

Existence (*wujūd*) and Quiddity (*māhiyyah*) in Islamic Philosophy

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THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SUBJECT

THERE IS NO ISSUE more central to Islamic philosophy and especially metaphysics than *wujūd* (at once Being and existence) in itself and in its relation to *māhiyyah* (quiddity or essence). For eleven centuries Islamic philosophers and even certain Sufis and theologians (*mutakallimūn*) have been concerned with this subject and have developed on the basis of their study of *wujūd* world views which have dominated Islamic thought and have also had a deep influence upon Christian and Jewish philosophy. Islamic philosophy is most of all a philosophy concerned with *wujūd* and hence with its distinction from *māhiyyah*. To understand the meaning of these basic concepts, their distinction and relationship, is, therefore, to grasp the very basis of Islamic philosophical thought.¹

It is true that Islamic metaphysics places the Absolute above all limitations, even beyond the ontological principle as usually understood. It knows that the Divine Essence (*al-Dhāt al-ilāhiyyah*) stands above even Being, that it is Non-Being or Beyond-Being² in that it stands beyond all limitation and even beyond the qualification of being beyond all limitation. Nevertheless, the language of this metaphysical doctrine remains in most schools of Islamic thought that of *wujūd*. Hence, the discussion concerning the choice between *wujūd* and *māhiyyah* remains central to Islamic metaphysical thought even if the Muslim gnostics and metaphysicians have remained fully aware of the supra-ontological nature of the Supreme Reality and have not limited metaphysics to ontology.

Only too often the concern of Islamic philosophers with *wujūd* and *māhiyyah* has been traced back solely to Greek philosophy and especially to Aristotle.

¹"The distinction between 'quiddity' and 'existence' is undoubtedly one of the most basic philosophical theses in Islamic thought. Without exaggeration the distinction may be said to constitute the first step in ontologico-metaphysical thinking among Muslims; it provides the very foundation on which is built up the whole structure of Muslim metaphysics." T. Izutsu, "The Fundamental Structure of Sabzavāri's Metaphysics," Introduction to the Arabic text of Sabzavāri's *Sharḥ-i manẓūmah*, edd. M. Mohaghegh and T. Izutsu (Tehran: McGill Univ. Institute of Islamic Studies, Tehran Branch, 1969), p. 49.

²For the metaphysical distinction between Being and Non-Being, see F. Schuon, *From the Divine to the Human*, trans. G. Polit and D. Lambert (Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 1982), part one; and his *Survey of Metaphysics and Esoterism*, trans. G. Polit (Bloomington: World Wisdom Books, 1986), part one. Schuon writes, "Beyond-Being or Non-Being is Reality absolutely unconditioned, while Being is Reality insofar as It determines Itself in the direction of Its manifestation and in so doing becomes personal God." *Stations of Wisdom*, trans. G. E. H. Palmer (London: John Murray, 1961), p. 24, n.1.

There is, of course, no doubt concerning the debt of al-Fārābī, who was the first Muslim philosopher to discuss fully the distinction between *wujūd* and *māhiyyah*, to the Stagirite. The manner, however, in which he and especially Ibn Sīnā, who has been called the "philosopher of being" *par excellence*,³ approached the subject and the centrality that the study of *wujūd* gained in Islamic thought have very much to do with the Islamic revelation itself. The Quran states explicitly, "But His command, when He intendeth a thing, is only that he saith unto it: Be! and it is (*kun fa-yakūn*)" (XXXVI;82); it also speaks over and over of the creation and destruction of the world. This world as experienced by the *homo islamicus* is, therefore, not synonymous with *wujūd*. It is not "an ontological block without fissure in which essence, existence and unity are but one."⁴

Moreover, the origin of the "chain of being" is not simply the first link in the chain but is transcendent *vis-à-vis* the chain. The levels of existence (*marātib al-wujūd*) to which Aristotle and Theophrastus and before them Plato refer are, therefore, from the Islamic point of view discontinuous with respect to their Source which is above and beyond them. The Quranic teachings about Allah as Creator of the world played a most crucial role in the development of Islamic philosophy as far as the study of *wujūd* is concerned. On the one hand, it made central the importance of the ontological hiatus between Being and existents and, on the other hand, bestowed another significance on the distinction between *wujūd* and *māhiyyah* by providing a meaning to the act of existentiation or the bestowal of *wujūd* upon *māhiyyah* other than what one finds in Aristotelian philosophy as it developed among the Greeks.

A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE STUDY OF *WUJŪD* AND *MĀHIYYAH*

Already in his *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikmah*,⁵ al-Fārābī distinguishes clearly *huwiyyah*, which in the terminology of early Islamic philosophy means that by which something is actualized, hence *wujūd*, from *māhiyyah*. Ibn Sīnā, deeply influenced by al-Fārābī, makes this distinction the cornerstone of his ontology and treats it amply in many of his works, especially the metaphysics of the *Shifā'* and the *Najāt* as well as in his final major philosophical opus, *al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbīhāt*.⁶ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, although a theologian, continues his concern for the issue while his contemporary Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī, the founder of the school of Illumination or *ishrāq*, constructs a whole metaphysics of essence which would

³See A. M. Goichon, "L'Unité de la pensée avicennienne," *Archives Internationales d'Histoire des Sciences* 20-21 (1952), 29ff.

⁴E. Gilson, *L'Être et l'essence* (Paris: J. Vrin, 1948), p. 90; also quoted in Izutsu, "The Fundamental Structure . . .," pp. 54-55.

⁵Although some scholars have doubted the attribution of this work to al-Fārābī and consider it to be by Ibn Sīnā (see S. Pines, "Ibn Sina et l'auteur de la Risālat al-fuṣūṣ fi'l-ḥikma," *Revue des Etudes Islamiques* [1951], 122-24), I see no convincing reason to doubt the view of Islamic philosophers held during the past millenium that the work is by al-Fārābī. S. H. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1975), p. 136.

⁶On Ibn Sīnā's views concerning *wujūd* and *māhiyyah*, see A. M. Goichon, *La Distinction de l'essence et de l'existence d'après Ibn Sina (Avicenna)* (Paris: Desclée, 1937), and M. Rahman, "Essence and Existence in Avicenna," in *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies*, vol. IV (London: Warburg Institute, 1958), pp. 1-16. For Ibn Sīnā's discussion of *wujūd* in general, see S. H. Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), pp. 197ff.

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be inconceivable without the basis established by Avicennan ontology.⁷ A century later in the seventh/thirteenth century, both Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī and his student 'Allāmah al-Ḥillī deal extensively with the question of *wujūd* and *māhiyyah* even in their theological writings⁸ as do most of the major philosophical figures between Ṭūsī and the Safavid period such as Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī, Ghiyāth al-Dīn Maṣṣūr Dashtakī, Ibn Turkah, and Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī.⁹

Finally, with the Safavid renaissance of Islamic philosophy in Persia and the founding of what has now come to be known as "The School of Isfahan,"¹⁰ Islamic metaphysics, based upon the question of *wujūd*, reaches its peak with Mīr Dāmād and especially Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī (Mullā Ṣadrā) who in his *al-Asfār al-arba'ah* has provided the most extensive discussion of *wujūd* to be found in the annals of Islamic philosophy.¹¹ This sage founded a new school of *ḥikmah* called the "transcendent theosophy" (*al-ḥikmat al-muta'āliyah*) which became the most dominant, although not the only, philosophical school in Persia especially as far as the question of *wujūd* and *māhiyyah* and their relation are concerned.

From the generation of Mullā Ṣadrā's students such as 'Abd al-Razzāq Lāhijī and Fayḍ Kāshānī to the Qajar revival of this school by Mullā 'Alī Nūrī, Hājī Mullā Hādī Sabziwārī, and Mullā 'Alī Mudarris Zunūzī,¹² numerous works dealing

⁷On Suhrawardī's metaphysics, see S. H. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, chapter 2; H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. II (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

⁸See *Kashf al-murād—Sharḥ tajrīd al-i'tiqād*, of which the text is by Ṭūsī and the commentary by Ḥillī, ed. with trans. and commentary by Abu'l-Ḥasan Sha'rānī (Tehran: Islāmiyyah Bookshop, 1351 [A.H. solar]/1972), chapter 1.

⁹On this most obscure period in the history of Islamic philosophy, see S. H. Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought* (Albany: Suny Press, 1981), pp. 75ff; and H. Corbin (in collaboration with S. H. Nasr and O. Yahya), *Histoire de la philosophie islamique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1986), especially Part Two written entirely by Corbin; and M. Cruz Hernández, *Historia del pensamiento en el mundo islámico*, 2 (Madrid: Alianza Univ., 1981).

Needless to say the Peripatetic school of the Maghrib which survived from the time of al-Ghazzālī to the beginning of this period also dealt extensively with the question of *wujūd* and *māhiyyah*, as can be seen in the commentary of Ibn Rushd upon the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle as well as in many of Ibn Rushd's other works.

¹⁰On the School of Isfahan, see H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. IV (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), pp. 9–201; and S. H. Nasr, "The School of Isfahan," in M. M. Sharif (ed.), *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, vol. II (Wiesbaden: O. Harrassowitz, 1966), pp. 904–32.

¹¹Mullā Ṣadrā devoted the whole of the first book of his *Asfār* to the discussion of *wujūd* to which he returned in several of his other works, especially the *Kitāb al-mashā'ir* and *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyyah*. See H. Corbin's introduction to his edition of the *Kitāb al-mashā'ir* (*Le Livre des pénétrations métaphysiques*) (Tehran/Paris: A. Maisonneuve, 1964); the introduction of S. J. Ashtiyani in Persian and of S. H. Nasr in English to Ashtiyani's edition of *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyyah* (Mashhad: Mashhad Univ. Press, 1967); S. H. Nasr, *Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and His Transcendent Theosophy* (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1978); and F. Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā* (Albany: Suny Press, 1976).

¹²See S. H. Nasr, "Sabziwārī," in Sharif, pp. 1543–56; and Nasr, "The Metaphysics of Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and Islamic philosophy in Qajar Persia," in E. Bosworth and C. Hillenbrand (edd.), *Qajar Iran* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1983), pp. 177–98. See also M. S. Soha, *A Bio-Bibliography of Post-Sadr al-Mutī' alihīn Mystics and Philosophers* (Tehran: Islamic Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1980).

S. J. Ashtiyani has also dealt with the figures of this period in several introductions to their works, especially those of Sabziwārī and the two Zunūzīs. See, for example, Mullā 'Abdallāh Zunūzī, *Lama'āt-i ilāhiyyah* (*Divine Splendours*) (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1976),

with *wujūd* and *māhiyyah* continued to appear in Persia while there was no less of an interest in this subject in India where the foremost thinkers, like Shāh Walīallāh of Delhi, dealt extensively with the subject.¹³ In fact, the centrality of the question of *wujūd* and *māhiyyah* in Islamic philosophy persists to this day wherever authentic Islamic philosophy has survived, as in Persia where several major works have dealt with the issue over the past few decades.¹⁴

THE MEANING OF *WUJŪD* AND *MĀHIYYAH*

Traditional teachers of Islamic philosophy begin the teaching of *ḥikmat-i ilāhī* (literally *theo-sophia*), or natural theology as it is called in Persian,¹⁵ by instilling in the mind of the student a way of thinking based upon the distinction between *wujūd* and *māhiyyah*. They appeal to the immediate perception of things and assert that man in seeking to understand the nature of the reality he perceives can ask two questions about it: 1) Is it (*hal huwa*)? and 2) What is it (*mā huwa*)? The answer to the first question is *wujūd* or its opposite ('*adam* or non-existence) while the answer to the second question is *māhiyyah* (from the word *mā huwa* or *mā hiya* which is its feminine form).

Usually in Islamic philosophy terms are carefully defined, but in the case of *wujūd* it is impossible to define it in the usual meaning of definition as used in logic which consists of genus and specific difference. Moreover, every unknown is defined by that which is known, but there is nothing more universally known than *wujūd* and therefore nothing else in terms of which *wujūd* can be defined. In traditional circles it is said that everyone, even a small baby, knows intuitively the difference between *wujūd* and its opposite, as can be seen by the fact that when a baby is crying, to speak to it about milk is of no avail, but as soon as "real" milk, that is, milk possessing *wujūd*, is given to it, it stops crying.

Rather than define *wujūd*, therefore, Islamic philosophers allude to its meaning through such assertions as "*wujūd* is that by virtue of which it is possible to give knowledge about something" or "*wujūd* is that which is the source of all effects."¹⁶ As for *māhiyyah*, it is possible to define it clearly and precisely as that which provides an answer to the question "what is it?" There is, however, a further development of this concept in later Islamic philosophy which distin-

Persian prolegomena of Ashtiyani and English and Persian introductions of S. H. Nasr. See also the long Persian introduction of Ashtiyani to his edition of Mullā Ṣadrā's *Shawāhid*.

¹³See, for example, his *Fayṣalat al-waḥdat al-wujūd wa waḥdat al-shuhūd* (Delhi, n.d.); and his *Lamaḥāt*, in *Sufism and the Islamic Tradition*, trans. G. N. Jalbani and ed. D. B. Fry (London: The Octagon Press, 1980).

¹⁴Such works as 'Allāmah Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn Ṭabāṭabā'i's *Uṣūl-i falsafah wa rawish-i ri'ālism*, with commentary by Murtaḍā Muṭaḥhari, 5 vols. (Qum: Dār al-'Ilm, 1332 [A.H. solar]/1953); Sayyid Muḥammad Kāzim 'Aṣṣār, *Waḥdat-i wujūd wa badā'* (Mashhad: Mashhad Univ. Press, 1350 [A.H. solar]/1971); Sayyid Jalal al-Dīn Ashtiyani, *Hastī az nazar-i falsafah wa 'irfān* (Mashhad: Khurāsān Press, 1379 [A.H. lunar]/1960); and Mehdi Hairī Yazdī, *Hiram-i hastī* (Tehran: Cultural Studies and Research Institute, 1363 [A.H. solar]/1984); and M. R. Ṣāliḥi Kirmāni, *Wujūd az nazar-i falsafah wa 'irfān* (Qum, n.d.), bear witness to the living character of traditional Islamic metaphysics in general and the study of *wujūd* or *hastī* in Persian in particular.

¹⁵Metaphysics or the science of Ultimate Reality is called *ma'rifah* or '*irfān* in the Islamic esoteric tradition or Sufism. In the philosophical tradition, it is called *al-ḥikmat al-ilāhiyyah* in Arabic or *ḥikmat-i ilāhī* in Persian.

¹⁶See S. H. Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought*, chapter 17, "The Polarization of Being," pp. 182–87.

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guishes between *māhiyyah* in its particular sense (*bi'l-ma'na'l-akhaṣṣ*), which is the response to the question "what is it?", and *māhiyyah* in its general sense (*bi'l-ma'na'l-a'amm*), which means that by which a thing is what it is. It is said that *māhiyyah* in this second sense is derived from the Arabic phrase *mā bihi huwa huwa* (that by which something is what it is). This second meaning refers to the reality (*ḥaqīqah*) of a thing and is not opposed to *wujūd* as is the first meaning of *māhiyyah*.¹⁷

As far as the etymological derivation of the term *wujūd* is concerned, it is an Arabic term related to the root *wjd* which possesses the basic meaning to find or come to know about something. It is etymologically related to the term *wijdān*, which means consciousness, awareness, or knowledge, as well as to *wajd*, which means ecstasy or bliss.¹⁸ The Islamic philosophers who were Persian or used that language also employed the Persian term *hasṭī*, which is of Iranian origin and is related to the Indo-European terms denoting being, such as "*ist*" in German and "*is*" in English.

Wujūd as used in traditional Islamic philosophy cannot be rendered simply as existence. Rather, it denotes at once Being, being, Existence, and existence, each of these terms having a specific meaning in the context of Islamic metaphysics. The term "Being" refers to the Absolute or Necessary Being (*wājib al-wujūd*); "being" is a universal concept encompassing all levels of reality, both that of creatures and that of the Necessary Being Itself. The term "Existence" refers to the first emanation or effusion from the Pure or Absolute Being, or what is called *al-fayḍ al-aqdas*, the Sacred Effusion in later Islamic philosophy, while "existence" refers to the reality of all things other than the Necessary Being.

Technically speaking, God is, but He cannot be said to exist, for one must remember that existence is derived from the Latin *ex-sistere*, which implies a pulling away or drawing away from the substance or ground of reality. The very rich vocabulary of Islamic philosophy differentiates all these usages by using the term *wujūd* with various modifiers and connotations based upon the context, whereas the single English term "existence," for example, cannot render justice to all the nuances of meaning contained in the Arabic term. Thus throughout this essay we have used the Arabic term *wujūd* rather than a particular English translation. There are also terms derived from *wujūd* which are of great philosophical importance, especially the term *mawjūd* or existent which Islamic philosophy, especially of the later period, clearly distinguished from *wujūd* as the "act of existence." Muslim metaphysicians knew fully well the difference between *ens* and *actus essendi* or *Sein* and *Dasein*, and therefore followed a path which led to conclusions very different from those in the West which finally led to modern Western *Existenz Philosophie* and existentialism.¹⁹

¹⁷T. Izutsu quite justifiably translates *māhiyyah* in the first sense as quiddity and in the second as essence. See his "The Fundamental Structure . . .," p. 73.

¹⁸It is remarkable how the three terms *wujūd*, *wijdān*, and *wajd* resemble so closely the famous *sat*, *chit*, and *ananda* in Hinduism where their combination *satchitananda* is considered as a name of God and the metaphysical characterization of Reality. See S. H. Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), p. 1.

¹⁹In his introduction to Mullā Sadrā's *Kitāb al-mashā'ir*, H. Corbin, who was the first person to translate M. Heidegger into French, has made a profound comparison between the Islamic philosophy of being and Heidegger's thought.

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN *WUJŪD* AND *MĀHIYYAH*

The starting point of Islamic ontology is not the world of existents in which the existence of something, that something as existent, and the unity of that thing are the same as is the case with Aristotelian metaphysics. For Aristotle the world could not not exist. It is an ontological block which cannot conceivably be broken; thus the distinction between *wujūd* and *māhiyyah* is not of any great consequence. For Islamic thought, on the contrary, the world is not synonymous with *wujūd*. There is an ontological poverty (*faqr*) of the world in the sense that *wujūd* is given by God Who alone is the abiding Reality, all "other" existents coming into being and passing away. The conceptual distinction between *wujūd* and *māhiyyah*, therefore, gains great significance and, far from being inconsequential, becomes in fact the key for understanding the nature of reality.

According to traditional Islamic philosophy, the intellect (*al-'aql*) is able to distinguish clearly between the *wujūd* and *māhiyyah* of anything, not as they are externally where there is but one existent object, but in the "container of the mind." When man asks himself the question "what is it?" with respect to a particular object, the answer given is totally distinct from concern for its existence or non-existence. The "mind" has the power to conceive of the quiddity of something, let us say man, purely and completely as *māhiyyah* and totally distinct from any form of *wujūd*. *Māhiyyah* thus considered in itself and in so far as it is itself (*min ḥaythu hiya hiya*) is called in Islamic philosophy, and following the terminology of Ibn Sīnā, "natural universal" (*al-kullī al-ṭabī'ī*). *Māhiyyah* can also appear in the mind, possessing "mental existence," and in the external world *in concreto*, possessing external existence; but in itself it can be conceived completely shorn of any concern with *wujūd*,²⁰ such as when the "mind" conceives of the *māhiyyah* of man which includes the definition of man without any consideration as to whether man exists or not.

Moreover, *māhiyyah* excludes *wujūd* as one of its constituent elements. Or to use traditional terminology, *wujūd* is not a *maqawwim* of *māhiyyah* in the sense that animal, which is contained in the definition of man as rational animal, is a constituent or *muqawwim* of the *māhiyyah* of man. There is nothing in a *māhiyyah* which would relate it to *wujūd* or necessitate the existence of that *māhiyyah*. The two concepts are totally distinct as are their causes. The causes of a *māhiyyah* are the elements that constitute its definition, namely, the genus and specific difference, while the causes of the *wujūd* of a particular existent are its efficient and final causes as well as its substratum.²¹ For a *māhiyyah* to exist, therefore, *wujūd* must be "added to it," that is, become wedded to it from "outside" itself.

In the history of Islamic thought, not to speak of modern studies of Islamic philosophy, there has often been a misunderstanding about this distinction and about the relation between *wujūd* and *māhiyyah*. It is essential, therefore, to emphasize that Ibn Sīnā and those who followed him did not begin with two "realities," one *māhiyyah* and the other *wujūd*, which became wedded in con-

²⁰These three ways of envisaging quiddity, namely in itself, in the mind, and in its actualization in the external world are called *al-i'tibārāt al-thalāthah*. See Izutsu, "The Fundamental Structure . . .," p. 65.

²¹For a clear Avicennan expression of the distinction between *wujūd* and *māhiyyah*, see his *al-Ishārāt wa'l tanbihāt* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1960), vol. I, pp. 202-203.

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crete, external objects, even if certain philosophers have referred to existents as "combined pairs" (*zawj tarkībī*). Rather, they began with the single, concrete external object, the *ens* or *mawjūd*, which they analyzed conceptually in terms of *māhiyyah* and *wujūd* and which they studied separately in their philosophical treatises.²² These concepts, however, were to provide a key for the understanding of not only the relation between the "suchness" and "is-ness" of existents, but also the ontological origin of things and their interrelatedness, as we see in the "transcendent theosophy" of Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī.

THE QUESTION OF THE "ACCIDENTALITY" OF *WUJŪD*

One of the problems which concerned philosophers who followed in the wake of Ibn Sīnā was whether *wujūd* is an accident (*'araḍ*) which occurs to *māhiyyah*, or not. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and other later Muslim thinkers took Ibn Sīnā to task for calling *wujūd* an "accident," while in the Latin West on the basis of an erroneous interpretation by Ibn Rushd of the Avicennan thesis as stated in the *Shifā'*²³ and elsewhere, such philosophers as the Latin Averroist Siger of Brabant and even St. Thomas himself understood Ibn Sīnā to mean that *wujūd* is an "accident" which occurs to *māhiyyah*. If one understands accident in the ordinary sense of, let us say, a color being an accident while the wood which bears that color is the substance upon which the accident alights from the outside (or *ens in alio*, as the Scholastics would say), then insurmountable problems arise. In the case of the wood, which is the place or locus where the accident occurs, the substance exists whether the accident occurs to it or not. The wood remains wood and possesses a concrete reality whether it is to be painted red or green. The wood has a subsistence and only at a later stage does the accident of color occur in it.

In the case of *wujūd*, the question would arise as to what state would the *māhiyyah* be in "before" the occurrence of the "accident" of *wujūd*. If it is already an existent, then *wujūd* must have occurred to it before and the argument could be carried back *ad infinitum*. If *māhiyyah* were non-existent, then it could not possess any reality like that of wood which would later be painted red or green.

This type of interpretation of Ibn Sīnā, which would understand "accident" in the case of *wujūd* to mean the same as the ordinary sense of the word "accident," is due partly to the fact that Ibn Sīnā did not fully clarify the use of the term

²²Classical works on Islamic philosophy usually have in fact separate sections or chapters devoted to the principles pertaining to *wujūd* (*ahkām al-wujūd*) and those pertaining to *māhiyyah*. The *ahkām al-wujūd*, moreover, are divided into the affirmative (*al-ijābiyyah*) and negative (*al-salbiyyah*), the first dealing with unity and multiplicity, causality, potentiality and actuality, and the like, and the negative with such themes as the fact that *wujūd* has no definition, that it has no parts, etc. As for *ahkām al-māhiyyah*, they are concerned with such issues as whether a *māhiyyah* is simple (*basīṭ*) or compound (*murakkab*), the question of species, genus or specific difference, etc. See S. H. Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought*, chapter 17.

²³It is the famous sentence from the *Shifā'*, "These quiddities (*māhiyyāt*) are by themselves 'possible existents' and existence (*wujūd*) occurs (*ya'rid*) to them from the outside" (وَمَا هِيَ إِلَّا مُمْكِنَاتٌ وَالْوُجُودُ يَأْتِيهِمْ مِنْ خَارِجٍ) which has been the main source of this misunderstanding. See Izutsu, "The Fundamental Structure . . .," pp. 109-10, In section 6 of this work entitled "Is Existence an accident?" Izutsu has given an excellent summary of this question and the reason for the misunderstanding that followed Ibn Sīnā's assertion of the "accidentality" of *wujūd*.

'*araḍ* as used in relation to *wujūd* in the *Shifā*'. In his *Ta'liqāt*, however, which, although not known in the Latin West, had a profound influence upon post-Avicennan philosophy in the Eastern lands of Islam and especially in Persia, Ibn Sīnā makes clear that by '*araḍ* as used in relation to *wujūd* and *māhiyyah* he does not mean accident in relation to substance as usually understood, and he asserts clearly that *wujūd* is an '*araḍ* only in a very special sense. Ibn Sīnā writes,

The 'existence' of all 'accidents' in themselves is their 'existence for their substrata', except only one 'accident', which is 'existence'. This difference is due to the fact that all other 'accidents', in order to become existent, need each a substratum (which is already existent by itself), while 'existence' does not require any 'existence' in order to become existent. Thus it is not proper to say that its 'existence' (i.e. the 'existence' of this particular 'accident' called 'existence') in a substratum is its very 'existence', meaning thereby that 'existence' has 'existence' (other than itself) in the same way as (an 'accident' like) whiteness has 'existence'. (That which can properly be said about the 'accident'—'existence') is, on the contrary, that its 'existence in a substratum' is the very 'existence' of that substratum. As for every 'accident' other than 'existence', its 'existence in a substratum' is the 'existence' of that 'accident.'²⁴

What is essential to note is that this whole analysis is conceptual and not based upon the external world where no *māhiyyah* is ever to be found without *wujūd*. In contrast both to Latin interpreters of Ibn Sīnā and to such Muslim thinkers as Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Ibn Rushd who misunderstood Ibn Sīnā on this point, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī was fully aware of Ibn Sīnā's intentions when he wrote,

Quiddity can never be independent of 'existence' except in the intellect. This, however, should not be taken as meaning that 'quiddity' in the intellect is separated from 'existence', because 'being in the intellect' is itself a kind of 'existence', namely, 'mental existence' [*wujūd dhihnī*], just as 'being in the external world' is 'external existence' [*wujūd khārijī*]. The above statement that *māhiyyah* is separated from *wujūd* in the intellect (*al-'aql*) must be understood in the sense that the intellect is of such a nature that it can observe 'quiddity' alone without considering its 'existence'. Not considering something is not the same as considering it to be non-existent.²⁵

To understand the question of the accidentality of *wujūd* as understood in the later tradition of Islamic philosophy which followed Ibn Sīnā's teachings, it must be remembered that in the "container of the mind," or as the intellect analyzes the nature of reality in itself and *not* in the external world, *māhiyyah* can be conceived purely as itself to which then *wujūd* is "added" or "occurs" from the outside. In the outside world, however, it is in reality the *māhiyyāt* which are "added to" or "occur in" *wujūd*, at least according to the school of the principality of *wujūd* (*aṣālat al-wujūd*) to which we shall soon turn. *Māhiyyāt* (plural of *māhiyyah*) must be understood not as extrinsic limitations or determi-

²⁴Izutsu, "The Fundamental Structure . . .," pp. 110–11. It is interesting, as far as the later history of Islamic philosophy is concerned, to note that this very passage was quoted by Mullā Ṣadrā in his *Kitāb al-mashā'ir*.

²⁵From Ṭūsī's *Sharḥ al-ishārāt*, trans. by Izutsu, p. 105. We have made a slight change by translating *wujūd dhihnī* by "mental existence" rather than "rational existence" which Prof. Izutsu prefers in the text although he refers to "mental existence" as an alternative translation in one of his footnotes.

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²⁶See, for example, 1938), pp. 224ff.

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nations of *wujūd*, but as intrinsic ones which are nothing in themselves and have a reality only in relation to *wujūd* which alone possesses reality.

NECESSITY, CONTINGENCY, IMPOSSIBILITY

One of the fundamental distinctions in the Islamic philosophy of being is that between necessity (*wujūd*), contingency or possibility (*imkān*), and impossibility (*imtinā'*). This distinction, which, again, was formulated in its perfected form for the first time by Ibn Sīnā and stated in many of his works,²⁶ is traditionally called "the three directions" (*al-jahāt al-thalāthah*) and is basic to the understanding of Islamic metaphysics. It possesses, in fact, at once a philosophical and a theological significance to the extent that the term *wājib al-wujūd*, the Necessary Being, which is a philosophical term for God, has been used throughout the centuries extensively by theologians, Sufis, and even jurists and ordinary preachers.

If one were to consider a *māhiyyah* in itself in the "container of the mind," one of three conditions would hold true:

1. It could exist or not exist. In either case there would be no logical contradiction.
2. It must exist because if it were not to exist, there would follow a logical contradiction.
3. It cannot exist because if it were to exist, there would follow a logical contradiction.

The first category is called *mumkin*, the second *wājib*, and the third *mumtani'*. The vast majority of *māhiyyāt* are *mumkin*, such as the *māhiyyah* of man, horse, or star. Once one considers the *māhiyyah* of man in itself in the mind, there is no logical contradiction, whether it possesses *wujūd* or not. Everything in the created order in fact participates in the condition of contingency so that the universe, or all that is other than God (*mā siwa' Llāh*), is often called the world of contingencies (*ālam al-mumkināt*).²⁷

It is also possible for the mind (or strictly speaking *al-'aql*) to conceive of certain *māhiyyāt*, the supposition of whose existence would involve a logical contradiction. In traditional Islamic thought the example usually given is *sharik al-bārī*, that is, a partner taken unto God. Such an example might not be so obvious to the modern mind, but numerous other examples could be given, such as a quantity which would be greater than the sum of its parts, for the supposition of that which is impossible in reality is not itself impossible.

Finally, the mind can conceive of a *māhiyyah* which must possess *wujūd* of necessity, that *māhiyyah* being one which is itself *wujūd*. That Reality whose

²⁶See, for example, the *Ilāhiyyāt* of the *Shifā'* (Tehran, 1305/1887), pp. 597ff; and the *Najāt* (Cairo, 1938), pp. 224ff.

²⁷Contingency or possibility also has another meaning which is related to potentiality which can become actualized and which refers to the potentialities latent in an existent. It is interesting to note that both potentiality and possibility are derived from the same Latin root *posse*, which, furthermore, bears the meaning of power. In this sense possibility is related to the latent creative power of the Divinity. For an in depth discussion of this basic metaphysical issue which cannot, however, be expanded here, see F. Schuon, *From the Divine to the Human*, "The Problem of Possibility," pp. 43-55.

māhiyyah is *wujūd* cannot not be; it is called the Necessary Being or *wājib al-wujūd*. Furthermore, numerous arguments have been provided to prove that there can be but one *wājib al-wujūd* in harmony with the Quranic doctrine of the Oneness of God. The quality of necessity in the ultimate sense belongs to God alone, as does that of freedom. One of the great masters of traditional Islamic philosophy of the beginning of this century, who was devoted to the school of the "transcendent unity of being," in fact asserted that after a life time of study he had finally discovered that *wujūd* or necessity is none other than *wujūd* itself.

This analysis in the "container of the mind" might seem to be contradicted by the external world in which objects already possess *wujūd*. Can one say in their case that they are still contingent? This question becomes particularly pertinent when one remembers that according to most schools of Islamic philosophy what exists must exist and cannot not exist. Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī summarizes this doctrine in his famous poem:

That which exists is as it should be,
That which should not exist will not do so.²⁸

The answer to this problem resides in the distinction between an object in its essence and as it exists in the external world. In itself, as a *māhiyyah*, every object save God is contingent, a *mumkin al-wujūd*. It has gained *wujūd*, and so for it to exist necessarily requires the agency of reality other than itself. Existents are, therefore, *wājib bi'l-ghayr*, necessary through an agent other than themselves. They are necessary as existents by the very fact that they possess *wujūd*, but are contingent in their essence in contrast to the Necessary Being which is necessary in Its own Essence and not through an agent outside Itself.

The distinction between necessity and contingency makes possible a vision of the universe in perfect accord with the Islamic perspective where to God alone belongs the power of creation and existentiation (*ijād*). It is He who said "Be!" and it was. Everything in the universe is "poor" in the sense of not possessing any *wujūd* of its own. It is the Necessary Being alone which bestows *wujūd* upon the *māhiyyāt* and brings them from the darkness of non-existence into the light of *wujūd*, covering them with the robe of necessity while in themselves they remain forever in the nakedness of contingency.

THE CONCEPT AND REALITY OF *WUJŪD*

Islamic philosophy followed a different course from Western philosophy in nearly ever domain despite their common roots and the considerable influence of Islamic philosophy upon Latin Scholasticism. In the subject of ontology most of the differences belong to later centuries when Islamic and Western thought had parted ways. One of these important differences concerns the distinction between the concept (*mafhūm*) and reality (*ḥaqīqah*) of *wujūd* which is discussed in later Islamic metaphysics in a manner very different from that found in later Western thought.

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schools of philosophy corresponding to the important schools of the centuries under the concept of "being" is the *wujūd* is the manifestation of the divine illumination and

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It is also in the Islamic perspective that remained always seen things not Islamic philosophy greater concern philosophers have experience of the speculative mind the act of *wujūd* being cut off from the concept of *wujūd*

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schools of philosophy, which consider *wjūd* to be merely an abstraction not corresponding to any external reality which consists solely of existents. The most important school of Islamic philosophy, however, which flowered during the later centuries under the influence of Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī distinguishes clearly between the concept of *wjūd* and the Reality to which it corresponds. The concept "being" is the most universal and known of all concepts, while the Reality of *wjūd* is the most inaccessible of all realities although it is the most manifest. In fact, it is the only Reality for those who possess the knowledge that results from illumination and "unveiling."²⁹

All later discussions of *wjūd* and *māhiyyah* must be understood in light of the distinction between the concept of *wjūd*, which exists in the "mind," and the Reality of *wjūd*, which exists externally and can be known and experienced provided man is willing to conform himself to what Being demands of him. Here, philosophy and gnosis meet and the supreme experience made possible through spiritual practice becomes the ever present reality that underlies the conceptualizations of the philosophers.

It is also in the light of this experience of *wjūd* that Islamic metaphysics has remained always aware of the distinction between *ens* and *actu essendi* and has seen things not merely as objects which exist but as acts of *wjūd*, as *esto*. If Islamic philosophy did not move, as did Western philosophy, towards an ever greater concern with a world of solidified objects, or what certain French philosophers have called "*la chosification du monde*," it was because the experience of the Reality of Being as an ever present element has prevented the speculative mind of the majority of Muslim philosophers either from mistaking the act of *wjūd* for the existent that appears to possess *wjūd* on its own while being cut off from the Absolute Being, or from failing to distinguish between the concept of *wjūd* and its blinding Reality.³⁰

THE UNITY, GRADATION, AND PRINCIPALITY OF *WJŪD*

1. The Transcendent Unity of Being (*waḥdat al-wjūd*)

The crowning achievement of Islamic philosophy in the domain of metaphysics and especially in ontology is to be found in the later period in Persia in the school which, as already mentioned, has now come to be known as the School of Isfahan,³¹ whose founder was Mīr Dāmād and whose leading light was Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī. It is in the numerous writings of this veritable sage that the vigorous

²⁹In one of the best known verses of the *Sharḥ-i manẓūmah*, Sabziwārī says,

مفهومه بی ادب است
و کانه فی تائید الحزن

Its notion is one of the best-known things. But its deepest reality [*kunh*] is in the extremity of hiddenness. *The Metaphysics of Sabzavārī*, trans. M. Mohaghegh and T. Izutsu (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1977), p. 31. The term (*kunh*) is used by Sabziwārī as being synonymous with *ḥaqīqah*.

³⁰In his introduction to Mullā Ṣadrā's *Kitāb al-mashā'ir*, besides dealing with the thought of Heidegger, Corbin provides an excellent comparison between the course of ontology in the history of Islamic thought and that of the West.

³¹During the past few years with the rise of interest in Shi'ism, a politicized usage of the term "School of Isfahan" has come into vogue employing the term originally coined by Corbin and myself, but in a very different context.

logical discussions of al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, the critiques of al-Ghāzzālī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, the illuminative doctrines of Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī, and the supreme experiential knowledge of the Sufis as formulated by such masters of gnosis as Ibn 'Arabī and Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī became united in a vast synthesis whose unifying thread was the inner teachings of the Quran as well as the *Hadīth* and the sayings of the Shi'ite Imams.³² All of the discussions about *wujūd* and *māhiyyah* which were going on for some seven centuries before the advent of the School of Isfahan in the tenth/sixteenth century (and which have been summarized above) are to be found in the grand synthesis of Ṣadr al-Dīn whose metaphysical doctrine is based upon the unity (*waḥdah*), gradation (*tashkīk*), and principiality (*aṣālah*) of *wujūd*.

As far as the "transcendent unity of Being" or *waḥdat al-wujūd* is concerned, it must be said at the outset that this doctrine is not the result of ratiocination but of inner experience. If correctly understood, it stands at the heart of the basic message of Islam which is that of unity (*al-tawḥīd*) and which is found expressed in the purest form in the testimony of Islam, *Lā ilāha illa' Llāh*, there is no divinity but Allah. This formula is the synthesis of all metaphysics and contains despite its brevity the whole doctrine of the Unity of the Divine Principle and the manifestation of multiplicity which cannot but issue from that Unity before whose blinding Reality it is nothing. The Sufis and also Shi'ite esotericists and gnostics have asked what does divinity (*ilāh*) mean except reality or *wujūd*? By purifying themselves through spiritual practice, they have come to realize the full import of the testimony and have realized that Reality or *wujūd* belongs ultimately to God alone, that not only is He One, but that He is the only ultimate Reality and the source of everything which appears to possess *wujūd*. All *wujūd* belongs to God while He is transcendent *vis-à-vis* all existents. The Quran itself confirms this esoteric doctrine in many ways, such as when it asserts that God is "the First and the Last, the Outward and the Inward" (LIII;3) or when it says, "Wheresoever ye turneth, there is the Face of God."³³

The experience of the "oneness of Being" or the "transcendent unity of Being" is not meant for everyone. Rather, it is the crowning achievement of human existence, the supreme fruit and also goal of gnosis or divine knowledge attainable only through arduous spiritual practice and self-discipline to which must, of course, be added the grace of God and His affirmation (*ta'yīd*).³⁴ Yet, the possibility of this experience has always been present throughout the history of Islam. Its realization could not but have the deepest effect upon philosophy which

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³²On Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī (Mullā Ṣadrā), see in addition to sources mentioned in footnote 11, Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. IV, pp. 54–122; Nasr, "Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī" in Sharīf, pp. 932–60; and J. Morris (trans.), *The Wisdom of the Throne, An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981).

³³On the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, see M. Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century* (Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1971), chapter 5; T. Burckhardt, *An Introduction to Sufi Doctrine*, trans. D. M. Matheson (Wellingborough: D. M. Matheson, 1976), chapter seven; and T. Izutsu, "The Basic Structure of Metaphysical Thinking in Islam," in M. Mohaghegh and H. Landolt (edd.), *Collected Papers on Islamic Philosophy and Mysticism* (Tehran: McGill Univ. Institute of Islamic Studies, Tehran Branch, 1971), pp. 39–72.

³⁴There have been of course those who have grasped the knowledge of *waḥdat al-wujūd* intuitively without the corresponding spiritual discipline, but they are the exceptions bound to be present, for the "spirit bloweth where it listeth."

³⁵See C. Ernst,

³⁶On these two between Ibn Arā (1951), 43–51. Th

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must of necessity be related to and concerned with the fruits of experience. But how different are these fruits in a civilization such as that of the modern West where experience is limited to what is derived from the external senses and based upon existents considered as mere objects or things, and in traditional Islamic civilization where the supreme experience has been not of existents but of Pure Being which can be reached through the inner faculty of the heart and whose act causes the existentialization of all quiddities.

Yet, because the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* is by nature an esoteric one reserved for the intellectual elite (*al-khawāṣṣ*), it has met opposition from within the ranks of exoteric '*ulamā*' throughout the history of Islam while encountering bewildering misunderstandings on the part of Western orientalists during the modern period. Some among the former have accused the followers of *waḥdat al-wujūd* of incarnationism, lack of faith, infidelity (*kufr*) and the like, while the latter have used their favorite pejorative categories such as pantheism, monism, and the like, used in a Western philosophical context and with all the theological anathema that is attached to such terms in Christian theology.

The early Sufis and gnostics spoke of *waḥdat al-wujūd* only through allusions or in daring theophanic locutions (*shaṭḥ*).³⁵ Only from the sixth/twelfth and seventh/thirteenth centuries with such figures as 'Ayn al-Quḍāt Hamadānī, Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī, and especially Ibn 'Arabī did this doctrine become more explicitly formulated, soon to become the dominant metaphysical doctrine in Sufism. Of course it was not accepted by all Sufis. Some simply remained silent on the subject and thought that the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*, which is the fruit of "presential knowledge" (*al-'ilm al-ḥudūrī*), of divine unveiling (*kashf*), and of illumination (*ishrāq*), should not be expounded explicitly beyond a certain degree. Such an attitude is to be seen in some of the greatest masters of gnosis, such as Shaykh Abu'l-Ḥasan al-Shādhilī, the founder of the Shādhiliyyah Sufi Order, which remains to this day one of the most important of Sufi orders from Morocco to the Yemen. Others, while being attached to a Sufi order, openly opposed the doctrine, one of the most famous examples being Taqī al-Dīn ibn Taymiyyah who was a Qādiri Sufi yet strongly opposed Ibn 'Arabī's formulations.

There were also those who opposed the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* by substituting the pole of subject for the object, formulating the doctrine which is known as *waḥdat al-shuhūd* or "unity of consciousness." This school, founded by 'Alā' al-Dawlah Simnānī in the eighth/fourteenth century, was to attract many followers in India including Shaykh Aḥmad Sirhindī who in the tenth/sixteenth century provided one of the most widely accepted formulations of *waḥdat al-shuhūd* in the Indian sub-continent. In fact, much of the intellectual history of Muslim India revolves around the debate between the doctrines of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and *waḥdat al-shuhūd* with immense repercussions not only in the domain of religion but also in the social and political life of the Islamic community.³⁶

In the central lands of the Islamic world itself, the doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd* received extensive treatment in the hands of the later commentators of Ibn 'Arabī

³⁵See C. Ernst, *Words of Ecstasy in Sufism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985).

³⁶On these two doctrines and an attempt at their synthesis, see Mir Valiuddin, "Reconciliation between Ibn Arabī's *Waḥdat al-Wujud* and the Mujaddid's *Waḥdat al-Shuhūd*," *Islamic Culture* 25 (1951), 43-51. This attempt at reconciliation goes back to Shāh Waliyallāh himself.

and of his immediate student Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, such figures as Mu'ayyid al-Dīn al-Jandī,³⁷ 'Afīf al-Dīn al-Tilimsānī, Dā'ūd al-Qayṣarī, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Jāmī, and others.³⁸ This doctrine also began to attract the attention of philosophers and even theologians, especially Shi'ite figures such as Sayyid Ḥaydar Āmulī³⁹ and Ibn Turkah Iṣfahānī.⁴⁰ In fact, as Islamic philosophy became ever more closely wedded to gnosis and the experiential knowledge associated with it,⁴¹ philosophical expositions of *waḥdat al-wujūd* became more prevalent until with Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī, *waḥdat al-wujūd* became the keystone of his whole metaphysics.

There are, to be sure, several different interpretations of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. For the gnostics of the school of Ibn 'Arabī only God may be said to possess *wujūd*. Nothing else even possesses *wujūd* so that the question of how the *wujūd* of a particular existent is related to Absolute Being does not arise. For Mullā Ṣadrā and his followers, however, *waḥdat al-wujūd* means that the Absolute Being bestows the effusion of *wujūd* upon all *māhiyyāt* in such a manner that all beings are like the rays of the Sun of Being and issue from It. Nothing possesses any *wujūd* of its own. A vast and elaborate philosophical structure is created by Mullā Ṣadrā to demonstrate *waḥdat al-wujūd*. But the aim of the sage is really to guide the mind and prepare it for a knowledge which ultimately could be grasped only intuitively. The role of philosophy is in a sense to prepare the mind to receive this illumination and to gain a knowledge which in itself is not the result of ratiocination (*baḥṭh*) but of the "tasting" (*dhawq*) of the truth.

2. Gradation (*tashkīk*)

As for gradation or *tashkīk*, it is closely related to the Ṣadrīan interpretation of *waḥdat al-wujūd* and must be understood in its light although the doctrine itself had a long history before Mullā Ṣadrā. The idea of gradation or the "chain of being" is already to be found in Greek thought, especially in Aristotle and his Alexandrian commentators, and has played a major role in the history of Western thought.⁴² Western medieval and Renaissance philosophers and scientists envisaged a universe in which there was a hierarchy stretching from *materia prima*

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³⁷See al-Jandī, *Sharḥ fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. S. J. Ashtiyani (Mashhad: Mashhad Univ. Press, 1361 [A.H. solar]/1983). Ashtiyani's own work *Hastī az naẓar-i falsafah wa 'irfān* contains a fine summary of various view on *waḥdat al-wujūd* and demonstrates how much the issue has remained alive to this day.

³⁸W. Chittick has devoted numerous studies to this school including his introduction to Jāmī's *Naqd al-nuṣūṣ fī sharḥ naqsh al-fuṣūṣ* (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1977). See also his "Mysticism versus Philosophy in Earlier Islamic History: The al-Ṭūsī, al-Qūnawī Correspondence," *Religious Studies* 17 (1979), 87–104; also his "Ibn 'Arabī and His School" in S. H. Nasr (ed.), *Islamic Spirituality*, vol. 20 of *World Spirituality: An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest* (in press).

³⁹Himself a major commentator of Ibn 'Arabī and his doctrine of *waḥdat al-wujūd*. See H. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. III, pp. 149–213; and Corbin and O. Yahya (edd.), *La Philosophie shi'ite* (Tehran/Paris: A. Maisonneuve, 1969), which contains the text of Āmulī's *Jāmī' al-asrār* as well as his *Fī ma'rifat al-wujūd* (*On the Knowledge of Being*).

⁴⁰His *Tamhīd al-qawā'id*, ed. S. J. Ashtiyani with Persian and English introductions by S. H. Nasr (Tehran: Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, 1976), shows clearly the philosophical concern for this gnostic doctrine.

⁴¹By gnosis is meant '*irfān* or *ma'rifah*, that is, that knowledge which transforms and illuminates, and not the sectarianism of the early history of Christianity.

⁴²The history of this idea was treated in the famous work of A. Lovejoy, *Great Chain of Being* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1936).

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through the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms, man and the angelic realms, and leading finally to God. Each creature in the hierarchy was defined by its mode of being, the more perfect standing higher in the hierarchy.

This scheme, attributed in the West to Aristotle, was not in fact completed in its details until the time of Ibn Sīnā who in his *Shifā'* dealt for the first time with the whole hierarchy, encompassing all the three kingdoms together in a single work. The *De Mineralibus* attributed for centuries to Aristotle, a work which complemented the works of Aristotle and Theophrastus on animals and plants, respectively, was actually a translation of Ibn Sīnā's chapter on minerals from the *Shifā'*. The idea of the hierarchy or "chain of being" (*marātib al-wujūd*) was in fact central to his thought and to Islamic philosophy in general, the doctrine of the hierarchy of beings having its roots in the teachings of the Quran and *Hadīth*.⁴³

In *al-Hikmat al-muta'āliyah* or the "transcendent theosophy" of Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī and later Islamic philosophy in general, this universally held doctrine of gradation gained a new meaning in light of the doctrine of the transcendent unity (*waḥdah*) and principiality (*aṣālah*) of *wujūd*. According to this school, not only is there a gradation of existents which stand in a vast hierarchy stretching from the "floor" (*farsh*) to the Divine Throne ('*arsh*), to use a traditional metaphor, but the *wujūd* of each existent *māhiyyah* is nothing but a grade of the single reality of *wujūd* whose source is God, the Absolute Being (*al-wujūd al-muṭlaq*). The Absolute Being is like the sun and all existents like points on the rays of the sun. These points are all light and are distinguished from other lights not by a specific difference (*faṣl*) as one would have in Aristotelian logic, but by nothing other than light itself. What distinguishes the *wujūd* of various existents is nothing but *wujūd* in different degrees of strength and weakness.⁴⁴ The universe is nothing but the gradation (*tashkīk*) of the single reality of *wujūd* in innumerable degrees of strength and weakness stretching from the intense degree of *wujūd* of the archangelic realities to the dim *wujūd* of the lowly dust from which Adam was made. Gradation is characteristic of *wujūd* while *māhiyyah* cannot accept gradation. To understand the meaning of gradation as it pertains to *wujūd* is to gain the key to the comprehension of that reality which is at once one and many, which is Unity and at the same time the multiplicity that issues from and returns to that Unity.

3. Principiality of *Wujūd* (*Aṣālat al-Wujūd*)

From the time of Mullā Ṣadrā, Islamic philosophers have been deeply concerned with the question of the principiality of *wujūd* or *māhiyyah* and in fact have carried this debate backwards to embrace the whole of the history of Islamic philosophy. The basic question asked by later Islamic philosophies is the follow-

⁴³On Ibn Sīnā's teachings concerning the "chain of being," see Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, pp. 203 ff; see also pp. 51ff. of this work for the significance of this idea in the *Rasā'il* of the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. Ibn Sīnā devoted numerous pages to this doctrine in many of his works and in addition wrote a treatise entitled *Risālah dar ḥaqīqat wa kayfiyyat-i silsila-yi mawjūdāt wa tasalsul-i asbāb wa musabbabāt* (Tehran: Tehran Univ. Press, 1952).

⁴⁴The Ṣadrian exposition of this doctrine is very similar to what Suhrawardī states concerning the nature of light. The light of the sun and a candle are distinguished from each other by nothing other than light. What unites them is the same as what distinguishes them from each other.

ing: Granted that there is a basic distinction between the concepts of *wujūd* and *māhiyyah*, which of these concepts is real in the sense of corresponding to what is real in the concrete object that exists in the external world? The answer to this question is not as simple as it might at first appear, for not only is there the question of *wujūd* and *māhiyyah*, but also of the existent or *mawjūd* and the central problem of the relation between the *wujūd* of various existents.

The whole of Islamic philosophy has been divided into two schools on the basis of this distinction, and numerous treatises have been written by the champions of *aṣālat al-wujūd* against *aṣālat al-māhiyyah* and vice versa. The great champions of *aṣālat al-māhiyyah* are usually considered to be Suhrawardī and Mīr Dāmād who hold that the *māhiyyāt* are real and *wujūd* is merely posited mentally (*i'tibārī*); Mullā Ṣadrā and Ibn Sīnā, along with his followers such as Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭuṣī, have been considered to be followers of *aṣālat al-wujūd*. Because Ibn Sīnā did not accept the unity and gradation of *wujūd* in the Ṣadrian sense, however, his *aṣālat al-wujūd* is in a sense similar to *aṣālat al-māhiyyah*. Mullā Ṣadrā himself wrote that at the beginning of his life as a philosopher he was also a follower of the school of *aṣālat al-māhiyyah* and that only after receiving special divine guidance and inspiration did he come to see the truth of the position of *aṣālat al-wujūd*.⁴⁵ Thus it might be said that there are two grand versions of Islamic metaphysics, one "essentialistic" or based on *aṣālat al-māhiyyah* and identified mostly with the name of Suhrawardī, and one "existentialistic" or based on *aṣālat al-wujūd* and associated with the name of Mullā Ṣadrā. Needless to say, both owe a very great deal to the basic works of al-Fārābī and especially Ibn Sīnā.⁴⁶

Suhrawardī, while interpreting Ibn Sīnā's thesis that *wujūd* is an "accident" (*ʿarīḍ*), considers it to be merely posited in the mind (*i'tibārī*) without corresponding to any reality in the external world; hence his defense of the correspondence of the concept of *māhiyyah* to the reality of an object. Mullā Ṣadrā, on the contrary, after his conversion to the truth of the doctrine of *aṣālat al-wujūd*, raised this principle to the very center of his metaphysical teachings, bringing about a profound transformation in Islamic philosophy which H. Corbin has called a revolution in Islamic thought. In the *Asfār* he takes the followers of *aṣālat al-māhiyyah* to task and provides numerous arguments to prove his

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⁴⁵"In the earlier days I used to be a passionate defender of the thesis that the 'quiddities' are *aṣīl* and 'existence' is *i'tibārī*, until my Lord gave me guidance and let me see His demonstration. All of a sudden my spiritual eyes were opened and I saw with utmost clarity that the truth was just the contrary of what the philosophers in general had held. Praise be to God who, by the light of intuition, led me out of the darkness of the groundless idea and firmly established me upon the thesis which would never change in the present world and the Hereafter. . . . As a result (I now hold that) the 'existences' (*wujūdāt*) are primary 'realities', while the 'quiddities' are the 'permanent archetypes' (*a'yān thābitah*) that have never smelt the fragrance of 'existence'. The 'existences' are nothing but beams of light radiated by the true Light which is the absolutely self-subsistent Existence, except that each of them is characterized by a number of essential properties and intelligible qualities. These latter are the things that are known as 'quiddities,' " (Izutsu, "The Fundamental Structure . . .," pp. 77-78).

⁴⁶There have been a few men such as Shaykh Aḥmad Aḥsā'ī who have sought to accept the views of both schools as being valid, but their claims have not been intellectually satisfactory and have not been favorably received by the most eminent representatives of the various schools of *ḥikmat-i ilāhī*.

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position, some of the most important being based on the unity of the external object and the impossibility of gradation in the *māhiyyāt*. Some of the arguments were later summarized by Sabziwārī in rhyming couplets in his *Sharḥ-i man-ẓūmah* and have become common knowledge among students of traditional Islamic philosophy in Persia.⁴⁷ The basis of acceptance of *aṣālat al-wujūd* by Mullā Ṣadrā, Sabziwārī, and other masters of this school resides, however, not in rational arguments but in the experience of the Reality of *wujūd* in which the intellect itself functions on a level other than that of ordinary life, even if it be the life of a philosopher of great rational powers and analytical acumen.

The acceptance of the unity, gradation, and principality of *wujūd* together constitutes a veritable transformation of earlier schools of Islamic thought. Associated with the name of Mullā Ṣadrā, this perspective in which *wujūd* is seen as the single reality possessing grades and modes from which the *māhiyyāt* are abstracted has also come to be identified with the Khusrawānī or Pahlawī sages and philosophers (*khusrawāniyyūn* and *fahlawiyyūn* in Arabic). These terms refer to the ancient sages of Persia and are derived from the writings of Suhrawardī who saw in their teachings the perfect combination of rational and intuitive knowledge which he identified with the theosophers (sing. *ḥakīm muta'allih*).⁴⁸ It might appear paradoxical that, although Suhrawardī is identified with the school of *aṣālat al-māhiyyah*, the followers of *aṣālat al-wujūd* should be called the Pahlawī sages, using the terminology of the master of the School of Illumination. This paradox disappears, however, if one remembers that although Suhrawardī considered *wujūd* to be merely "mentally posited" (*i'tibārī*), he bestowed all the attributes of *wujūd* upon light (*al-nūr*), while Mullā Ṣadrā and other later philosophers of his school who accepted the unity, gradation, and principality of *wujūd* often identified *wujūd* with light and in fact used the term *kathrah nūrāniyyah* (luminous multiplicity) when they referred to the multiplicity resulting from the gradation of *wujūd*.

THE STRUCTURE OF REALITY

The analysis of the previous pages can be summarized as follows: External reality appears as one ontological block as it presents itself to man through his immediate experience but can be conceptually analyzed into *wujūd* and *māhiyyah*. As far as *wujūd* is concerned, one can distinguish between the concept of *wujūd* and its reality.⁴⁹ Furthermore, the concept or notion of *wujūd* is either of absolute *wujūd* or of a particular mode of existence called portion (*ḥiṣṣah*) of *wujūd* in Islamic philosophy. As for the reality of *wujūd*, it refers either to the all-embracing and general Reality of *wujūd* (*fard 'āmm*) or to particular "units" of the reality of *wujūd* (*fard khāṣṣ*).

The structure of reality is envisaged differently by different schools of Islamic thought depending on how they conceive of these four stages or meanings of *wujūd*. The Ash'arite theologians simply refuse to accept these distinctions,

⁴⁷See Sabziwārī, *The Metaphysics of Sabzavārī*, edd. M. Mohaghegh and T. Izutsu, pp. 32ff. Two of these arguments have been summarized by Izutsu in his "The Fundamental Structure . . .," pp. 80ff.

⁴⁸It must not be forgotten that one of the titles of Mullā Ṣadrā was Ṣadr al-muta'allihīn, literally foremost among the theosophers.

⁴⁹See the masterly analysis of Izutsu in his "The Fundamental Structure . . .," section 7.

whether they be conceptual or belonging to the external world. The school of Mullā Ṣadrā, at the other end of the spectrum of Islamic thought, makes a clear distinction between all four meanings of *wujūd*. Certain philosophers accept only the concept of *wujūd* and deny its reality, while certain Peripatetics accept the reality of *wujūd* but identify the multiplicity in the external world not with the multiplicity of existents but with that of *wujūd* itself so that they identify *wujūd* not with a single reality with grades but with realities (*ḥaqā'iq*). Then there are those thinkers identified with the "tasting of theosophy" (*dhawq al-ta'alluh*), especially Jalāl al-Dīn Dawānī, who believe that there is only one reality in the external world to which *wujūd* refers and that reality is God. There are no other realities to which *wujūd* refers. Finally, there are several schools of Sufism with their own doctrines concerning the relation between the concept and reality of *wujūd*. The most metaphysical of these views sees *wujūd* as the absolute, single Reality beside which there is no other reality; yet there "are" other realities which, although nothing in themselves, appear to exist because they are theophanies of the single Reality which alone Is as the absolutely unconditioned *wujūd*.

Later Islamic philosophy, following upon the wake of the teachings of Ibn Sīnā, displays a remarkable richness of metaphysical, philosophical, and theological teachings concerning the structure of reality, the rapport between unity and multiplicity, and the relation between *wujūd* and *māhiyyah*. All of these schools have sought to demonstrate the unity of the Divine Principle and the relation of the world of multiplicity to that Principle.⁵⁰ Among these schools, which include not only the Ash'arites and the Peripatetics but also Ismā'īlī philosophers and theologians, *ishrāqī* theosophers, and the various schools of Sufism, the "transcendent theosophy" associated with Mullā Ṣadrā represents a particularly significant synthesis of vast proportions. Therein one finds the echo of centuries of debate and analysis concerning *wujūd* and *māhiyyah* and the fruit of nearly a millenium of both the thought and spiritual experience of Muslim philosophers and gnostics.

In this school there is but one Reality, that of *wujūd*. There are not existing objects related to other existing objects. The very existence of objects is their relation to that one *wujūd* which partakes of modes and gradation as do rays of light, modes and gradation from which the mind abstracts the *māhiyyāt*. There is in the universe nothing but the Reality of *wujūd*.

It might of course be asked how in such a perspective one can avoid identifying the world with God and what happens to the central thesis of the transcendence of God emphasized so much by Islam. The answer is provided by the distinction that the "Pahlawī sages" make between the "negatively conditioned" (*bi-sharṭ lā*), "non-conditioned" (*la bi-sharṭ*), and "conditioned by something" (*bi-sharṭ shay*) stages of *wujūd*. These aspects were originally applied by Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī to *māhiyyah* which can be considered as "negatively conditioned," that is, in a complete purity in itself, or as "non-conditioned," as indeterminate in the

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⁵⁰See S. H. Nasr, "Post-Avicennan Islamic Philosophy and the Study of Being," in P. Morewedge (ed.), *Philosophies of Existence* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 1982), pp. 337-42. See also R. M. Frank, "Attribute, Attribution, and Being: Three Islamic Views," pp. 258-78, and P. Morewedge, "Greek Sources of Some Near Eastern Philosophies of Being and Existence," pp. 285-336, in the same volume.

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sense that it can or cannot be associated with something, or as "conditioned by something," that is, associated with some other concept.⁵¹

These distinctions have been applied by the "Pahlawī philosophers" to *wujūd*. Considered as such, "negatively conditioned" *wujūd* is the Absolute, Pure, and Transcendent Being of God. "Non-conditioned" *wujūd* is the expansive mode of *wujūd* which is indeterminate and can determine itself into various forms. It is identified with the act of existention and the "Breath of the Compassionate" (*nafas al-raḥmān*) of the Sufis and is sometimes called the expansive *wujūd* (*al-wujūd al-munbaṣiṭ*). Finally, as "conditioned by something," *wujūd* refers to the actual stages and levels of *wujūd* in particular existents. Moreover, these three levels of *wujūd* are hierarchical. "Negatively conditioned" *wujūd* is the Source and Origin of the Universe, the Reality that is transcendent and yet from which everything issues. "Non-conditioned" *wujūd* stands below that supreme source and is itself the immediate source for the *wujūd* of the existentionated order. Finally, *wujūd* "conditioned by something" comprises the whole "chain of being" from the angels to the pebbles along the seashore.

The Sufi metaphysicians have gone a step beyond the "Pahlawī sages" and criticized them for identifying "negatively conditioned" *wujūd* with God since negatively conditioned still implies a limitation and a condition. The Absolute Being cannot be conditioned or limited in any way even by the condition of being negatively conditioned. They identify, therefore, not "negatively conditioned" but "non-conditioned" *wujūd* with God. Herein lies a major distinction between the metaphysics of the Sufis and of the later philosophers. Nevertheless, the basic structure of reality envisaged by them is the same in that both see beyond the multiplicity of the world a unity which transcends yet determines that multiplicity and in fact is that multiplicity in a *coincidentia oppositorum* that can be grasped only by that intellectual intuition which provides the immediate knowledge granted only to those whom the traditional Islamic sources, following the terminology of the Quran, call people of vision (*ahl al-baṣīrah*), those who in the words of the Quran are "deeply versed in knowledge."

THE EXPERIENCE OF *WUJŪD*

Man lives in the world of multiplicity; his immediate experience is of objects and forms, of existents. Yet he yearns for unity, for the Reality which stands beyond and behind this veil of the manifold. One might say that the *māhiyyah* of man is such that he yearns for the experience of *wujūd*. It is in the nature of man, and in this realm of terrestrial existence of man alone, to seek to transcend himself and to go beyond what he "is" in order to become what he really is. Man's mode of existence, his acts, his way of living his life, his inner discipline, his attainment of knowledge, and his living according to the dictates of Being affect his own mode of being. Man can perfect himself in such a manner that the act of *wujūd* in him is intensified until he ceases to exist as a separate ego and experiences the Supreme Being, becoming completely drowned in the ocean of the Reality of *wujūd*.

Man's spiritual progress from the experience of existents to that of the Absolute

⁵¹See Izutsu, "The Fundamental Structure . . .," pp. 143-44.

Reality of *wujūd* can be compared to seeing objects around a room whose walls are covered with mirrors. Soon the observer looking at the walls realizes that the walls are mirrors and he sees nothing but the mirrors. Finally he sees the objects, yet no longer as independent objects but as reflections in the mirror. In the ascent towards the experience of *wujūd*, man first realizes that objects do not have a *wujūd* or reality of their own. Then he experiences *wujūd* in its Absoluteness and realizes that he and everything else in the universe are literally "no-thing" and have no reality of their own. Finally, he realizes that all things are "plunged in God," that the "transcendent unity of Being" means that *wujūd* is one yet manifests a world of multiplicity which does not violate its sacred unity.

The vast metaphysical synthesis of Islamic sages and philosophers has for its aim the opening of the mind to the awareness of that reality which can only be experienced by the whole of man's being and not by the mind alone. Yet, the doctrines in their diverse forms serve to prepare the mind for that intellection which is supra-rational and to enable the mind to become integrated into the whole of man's being whose center is the heart. Only the person who is whole can experience that wholeness which belongs to the One, to *wujūd* in its Absoluteness.

These Islamic doctrines have also created a philosophical universe of discourse in which the inner dimension of things has never been forgotten, where the act of *wujūd* has been an ever present reality, preventing the reduction of the world to objects and things divorced from the inner dimension as has happened with post-medieval philosophy in the West leading to dire consequences for the human condition. The message of Islamic philosophy, as it concerns the study of *wujūd* and *māhiyyah*, is therefore of great significance for the contemporary world which is suffocating in an environment of things and objects which have overwhelmed the human spirit. This philosophy is also of great significance for a world which lives intensely on the mental plane at the expense of other dimensions of human existence, for although this philosophy speaks to the mind it draws the mind once again to the heart. The heart is the center of the human being and seat of the intellect, where man is able to know experientially that Reality of *wujūd* which determines what we are, from which we issue, and to whose embrace we finally return. It is only in experiencing *wujūd*, not this or that *wujūd* but *wujūd* in its pure inviolability, in its absoluteness and infinity, that man is fully man and fulfills the purpose for which he was drawn from the bosom of *wujūd* to embark upon this short terrestrial journey, only to return finally to that One and Unique *wujūd* from which in reality nothing ever departs.

An Inquiry

IF WE BELIEVE in the possibility of doing so. But with the problem of the predicate from which is not fulfilled, in the critic's view. If through argument we find ways in which the tradition because the proposition does not; we expect our

I do not intend a discussion of the existence theory of the world of view. Rather first by asking what that kind of definition is, well whether it is and to what degree it is ship.

Let us delve into the work expressed in *Being and Time*. The work fulfills an intention of Heidegger, as we see in the argumentation but we are bound to the Being.

This connects to the broader dimensions of the meaning of Being in interpersonal relationships demonstrated in the meaning of truth. The truth enters into