



Research Paper

Ontological Analysis of the Theory of Forms from the Perspective of Şadr al-Muta'allihīn, with Emphasis on the Considerations of Muḥammad-Taqī Mişbāḥ Yazdī

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Abstract

The Platonic Theory of Forms has long been regarded as a fundamental pillar of classical philosophical ontology. Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, this theory has undergone various reinterpretations, among which the most prominent is its reformulation in Mulla Sadra's Transcendent Philosophy. Drawing on key principles such as the primacy of existence, the gradation of being, and substantial motion, Sadra defines Forms not as mental constructs or imaginary images, but as rational and independent beings. These entities function as the origin of the natural world in the arc of descent and as its ultimate perfection in the arc of ascent. This ontological understanding of Forms marks a fundamental departure from their conceptual and logical interpretation within the Peripatetic tradition. In contrast, Ayatollah Mesbah Yazdi, adhering to Peripatetic principles and logic, critiques Sadra's view across multiple axes—including the relationship between Forms and natural universals, their role in divine knowledge, their scope regarding ethical and immoral concepts, and ambiguity in their essence. Each critique, grounded in specific philosophical frameworks, challenges the intellectual or external realization of the Forms. Employing a descriptive-analytical method, this study explores Sadra's responses to these critiques. The analysis shows that by redefining Forms as existential realities rather than mental abstractions, Transcendent Philosophy not only maintains theoretical coherence but effectively addresses many of Mesbah Yazdi's objections. Ultimately, the study concludes that the Sadrian theory of Forms, backed by robust metaphysical foundations, is intellectually defensible and provides new avenues for dialogue within Islamic philosophy.

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Extended Abstract

The Platonic theory of Forms has long stood as one of the foundational pillars of classical philosophical ontology. Mulla Sadra, drawing upon the principles of his Transcendent Philosophy—particularly the primacy of existence (*asalat al-wujud*), the gradation of being (*tashkik al-wujud*), and substantial motion (*harakat jawhariyya*)—offers a novel interpretation of Platonic Forms. He posits that every corporeal species possesses an immaterial, rational archetype in the realm of intellect, which not only serves as the origin and source of its material instances but is also ontologically unified with them in essence and subsists independently.

Accordingly, Mulla Sadra defines the Forms as entities endowed with independent existential reality, linked to the realm of divine origination (*alam al-ibda'*), and free from material accidents. Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, this theory has undergone various reinterpretations, among which Mulla Sadra's rearticulation in the framework of Transcendent Philosophy is particularly prominent. Unlike the Peripatetic tradition, which often treats Forms as mental constructs or imaginative representations, Sadra regards them as rational and autonomous beings. In the arc of descent (*qaws al-nuzul*), they constitute the source of the natural world's emanation, and in the arc of ascent (*qaws al-su'ud*), they represent the telos of its perfection.

This ontological reading of the Forms marks a fundamental departure from the conceptual and logical interpretation prevalent in the Peripatetic tradition. In contrast, Ayatollah Misbah Yazdi, adhering to the principles of Peripatetic philosophy, critiques Sadra's view on several fronts.

His objections include the plausibility of positing two modes of existence for a single nature, the relationship between Forms and natural universals, the role of Forms in divine knowledge, their applicability to ethical and base concepts, and the ambiguity surrounding their essence. Each of these critiques, grounded in specific philosophical premises, challenges the external or intellectual realization of the Forms.

This study, employing a descriptive-analytical method, examines Mulla Sadra's theory in response to the aforementioned considerations. The analysis reveals that Transcendent Philosophy, by reformulating the concept of Forms from mental constructs to existential realities, not only preserves its theoretical coherence but also possesses the capacity to address Misbah Yazdi's objections. The ontological divergence between Misbah Yazdi's critique and Sadra's metaphysical framework constitutes one of the central themes of this inquiry.

Ultimately, it becomes evident that Misbah Yazdi's criticisms are largely rooted in the philosophical foundations of the Peripatetic tradition and its Aristotelian-Avicennian conception of essence and existence. In contrast, Sadra's responses, grounded in the principles of Transcendent Philosophy—such as the primacy of existence, gradation of being, essential and accidental predication (*haml awwali wa shay'i*), and illuminative relation (*idafa ishraqiyya*)—seek to resolve these issues in a foundational and coherent manner.

Misbah Yazdi considers the assumption of two modes of existence for a single nature problematic, viewing it as a contradiction in the essence of things. However, Sadra, through his theory of the



gradation of existence, demonstrates that entities can manifest across varying degrees of being—intensified or diminished—without forfeiting their essential nature. This perspective, rooted in unity within multiplicity, resolves the dilemma of dual existence and illustrates that an existential outlook transcends the mental confines of essence.

Sadra's responses to Misbah Yazdi's critiques not only dispel philosophical ambiguities but also construct a comprehensive framework of ontological and epistemological explanations.

This opens new horizons in understanding the relationship between human beings and existence, intellect and intelligible, and mind and truth. Contrary

to Misbah Yazdi's assumption, Sadra does not seek to undermine philosophy; rather, he endeavors to elevate it through existential intuition and the epistemic union of the human intellect with being.

In conclusion, this research affirms that the theory of Forms within Transcendent Philosophy, supported by robust metaphysical foundations, is intellectually defensible and offers fertile ground for renewed discourse within Islamic philosophy. It bridges classical metaphysical concerns with contemporary philosophical inquiry, reaffirming the enduring relevance of Sadra's thought in the evolving landscape of philosophical reflection.