

MULLĀ ṢADRĀ'S DOCTRINE OF  
THE PRIMACY OF EXISTENCE  
(AṢĀLAT AL-WUJŪD)



MEGAWATI MORIS



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## PREFACE

The aim of this study is to examine and discuss the doctrine of the primacy of existence (*aṣālat al-wujūd*) formulated by the great Persian Muslim philosopher (*faylasūf*) and sage (*ḥākīm*), Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1640). This doctrine is of great importance and significance in the history of Islamic thought since in it Mullā Ṣadrā demonstrates how he proved and hence, resolved the question of the ontological fundamentality or primacy (*aṣālah*) of existence. The question of ontological primacy between existence (*wujūd*) and quiddity (*māhiyyah*) could be viewed historically as having divided Islamic philosophy into two schools, based on the position of the primacy of existence (*aṣālat al-wujūd*) and the primacy of quiddity (*aṣālat al-māhiyyah*). This question arose as a result of the discussion of the fundamental distinction between existence (*wujūd*) and quiddity (*māhiyyah*) began by the Greek philosopher, Aristotle, and continued and adapted by the Muslim philosophers al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā.

In line with the historical development of the discussion of ontological fundamentality between existence and quiddity, this study first examines the discussion of the distinction between existence and quiddity by Aristotle, al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā before giving an account of the doctrine itself. An examination of the discussion by Aristotle of the distinction between existence and quiddity has shown that this distinction is not significant in his metaphysical system. This is in contrast to the Muslim philosophers who gave to the distinction tremendous philosophical and theological significances. To distinguish between existence and quiddity, al-Fārābī, and more explicitly Ibn Sīnā, stated that existence is an accident (*'arḍ*) of quiddity. This assertion consequently caused a major discussion among interpreters since they misunderstood Ibn Sīnā's real contention of the meaning of the term "accident" in this context. In light of this misinterpretation, Ibn Sīnā was viewed as an advocate of the position of the primacy of quiddity.

In the discussion of Mullā Ṣadrā's doctrine of the primacy of existence<sup>1</sup>, an explanation of its epistemic foundation is given since he maintained that knowledge of the reality of Being cannot be understood by the mind, but can only be attained through spiritual illumination or intellectual intuition. In this doctrine, Mullā Ṣadrā asserts that existence is primary since it has an external reality, i.e., it is Being (*wujūd*) which bestows reality upon things and the quiddities are only mental abstractions of the limitations of a particular act of Being and, hence, are nothing in themselves. Everything is really acts of Being and not objects that exist (*mawjūdāt*). Although it appears that things exist, in reality it is Being which takes on the accidentality of things while remaining immutable in Its unity. An examination of Mullā Ṣadrā's rational demonstration (*burhān 'aqlī*) is also presented in this study. He achieved this by giving logical arguments to support his position as well as refutations against the opposing position of the primacy of quiddity as represented by the Illuminationist (*ishrāqī*) philosopher, Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī. Mullā Ṣadrā's doctrine of the primacy of existence is also the basis of the other doctrines in his philosophy which has exerted a great influence on the works and perspectives of philosophers after him.

This work provides a basic, but comprehensive introduction to Mullā Ṣadrā's metaphysics. The doctrine of the primacy of existence (*aṣālat al-wujūd*) is important in the general comprehension of Mullā Ṣadrā's metaphysics since it serves as the main principle of his philosophizing and the basis on which he constructed his vast system of metaphysics.

Although Mullā Ṣadrā is a major philosopher whose system and thought in general, and study of Being in particular, provides one of the most comprehensive, systematic and profound insights into the philosophical difficulties surrounding the concept of Being in the history of Islamic thought, there are

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<sup>1</sup> As explicated from his major work *al-Ḥikmah al-Muta'āliyah fī al-Asfār al-'Aqliyyah al-'Arba'ah* (henceforth, referred to simply as *Asfār*) especially Volume 1 and *Kitāb al-Mashā'ir* which is a summary of his metaphysics.

still relatively few studies on him in the English language compared to those done on other Muslim philosophers such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā. I hope this book will contribute in a meaningful way to the general collection of works in English on Mullā Ṣadrā which will hopefully stimulate further interest in his philosophical thought, as well as studies on him.



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She also received her Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Business Administration from California State University, Fresno in California, U.S.A. She was a Research Fellow attached to the Publications Unit in ISTAC from 1997–2002. Presently she is a lecturer at IIUM and is writing her Ph.D dissertation on al-Ghazālī's Influence on Malay Thinkers. Her areas of interest are in Islamic philosophy and Sufism.

This book analyzes and discusses the important contribution of Mullā Ṣadrā to the debate on the question of ontological primacy. This question has divided Islamic philosophy into two schools—one affirming the primacy of existence (*aṣālat al-wujūd*) and the other the primacy of quiddity (*aṣālat al-māhiyyah*). The book shows how Mullā Ṣadrā has proved the ontological primacy of existence.



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