



Research Paper

A Study of the Relationship Between the Soul and the Body from the Perspectives of MullaSadra and Plotinus

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Abstract

The soul is one of the most important philosophical topics in the works of Mulla Sadra and Plotinus. In this article, we conduct a comparative study of these two philosophers' views on the relationship between the soul and the body, using a descriptive-analytical method. Both thinkers believe in the corporeal origination of the soul and consider the body the final part of the total cause. Regarding the corporeal origination of the soul, the unity of the soul and body, the levels of the soul and body, and the instrumentality of the body for the soul, they share similarities in some aspects and differ in others. Moreover, traces of intensified substantial motion can be found in Plotinus's thought, as he considers form to be a substance and views the accumulation of the perfections of forms in the natural world as essential for living beings. On the other hand, both Plotinus and Mulla Sadra affirm the unity of souls in the arc of descent—within the intellect (in MullaSadra's view) and the Universal Soul (in Plotinus's view)—and uphold the natural unity of soul and body. They argue that the body is merely an instrument for the soul and is not the true source of perception and stimulation. The soul is the actual perceiver, using the body as a means to engage with the natural world.

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

The first thing we recognize about ourselves is that we have a body. However, upon further reflection, we realize that we possess an immaterial essence beyond our physical body. This leads to the fundamental question: How does this immaterial essence relate to the material body? Since the study of the soul is the central issue in Plotinus' philosophy, this article explores his response to the aforementioned question. Additionally, it examines Mulla Sadra's responses as a philosopher who dominated the Iranian-Islamic intellectual tradition and is considered the pinnacle of Muslim philosophy. The study aims to identify the commonalities and distinctions between their perspectives. In this article, we aim to conduct a descriptive-analytical examination of Mulla Sadra's and Plotinus' per-

spectives on the relationship between the soul and the body, focusing on four main topics:

- **The corporeal origination of the soul:** Is the soul eternal or temporal? If it is temporal, does it come into existence with the body and within it, or does the body merely receive a soul that has been created in the realm of intellect?
- **The union of the soul and the body:** How can an immaterial entity be combined with a material one?
- **The hierarchy of the soul and the body:** How are their levels structured?
- **The soul as an instrument for the body:** How does the soul influence the body?

2. Methods

This research employs a descriptive-analytical method, utilizing primary sources from Mulla Sadra's *al-Asfar al-Arba'a*, *Al-Shawahid al-Rububiyah*, and Plotinus' *Enneads*, as well as secondary sources and scholarly interpretations. The study systematically compares key concepts in their philosophies, including the ontological status of the soul, the nature of its unity with the



body, and its transformation across different existential stages.

3. Results

From both Plotinus' and Mulla Sadra's perspectives, the individual soul is a created temporal entity, and the body is the material cause and the last part of the complete cause that helps it to emerge. However, Mulla Sadra asserts that the soul emerges from within matter through intensified substantial motion, whereas Plotinus maintains that the soul, upon coming into proximity with a living body, takes its governance. Plotinus and Mulla Sadra, despite some differences, both believe in the unity of souls in the arc of descent. Plotinus holds that souls are united through their connection to the universal soul. However, Mulla Sadra maintains that souls, in the arc of descent, only have a collective realization within the intellect and possess an epistemic existence in that realm rather than an individual. From Mulla Sadra's and Plotinus's perspectives, souls in the nature realm are multiple. What generates multiple souls, according to Mulla Sadra, is the bodies themselves. In contrast, Plotinus acknowledges the body's role in that but attributes the primary distinction to the limited forms that bodies receive. Both philosophers assert the natural unity of the soul and body. Additionally, both Mulla Sadra and Plotinus concur on the dual nature of the soul, acknowledging its rational dimension and its attachment to matter. Plotinus and Mulla Sadra both consider the body as an instrument of the soul. It is the soul that is fundamentally active.

4. Conclusion

Plotinus, has a thought close to Mulla Sadra's theory of intensified substantial motion, according to which the elemental body first receives a form from nature and ultimately reaches perfection in its stages in the presence of the universal soul, and the individual soul is created. In this process, the forms granted to matter are not being generated and corrupted, but each is a subsequent perfection for it. However, Plotinus does not present this theory as a separate theory and does not emphasize it within a structured theory.

The views of both philosophers on the union of the soul and body are closely similar. Both

philosophers agree on the unity of souls in the intellect realm and their multiplicity in the world of bodies. However, Mulla Sadra considers this unity to be a collective and intellectual unity within the intellect realm, without individuation (intellectual existence), while Plotinus regards the higher aspect of the soul, which is inherently intellectual, as common among all the actualized souls in nature. Nevertheless, both believe in the natural unity of the soul and body in the material world. Both philosophers regard the soul as immaterial and attribute to it two aspects: the intellectual aspect and the aspect of its connection to matter. Both philosophers consider the body an instrument for the soul in its actions and perceptions, and they regard authentic perception as belonging to the soul.

Despite the similarities between the theories of these two philosophers on the relationship between the soul and body, it seems that Mulla Sadra's theory has superiority over Plotinus' in at least two respects: First, Mulla Sadra has effectively applied intensified substantial motion in the creation of the soul, and soul connection to matter, and his innovation better justifies the process of various upward and downward movements of humans toward good and evil. In addition, using his view, the identity of the human soul is ultimately aligned well with humans' free will. In contrast, in Plotinus' view, it seems that a part of the individual human soul is never affected by the soul's owner. Second, the realization of souls in multiple periods in the material world, according to Sadra, is not limited to something fixed, meaning the increase or decrease in bodies and souls does not disrupt this. However, in Plotinus' view, a limit is set, and the number of souls in each era is tied to the number of forms.

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Authors' Contribution

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Conflict of Interest

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