



Research Paper

Tracing the Roots of Avicenna's Existentialist Metaphysics and its Theological Implications

Mohammad Mahdavi^{*1} 

¹ Associate Professor of Theology Faculty of Tabriz University - Tabriz – Iran

***Corresponding Author:** Mohammad mahdavi
Address: Tabriz University - Tabriz – Iran

Email: Mo.mahdavi@tabrizu.ac.ir


[10.22080/JRE.2024.28106.1228](https://doi.org/10.22080/JRE.2024.28106.1228)
Received:

October 6, 2024

Accepted:

November 27, 2024

Available online:

December 1, 2024

Keywords:

Priority of Existence,
Necessary Existent,
Theological Implications,
Mulla Sadra, Ibn Sina

Abstract

The principle of the priority of existence (asalat al-wujud), a fundamental tenet of Islamic philosophy, particularly in the transcendental theosophy (ḥikmat muta'aliya) of Mulla Sadra, posits the precedence of existence over essence. This theory considers existence as an independent and primary reality from which the essence of beings is derived. In Islamic philosophy, "asalat" signifies the source of effect, and the external realization of an object is through this primordial principle. This article, employing an analytical-descriptive approach and examining the works of Avicenna (Ibn Sina), traces the roots of Sadra's theory of the priority of existence in the pre-transcendental theosophical thought of this philosopher, demonstrating that Avicenna's statements can illuminate this theory. Evidence such as the equivalence of existence and goodness, the indifference of essence to existence and non-existence, the supervention of existence upon essence, and the inherent contingency of existence, indicates the roots of Mulla Sadra's theory of the priority of existence in Avicennan thought. However, differences and distinctions exist between the priority of existence in transcendental theosophy and Avicenna's concept, which are discussed in detail in the article. The theological implications of this theory can have profound effects on our understanding of being, God, the human relationship with God, prophethood, imamate, the embodiment of actions, and so on. These implications demonstrate the depth and breadth of this theory's influence on various areas of Islamic theology.

Extended Abstract

The originality of existence and essence are two fundamental approaches in Islamic philosophy. Avicenna (Ibn Sina) did not explicitly address this issue, and this has led to differing views on his position. The root of this debate goes back to the era of Mir-Damād and Farabi. In Illuminationist philosophy, Suhrawardi represents the priority of essence, while Avicenna's views are considered contradictory. However, it seems that he leaned towards the priority of existence. Points of agreement and disagreement between Avicenna and Mulla Sadra are observed in ontological discussions. The theory of the priority of existence in Sadrian thought means being the source of effect and

objective reality, while (اعتبارات) 'etibārāt refer to matters that do not have inherent reality. Allama Tabatabaei emphasizes that originality refers to existence that is objectively real and effective. There is a difference of opinion in Islamic philosophy regarding the priority of existence and essence, with some emphasizing essence and others emphasizing existence. Mulla Sadra, as a strong proponent of the theory of the priority of existence, believes that existence has degrees of gradation (تشکیکی), and God is absolute being. According to the argument of Sadr al-Muta'allihīn, existence alone has reality, and God is the absolute being without qualification. In this approach, there is no need to prove creation; rather, creation depends on the existence of God. Mulla Sadra himself argues that existence is prior to essence. This is a key point of difference between the views of Avicenna and Mulla Sadra. This translation aims to reflect this key difference.

The discussion of the unity of existence and beings in Islamic philosophy and Sufism is divided into two main viewpoints. The Sufi perspective considers only the divine essence as truly existent, regarding other beings as illusory. The theory of the unity of existence and the



multiplicity of beings, attributed to Mohyuddin Ibn Arabi, posits a single, real existence, considering other beings as derivative of the Necessary Existent (God). In contrast, the philosophers of the Ishraqi school emphasize the multiplicity of existence and beings, viewing each being as independent and possessing its own unique existence. Finally, the theory of unity within multiplicity, accepted by Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi (Mulla Sadra), considers both multiplicity and unity as guaranteed realities in the realm of existence, presenting them within a coherent framework.

Sadrian metaphysics of the priority of existence has significant theological implications. Firstly, the proof of the Necessary Existent (God) is established directly through this theory, demonstrating the unity of existence and the oneness of God. Secondly, the concept of "existential unity" states that all beings are manifestations of a single reality and none are independent of the divine existence. Thirdly, the theory of inevitability helps explain divine justice, as every being must strive towards the realization of perfection. Furthermore, this theory addresses humanity's connection to God and its dependence on absolute existence, and can clarify debates concerning free will and destiny. In addition, Mulla Sadra, relying on the priority of existence, relates the problem of evil to the lack of existence and analyzes the concepts of the afterlife and the soul as independent existences.