



**Mulla Sadra's Views about Divine Knowledge from the Perspective
of Avicenna**

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**Mulla Sadra's Views about Divine Knowledge from the Perspective of Avicenna
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ABSTRACT

The main questions addressed in the present article are: How the divine knowledge of the essence and the creatures is perceived by Avicenna and Mulla Sadra? What are possible similarities and differences in the viewpoints of the two philosophers? And which view is more complete and less defective? According to the findings of the study, Avicenna and Mulla Sadra interpret God's knowledge of the essence through the union of the knower and the known, but the divine knowledge of the creatures is addressed by Avicenna through the imprinted forms while Mulla Sadra deals with the issue through the principality of existence and its degrees of gradation. It was also shown that the explanation of Avicenna about God's knowledge of the creatures faces problems such as the emptiness of the God's essence from the cognitive perfection. But Mulla Sadra's explanation can account for this issue more effectively.

Keywords: the union of the knower and the known, imprinted forms, priority and gradation of existence, intuitive knowledge, acquired knowledge, knowledge in undifferentiated mode and in detailed fashion



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1. INTRODUCTION

Divine knowledge as one of the most difficult and complex issues of the Islamic philosophy in the history of philosophy has always been proved as a serious challenge for philosophers. Usually, philosophers consider the God's knowledge of his own essence as a kind of intuitive knowledge and there is no significant controversy between them in this regard. However, there is a serious controversy among philosophers over the God's knowledge of the creatures, especially about the knowledge of material and variable beings in the degree of essence. Some have considered this knowledge to be acquired, some have assumed it to be intuitive, and others have supposed it as belonging to the undifferentiated mode or differentiated mode. Therefore, research into recognizing the views of Avicenna and Mulla Sadra, the former as the representative of Aristotelian philosophy and the latter as the transcendent theosophy, seems to be necessary.

The divine knowledge is usually discussed in philosophical books in three sections: (1) Divine knowledge of his own essence, (2) Divine knowledge of the creatures in the degree of essence, and (3) Divine knowledge of the creatures in the degree of creations. Considering the Given huge bulk of the materials and the focus of scholars on the first two sections, we discuss only the same focused sections in this article. Employing a descriptive-analytical method, this article attempts to present and analyze the views of Avicenna and Mulla Sadra with the intention to shed light on their strengths and weaknesses.

2. DIVINE KNOWLEDGE FROM AVICENNA'S VIEWPOINT

The divine knowledge of the essence: Avicenna believes that Allah Almighty has knowledge of his own essence, and this knowledge is intuitive not acquired (Avicenna, 1984). According to this explanation, it seems that for Avicenna, God is a necessary essential existence, and that the essential necessity or self-necessity requires that he shall be complete in all aspects, that is to say, he has no components and no potential or property, because the prerequisite to have components requires a need and the prerequisite to have potentials requires a defect. In addition, as God is self-contained and immaterial in terms of properties, then he is aware of his own essence. This is to say that, on the one hand, as his abstract essence is immanent for his own immaterial essence, he is intellectual and, on the other hand, for the same reason it can be understood that he is a rational being.



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Therefore, the divine immaterial essence is both intellectual and intelligent. In other words, God's essence is both knower and the object of knowledge.

Of course, in order to understand Avicenna's views, it should be noted that knowledge is divided into two types: Intuitive and acquired knowledge. In intuitive knowledge, the known external existence is immanent in the presence of the knower, but in the acquired or discursive knowledge, the known conception is immanent in the presence of the knower.

3. QUESTION AND ANSWER

It is argued that the requirement of Avicenna's words about the God's knowledge of his own essence is that the two attributes of intellectual and intelligent are the same thing, that is, if something is intellectual, it must be intelligent; while sometimes we believe in intellectuality of something without considering it to be intelligent, and vice versa (Fakhr Razi, 1411 AH). In response, it is said that this problem occurred because of the fact that the conception and extension (referent of a concept) are confused with each other and when two things are contradiction in terms of conception, it does not mean that they are also contradictory in the referent of the concept (Mulla Sadra, 1981).

A. Another question and answers

It is stated that the knower and the object of knowledge (the known) are correlatives, and correlatives are confrontation and they cannot be gathered around in unity. In response to the above statement, it can be said that the knower and the object of knowledge (the known) are not correlatives because attribution is repeated in correlatives, while there is no attribution repeat between the knower and the object of knowledge, and every conscious human can perceive himself, and considers the knower and the object of knowledge to be the same thing (Ibid).

B. God's knowledge of creatures before creation

Avicenna believes that the God's knowledge of his own essence is the knowledge of the perfect cause of an object, and such knowledge requires having the knowledge of the effect of that object (Avicenna, 1984).

It should be noted that as it was stated earlier, God has knowledge of his own essence, and since there was nothing before the creation of beings other than God to be involved in the creation process, therefore God is the perfect cause of all beings and since the full



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knowledge of the cause is the same as the knowledge of the essence of the cause and all its necessities, including the effect, so full knowledge of the cause requires having the knowledge of the effect.

Avicenna believes that the God's knowledge of the creatures comes through imprinted forms, which are issued from the divine essence and are beyond the essence, and necessary essentially for the essence and dependent on the divine self-contained essence (Ibid). In addition, in Avicenna's view, the God's knowledge of these forms is an active knowledge not a passive knowledge, but it is the same as the essence of these forms. For Avicenna, God's knowledge of the beings come through the acquisition of these imprinted forms, in the way that creatures are initially known by God through the imprinted forms, and then they come to existence.

God's knowledge of the beings is an active knowledge, not the passive knowledge, that is, God's knowledge of the beings causes the existence of beings and this knowledge does not come from the beings. For instance, the knowledge of an inventor of his own inventions is the cause of the invention, and it is not the independent existence of the invention that creates the inventor's knowledge of that invention.

Of course, it should be remembered that the God's active knowledge is different from the man's active knowledge, in the sense with this explanation that the man's active knowledge is not the perfect cause of the effect in its totality in the outside world and there are other needed factors such as materials, tools, will, incitement of the members, etc. However, the God's active knowledge is the perfect cause of the effect in the outside world (Ibid).

One of the most important problems with the recognition that the God's knowledge of the creatures, whether material or immaterial, is an acquired knowledge that such knowledge belongs to beings that are connected with the natural world through the power of senses, imagination, and fancy, and such knowledge cannot be attributed to immaterial beings, because the conception and judgment, and other qualities of acquired knowledge do not belong to the world of abstractions. Therefore, it can be suggested that God Almighty who is above and beyond all material things free from such a knowledge. That is, in the same way that the possession of material components is considered to be a defect and imperfection for God, the acquired science is also regarded a negative quality for the



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divine essence (Mulla Sadra, 1981). In Mulla Sadra's terms, considering the God's knowledge as acquired knowledge requires that external objects to be defined as known-by-another rather than known-by-essence (Mulla Sadra, 1420 AH).

In addition, acquired knowledge is not partial because individuality or particularity depends on an external existence, and imprinted forms are concepts that can be applied to many people and their particularity is correlative not actual. Therefore, if God's knowledge of creatures is considered to be a acquired knowledge, then God Almighty will not have any knowledge of external particularities (Javadi Amoli, 1993).

Also, Avicenna's argument in proving God's detailed knowledge of the creatures before their creation can only prove God's knowledge of the beings after the degree of God's essence, and cannot prove the unity and the sameness of God's essence and his knowledge of the beings. As a result, it cannot be proved that the world of the creation is the most intelligent and the best ordering of thins (Mulla Sadra, 1981).

In addition, Avicenna's idea that the knowledge of the cause entails the knowledge of the effect is true only if the cause is the perfect or sufficient cause. However, God's knowledge of the particularities of the affairs of the universe is not the perfect cause, because the creation of particularities requires other conditions such as time and place (Ibid).

C. The quality of God's knowledge of material and variable affairs

Now that it is clear that God Almighty is aware of all the components of the world, the question is: How is this knowledge? Does God's knowledge change with changes in material and particular affairs, or is God's knowledge fixed and unchangeable?

Avicenna considers the God's knowledge of the partial things is a general knowledge, that is, while the God's knowledge dominates particularities, it is always fixed and unchangeable. Therefore, according to Avicenna, the God's knowledge of particularities comes through intellectuality and the perception of general natures of those particular things. This means that the perception of particular matters happens through the causes of these matters. And if all the factors involved in the development of a particular matter are perceived, then that part is perceived, and this perception, while it is general, has no other referent other than that particular thing (Avicenna, 1984).



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Therefore, it can be said that God's knowledge of the particular matters has the following characteristics:

1. As this knowledge is general it is always fixed and does not go through a change before, during, and after the creation of a particular matter or object.
2. As this knowledge has been emerged through awareness about the origins and causes of the particular matter, it is a certain/definite knowledge, because the relationship between the cause and the effect is an essential relationship.
3. This knowledge, while is universally sound and cover plural matters, does not have more than one referent of a concept, which is the particular matter.

In order to elucidate his theory, Avicenna uses the example of the astrologer's knowledge of lunar eclipse, stating that the astrologer's knowledge is acquired through science the awareness about the motion of planets and celestial bodies and the connections and disconnections among them, and other things involved in the appearance of the eclipse. And such knowledge is constant and unchanged before, during, and after the creation of the eclipse. Nevertheless, it should be noted that although the astrologer's knowledge is the knowledge of a general eclipse, this general eclipse that has occurred through individualizing accidents in the outside world does not have more than a referent that is that particular eclipse (Avicenna, 1413 AH).

Reflecting on Avicenna's ideas, the weakness of his theory concerning the obligatory knowledge of particular and external matters becomes evident, since conception is conceptually a general matter and it cannot turn into a particular matter by adding thousands of constraints for individualizing accidents.

4. DIVINE KNOWLEDGE FROM MULLA SADRA'S VIEW

This section addresses the divine knowledge from Mulla Sadra's view.

A. God's knowledge of the essence

Mulla Sadra proves that God's knowledge of his essence through the immateriality of his essence from materia and material things, explaining that God Almighty is a pure and indivisible existence; that is, and his reality is nothing but existence, and he is free from any defect or impossibility and possibility. In other words, the essence of every immaterial being is perfect and free from any potency, and its existence for another object is immanent whether that object is being itself or other than itself. Because the barrier to



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the presence of on matter is its materiality and this is not the case for an immaterial existent. Moreover, since the truth of knowledge is the same as the presence for the known (the object of the knowledge) for the knower, then every immaterial essence is intellectual for its own essence. Also, the stronger the immaterial thing in existence, and the more intense in realization, and the more perfect in essence, the more perfect it will be in terms of intellect and intellectuality and the stronger it will be in terms of intelligence for its own essence. As a result, God's knowledge of his essence is the most complete and most intense of the sciences in terms of manifestation and illumination (Mulla Sadra, 1981).

B. God's knowledge of creatures at the level of essence

Considering the shortcomings of Avicenna's view on God's knowledge of creatures, Mulla Sadra tries to put forward a theory that is free from the same weaknesses and shortcomings in the Avicenna's view. The fundamentals of Mulla Sadra's theory are as follows: (1) The existence is the principal and authentic, not essentia, implying that anything that has reality in the outside world and rejects non-existence is existence not essentia. (2) The existence has degrees of gradation; that is, the existence has degrees and levels, and those in higher degrees possess all advantages and potentials of the matters of the lower grades, without the necessity for plurality. (3) "Basit ol-Haqiqa kol ol-Ashia va Laisa Beshayen Menha" means The simple reality contains the perfections of all beings and is free from their imperfections. (4) God's knowledge of the creatures is not requisite for the essence of God, but it is the same as his essence. (5) God's knowledge of creatures is an intuitive and knowledge in undifferentiated mode that is the same as detailed unveiling.

Mulla Sadra believes that the God's detailed knowledge of creatures with respect to essence is not compatible with acquired knowledge and the originality of existence, which is associated with the distinction of the beings, and only based on the originality of existence and gradation of the reality of existence, it is possible to acknowledge that existence has the highest order which encompasses all perfections of lower levels in a decent manner in without necessitating plurality. In Mulla Sadra's view, a type of knowledge can be considered indivisible and in undifferentiated mode that is the same as detailed unveiling and such knowledge is the same as the exact essence of God (Ibid).



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Accordingly, God is free from all forms of compositions and he is invisible in all respects and possesses all the perfections. And the perfections of all beings are impeccably manifested in his essence, without causing plurality and the composition of that essence. Besides, since the truth of knowledge is the same as the presence of an immaterial thing before the immaterial matter, then God in his essence has knowledge of the perfections of creatures and of all the systems governing them, and this knowledge is a indivisible undifferentiated knowledge representing detailed unveiling. (Mulla Sadra, 1979).

In other words, it can be suggested that God Almighty has the knowledge of his own essence and his essence contains all the perfections of beings. Therefore, the knowledge of the divine essence is the same as the knowledge of all beings; and since God's entity precedes all beings and the knowledge of the essence is the same as the essence; therefore, knowledge of the essence precedes all beings.

5. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Both Avicenna and Mulla Sadra prove the God's knowledge of essence through the union between the intellect and the intelligible, but Avicenna demonstrates God's knowledge of the creatures especially material and variable beings through imprinted forms necessary essentially for the essence of God and Mulla Sadra in contrast, proves it through the rule of "Basit ol-Haqiqa kol ol-Ashia va Laisa Beshayen Menha" and the God's intuitive knowledge .

Mulla Sadra believes that Avicenna's view is incomplete and suffer from some shortcomings such as the belief in acquired nature of God's knowledge of the beings and the emptiness of the divine essence of cognitive perfection and detailed knowledge. Therefore, he tries to put forward a theory that is free from the weaknesses and shortcomings contained within Avicenna's view .

According to Mulla Sadra, knowledge is of the same nature of existence, and like existence, which being characterized by simplicity has degrees and orders, and he considers the highest degree of knowledge to be God's knowledge, which encompasses the perfections of all beings in the most comprehensive manner.

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