

Mulla Sadra's Anthropology – with an Emphasis Upon the Perfect Man

SEYYED MOHSEN MIRI

Al-Mustafa International University, Iran,
smmiri@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT: Mulla Sadra, the great Islamic philosopher who founded a new philosophical school called Transcendent Wisdom, held his own specific views on anthropology in general and upon the perfect man in particular. By reviewing the general principles of his school, the present essay discusses Mulla Sadra's perspective on the perfect man and his characteristics from various aspects.

KEYWORDS: Mulla Sadra, anthropology, perfect man, the four intellectual journeys

Introduction

As we know, Mulla Sadra gathered different perspectives within his comprehensive philosophy and had his own unique viewpoints on a variety of philosophical problems, including the creation of the soul. With regard to the human soul, Mulla Sadra believed that it was corporeal in the beginning, but gradually becomes abstract and free of matter by passing through various states – from solid to vegetable, from vegetable to animal and from animal to human – while retaining the same identity throughout all its various transformations.

Mulla Sadra held that human beings are of two aspects: physical and spiritual. Through bringing their speculative and practical faculties to perfection, while following an ascetic path to purify their hearts, they can attain a station of perfection

that no one else can attain. Indeed, they can attain such proximity to God that that they would become a mirror which reflects God and His Attributes. However, the status of the perfect man is unconditionally higher than ordinary men.

In order to have a correct comprehension of Mulla Sadra's concept of the perfect man, it is necessary to mention certain philosophical essentials, as well as Mulla Sadra's pre-suppositions, which play roles in the exposition of the structure of this topic.

Self-Evidence and the Necessity of the Essence of Reality

Despite some original and existing viewpoints which deny any kind of reality, while holding that no extension of reality has been actualized – such as what Gorgas, the extreme sophist, is believed to have said – Mulla Sadra believed that the essence and actualization of reality is not only certain and decisive but self-evident and necessary and it cannot be in any way denied or even doubted. For denying or doubting 'the' reality entails that the denier or doubter has accepted some realities (such as his own reality, the reality of understanding, the reality of reasoning, the reality of the person for whom he argues, etc.) before his denial.¹

The Principality of Existence

After accepting the essence of reality, we should then answer the philosophical question of whether objective fact and reality belongs to existence or to quiddity. For whenever we think of an objective fact, such as a tree, two of its modes come to mind – the concept of the tree which makes it distinctive from other things, such as man, stone, etc. and which in fact expresses the quiddity of the tree, and the concept of existence in which the tree shares all other objective things. And since there is only one reality in the external world, we should find out which of those two modes is actualized, existent, principal and is the origin of external impressions in the external world and furthermore, which of them is merely an intellectual, abstract, and non-principal concept whose actualization in the external world is figurative and subject to the other.

Among the Muslim philosophers who appeared before Mulla Sadra, such figures as al-Farabi, Avicenna, Bahmanyar, Suhrawardi, and Mir Damad had taken

the question of the principality of existence, or quiddity, into consideration, however it was Mulla Sadra who concentrated on the issue and made it the most canonical subject of his philosophy, holding that the issue of quiddity is the basis of several other philosophical issues. Following his master, Mir Damad, Mulla Sadra initially believed in the principality of quiddity but later returned to the theory of the principality of existence, and, while considering that return to be a divine gift, established a number of arguments in its favor.

In this regard, he asserts:

I used to support them strongly in their belief in the principality of quiddity until the time came when my Lord guided me in realizing that...the converse is the case.²

Mulla Sadra held that believing in the principality of quiddity creates a lot of serious, unsolvable problems in philosophical arguments whereas by believing in the principality of existence all those problems can be solved. ‘The exposition of conditions of connection of the effect with the cause’ (i.e., the essential, fundamental need of the effect for the cause, which in turn is a basis for solving several other major philosophical issues such as denying fatalism [*al-jabr*] and delegation [*al-tafwid*] and so on) and the ‘trans-substantial evolutionary motion of matter’ are only two examples of issues affected by the issue of principality of existence.³

Gradation of the Essence of Existence

After the principality of existence, whether or not existence is one and whether the universe is under the domination of unity or multiplicity needs to be discussed. There are different viewpoints concerning the issue, some of which are as follows:

1. The viewpoint of certain Sufis and mystics who believe in sheer unity, holding that existence is one affair and has only one extension, i.e., the Truth. Things other than Him are endowed with no objective, external existence and thus are all illusions and imaginations, or, at most, manifestations of the Truth – like a wave compared to the sea – and have no objective existence anyway.

2. The viewpoint of sheer multiplicity, which is attributed to the Peripatetics, says that a reality of multiplicity exists in the external world and all existents such as God, man, stars, etc. are external realities that are endowed with an objective, real existence but are distinct from one another; that is, each of them are distinct from others by their own complete essence and reality. Thus, unity in the external world is an unreal affair.
3. Mulla Sadra's viewpoint is of unity in multiplicity (graded unity). He believed that his perspective was immune to extremes like that of the other two viewpoints. Mulla Sadra established his argument by using the ancient Iranian philosophers' belief in the unity of multiplicity (gradation) concerning the light.⁴ He believed that, despite the viewpoint of some mystics, multiplicity in external, objective existence is an undeniable, real affair. As God is an objective existence, matter, spirit, man, etc. are therefore objective, real existents as well. However, contrary to what Peripatetic philosophers hold, it is not true that those multiplicities have no unifying aspect and external connection and are essentially distinct from one another. Rather, this multiplicity refers to some kind of objective unity.

Using the example of light, Mulla Sadra asserted that, although light has many extensions, such as the sun, the moon, or a candle, etc., which are different from one another in intensity, they are all similar in the essence of being light. Here the common factor (i.e., light) is the very distinguishing factor, for what is not light (i.e., darkness) cannot make a difference. The point is the same with existence. The essence of God and of all beings in the universe are at once real, objective 'multiples' and real, objective 'ones'. They all are connected to one another in the essence of existence and are considered one reality, but each one is endowed with either a weak or an intensified level of existence. This difference is caused by nothing but existence itself, for nothing can be externally effective in the universe but existence. Thus, Mulla Sadra's existential hierarchy is shaped.⁵ Taking into consideration these three principles (self-evidence and the necessity of the essence of reality, the principality of existence, and the gradation of existence) has prepared the ground for accepting man as an undeniable reality who is endowed with a certain level of existence.

***Cause and Effect Relation among Existents
(and Truth's Relation with Other Existents)***

There is a special relation among all existents and that is the cause and effect relation. There is no single existent that is outside of this chain. The head of the chain is, of course, merely cause and the end of it is only effect, but there is no existent that is neither a cause nor an effect. The reason is that, for their actualization, existents are either in need of, or not in need of, something else. The first is a needy existent, which is an effect, and the second is the necessary being whom all existents need.

Since Mulla Sadra held that it is existence which is principal and which is endowed with reality (and not quiddity), he therefore holds that making and causality are on an existential axis and the creative cause is considered the cause of the effect because of its granting existence to the effect by leading it from non-existence to existence. The objective, external existence of the effect is greatly dependent upon the existence of its creative cause and has no independence or dependence upon itself. In other words, it is not true that each cause and effect has an existence separate and independent of the others and that there is an external connection out of their essences which links them. Rather, the entire existence and essence of the effect is the very dependence and attachment to the cause. Mulla Sadra writes:

Whatsoever is an effect of an agent is in essence connected and related to the latter and thus its essence per se must be exactly the same with connection and relation to the agent.⁶

On the other hand, each effect, because of its full cognation with its cause, manifests in itself the existent of the cause as much as its amplitude. The effect is basically the manifestation and appearance of its cause, that is, the cause appears in the effect with its whole existence and its whole perfection and the only distinguishing point between them is the weakness of existence and perfection in the effect and the intensity of them in the cause. Thus, the whole universe is composed of a chain of objective existents in which the consistency of any connection is due to its higher link which is more perfect than its inferior. The chain of causes goes further until it stops at the Origin of Existence who is limitless in the intensity of His Existence and encompasses all contingency levels while at the same time establishing their existence.

No single existent is independent of Him, rather they are all in need of and dependent upon Him.

Thus, now we realize that the effect is in need of the cause not only in its originatedness but, according to the same criterion, in its continuance as well.⁷

This principle is important because man, especially the perfect man, is a being created by God and is a name of His Names who is, on the one hand, in need of His Grace and Mercy in each moment and is, on the other hand, a sign of the Truth.

The Flow and Actualization of All Perfections and Attributes of Perfection in All Levels of Existence

Mulla Sadra held that all perfections and attributes of perfection are to be found in existence and not in anything else, for there is nothing which is outside of existence but non-existence and quiddity.

Non-existence is annihilation and quiddity is the limitation of existence whose actualization is dependent upon existence. Thus all perfections are actualized in existence. On the other hand, existence has different levels of intensity and weakness. The Necessary Being contains all such perfections as life, power, knowledge, love, etc. necessarily and limitlessly because of His necessary and limitless existence, while other existents, even those at the lowest level, which are in fact his effects, are endowed with those perfections and attributes in a limited manner according to their existential amplitude. It can be said, therefore, that every existent is somehow endowed with such existential perfections as life, knowledge, and power.⁸ 'Existence in its various grades is the same as knowledge, power, will, and all other existential attributes'.⁹

According to this principle, the perfect man – depending upon his existential extension which is unique next to the Truth – is the most complete manifestation of all attributes of perfection as well as God's Names and Attributes. That is, the perfections and attributes of life, power, vision, knowledge, etc. of this man is higher and deeper than any other being.

Levels of Existence in the Arcs of Descent and Ascent

According to Mulla Sadra, existence is like a circle whose ending point is its inception. This circle is divided into two arcs of descent and ascent, each of which has certain levels and steps. In the arc of descent, existence begins from the Truth and passes through three worlds of intellects, ideas, and matter which are the creatures and effects of the Truth and are dependent upon one another respectively. Each level of these three levels of existence has in turn numerous other levels. The last and weakest level of the world of matter is an existent called prime matter which is at the end of the arc of descent.

Subsequently, the arc of ascent will commence, which is exactly the same with, but contrary to, the arc of descent and, therefore, is divided into those three worlds. By passing through those three levels, existents can evolve, and, at the end of this arc, they can return to the existence of the Truth as the end for all existents is the very existence from which the arc of descent had begun.¹⁰

1. Existence of the Necessary Being. The first level of existence is the Necessary Being who is independent, limitless, and not in need of others; while all existents and existential levels are in need of Him.

There is no compound (such as matter and form, genus and differentia, existence and quiddity, etc.) which would cause need in His Essence and Existence. Rather, He is Pure Existence and is not affected by motion, inertia, time, place, or any other material or non-material deficiencies. All attributes of perfection such as knowledge, power, life, etc. are to be found in Him, and His Attributes are also necessary, limitless, and not in need of others. Although those attributes are different from one another in concept and are distinguished from the essence of the necessary being, they are all existent by one necessary existence which is the essence of the Truth. In other words, all those attributes are extensionally the very essence of the Truth.¹¹

2. World of Intellects. The existents of this world are like the Necessary Being post-time and post-place, and are both abstract in their essences and their acts, however they are creatures and effects of the Truth and their existences are contingent, suffering from the limitations and deficiencies of being both

effect and creature. These existents are the most perfect creatures who are agents between the Truth and their inferiors and who transfer good, existence, and all other perfections from Him to them and, therefore, being their inferior causes, have all their perfections in a more perfect manner.¹²

These existents have their own hierarchy. The First Emanation (*al-Sadir al-Awwal*) is the highest existent in which there is no veil between it (the existent) and God and is always in the station of union and meeting with God. He is endowed with two aspects which enable him to be an agent between the Truth and other existents. One aspect is his cognition with the Truth due to his intensified existence and the other is his cognition with creatures due to his createdness. These two conations, at that extent, are not to be found in any other existent. That very existent is the reality and the interior of 'the perfect man; in the final step of his perfection, i.e., union with the Truth, becomes unified with the First Emanation. The First Emanation is also called the First Intellect (*al-Aql al-Awwal*), the Greatest Spirit (*al-Ruh al-A'dham*), the Muhammadan Truth (*al-Haqiqat al-Muhammadiyah*), etc.

By the generation of the existents of the World of Intellects, multiplicity gradually manifests in existence and prepares the ground for the generation of the next world'.¹³

The last link of the World of Intellects in this gradual descent is the Active Intellect (*al-Aql al-Fa'al*), which is the closest abstract intellect to the soul – and which is derived from the former – and in which all intellectual forms are present in the form of an All-Comprehensive Intellect and with which souls prepared for the intellection become unified with and would benefit from intellectual forms. The Active intellect (*al-Aql al-Fa'al*) grants forms to the world and new forms are flowed from it at any moment in order to feed the matter of the world.¹⁴

The perfect man would become unified with the Active Intellect in the station of perfection of his speculative faculty – as will be mentioned.

3. World of Ideas. The existents of this world who are creatures of the last existent in the chain of the World of Intellects, are essentially abstract and immune to motion and change, however they do have some impressions of matter, such as quantity, shape, quality, etc. This existential world is in fact

between the World of Intellects and the World of Matter. Existence in this world has its own hierarchy and every existent's position is determined by its existential perfection. The existents of this level of existence are the cause of their inferiors, i.e., the existents of the world of matter, and are endowed with their perfections in a more perfect manner.¹⁵

4. Material or Corporeal World. This world, which is also called the Sensible World (*al-'Alam al-Mahsus*), lies at the last level of existence. Motion, change, and graduality are among those fixed characteristics of this world. The existents of this world differ from those of the two previous worlds by being both essentially and actually material. The World of Matter has its own hierarchy as well, the last of which is Prime Matter (*al-Maddat al-'Ula* or *al-Hayula al-Ula*) and which is in fact sheer preparedness and potentiality and is void of any actuality while being the recipient of all actualities. This existent will attain the existential perfections of a certain level when it receives the actualities of that level.

The existents of this world are both material and bodiless in three dimensions. Actualization in a particular place, the ability of being divided into smaller parts, and being time-bound are a few characteristics of the body. Bodily affairs are such things as color, shape, and numerous attributes and diseases are actualized by and dependent upon the body. As perfect man is material both bodily and spiritually at the inception of his existence, he begins his motion towards the desirable perfection from the lowest level of this material world.

It should be noted that all these levels are exactly repeated in the arc of ascent which commences from the Prime Matter (*al-Maddat al-'Ula* or *al-Hayula al-'Ula*) and ends with the Truth.

As will be mentioned, man has commenced his evolutionary motion in the arc of ascent from material levels and can ascend to the station of unification with the Truth.¹⁶

Trans-Substantial Motion of Matter

Motion, as Aristotle has said, is the actualization of the potentiality of a thing. The followers of Aristotle accepted motion and change in the world of matter but only in four accidental categories of quantity, quality, situation, and place and denied motion in the substance of things. Mulla Sadra believed that motion and renewal occurs in each moment not only in accidents but also in the substances and essences of things. Like mystics, he considered the world as an ever-flowing river which is renewed at every moment. The matter of any existent takes on a new form and attains a higher perfection without abandoning its previous perfection, form, or cloth.

According to Mulla Sadra, the body consists of matter, bodily form, and specific form. Matter is the potential aspect of the body which enables the body to accept different forms; bodily form is the actuality of the matter which exists in all bodies; and specific form is what determines the species of the body. According to trans-substantial motion, at any moment both of these forms change, matter wears a new cloth, and the entire matter and its previous form becomes the matter for the next form. The earth, sky, all living beings, and the entire universe itself are never calm and in peace. Thus, by any new form they receive new life, actuality, and new perfection. Gradual perfection, therefore, occurs in the body and thus the continual creation of the universe takes place through the agency of God.¹⁷ As man has two aspects which are in turn both material and abstract, this trans-substantial motion exists in his material aspect.

Goal-Seekingness of the Universe

All existents of the universe – save God – including the World of Intellects, of Ideas, and of Matter are essentially striving for higher perfection and move in search of a goal and a final end. They will certainly not bring their striving and moving to an end unless they attain absolute existential perfection, i.e., Almighty God, while passing through various evolutionary levels before attaining Him. The whole universe, therefore, engages in a goal-seeking whose final or end-goal is attaining the Truth.

According to the principality and gradation of existence, trans-substantial motion, etc., and to the said principle above, matter can move from the lowest level of existence toward the highest level of being. Thus, the arc and level of existential

ascent is shaped.

The exposition of these preliminaries has prepared the ground for expounding upon the status of man and how he can attain the position of the perfect man. Thus, the concept of the perfect man can be thoroughly comprehended through expounding certain arguments concerning man.¹⁸

Material Generation (al-Huduth) of the Soul

Mulla Sadra believed that man consists of two parts: the body and the soul. The body is the material existent which is in unity with the soul and is used instrumentally by the soul in the latter's way towards perfection.¹⁹

Concerning the soul and its generation in the body, he holds that the former first appears in the form of a body and then, through evolutionary trans-substantial motion, gradually intensifies its existence and passes from potentiality to actuality by an elevation from the bodily situation to the vegetable, then to the animal, and finally to the intellectual human soul. In fact, that soul was on the actual body and potential vegetable in the womb, then, by growing in the womb, it became an actual vegetable and a potential animal, and later, when it was born, it became an actual animal and a potential man, and finally, in its maturity, it became an actual man.

Generally speaking, the evolutionary travelling of the soul is something which, by and through trans-substantial motion, it can absolutely attain the station of being abstract from matter, finding at each moment a new life in a new state by dying to its previous form. The soul receives new potentials in every state of its journey. When the soul is in the state of solid form, it has the potentiality of preserving new forms; in the form of a vegetable, it is endowed with the potential of being fed and grown; in the form of an animal, it has the potential of motion and numerous kinds of lust and several external and internal senses such as memory and imagination; and finally, in the form of a human, it is endowed with five complete inner senses such as common sense (which comprehends the forms), illusion (which comprehends particular concepts), imagination (which preserves the forms), recollection (which preserves concepts), and thinking (which manages sensible and intellectual concepts).²⁰

The soul, which is of material generation, will attain eternity in the level of permanence. Such attainment will take place in this world by utilizing the body and the material world. Perfect man will attain the Truth while preserving his previous evolutionary levels which are in need of actualizing both speculative and practical faculties of the soul whose exposition is as follows.

Speculative and Practical Faculties of the Human Soul as a Path to Attainment of the Position of the Perfect Man

Man's soul is endowed with two faculties in order to attain perfection and higher levels: the speculative and the practical.

A. The Speculative Faculty: pertains to man's intellect, comprehension, and understanding and has four levels:

1. Potential Intellect (*al-Aql bi al-Quwwah*):

This level is accompanied with the soul from its very beginning and is, like the soul itself, poor while having no self-evident and speculative intelligible affairs. This state of soul existence is the last level of the bodily world and the first level of entering metaphysics.

2. Possessive Intellect (*al-Aql bi al-Malakah*):

This level, which occurs immediately after the previous one, is actualized by the acquisition of primary intelligible affairs (concept and assent) or primary data, data by experiment, data by transmission, etc. (in which all people are common) such as 'the whole is bigger than the part, lying is indecorous', 'one is half of two', and so on. Those perceptions are necessary to actualize the next level.

3. Actual Intellect (*al-Aql bi al-Fi'l*):

When those intelligible affairs are generated for the soul, the reflection and longing for inferring intelligible affairs which it has not comprehended yet will be brought about in man so that it will in turn make him reflect voluntarily by using his previous savings to achieve a new mental, acquired understanding. Although speculative, intellectually known objects are not actually present

within the intellect, they will be learned as soon as the soul wills. Thus there would then be no need for proof-seeking and the motion of thought to the known and from the known to the unknown; for frequent observations of speculative and intellectually known objects, intellectual motions towards the bountiful principle, and being connected to that principle, have caused the connection-possession and intelligible affairs of the intellect, therefore, they will be actually present with it.

4. Acquired Intellect (*al-Aql bi al-Mustafad*):

This level of intellect is exactly the same as the Actual Intellect save this point – all speculatively known objects are actually present with it and there is no need for will and attention. The reason is that the soul observes all the self-evident and speculative intelligible forms which conform with higher and lower Truths without any material intermediary while it is connected to the Active Intellect (*al-Aql al-Fa'al*) and thus such an intellectual world becomes similar to the objective world. That is why such intellect is called acquired, due to the benefits it receives from outside itself, i.e., the Active Intellect.

From this aspect, man is the perfection of the World of Return just as the Active Intellect is the perfection and end of the World of Inception; for the final end of the creation of the material world is the creation of man and the end of the creation of man is the level of Acquired Intellect, i.e., the observation of intelligible affairs and the connection to the higher world.

When discussing the faculties of the soul, Mulla Sadra deals with the sacred faculty and asserts that if a soul in this level is distinguished from other souls due to its multiple primary data, intensified talent and rapid acceptance of intellectual lights, it should be called a sacred faculty which reaches the result in the shortest time without any need for the acquisition of preliminaries.²¹

B. The Practical Faculty:

The practical faculty also has four levels in order to attain perfection.

1. The purification of appearance by observing the divine laws and religious precepts such as prayer, fasting, alms-giving, care for relatives, and so on.

2. The purification of the heart from immorality.
3. The ornamentation of the soul with sacred forms and virtues.
4. The annihilation of the soul into God while exclusively observing the Lord and His Kingdom - which is end of the first journey.²²

***Purpose of the Creation of the World
and the Necessity of a Successor***

1. God knows the forms of things in His Essence before creating them and: 'Because of the love of His Own Essence and of the Manifestation of His Essence and Attributes by emerging from veils and due to His Necessary Reign of His Pre-Eternal Essence, His High Attributes, and His Encompassing Mercy and Care, He willed, by His Essential Will, to expound His Divine Kingdom, raise the flag of His Lordship by actualizing those intelligible forms and bringing about creatures in the external world so that they can achieve perfections and graces and can know Him and His Essence, Attributes, and Names'.²³

It is known, therefore, that firstly as His Essence is the creator and agent of the world 'with respect to the existence and in the arc of descent, all beings are emanated from Him; His Essence is the final goal and end of the universe in the arc of ascent by which existents elevate and attain Him; and secondly, the purpose of creation is God's Manifestation in the world.²⁴

2. Now that God wills to create the universe in the arc of descent in different existential levels, His Sacred Essence is naturally higher than created existents that are necessarily limited by several aspects, such as poverty, need, substance, contingency, possibility, motion, and so on, without an intermediary; for, on the one hand, His Existence is limitless and endless due to His Majesty, while on the other hand, the existential cognation and pertinence between these two are very poor. There would be, therefore, the need for an existent who would become God's successor – in initiation, effusion, protection, and care for creatures – and who would reflect the Truth's Attributes and Names.

‘Such a successor is endowed with full cognation with God on the hand by which he seeks assistance and grace from Him and with contingency and createdness by which he transfers grace to the creatures.’²⁵

This successor is called the Greatest Spirit, the Prime Intellect, or the Muhammadan Truth, etc. and is the first creature of the Truth who is created without any intermediary and is considered in relation to all his inferiors in both the material and non-material worlds as form and soul pertaining to the matter and the body and is endowed with all of their perfections in a more perfect and more complete manner. The inner Truth of the Greatest Spirit is what man attains in the arc of ascent and thereby deserves succession.

3. Why should man be this successor and no one else? Mulla Sadra believed that it is only man who can achieve that succession and intermediary status and no other creature, even angels and intellectual, luminous existents can achieve anything similar. The explanation is that what cause the natural transmission of an inferior existent to the higher level is (1) its poor actual and formal aspect; (2) its too much potentiality; and (3) finally the agent’s care in granting grace upon it. For when something actualizes its potentiality and brings to an end such preparedness, it will naturally lose its ability in that existential boundary. Another notable point is that, compared to all other existents, including angels, souls, animals, vegetables, and solids, man is endowed with less actuality and more potentiality in proportion to his level. In other words, he is the weakest being in the world at the time of his generation.

For instance, man, who is a type of animal, is weaker than other animals in the form and actuality of beasthood such as sensibility, motion, self-defense, sense of smell, etc. and is endowed with less stability. This weakness in beasthood, having more potential and less actual aspects, grants him the opportunity of passing this existential level much more easily and entering a higher existential level compared to that of other animals. The case is the same with all other existents such as solids, demons, Jinns, and even angels; because angels are stable in their existential actuality, having no motivation for more perfection due to their constant proximity to God. But man, because of his very weakness, is endowed with the full potential to reach

the end of ends and thus there can be no predicable station for him. He can achieve a cognation with God and the perfections and actualities that he can attain are impossible for other existents.²⁶

In order to achieve the desirable perfection, man should have a long, spiritual journey which necessitates certain spiritual evolutions within him. This journey should contain two aspects:

- a) The speculative aspect, which has already been discussed in the topic of speculative faculty of the soul.
- b) The practical aspect, which is actualized in four levels.

The Four Intellectual Journeys

Following such mystics as 'Abd al-Razzaq al-Kashani, Mulla Sadra believed in four human journeys of inner, spiritual significance. They were of such importance for him that he based the discipline and structure of his philosophical system on those four journeys in his corpus *al-Hikmah al muta'aliyah fi al-asfar al-aqliyyah al-arba'ah*.

The four journeys can be explained as follows:

When man comes into this world, the World of Matter, he knows of nothing but eating and drinking as other beasts do. Other characteristics of the soul, such as lust, anger, greed, jealousy, stinginess, and so on – such characteristics and temperaments are brought about by being in a veiled form of existence – will appear gradually. In this stage, he is like a beast, having no motion towards the Truth and the Transcendent World, being involved in mundane intentions originating from lust and anger, paying full heed to multiplicity, dark veils, and lusts, and is prohibited from observing the Light and the Truth.

When he is awakened from his heedlessness and becomes conscious, he realizes that he has been at the service of his lusts, having been neglectful that beyond those beastly pleasures there are spiritual joys of a higher level. Thus, turning his back to worldly pleasures, bad deeds, ignorance, and obedience to carnal desires, he turns towards the Truth and commences his spiritual journey. This is the inception of the first journey – which is travelling from creatures to the Truth and from multiplicity

to the unity with which the wayfarer starts his migration to the Truth through migrating from himself and neglecting his worldly desires. In this way, he avoids any obstacle and prevents himself from thinking any thought which will avert his mind from the Truth while taking account of his soul's deeds and sayings and being wary of the tricks of his *nafs*; for the love of lusts is an inherent characteristic of the carnal soul.

By being released from the carnal soul, his heart will be illuminated by the spiritual light which will in turn enlighten his inner self and will clean and purify his life. He will gradually get closer to the Truth and will enjoy a delightful proximity with his beloved. The wayfarer will then bypass the Material World and will enter the World of Ideas (*Alam al-Mithal or al-Barzakh*). The Gate of the Kingdom is thus opened to him and lights from the unseen in the form of ideals will frequently appear to him. But he has not finished yet; for although he has replaced the dark veils of ignorance and lust with the lights of the heart, he should bypass those lights and spiritualities (which, because of their limitedness, are in turn veils of the light, and prevent one from attaining higher perfection) in order to achieve a higher state, that is, to attain the Truth.

The motivation and cause for his hunger to rend the worldly veils is a spiritual pleasure that the wayfarer tastes in this station and which encourages him to increase his meditation, recollection, and solitude in order to empty his heart from love of anything but the Truth. In this stage, certain states of ecstasy, intoxication, longing and consternation appear upon the wayfarer. By avoiding being satisfied with these states, he eliminates them one by one so that he receives deeper and more mysterious Truths and hence attains actualization and stabilization in his intuitive and apocalyptic observations of the World of Ideas.

The next stage, after passing the World of Ideas, consists of entering the World of Intellects in which intellectual Truths and Lights will appear temporarily to him yet will disappear rapidly. This temporality would then be replaced with a Divine, Spiritual *Ataraxia* (Tranquility) which makes those lights and states his habitat. Here, while observing the abstract intellects and the triumphal lights, he actualizes their lights within himself. The lights of Divine Unity and Truth will then appear to him, and while absorbing the mount of his 'is-ness' into the essential existence of the

Truth attains the station of extinction in the Truth and becomes unified with the Truth. This is the end of the first journey.

The second journey is the journey from the Truth to the Truth Himself which is accomplished by the Truth Himself. This journey is wayfaring from the Truth's Essence to His Attributes and Names one by one so that the wayfarer can observe all of the Truth's Perfections and intuitionally witness all His Attributes save what He preserves with him.

In this state, in addition to the wayfarer's essence, which is already annihilated into the Truth's Essence, his attributes and actions will be annihilated into the Attributes and Actions of the Truth. More importantly, he will be annihilated from this annihilation itself, that is, he will become heedless to that annihilation, and thus will attain the station of perfection and *wilayat* by bringing to an end the circle of the latter. Here the wayfarer has attained great perfection and happiness even if he remains in the station of annihilation and does not venture into the further state of sobriety.

The third journey, which is the journey from the Truth to the creatures by the Truth, commences with the end of that annihilation and elimination when the wayfarer becomes absolutely conscious and sober as well as subsistent with the Divine Subsistence.

He embarks on the journey to descendant worlds (abstract beings, souls, and material beings) and observes all those worlds and their impressions clearly. In this state, he informs people about the Truth's Essence, Attributes, and Actions, although he is not a Prophet. The wayfarer's heart in this state has such amplitude and capacity to include both the Truth and other creatures. This is why he is able to endure the responsibility of messengerhood, while in the previous state he was overcome with observing the beauty and perfection of the Truth and was heedless of himself and other creatures.

The fourth journey is the journey from the creatures to the creatures by the Truth, in which the wayfarer observes all the creatures and their impressions and becomes absolutely aware of the causes of happiness and wretchedness and will know the circumstances of returning to the Truth. Such a person is a Prophet, and in this

state, he deals with the guidance and education of the inhabitants of this dark world, leading them to the light and the true life. Since those observations are conducted by the Truth Himself, he will not become heedless of the Truth by paying attention to the creatures. Whatever he observes and feels in the universe, he observes the Truth with it as well. Actually, it is by the Truth's Light that he observes and feels them. He tastes the transcendent flavor of the Truth in everything.

This will not, however, create any multiplicity and incarnation on the part of the Truth. In a very well-known sacred tradition, the Almighty says:

My servant has not gained access to my proximity better than by what I have made compulsory against him. And he always gains access to my proximity by what I have recommended (which is not compulsory) so that I would love him; and when I love him, I shall be his ear by which he listens, I shall be his eye by which he sees, and I shall be the hand by which he takes.²⁷

Another notable point in man, who was chosen as God's successor from among all other beings, is that perfect man is endowed with all levels of the chain of existence – a station which no other being, not even intellects, can attain. In other words, he is the comprehensive being who contains all beings in all worlds, and that is why he is called the microcosm. For he is endowed with sheer abstract being, like higher intellects and even the First Emanation, ideal being, and material being, while all other existents lie only on their specific level.

Characteristics of the Perfect Man

Some of the characteristics of the perfect man were mentioned in previous topics while others are as follows:

1. The power to bring about things in the external world. As we know, the creative power of all human beings concerning subjective concepts is such that, whenever they will to imagine something in their minds, it would be there by their mere will without any need for any preliminaries, conditions, or lapse of time. The perfect man, who is a mystic because of his death from all material belongings and pleasures, his inner cleanliness, the illumination

of his soul by the lights of obedience, fellowship, and love of God, his attainment of annihilation in the Truth and the achieving of eternity by His Eternity, has also attained such position as mind in bringing about the subjective concepts and God in creating external existences to actualize things in the external world by the mere willing of them.

His command would penetrate into all levels of existence, he would be given the gift of creation, his prayer would be considered in all worlds, and the inwardly kingdom, angels, and all other existents would be at his service. Such position is called the 'Station of Be', for whenever he orders something and says 'Be!', it will become.

It should be noted that, according to the Islamic viewpoint, all the people of heaven will be endowed with such power in the Hereafter, but the perfect man has that power even in this world.

And the mystic may attain a station called the station of 'Be' ... Thus, his situation will be as that of the people of paradise – although he is still in the material world – he will not say 'be' to anything unless it will exist.²⁸

2. Since God has transformed the inner aspect and spirit of perfect man through his manifestation, he will be resurrected in this world before the compulsory entrance into the coming one. He would get out of his material, bodily grave and will voluntarily die to his this-worldly life while becoming alive with the coming-world life while he is still in this world. In his new life, he can see what others cannot see because of their attachment to matter, the body, and lusts and can observe the Hereafter forms of other people without waiting for the annihilation and death of all existents as others do.

'There is no real mystic ... unless he is resurrected in his this-worldly life before the life to come ... thus he sees what other people do not see ...'²⁹

3. Mulla Sadra held that:

'The Lord of most people is not the Truth or God who is the

Necessary Being and Holder of All Perfections. Rather, they in fact worship what they have created by their intellectual and imaginary beliefs in their own minds, which is in reality their creature'.³⁰

Or, at most, they have known the Truth in some of his manifestations whom they worship and because of following judgments of those manifestations and being absent of other manifestations deny other perfections of the Truth and therefore excommunicate so many other people who have known the Truth better than him or in some other attributes and manifestations. Such a problem exists not only for man but also:

'... for existents of the non-material world and those abstract intellects unto whom God appears by his negated attributes. While they have accepted God and they glorify him, they deny whoever is not abstract (such as illusion, imagination, and some souls), and in other words, is in the station of assimilation and not negation. But perfect man observes all Divine Manifestations in all the Worlds of Intellects, Souls, Ideas, and Matter; he is guided by their lights; and he worships God with regard to all his Attributes. In fact, he is the real servant of God'.³¹

Therefore his return would be to God's Essence, without any veil, which holds all Attributes of Assimilation and Negation, i.e., Allah, while other existents would return to God with regard to a Specific Attribute and Name of Him and are veiled from His other Attributes and Names.³²

4. The mystic who has attained the Truth and is annihilated in Him while he is subsistent by Him is not an object of changes and alterations. For he has passed the World of Contingency and Possibility, has attained the World of Divinity, and has joined the people of ecstasy and thus, according to a tradition from the Holy Prophet, one ecstasy from God unto him is paralleled by all the good works done by human beings and angels.³³
5. At the end of the first journey, the perfect man will not let any veil, even a veil of his own entity, remain between him and the Truth, due to his extreme passion and love for Him. In the position of observing the Lights of

the Truth's Assimilation and Negation and Illumination by His Light, he pays no heed to either himself nor anything else but God - he is even heedless to his transcendent knowledge, faith, and mysticism as if the Sun of the Truth has melted the snow of his entity and thus real faith appears to him. By this face, the substance of polytheism, even its hidden form, is rooted out from his spirit and soul. Such position is the manifestation of the station of the One, Dominant God.³⁴

6. According to the Qur'an: 'We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to carry it and were afraid of it ...'. (33:72) Now what is this trust? Mulla Sadra believed that it is the very Divine Light and Attributes of the Truth.

It should be noted that man, from the beginning of his motion towards the Truth until he attains the station of perfect man, is endowed with that Divine Light and the manifestation of God's Essence, Attributes, and Names in all levels, but the higher the level he attains, the more perfect they appear to him. And since he is considered trustworthy by God, at each level he delivers the trust which he has undertaken and the clothing of actuality he has worn concerning that trustworthy level while being honored with a new garb.³⁵

7. Since the perfect man is perfect both speculatively and practically, having cut his this-worldly belongings while expelling the love of this material world and whatever exists in it from his purified heart, his existential perfection, therefore, is higher than all other existents. He comprehensively reflects God and His Attributes, he receives the highest grace from God, and his hunger for and the love of God is much deeper than all other existents because the love of God is based on the existential level of a being and his level is the highest.³⁶

The Perfect Man and Society

As mentioned before in the four intellectual journeys, the perfect man's growth will not end by attaining individual perfection at the end of the first journey. Rather, he should attain super (or absolute) perfection, which afterwards is actualized by educating people and leading them to the Truth.³⁷

The reason for this is that, contrary to other people, the perfect man who is a Prophet is comprehensively perfected both speculatively and practically. He takes the Truth into consideration alongside all things and beings and, after having finished the journey to the Truth, he returns to the people calling them to the Light and the Truth. But on the one hand, some people are only perfected practically who are not to be called perfect in a real sense. They will enjoy salvation and a good position in the world to come, but they are not endowed with the position of Divine Absolute Succession. For he cannot play a role in leading people to God's Mercy through knowing His Essence and in bringing about the suitability between people and the world to come, which is the purpose of creation, due to the said deficiency.³⁸

On the other hand:

'Some people are perfected only speculatively. They are sunk into a vision of the Truth's Essence and Attributes and are heedless to their own essence which is illuminated by God's Light, so how can they pay heed to others?! Such persons suffer a deficiency of vision of the people, though they are annihilated into God and have attained the end in their journey to the Truth'.³⁹

Sincerity and having a pure intention for seeking God is greatly emphasized for a wayfarer. Therefore, worship services of all kinds (even social services) are of more Divine value the more they are free from showing off, hypocrisy, and the hidden polytheism which will cause man's fall from his spiritual position. But when the wayfarer attains annihilation in God and subsists by His Subsistence, his spirit will become so strong that it will not cause negative influences upon man's Divine motivations and, hence there would be no difference between solitude and appearance, revelation and hiding, etc., for selfishness has been completely removed from his existence. Of course, sometimes certain religious interests propel him to carry out various religious services such as congregational Friday prayer, praying in the mosque, and so on in order to guide people in spiritual wayfaring. This will not be harmful to him, for such a person basically considers only God to be the Truth and treats all other beings as shadows, signs, and mirrors in which the Truth has appeared and not as independent things.⁴⁰

As perfect man is the intermediary of all existential perfections and both

material and spiritual facilities between God and all other beings, no period of time could be void of such a perfect man. In this period, the perfect man is Imam Mahdi(AS), the Twelfth Imam of the Household of the Holy Prophet, who is apparently absent and only his close companions can see him. For Shi'ites, he is the Messiah who will someday emerge in order to establish justice throughout the entire world.⁴¹

Notes

1. Mulla Sadra, *al-Hikmah al-muta'aliyah fi al-asfar al-aqliyyah al-arba'ah*, ed. M.H. Tabataba'i (Tehran: Mustafavi, 1958), p. 25-27
2. Ibid., p. 49
3. Ibid., pp. 38-44; Nasr, *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, vol. 2, ed. M. M. Sharif (Lahore: Pakistan Philosophical Congress, 1961), pp. 482-486
4. Mulla Sadra, Ibid., p. 108-109
5. Ibid., pp. 44-46, 68-71; vol. 3, p. 453; vol. 6, p. 124
6. Mulla Sadra, *al-Shawahid al-rububiyah*, ed. S. J. Ashtiany (Tehran: Nashr Daneshgahi, 1360 S.A.H.), pp. 49-50
7. Mulla Sadra, *al-Hikmah al-muta'aliyah fi al-asfar al-aqliyyah al-arba'ah*, vol. 1, p. 219, 440; vol. 2, p. 214, 299; vol. 6, p. 269; vol. 7, p. 149.
8. Ibid., vol. 1, p. 276; vol. 2, p. 235; vol. 6, p. 150; vol. 9, p. 257
9. Ibid., vol. 6, p. 139
10. Ibid., vol. 8, pp. 131-32; vol. 9, pp. 194-95, 321
11. Mulla Sadra, *al-Shawahid al-rububiyah*, pp. 35-38, pp. 137-139
12. Ibid., pp. 152-154
13. Ibid., pp. 139-140
14. Nasr, *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, vol. 2, p. 489

15. Mulla Sadra, *Tafsir al-Qur'an*, vol1. 3, p. 66; *al-Hikmah al-muta'aliyah fi al-asfar al-aqliyyah al-arba'ah*, vol. 1, p. 299; vo1. 7, p. 257
16. Mulla Sadra, *al-Hikmah al-muta'aliyah fi al-asfar al-aqliyyah al-arba'ah*, vol1. 9, p. 147, 228
17. Ibid., vol1. 2, pp. 176, 198; vol1. 3, pp. 62-65, 85, 95, 101-109
18. Mulla Sadra, *al-Hikmah al-muta'aliyah fi al-asfar al-aqliyyah al-arba'ah*, vol1. 5, pp. 200-201; vol1. 7, pp. 148-153
19. Ibid., vol1. 6, pp.109, 157, 172
20. Ibid., vol1. 2, p. 379; vol1. 8, pp. 330-331; Nasr, *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, vol1. 2, pp. 491-492
21. Mulla Sadra, *al-Shawahid al-rububiyah*, pp. 203-204; *al-Hikmah al-muta'aliyah fi al-asfar al-aqliyyah al-arba'ah*, vol1. 3, pp. 420-421, 385-386
22. Mulla Sadra, *al-Shawahid al-rububiyah*, p. 207
23. Mulla Sadra, *Tafsir al-Qur'an*, vol1. 2, ed. M. Khajawi (Qom: Bidar, 1401 AH), pp. 302-303
24. Mulla Sadra, *al-Hikmah al-muta'aliyah fi al-safar al-aqliyyah al-arba'ah*, vol. 6, 301; *Tafsir al-Qur'an*, vol.2, pp. 309-313; ~01.6, pp. 54, 155
25. Mulla Sadra, *Tafsir al-Qur'an*, vol. 2, pp. 302-303
26. Ibid., vol1. 3, pp. 62-64, 309-314
27. Mulla Sadra, *al-Hikmah al-muta'aliyah fi al-asfar al-aqliyyah al-arba'ah*, vol. 1, pp. 13-18; *al-Mabda'a wa al-ma'ad*, pp. 275-278
28. Mulla Sadra, *Tafsir al-Qur'an*, vol1. 5, pp. 196-97; vol1. 7, pp. 32-33
29. Ibid., vol1. 5, p. 174; vol1 .7, pp. 32-34
30. Ibid., vol1. 4, pp. 49-50
31. Ibid., p. 51
32. Ibid., vol1. 4, pp. 49-50

33. Ibid., vol. 4, p. 223
34. Ibid., vol. 4, p. 266; pp. 416-17; pp. 426-27
35. Ibid., vol. 2, pp. 287, 312-313
36. Ibid., vol. 6, pp. 103-105
37. Ibid., vol. 7, 379-381
38. Ibid., vol. 7, pp. 372-375
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., vol. 4, pp. 41-42