reject Ibn Sina's proposition quoted above. Yet it is astonishing that al-Tūsī remains somewhat silent in his commentary on al-Ishârât, in which he makes simply the distinction in question without criticizing Ibn Sina.

As it has been pointed out above, Ibn Sina's primary goal in his view that God's knowledge precedes the form to be known is to establish the fact that God's knowledge cannot derive from things, since such a view, for him, would make God dependent upon something other than Himself. This is the gist of Ibn Sina's doctrine of God's knowledge, that appears in almost all of his works. In his al-Shifā, as noticed by Sadra also, he argues as follows:

It is not possible for the Necessary Existent to conceive things from things themselves; if it were so, His essence would be either constituted of what He conceives, and hence would be constituted of things, or accidental to the things to be conceived, in which case He would not be the Necessary Existent in any way whatsoever. But this is impossible... He is, therefore, the origin or principle of all beings, and He conceives by reason of His essence that He himself is the origin of Himself and also the origin (mahda') of all the existents in their very reality... It has become clear then that God's knowledge of things, according to Ibn Sina, is not produced by things, on the contrary, they exist as a consequence of His knowledge of them. One of the ultimate reasons for this idea is that God's knowledge is eternal, unchangeable, universal and intellectual, in contrast to man's knowledge that is temporal, changeable, particular and mostly perceptual. Strictly speaking, for Ibn Sina, the Necessary Being possesses an instantaneous knowledge in which everything is ordered according to the principle of causality (cause-effect). This point is made clear by him as follows:

Do not think that if God's knowledge of objects possessed many forms, then the multiplicity of the forms that He apprehends would constitute the parts of His essence. In that case, since by means of His apprehension, of His essence He apprehends Himself, and then apprehends all that which are posterior to Him (Mū'ādhat), how could these forms come after His essence? His apprehension of His essence is the cause of His apprehension of (things) that which come after His essence. Thus His apprehension of (things) that which come after His essence is the effect (ma'āli) of His apprehension of His essence. All that has been said so far by Ibn Sina is summarized elaborately by his commentator, al-Tūsī:

Since the First apprehends His essence by means of His essence and because His essence is the cause of multiplicity, it follows that He apprehends multiplicity because of His apprehension of His essence by means of His essence. Thus, His apprehension of multiplicity is a concomitant effect of Him, and the forms of multiplicity, which are the objects of His apprehension, are also His effects and His concomitants ranked in the order of effects and therefore posterior to the reality of His essence as an effect is posterior to its cause...

Then, as noted above, God's knowledge of things is based exclusively on His apprehension of His essence which constitutes the cause of the multiplicity of them. Now when we revert again to our philosopher, Mullâ Sadra, we find him agreeing with Ibn Sina on the whole of the premises which have been presented so far. However, on specific points which we shall treat now, he seems to oppose Ibn Sina and refute him on several grounds.

One of the apparent disagreements between Ibn Sina and Mullâ Sadra in regard to God's knowledge lies in the question as to how this knowledge is related to God Himself. This is a question whose ramifications are twofold: 1. What is the relation of God's knowledge of His essence to Himself? 2. What is the relation of God's knowledge of all things to Himself? To the first question which seems simpler than the other, Ibn Sina offers an answer that God as a Necessary Being is the Knowledge ('ilm), the Knowing ('ālim) and the object known (ma'ālim). And since these three qualities, Ibn Sina proceeds, are indistinguishable from one another, they never involve any multiplicity in God's Being. This being so, God, for him, is one simple reality, and His knowledge of Himself is identical with Himself. On this particular issue, i.e. God's knowledge of Himself, Mullâ Sadra seems to be of the same opinion since he at least remains silent without saying anything for or against it.

19. Ibn Sina's original words: "بِلْ يَكْنَى مَا يَعْلَمُ وَلَـٰٓا إِنَّمَا الْعَرْفُ عَلَى الْرَّجُلِ الْيَنِينِ"; ibid.
23. Ibn Sina, "al-Rašâdâl: 'Arshiyâh", in Rasâl al-Shakhl Ibn Sînâ, Intishârât Baydâr, n.d. pp. 248 see for another connotation of the same statement; al-Shifâ' II, p. 357. Therein Ibn Sina uses the term 'âdil instead of 'âlim, namely God is Intellect (âdil), Intelligent (âdil) and Intelligible (ma'âli).

The most problematic issue for both of the philosophers, i.e., Ibn Sina and Sadra, is how God’s knowledge of forms and objects can be logically linked with God Himself without endangering His absolute unity, and how such a knowledge can be plausibly explicated. To begin with, Ibn Sina holds that God apprehends the multiple things by virtue of His apprehension of His essence and that these things come to Him as posterior concomitants (lazmainan muta-akhkhiratun), and never enter into His essence as constituents of Him.24 Furthermore, in Ibn Sina’s view, the forms and objects known to God exist intelligibly in His essence as “concomitants”. Or strictly speaking, they are rather imprinted in His essence as “posterior accidents or concomitants”.25 If these forms were not in such a state, i.e. in the state of “posterior concomitants”, then, Ibn Sina continues, they would jeopardize the unity of God:

If you made these forms a part of His essence, then the multiplicity would occur to Him; or if you made them additional to His essence, in that case, the contingency would attach to His essence, and hence He would be no longer Necessary Being; or if you made them independent things by their own essence, then they would become Platonic Forms.26

As is obvious, Ibn Sina’s hesitation is that God’s uniqueness and simplicity would be destroyed by an erroneous relation between the forms and His essence. These forms should not be attached at any rate to the absolutely Necessary Being. Rather they should be taken as “the necessary consequences” or “concomitants”, which are inscribed in His Being in a causal and effective ordered manner.27 Furthermore, these forms, before their actual existence, are conceived by God; however it does not mean that God conceives them only in their status of forms, on the contrary, their existence and their intellection by God is one and the same fact. So, according to Ibn Sina, when we say that, since God conceives the forms, then they come into existence, we subsequently acknowledge that their apprehension and their existence are one and the same thing for God.28 It is debatable, however, what exactly Ibn Sina means here by the term existence.

This theory of Ibn Sina is mostly admitted by Mullâ Sadra, except for only one significant point that is the position of the forms to God as “posterior concomitants”. This particular point is also concerned closely with the issue of Platonic Forms and that of identity of the knower and the knowledge that has been originally ascribed to Porphyry. In the first place, Mullâ Sadra affirms Ibn Sina’s view of God’s knowledge of multiplicity that flows from Himself in an ordered way of causes and effects by means of His apprehension of His essence. After that, he makes a little modification to the part of the existence of forms, declaring that “it is not the case that the forms are first intellecuted and then they come into existence, or they first exist and then are intellecuted; but rather they exist intelligibly and are intellecuted existentially”.29

The most severe criticism against Ibn Sina on this question, viz. God’s knowledge of forms as “posterior concomitants” is made by Nasir al-Dîn al-Tüüsî who holds that in apprehending His essence as well as the other things, God does not need any form other than “the form of His own essence” and “the form of the emanation”30 and by al-Suhrawardi who claims that to attribute “accidents” and “posterior qualities” to God means to destroy His absolute perfection, since, in that case, His essence would be a substratum for those qualities, which means that His essence would be eventually affected by them.31 In the case of al-Tüüsî, what God perceives is God Himself, and when He perceives things other than Himself, His perception implies some sort of participation by them; there are not two forms at all, side by side for the apprehender to apprehend them, but rather what makes them double, he says, is “your mental considerations (tibârdât) connected with your essence and that form only”.32 Al-Tüüsî’s critique of Ibn Sina, as noticed above, intensifies on the point that God cannot be a place for the forms, since such a view leads us to admit that God is both an agent (fu’ûl) and recipient (ga’ûl); in this case, His being would be a substratum for His multiple-contingent effects, whereas He is exalted above this. In this issue, al-Tüüsî seems to have shared the same view with al-Suhrawardi who also held, as indicated above, that the very being of God cannot become a substratum for the

28. Ibid. See also, al-Ashârî, Fasl. 7.
32. Al-Tüsî, op. cit., p. 715.

accidents at all, as he himself expounds in the following passage:

As to their statement (i.e. of Peripatetics) that "His essence indeed is a substratum for the multiple accidents, but (being so) His essence is not affected by them (i.e. by these accidents), we should remind that this statement has some meaning in itself for the ignorant to think. He (the ignorant person) estimates that the "affect" (infāl) is not used but only in the case of renewal (lajjudād) as understood from the category of "Positivity" (an yarātī). It is of no use to him, since, even though the renewal affect is not necessitated by the existence of the accident, however, the variety of the requirement and the reception becomes attached necessarily (to essence), as mentioned previously, it is "act" in one respect and "reception" in another. Then how can an intelligible person believe that an essence can be a substratum to accidents without being qualified by them? And how would the quiddities be qualified with attributes in that essence, unless they would be the substratum for them?"

As noticed, for both al-Tusi and al-Suhrawardi, what seems to be dangerous for the uniqueness of God is to bring forms into His very essence so as to make Him conceive other things. And both of them make an effort to save God from characterizing Him with any additional or accidental forms. If put into a simple question, why does God as a Self-existent and Necessary Being need other things besides Himself to be a knower? In as much as the so-called concomitants (lawżam), no matter what they and their nature are, are established in the being of God, they would produce multiplicity in His essence anyway, and hence they would change the eternity and the necessity of God on the account that they would connect Him with contingent. This means that God would no longer be the Necessary Being.

Now let us go back to our philosopher, Sadra, and have a look at his opinion of the critiques directed against Ibn Sina. As remarked previously, Sadra's criticism of Ibn Sina stresses his description of forms as "posterior concomitants" and as "imprinted in God's essence", to which we shall refer in the succeeding lines. As for the rest of Ibn Sina's present theory, Sadra appears to be in agreement with him. He does not only agree with Ibn Sina but also defends him on certain points against the severe attacks of al-Suhrawardi and al-Tusi. The most relentless objection of both philosophers to Ibn Sina, as cited earlier, is the question as to how God can be a substratum for the accidents; it, they say, is impossible, just because such a view implies change and multiplicity in the being of God. To this, Sadra replies that Ibn Sina has never said in his works that God's being is a substratum for the accidents. This statement, however, he says, was later stated explicitly by Bahmanyar in his book, al-Tahsid. On the other hand, Sadra continues, Ibn Sina has not intended to attach any extrinsic forms at all to God by his "posterior concomitants" which, as he himself cited, are not at any rate the constituents of His essence whatsoever. Furthermore, Ibn Sina's insistence upon the concept of "simple being" representing the being of God is also a unique evidence to prove that God's knowledge of forms and God himself are one and the same. When we look carefully we can see that, Sadra implies that both al-Suhrawardi and al-Tusi take God as a Subject and forms as Object. And in any relationship, one of them should be attached to the other; otherwise, in their view, there would be no knowledge. In this case, there would seem to be two separate entities whose natures are distinct. So, insofar as God as a subject, e.g. apprehender gets in touch with the object, It is in possession of it. If we think from this standpoint, for Suhrawardi and al-Tusi, it is hardly possible to save God's absolute perfection from the attachment of the contingents. The ultimate solution to this complex issue, for Sadra, might be that God's knowledge of forms is identical with God Himself. And keeping in mind that God is a simple being, His knowledge of forms and His attributes must be conceived not as distinct but as absolutely identical with His simple reality. Therefore, Ibn Sina's treatment of God's cognitive forms never posits any multiplicity in His very being. From this point, Sadra moves a little further and declares that God does not know things as we know them, since in His case, the occurrence of the forms is His very cognition of them, and that is why His knowledge is so simple, whereas in our case, we know them after they occur to us."

One of the severe attacks of Sadra against Ibn Sina is intensified, as mentioned above, on his denial of the identity of the intellect and the intelligible attributed to Porphyry. He wonders how Ibn Sina claims, on the one hand, that God's cognitive forms and His being are one and the same and denies, on the other hand, the identical

33. Al-Suhrawardi, op. cit. p. 481; and Sadra, al-Astār, Fasl, 7.
35. Ibid.
36. Ibid.
unification of the form and the perceiver. As it is recalled, Sadra, having been inspired from this principle of unification, has proved that God's being and His knowledge are identical.

As a corollary of this unification, Sadra first poses the question of Platonic Forms and their relation to God. Here he accuses Ibn Sīnā of having misunderstood and misinterpreted the Platonic Forms as separate from God. In fact, says Sadra, Plato did not proclaim that these forms are distinct from God's being, on the contrary, he took them as identical with God.

The most relentless attack of Sadra against Ibn Sīnā on the present issue is related to the question of "the imprint of the cognitive forms in God's mind". Sadra declares openly that God's cognitive forms cannot be described, as Ibn Sīnā and other Peripatetics held, as "imprinted" (muṭārasim) in His essence, since such a view would violate the principle of identity between God and His knowledge. Nor can these forms be taken only mentally, but existentially as well. The obvious fallacy of Ibn Sīnā's treatment of forms, is not because there would be multiplicity in God's being, but rather because he regarded them to be mental and "imprinted" in the essence of God. Sadra immediately objects to this view, asserting that the forms of God's knowledge are existentially identical with God, yet conceptually distinct. In addition, they cannot be described as "imprinted" nor "accidental".

Although Sadra rejects Ibn Sīnā's theory of God's knowledge on several grounds that we have indicated above, he, nonetheless, forms his own theory. Furthermore, all existence has been explained by him by virtue of this primary concept. God as a simple being is the most perfect Being in which all existence is present. In like manner, Platonic Forms, Attributes and the Intelligibles of Peripatetics are existentially unified with this simple Being. In Sadra's eyes, therefore, this simple Being, viz. God, knows all things, particulars as well as universals, because he encompasses all existence as His manifestations, and because His existence and His knowledge are co-extensive.

III. Al-Suhrawardi and Theory of Light

As we have remarked in the beginning of the preceding part, Mullā Sadra has put al-Tūsī and al-Suhrawardi in the same category and attributed to them the view that "all the forms of things in external reality, be material or abstract, are the objects of God's knowledge". Before embarking upon the criticism of Sadra against this view, it would be better to give a summary of Suhrawardi's own theory in reference to his own works.

According to al-Suhrawardi, God's knowledge occurs by a direct illuminational relationship between God and things. Regarding the nature of this relation, he himself articulates as follows:

So, the true nature of this sort of knowledge (i.e. Divine Knowledge) is the principle of Illumination (iḥrād), that is, His knowledge of His essence consists in that He is a light to His essence, and apparent (ṭbur) to His essence. And His knowledge of things consists in that they are apparent to Him either by themselves or by their attachments (muṣallāqiyya), which are the dwellings (muwadda) of the permanent knowledge for the supreme regents. This is a relation. (idāfah).

As it is seen, al-Suhrawardi bases his theory on the concepts of "light" and "relation". In fact, it seems difficult to decipher the passage above in a logical way, because of its obscurity. However, the ultimate point is that all things are manifest to God, as God is manifest to His essence. It means that all existence is open to God's knowledge, therefore He does not need any intermediary forms at all to know them. This is more illustrated by al-Suhrawardi in the following lines of the text above. Therein he promulgates:

The vision (iḥrād) is acquired by the relationship between the eye and the object manifest to it along with the non-existence of veil. So that the relation of the Necessary Existing with all things that are manifest, is vision and perception for Him, and the variety of the intellectual relations does not require a plurality in His essence...

It is amazing that al-Suhrawardi, as seen above, connects the vision with the perception, and thereby asserts that God has a direct relation with the objects.

37. Ibid., Fasl. 7.
40. Ibid.; and refer, for the usage of the term 'iṭsām' in connection with God's knowledge, to Ibn Sīnā, al-Shīfā, al-Ḥādiyya II, p. 365.
41. See, n. 29.
43. Ibid., p. 153.
Therefore God knows things directly as He sees them without any mediation. Moreover, His knowledge and His vision are one and the same, since His knowledge is reducible to His vision, but not vice-versa.44

According to al-Suhrawardi, the basic idea is that, as noted earlier, there is no form at all between the knower and the object to be known. He advocates this view on several grounds. At first, he says that when one perceives his essence, he does not perceive a form at all. The form that exists in the soul (nafs) is not the soul itself. Secondly, the form would still be universal and therefore be applicable to many, not to the individual.45 Therefore, al-Suhrawardi claims, man possesses an illuminational and presential knowledge, not cognitive knowledge.46

On the other hand, al-Suhrawardi rejects Ibn Sina's theory of God's knowledge of cognitive forms on the ground that such a knowledge is something negative (salēf), for it posits the absence of the real object and the precedence of the form to existence and also posits that God's knowledge of His concomitants is included in His knowledge of existence.47 This is inconceivable for him.

After having recapitulated briefly al-Suhrawardi's view on the issue at hand, let us refer to Sadra's objections against him. In the first place, Sadra accuses him of having violated the Divine Plan (āndiyah) according to which all beings have a cause-effect relation and make a harmony in the world system. In other words, since al-Suhrawardi denies all cognitive forms to God, he subsequently destroys the marvellous order of the universe, and pushes it to a haphazard system. Sadra wonders how al-Suhrawardi overlooks this order, notwithstanding that many ancient philosophers acknowledged it, even Aristotle, in his pseudo-theology (Uthulqiyā). emphasized it.48

Another ground for rejecting al-Suhrawardi's theory is his treatment of knowledge as "relation" (idāfah). In this context, Sadra announces that knowledge cannot be defined as "a pure relation", whether this relation is called "ishāq" or not. Knowledge, Sadra continues, could be described and classified in several ways, like, for example, the one which corresponds to reality, and knowledge of conception (tusawwur) and that of judgement (tassalq), whereas this is not the case for "relation".49

Sadra refutes this relation also on the basis that a relation as such takes place just after the existence of both the knower and the object known, in which case, God's glorious attributes would need the creature. This implies that God is not perfect, which is impossible.50

One other objection is related to the theory of perception, which has been treated in various ways by various philosophers. As we have mentioned above, al-Suhrawardi believes that knowledge occurs by a direct relationship between the knowing subject and the known object or better the seen object. This is refuted by Sadra on the ground that material things as such cannot become even objects of human perception, let alone of God's.51

Parallel to the idea just mentioned above, Sadra brings another argument to refute the so-called direct illumination, that the forms as well as objects cannot become knowledge, for they need to be abstracted from their very beings, i.e. from their material coverings. How can, Sadra posits, the direct illuminational relation acquire the cognition of them without abstracting their forms?52

To sum up, according to Sadra, the theory of "ishāq" fails to interpret the real nature of God's knowledge, because it rules out the existence of God's prior knowledge, viz. His cognitive forms. Again, this view is false in reducing all knowledge to simply vision.

IV. An Evaluation and Sadra's Originality

As was remarked at the very outset of this paper, it is very hard to give a detailed and accurate review of Sadra's theory of God's knowledge, because of his critical but somewhat unsystematic character of treating the subject, which forces him mostly to criticize the theories of the earlier philosophers on this particular issue rather than to set out his own ideas. This fact seems to have been intensively dominated especially in his al-Asfār al-Arba'ah, which has been so far the primary source for us. However, now we would better turn our attention to his more precise work, al-Masha'ār in which the author seems to have exerted an intensive effort to establish his

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44. Sadra, op. cit, Fasl, 11.
45. Al-Suhrawardi, al-Mutahhar, p. 484.
46. Ibid., p. 485.
47. Ibid., Hi'mah al-Ishāq, p. 151.
48. Sadra, op. cit, Fasl, 11.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., p. 153.
51. Ibid.
52. Ibid.
own theories; although he therein has occasionally made severe attacks against his predecessors, but it is more informative rather than critical. In what follows, therefore, we shall present a brief summary of Sadra’s theory of God’s cognition, drawn from al-Mash’îr.

According to Sadra, as in the case of Ibn Sinâ, God as a Necessary Being conceives Himself and conceives also all things from Himself. God is a simple being free from any kind of mixture, deficiency and contingency. Because of this, His essence is present to His essence without there being any veil.\(^{53}\) This is Sadra’s description of God’s nature. As pointed out in our discussion of his view on this issue, for Ibn Sinâ too, God is a simple essence or being. This dictum has been the primary tenet of Sadra, on which almost the whole present theory is based.

Knowledge, according to him, is simply the presence of the existence without corporeal coverings. It is astonishing that, in Sadra’s view existence (wujûd) and presence (hûdûr) seem to be identical with each other, in so far as knowledge is concerned. The perception (îdâra) is attained by means of abstraction from matter and material coverings. The matter is the source of the absence and the negation, and each part of the corporeal body is absent from the other part of it. When it is so, the whole is absent from the part, and the whole from the whole. From this analysis, Sadra passes on to examine the relationship between matter and form in conjunction with perception. He reasons that “the more a form is disengaged from matter, the more truly it becomes presence to its essence.”\(^{54}\) In the lowest degree the form, thanks to its full engagement with matter, would be sensible only as such. What comes above the sensible is the imaginative forms, above which the intelligibles inhere. So, in the hierarchy of the forms, the intelligibles (al-maqâlîd) deserve to be placed at the most elevated level, since, for Sadra, the most elevated forms are the most intensive existents, that is the Necessary Existent whose essence is apprehender of His essence, and apprehensible to His essence with the most glorious intellect. Furthermore His essence is the source of every emanation, and He conceives everything intelligibly by means of His essence without there being any multiplicity at all.\(^{56}\)

After having expounded the relationship between the forms themselves, and the forms and the Necessary Being, Sadra moves on to explain the relationship between the knower and the objects to be known. Here the main issue is to show the real unification between intellect and intelligible in terms of existence. He says:

Afterwards, each perceptual form – whether it be intelligible or sensible – is unified with the perceiving agent in existence according to the proof that emanates from God. And each perceptual form, let it be a form of intellect, its existence in itself, and its being object of intellect (or intelligibility), and its existence for its apprehender (all three of them) are one and the same without any differentiation.\(^{57}\)

As we have mentioned in the preceding parts, one of the objections of Sadra to Ibn Sinâ is his inconsistency in holding, on the one hand, that God’s knowledge of forms and Himself are the one and the same, and in disregarding the unification of the intelligibles and intellect on the other. For Sadra, the unification (îtihâd) between them is a real unification in terms of existence, not a unification that contains two originally distinct entities. If they were two separate things from each other, then both of them would get into an accidental relation, like for example, the relation of father to son and that of power to state. In these examples, as one may notice easily, the relationship comes after “the existence of the essence”\(^{58}\).

This sort of unification (îtihâd) is applied by Sadra to prove first that God’s knowledge of every individual thing and God’s essence (Himself) are one and the same, and that God’s existence and God’s knowledge are one and the same. He declares that His existence, His knowledge of Himself and His knowledge of all things are one Reality. This oneness or unity, he says, is not in the numerical sense, namely one in number, but in the true sense.\(^{59}\) Nevertheless, Sadra does not elucidate what he intends by “true sense”. From what he said in his al-Asfâr, we can conclude that this unity may tenably be explained and somehow justified on the basis of his theory called by Fazlur Rahman,\(^{60}\) “systematic ambiguity” (tashkîl), by which Sadra illustrates primarily the various levels of existence in reality. As it is recalled, all the existing things, according to Sadra, are spread out in reality in varying degrees of existence, therefore, they, though being the same in their very nature, are different,

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53. al-Mash’îr, p. 50, par. 111.
54. Ibid.
55. Ibid.
56. Ibid, pp. 50-51, par. 112.
57. Ibid.
however, in existence from one another in terms of priority and posteriority, perfection and imperfection, strength and weakness. This unity in diversity could be reasonably explained by principle of "tashkhik". According to this principle, the actual difference between existents does not spring from the very nature of existence itself; on the contrary, they are distinct, because of the fact that each possesses a different level of existence in terms of remoteness and closeness to the Real Existence. They are, in their very nature of existence, one and the same, yet different in their participation with existence at various degrees.

When this systematic ambiguity is applied to the multiple knowledge of God, it is reached that God’s knowledge of forms including Platonie Ideas, the Intelligibles of Peripatetics and His Attributes —three of them are taken to be one and the same by Sadra— and His very being are existentially one and the same, though they are multiple conceptually. This conceptual plurality does not produce an essence in God’s being. In a short word, His knowledge, for Sadra, is existentially unique, but notionally distinct. I have tried to expose Sadra’s understanding of God’s knowledge in conjunction with the views of his predecessors. With regard to the problem of God’s knowledge, Sadra has an eclectic theory whose traces extend to the early Greek as well as Muslim philosophers. It is clear that from Plato he has received the Platonic Forms and identified them with God’s being; and from Porphyry he has taken over the theory of unification between intellect and intelligibles and made use of them to explicate the identification of the cognitive forms with the existence of God. Among the Muslim philosophers he has borrowed primarily the concept of "simple being" and secondarily God’s cognitive forms from Ibn Sina. But it does not mean that Sadra has offered just a repetitive account concerning the doctrine of God’s knowledge. Such a judgement would be unfair, for this would be overlooking his essential concept of "tashkhik", by which, as remarked above, he has established a tenable ground to explicate the complicated problem of God’s multiple knowledge, which is existentially one but notionally plural.

As a result, we can say that under the overwhelming impact of the inspiration of the accumulated heritage of the philosophic tradition of his time, Sadra has founded a theory which is systematically eclectic but mystically and conceptually original.