

Examining the concept of Unity of Existence according to the perspective of Islamic philosophers and Mystics

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Received : April 14, 2025

Accepted : Mei 20, 2025

Published : Mei 31, 2025

Citation: Irawan, R., Putra, A.L., & Sidqi, H., (2025). Examining the concept of Unity of Existence according to the perspective of Islamic philosophers and Mystics. Sinergi International Journal of Islamic Studies, 3(2), 96-112.

<https://doi.org/10.61194/ijis.v3i2.754>

ABSTRACT: This article discusses the concept of Wahdat Al-Wujud (Unity of Existence) from the perspectives of Islamic philosophers, categorized into three major groups: the Peripatetic philosophy, the Illumination philosophy, and the Transcendental philosophy. Additionally, this article will explore the thoughts of Sufis such as Sheikh Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi and Hamzah Fansuri (Indonesian Archipelago), through several of their works like Asrar Arifin, Sharab al-Ashiqin, and Al-Muntahi. To analyze this discussion, authors employs an analytical-descriptive method, ultimately concluding that among philosophers, the concept of existence (Wujud) is not only self-evident but is also deemed impossible to define. The Peripatetic school believes in Asalatul Wujud, while the Illumination philosophy upholds Asalatul Mahiyah. Interestingly, Mulla Sadra builds the foundation of his philosophy on the concept of Asalatul Wujud. Yet, he can explain the theory of Taskik Wujud through the metaphor of light, which has often been discussed in Illumination philosophy. The concept of Unity of Existence in mysticism asserts that there is only one true existence: the existence of the Divine Essence, and all that exists are manifestations. It does not deny multiplicity (Kasrat); however, it is found in the appearances and manifestations, not in existence itself.

Keywords: Wahdat Al-Wujud, Kasrat, Philosophy, Mysticism.



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INTRODUCTION

Discussions on the theme of "wahdat al-wujud" in Islamic studies often only encounter a simplification of antagonistic conclusions, namely between the impressions of "orthodox" and "heterodox". In the end, as this theme is often present in works on Sufism, only views that support or oppose it will be presented. Unfortunately, this theme is often considered controversial, which further stigmatizes Sufism itself. Throughout Islamic history, for example, stretching from the Middle East to Indonesia, this concept is considered "deviant" (Arafah Pramasto, 2019). Even in Indonesia, one of the countries with the largest Muslim population in the world, in its history it also records a figure named Sheikh Siti Jenar with the idea of "*manunggaling kawula gusti*" which is considered "pantheistic". It contradicts Islamic monotheism (Pramasto, 2020b). Despite being far from the Middle East, the traditional intellectual group of Indonesian Islam in Mecca (known as

the 'Jawi Community'), has discussed the theme which is feared will make Muslims neglect the Shari'a (Pramasto, 2020a). This condition is more due to the lack of in-depth study of wahdat al-wujud. This study is not limited to discussions in the context of mysticism but also philosophical aspects.

This research is motivated by the proliferation of studies on the concept of wahdat al-wujud among academics in Indonesia. However, unfortunately, most of them still consider the concept of wahdat al-wujud taught by Sufi figures such as Hamzah Fansuri to be a misguided and heretical doctrine. Such concepts of wujudiah teachings are what lead Hamzah Fansuri's opponents to accuse him and his followers of being pantheists, having deviated and strayed from true Islam. As a result, the teachings and doctrines of Hamzah Fansuri are often regarded as a form of heretical Sufi innovation (*bid'ah*) that contradicts the teachings and doctrines of Sunni (orthodox) Sufism. They view the ideas developed by Hamzah Fansuri as a perspective that needs to be corrected, leading to Hamzah being seen as an unworthy figure to follow, and subsequently declaring their intention to combat and eradicate his teachings (Damanhuri, 2021).

It cannot be denied that in the following period, the teachings of Sufism by Hamzah Fansuri became the root of severe and prolonged issues and polemics within the Islamic community in Indonesia. Some scholars who supported, appreciated, defended, and even followed him studied and developed his teachings in society. In this article, we will discuss the thoughts of Sufis such as Sheikh Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi and Hamzah Fansuri, a renowned Sufi in the Archipelago, in several of his works like "Asrar Arifin." However, as a foundation for understanding the concept of wahdat al-wujud from the perspective of Islamic irfan, we must analyze the concept of wahdat al-wujud in the thoughts of Islamic philosophers, which can be categorized into three major groups: the Peripatetic philosophy initiated by Ibn Sina, the Illumination philosophy initiated by Shihabuddin Suhrawardi, and the Transcendental philosophy initiated by Mulla Sadra.

In addition, some still have an ambiguous understanding of the concepts of wahdat al-wujud and wahdat al-shuhud. For example, they say that society in general is familiar with wahdat al-wujud through other figures, such as the most famous in the archipelago, like Hamzah Fansuri, Nurrudin Al-Raniri, and Abdul Rauf Al-Sinkili, who spread this understanding in the Aceh region. Another influential figure, Sheikh Siti Jenar, is known for his deeply devoted practice of wahdat al-wujud. However, what is interesting to note about a figure who adheres to wahdat al-wujud but practices wahdat al-shuhud is Sheikh Yusuf Al-Makasari (Maulani et al., 2022).

Simply put, researchers interpret wahdat al-wujud, which will henceforth be referred to as the unity of existence, as a concept that believes that existence is solely God. Everything else is merely a shadow or manifestation of God's existence. Meanwhile, wahdat al-syuhud, referred to as the unity of intuition, is a concept that holds that a Sufi, in their unveiling, only witnesses Allah. In explaining the difference between the concepts of the unity of existence and the unity of intuition, some people consider the concept of the unity of existence superior to the concept of the unity of intuition. According to Asep Saepullah, wahdat al-wujūd is a direct consequence of the shahada, which will then give rise to the concept of *insān kāmil* (Saepullah, 2021).

Several prominent contemporary thinkers in Iran, such as Yahya Yathribi, argue that there is no difference between the concept of the unity of existence and the unity of intuition. He believes

that the concept of the unity of intuition is a form of misunderstanding and misinterpretation among researchers who assume that the concept of the unity of intuition is opposed or contradictory to the concept of the unity of existence. Yahya Yathribi explains that some common mistakes made by researchers are as follows:

1. Separating the Arif who adhere to the concept of wahdat al-wujud from those who follow the concept of wahdat al-shuhud.
2. Distinguishing between the irfan of Ibn Arabi and the irfan of Jalaluddin Rumi.
3. Classifying irfan into that which relies on worship and that which relies on love.

However, in the view of Yahya Yathribi, wahdat al-wujud and wahdat al-shuhud are merely levels of tauhid and not two opposing viewpoints (Yatsribi, 2012). A question that often arises among researchers of theoretical Islamic Sufism is: what is the meaning of the unity of intuition when interpreted as seeing only one thing or not seeing anything except that one? If the intention is that the true existence is only one, namely the existence of Allah, and an Arif, in their witnessing, sees nothing but that one true existence, then this meaning is essentially the same as the theory of the concept of unity of existence. Therefore, we will not delve deeply into the concept of wahdat al-shuhud in this article because we believe these concepts do not exist on two different spectrums. Thus, this research will address the formulation of the problem: how is the concept of wahdat al-wujud understood in the perspective of philosophy and Islamic mystics?

METHOD

The research method is an essential element in any research, as it outlines how and in what manner the necessary data can be collected so that the final results can present valid data (Bungin, 2001). In this study, the author employs library research, which gathers data from published scholarly writings related to the investigated issue. By examining literature pertinent to the main issue, namely the concept of wahdat al-wujud in the thoughts of Islamic philosophers, the study categorizes them into three major groups: the Peripatetic philosophy initiated by Ibn Sina, the Illumination philosophy proposed by Shihabuddin Suhrawardi, and the Transcendental philosophy introduced by Mulla Sadra. Additionally, it will discuss the thoughts of Sufi figures such as Sheikh Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi and Hamzah Fansuri, a renowned Sufi in the archipelago, through several of their works, including Asrar Arifin, Sharab al-Ashiqin, and Al-Muntahi, in a descriptive-analytical manner.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Muslim philosophers discuss the concept of existence in three main groups:

1. Peripatetic (Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina): Existence has primacy, essence is conceptual. Each being is different.
2. Illuminationist (Suhrawardi): Existence is conceptual, essence is real. Rejects the primacy of existence because it causes infinite regression.

3. Transcendental (Mulla Sadra): Accepts the primacy of existence and the conceptual nature of essence. Discusses the gradation and unity of the person of existence.

In Islamic mysticism especially Ibn Arabi, existence is specific to the Divine essence. Only the Divine essence is true existence, while the universe is His manifestation. Hamza Al-Ansari sees existence other than God as an illusion, but God's co-existence with creation is true and a sign of God.

A Glimpse into Concept of *Wujud* (Existence)

Some theologians have provided definitions for '*Wujud*' (existence), such as stating that "existence is the fixed essence," meaning "something whose essence, truth, and reality are established, that is, it is." Others have said that "existence is that which can be spoken about," meaning it can be referred to, because when something is non-existent, one cannot say it is white or black. It is also described as something that can act and be acted upon (Toni, 2011a). However, what has been referred to as the definition of existence is merely an explanation of the term or a verbal description, meaning that this term has been used in place of another term. The true essence of existence is not conveyed to the mind, so it cannot be said to be self-evident rather than a theoretical concept. Among philosophers, existence is the most self-evident of all concepts that the mind abstracts from all beings. Existence is the only concept that is indefinable and simple. In essence, it does not require proof and is, in fact, a self-evident and clear matter. This concept is inherently understood and comes to mind without needing another concept for its contemplation. The concept of existence is not only self-evident but even impossible for the knower to deny for several reasons:

Among philosophers, the concept of existence is one of the most fundamental ideas the mind abstracts from all entities. Existence is the only concept that is indefinable and simple. Essentially, it does not require proof and is, in fact, a completely self-evident and clear matter. This concept is inherently understood, comes to mind, and does not require another concept for its contemplation. The concept of existence is not only self-evident but also, for several reasons, impossible to define. The first reason is that in the definition of a defining term, it must be clearer or more well-known to the audience than the defined term (Mozaffar, 2005a). However, there is no more evident concept than that of existence. The second reason is that a true definition consists of a combination of genus and species or species and accident. A definition can be in the form of a limit or the form of a description, and each of these can either be complete or incomplete (Mozaffar, 2005b). If the definition is formed from a proximate genus and a proximate species, it is called a complete limit; if it uses only a proximate species, it is called an incomplete limit. The definition consists of a complete genus and a specific description; if only a specific necessary accident is mentioned, it is termed an incomplete description. Therefore, one of the general concepts must be present in the definition for that entity to be defined, while existence possesses none of these characteristics. Existence has neither genus, nor species, nor specific attributes. Consequently, it cannot be defined either as a complete limit or an incomplete limit, nor as a complete description or an incomplete description.

The concept of *Wujud* in shared meaning

One of the discussions regarding the concept of existence in philosophy is the notion of shared meaning. There is no doubt that the word "existence" or "being" is used in various contexts; for example, a tree exists, a human exists, the sky exists, and even God Almighty exists. In these cases, existence has a common meaning. In other words, two scenarios can be envisioned when a term is applied to different instances. The first scenario is that the term has a single meaning and is applied in that same sense to multiple instances, such as "human" and "animal," which is referred to as shared meaning. The second scenario is that the term has multiple meanings and different instances, such as the word "lion" in Persian, which refers to three things: edible lion (a type of milk), a specific carnivorous animal, or a device used for controlling water flow. In all three cases, the term "lion" is used, and to refer to each of these, one would say, "This is a lion," but each has a specific meaning, meaning they are only shared in the term "lion." Various perspectives on whether the concept of existence is a case of shared meaning or shared terminology:

First Perspective: Philosophers believe that the meaning of existence is singular, and its application to various cases is a matter of shared meaning (Tabatabaei, 2019a). The reasons for this are threefold. The first reason is that existence is divided into different categories. Such a division is valid only if the subject of division is one and present in all its categories. Only a shared meaning can be divided into various categories; for example, a human can be white or black, knowledgeable or ignorant, male or female. This is the best evidence for shared meaning because existence can be divided into different types, such as saying existence is substance or accident, necessary or possible. In this division, there must be a singular meaning because if the concept of existence were merely a verbal commonality, we would not know which meaning to use. The second reason is that existence is contrasted with non-existence. Since non-existence has only one meaning, which is the existence that is its contradiction, it cannot have multiple meanings. The third reason is that we affirm the existence of something and later become uncertain about its inherent characteristics. When we see something from a distance, we are certain that it exists, but we doubt what that existence is—whether it is a cat or not. Similarly, we believe in the soul of a human, but we are unsure whether that soul is immaterial or material, whether it is substance or accident (Toni, 2011b).

Second View: Some theologians believe existence is a verbal commonality among thousands of meanings. This means there is a verbal commonality of existence among all entities, and it applies to all essences, signifying the same essence. Abu al-Hasan al-Ash'ari is recognized as someone who defends existence as a verbal commonality, asserting that the existence of each thing is that very thing (Bu Namarijaz, 1380: 169).

Third View: Some theologians state that existence is a verbal commonality but has only two meanings: one concerning the Almighty God and the other regarding all that is not God, i.e., created beings. This is because the Almighty God exists, and the creatures also exist, but the existence of God and the existence of the non-God differ. God is necessary existence, while creatures are contingent existence.

Existentialism

In philosophical discussions, it is often stated that two concepts come to mind when confronted with an external reality. These are referred to as the concept of existence and the concept of essence, which are abstracted from an external object. The question that has always engaged philosophers is which of these two concepts—existence or essence—is the original. There are three possibilities in response to this question: The first possibility is that both concepts genuinely reflect that external reality, meaning both are original. This implies that we have two distinct concepts, each with a counterpart in the external world. Consequently, we must have two realities in the external realm, even though these concepts have been abstracted from one external existence. Therefore, this possibility is not acceptable. The second possibility is that neither of these concepts has any basis in that external reality. This possibility is also unacceptable because if both existence and essence are constructs, then nothing exists in reality. The third possibility is that one is original while the other is a construct. All philosophers agree that neither existence nor essence is entirely original (Toni, 2011b). What truly exists in the external world is existence, while essence is a form and limitation. For example, when observing a black square, we can either identify two things (the black spot and the square) or simply perceive it as a black spot in the shape of a square. It seems that this possibility does not have any flaws.

In philosophy, the concept of authenticity is understood in comparison to its opposite term, which is conventional. Authentic refers to something that has reality and is the source of external effects, such as a human being, while conventional refers to something that lacks true reality and is a construct of the human mind, and is not truly the source of external effects; for example, the phrase "gold mountain" is used. Many supporters and proponents of the authenticity of existence or essence have presented arguments to support their theories, which will be mentioned in this chapter. Some philosophical schools, such as the Peripatetic and followers of Transcendent Philosophy, accept the authenticity of existence, while others, like the Illuminative school, accept the authenticity of essence. Before discussing the matters related to the mystical unity of existence, it is essential to note that the first discussion pertains to the relationship between essence and existence, and secondly, what is realized in the external world is existence, not essence.

Unity and Plurality of Existence According to the Perspective of Peripatetic Philosophy

Unity and multiplicity have always been of interest to philosophers and mystics, and it is necessary to examine the opinions of these Islamic thinkers in this regard to briefly present their various theories and viewpoints. Among Muslim philosophers, discussions about the unity and multiplicity of existence can be categorized into three different groups, with the first group including Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Sina. From Al-Farabi's perspective, necessary existence pertains to God, while possible existence applies to all beings other than God (Masvari, 2016: 120). Following Al-Farabi, Sheikh Al-Ra'is Abu Ali Sina, who is his disciple, divides existence into necessary existence, possible existence, and impossible existence (Nasr, 2014).

If a being is necessary for a subject and cannot be separated from it, the proposition is "necessity," and that being becomes necessary existence, like God, who is necessary; it is essential to affirm existence for the Almighty God. Conversely, if existence is impossible for a subject, meaning under no circumstances can it be predicated of that subject, the matter of the proposition is "impossibility," and that being becomes impossible existence, like the conjunction of opposites, which can never be affirmed as existing. Sometimes, neither necessity nor impossibility applies to this concept; here, the matter of the proposition is "possibility," and that being becomes possible existence, such as comparing the concept of existence with human beings, where existence is neither necessary nor impossible for humans. In other words, a human can either not exist or exist. The division of existence into three categories—necessary, possible, and impossible—is a novelty introduced by Ibn Sina, and such a division did not even exist in Aristotle's works (Gohari, 2009).

Tashkik al-Wujud according to the Perspective of Peripatetic Philosophy

The discussion of skepticism can be formulated and elucidated based on the primacy of existence. Considering the viewpoints of philosophers and mystics regarding the unity and multiplicity of existence, skepticism also acquires different interpretations. One of these interpretations is what is referred to as general skepticism. This skepticism pertains to the proponents of the distinction in existence, namely the Peripatetic school of philosophy, and in fact, this skepticism is a conceptual one rather than an external one (Ashtiani, 1994a).

Although Peripatetic philosophers believe in the primacy of existence and the nominal nature of essence, they assert that each has a specific existence, and all beings are inherently distinct from one another, with no commonality found among them. The necessary existence and possible beings have an inherent distinction. The external essences of things are distinct, and their commonality exists only in a mental concept. Thus, this notion is famously called "unity of concept." Avicenna and his followers believe skepticism regarding essence is impossible, but the multiplicity of beings is undeniable. In other words, they establish multiplicity as a principle in external realities and strongly emphasize it. This theory is referred to as "general skepticism of existence" (Yazdanpanah, 2014a).

Therefore, this general concept, due to the inherent distinction of beings, must be outside the essence of those beings. The proponents argue that objective existences fall into several categories to prove their claim. First, they are all individuals of a single truth, similar to individuals of a single type. Second, they have various types that share a common genus, such as the commonality of animal types within the genus of animals. Third, they have no commonality and are entirely distinct. The third category is the one in question and is proven by refuting the other two categories (Yazdi, 2015a). The reason for the invalidity of the first category is that it implies that existence is composed of genus and species. In contrast, existence is simple and does not align with the simplicity of the essence of existence. The second category is also invalid because it implies that existence is like a natural universal, which creates multiple individuals by adding specific accidents. In this case, the question arises as to how these accidents, given that they are existents and, according to this assumption, possess a single truth, lead to the realization of various individuals. Therefore, there is no option but to accept the third state.

Thus, in the perspective of peripatetic philosophy, one form with another has no similarity in the external world. For example, the form of paper with the form of a pen each has a different character. While the similarity of the form is only in the realm of thought, so this concept is often known as the term *tashkik am* (general gradation).

Unity and Multiplicity of Existence according to the Perspective of Illuminative Philosophy

After Ibn Sina, the second group of Islamic philosophers includes Sheikh Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi and Mirdamad. As we have seen, the philosophy of the Illuminative School and its followers, in contrast to the Peripatetics who regard existence as primary, argue that existence is merely a concept and that essence is primary; thus, the discussion of the unity of existence has not arisen. Therefore, we cannot engage in the discussion of the unity of existence. Sheikh al-Ishraq Suhrawardi, opposing the Peripatetic philosophers, asserts that existence is conceptual and essence is primary. Proponents of the primacy of essence have provided several arguments to support their theory.

The first argument is that if existence is realized in the world, it must be existent. Suppose existence is primary and essence is conceptual. In that case, it leads to an infinite regress because if existence is primary, this process continues and results in an impossible infinite regress, meaning there would be another existence. This statement about existence would repeat, leading to an infinite series of existence. Infinite regress is invalid. In other words, when it is said that existence is existent, what is existent has existence, and that existence is also existent, which has yet another existence. So on, this repetition continues infinitely. Consequently, this regress will extend to infinity and will never come to an end (Toni, 2011b).

In response to this objection, it can be said: When it is stated that existence exists, it does not mean that existence comes into being only through the existence of another. Rather, it means that existence is the essence of the existent; that is, existence is self-sufficient and does not require the mediation of anything else. Therefore, the primacy of existence is necessary, and there is no infinite regress. For example, when it is said that the Almighty God is knowledgeable, this does not mean that God possesses knowledge; rather, knowledge is the essence of the Almighty God. God's knowledge cannot be compared to a building that did not exist before but now does or will cease to exist. Rather, God's knowledge has always existed and will endure forever.

The second reason is that if existence is to be understood as being self-existent, not as an additional existence, then applying the term "existent" to existence and essence will not be in the same sense. This is because applying the term "existent" to a human means something that has existence, while applying it to existence means simply existence itself. However, applying the term "existent" to anything is similar. As mentioned, existence is a shared meaning, not a shared term.

In response to this objection, it can be said that the concept of existence has one meaning: "having existence," and the difference lies in the instances. Whenever it is said that a human is existent, it means that he has existence, which is additional to the human. And whenever it is said that existence exists, it means that it has existence. Because the affirmation of anything is necessary for

itself, and the denial of anything from itself is impossible. Since existence is not additional to existence, the difference is not in the concept but in the instances, and its application in all cases is in the same sense (Toni, 2011b).

The Emergence of Multiplicity from the Perspective of Illumination

In the philosophy of illumination, Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi employs the concept of "light" and elucidates the levels of existence through it. Just as other philosophers regard existence as an obvious concept, for the master of illumination, Sheikh Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi, nothing is clearer than the light of existence, which cannot be defined by anything else. Therefore, light is an obvious concept and is considered one of the most recognized ideas and realities (Shahrudi, 2014).

Light is a singular truth that manifests in various degrees. These degrees, in essence, do not differ in their luminosity. Suhrawardi believes that all realities are nothing but the truth of light, and the only distinction among them is intensity and weakness or perfection and imperfection. No other differentiation is observed among them. The strongest and highest of these is referred to as "the Light of Lights," which, due to its intense manifestation, encompasses all other lights, representing the essence of the Almighty God (Drajat, 2005a). This light is the truth of the Almighty God, characterized by intense luminosity, and it is the source of all beings. The weaker and imperfect levels are nothing but a reflection of dependence on the complete and intense degree. In the universe, various and multiple lights exist, and the multiplicity of light fills the world. For instance, when comparing the light of the sun, the light of a lamp, and the light of a candle, all share in the quality of being light, yet they exhibit differences in degrees of luminosity.

All beings in the degrees of existence depend on their proximity to the original light, with those closer to the source of true light possessing a more complete and stronger degree of luminosity. The universe consists of various degrees of light and darkness, with their differences being a matter of intensity and weakness.

Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi articulated the emanation of multiplicity from the abundant source: it first emanated from the singular source, the light of the True Divine, the First Light. From that light came the Second Light, from which the Third Light emerged, and from there the Fourth Light, continuing until it reached a finite number due to the weakness obtained in the lower light due to its distance from the source. The lower lights experience humiliation and poverty about the higher lights, while the higher lights manifest dominance, assistance, and superiority over the lower lights.

Thus, the illumination of the light of lights about the lower lights can be observed once with dominance and once with abundance. Furthermore, a composite view of all three can be taken. The humiliation and poverty of the lower lights are considered in light of the higher light, while at another moment, one can observe the love of the higher light. In another instance, a composite perspective of all aspects can be established to reveal multiple dimensions (Asfarayni, 2004a), Also (Drajat, 2005b).

This means that in the view of this school, light has a very significant position to refute the arguments of the concept of *ashalatul wujud* initiated by the peripatetics. According to the view of the philosophy of illumination, light encompasses all nature, and the source of that light is called *nurul al anwar*. Furthermore, the closer something is to the source of light, the stronger the lighting it will receive.

Unity and Multiplicity of Existence according to the Perspective of Transcendent Philosophy

Sadr al-Din Muhammad ibn Ibrahim Shirazi Qawami, known as Mulla Sadra and titled Sadr al-Muta'allihin, is one of the greatest Islamic philosophers and later sages. To clarify Mulla Sadra's theory, it is essential to first grasp the fundamental principles of this thought, namely the primacy of existence, the gradation of existence, and the personal unity of existence. Then, the theory can be presented systematically.

Mulla Sadra was present amid the debate between the two great schools of Islamic philosophy: the peripatetic and the illuminationist. Interestingly, Mulla Sadra still adhered to the doctrine of *ashalatul wujud*. However, he was able to provide rational arguments and use the analogy of light that the illuminationist school previously used to criticize the peripatetic school.

The school of Transcendent Philosophy accepts the primacy of existence and the conceptual nature of essence. After acknowledging the primacy of existence, it addresses the gradation of existence. This is because if the issue of the primacy and identity of existence is not raised and accepted, the gradation of existence will also lack meaning. The Peripatetic philosophers and followers of Transcendent Philosophy believe in the primacy of existence and the conceptual nature of essence. They have presented several arguments to support their theory:

The first reason is that the ratio of essence to existence and non-existence is equal (Tabatabaei, 2019b). It is through the combination with existence that the mind perceives it as valid and brings it into existence as a reality. In other words, something becomes present and actualized by virtue of existence.

The second reason is the distinction between mental existence and external existence. External existence is that which has effects attributed to it, while mental existence is that which does not cause effects. For example, the fire that exists externally has the effect of heat attributed to it, unlike the fire that exists in the human mind, which does not have the effect of heat attributed to it. Therefore, if nominal existence and essence are authentic, both external and mental existence must each be the source of external effects; that is, the fire must burn both externally and in the human mind (Tabatabaei, 2019b). Similarly (Asfarayni, 2004b). If existence is not authentic, considering that essence is preserved in both existences, there will be no difference between what is in the mind and what is actualized.

The third reason. Philosophers and mystics believe that the Necessary Being has pure existence and no essence, because essence is abstracted from the limits of existence (Tabatabaei, 2019b). Since human existence is limited in that it does not possess the existence of the celestial and the

corruptible, essence is abstracted from human existence due to this lack, which is a non-being. And since the Necessary Being has no limitations, it has no essence. How is it possible for the existence of God to be unreal, while He is the complete and ultimate reality (Toni, 2011b).

The Specific Gradation from the Perspective of Mulla Sadra

One of the most important and challenging topics in Transcendent Philosophy is the gradation of existence. Based on the unity of the gradation of existence, it is stated that existence has different levels, all of which share a commonality in being, with their differences lying in intensity and weakness. Thus, according to this perspective, existence comprises multiple realities distinct in their shared essence. Since the essence of existence, in which gradation occurs, is derived from that essence without any limiting condition, it possesses various degrees while maintaining unity, permeating all realities of existence (Ashtiani, 1994b).

Everything in the realm of reality must share a commonality in their essence and the fundamental nature of their external identity, which justifies the abstraction of a singular concept. This commonality and the direction of unity are referred to in Sadrian terminology as the objective reality of existence. This objective reality, rather than the accidental concept of existence applied to instances, possesses intensity and weakness. The theory of Sadra and the theologians regarding this matter is termed specific gradation (Yazdanpanah, 2014b). However, it should be noted that specific gradation is not Mulla Sadra's final theory in this regard. In other words, although specific gradation is presented within the school of Transcendent Philosophy, it seems that Mulla Sadra did not propose this theory as his ultimate theory; rather, he used it as an intermediate theory and a means to reach his final theory, which is the mystical unity of existence or the personal unity of existence.

A single, true entity exists with multiple degrees, and the commonality and differences among these degrees are nothing but the truth of existence itself. Concerning the degrees of existence, multiplicity is observed, but there is only one truth to which this multiplicity returns. For this reason, the saying "unity in multiplicity and multiplicity in unity" has been coined. An example used in this context is "light," which, despite being a single essence, has various degrees that differ in intensity. Light is fundamentally one truth, yet it has different levels of strength and weakness. According to Mohammad Taqi Misbah Yazdi, the difference between intense and weak light lies in intensity. However, this does not mean that intensity in intense light is anything other than light, or that weakness in weak light is something other than light. Rather, intense light is nothing but light, and weak light is also nothing but light, and at the same time, they differ in degrees of intensity and weakness. However, this difference does not harm the simplicity of the truth of light that is common between them (Yazdi, 2015b).

In this analogy, the sun, a lamp, and a candle are multiple lights that share the essence of being light, illustrating both unity and multiplicity. The difference between sunlight and the light of a lamp or candle lies in the intensity and weakness of the light, which is nothing other than the original light itself (Yazdanpanah, 2014b). Some argue that a more accurate analogy for this

context is the example of a single light that gradually and gently weakens, similar to sunlight that shines on the moon and then reflects onto the Earth.

Considering the foundations of the unity of the gradation of existence, the reasons can be expressed in two ways. The first reason is based on the primacy of existence and the acceptance of a shared single concept. This is stated so that all existential truths and external realities, from the necessary being to the primary matter, are subject to gradation in existence. On the other hand, a single concept is abstracted from all objective realities. Since the concept of existence is a shared meaning, this concept is derived from multiple instances. The second reason is based on the causal relationship among beings, and no being exists outside the chain of causes and effects. Of course, a being that is at the top of the chain is only characterized by causality, while a being that is at the end of the chain is only characterized by being an effect. Nevertheless, there is no being that does not have a relationship of causation and effect with another being, such that it is neither a cause for something nor an effect for something (Yazdi, 2015b).

The Unity of Existence Mulla Sadra

Proves the unity of personal existence by accepting the gradation of existence. His ultimate theory is the unity of personal existence, not its gradation. He provides rational and philosophical evidence for the unity of personal existence based on the foundations of his philosophy. This theory is presented in the form of a mystical and philosophical framework. In other words, he introduces the unity of personal existence as the ultimate theory of Transcendent Wisdom regarding the issue of the unity and multiplicity of existence. Given the personal unity, gradation does not occur because the true being is but one existence, and the other aspects and manifestations are that true existence. Thus, it can be said that based on this perspective, nothing is found outside of existence. There is no multiplicity in the essence of existence, and true multiplicity is solely from the manifestations and aspects of existence. The absolute reality of existence is in no way gradable and exists purely in the description of unity, but gradation is possible in its manifestation. The differences among the manifestations of existence are gradational differences, thus gradation occurs in the manifestation of existence, not in the essence of its truth (Shafii, 2000, p. 445). In other words, in the realm of existence, there is only one true personal existence, which is the existence of the Almighty. All particles of the universe are signs and mirrors of the manifestations of that beautiful essence of the Almighty, each reflecting that singular truth according to their own capacity for existence (Yazdani, 2001, p. 474).

Thus, there are three basic concepts in Mulla Sadra's thought, namely the Grounding of Being (Ashalat al Wujud), Gradation of Being (Tashkik Al Wujud) and Unity of Being (Wahdat Shakhshi Al Wujud). Tashkik in Mulla Sadra's thought is known as Tashkik al Khas which assumes that all beings have different gradations. While in Wahdat Shakhshi Wujud, Mulla Sadra believes that in this world there is only one true being and other than that is only seen from the manifestation of that true being, namely the being of God. This thought seems to be a little in accordance with the thought of Islamic mystics which we will discuss below. The Existence according to the perspective of Islamic Mystics

After explaining the unity and multiplicity of existence from the perspectives of three groups of Islamic philosophers, it is now time to present the mystical theory in this regard. This is because mystics have also addressed the issue of the unity and multiplicity of existence.

First Discourse: Existence from a Mystical Perspective

As mentioned earlier, the two terms "unity and existence" are philosophical terms that traditional philosophers are quite familiar with. In theoretical mysticism, existence has a meaning that transcends the existence considered by philosophers, especially in the thought of Ibn Arabi, where existence is exclusive to the Divine, and what is seen in the world is merely Him and His manifestation (Sokhavatian, 2016: 59). Although Ibn Arabi does not mention the term "unity of existence" in his famous books (Larijani, 2009, p. 59), it is known that in Islamic mysticism, Ibn Arabi is regarded as the founder of theoretical mysticism. He was the first to raise the issue of the unity and multiplicity of existence under "unity of existence" in the seventh century AH. Qasim Kakayi believes that there are numerous philosophical and theological terms in Ibn Arabi's works, such as existence, existent, unity, multiplicity, necessary being, contingent being, impossible being, impossibility, non-existence, eternal, temporal, substance, accident, essence, and more. Many of these terms were not used or were used less frequently in the works of Sufis before Ibn Arabi. Although Ibn Arabi employed many philosophical terms, he should not be classified among philosophers, nor should a separation be drawn between him and the Sufis (Kakaei, 2006a, pp. 168–187).

Jalal al-Din Ashtiani explains that existence in itself, meaning the essence of existence and being, is distinct from external and mental existence; it is broader than both external and mental existence. This is because each of external and mental existence manifests the original essence of existence. Any limitations do not constrain the original essence, and it is even devoid of the limitation of absoluteness (Ashtiani, 1994b). In the realm of existence, there is nothing other than the Divine Truth; true existence is, in fact, the essence of existence that constitutes all levels of realization, neither substance nor accident. Based on the primacy of existence in Ibn Arabi's thought, existence is considered a singular and unique entity. He regards all beings as conventional and illusory. If existence were absent, no being could be realized either in the mind or in the external world (Ashtiani, 1994b). Additionally, Hamzah al-Fansuri states that if existence did not exist, then what would be the source of effects? (Hamza al-Ansari, 2018: 60)

For Ibn Arabi, in the unity of existence, the mystic considers himself one with the object of his perception, and he sees the discovery of existence as one. In this context, the knowledgeable have reached a truth through the unveiling of vision, some referred to as the unity of existence. This discovery does not come through observation and thought but is achieved solely through unveiling and vision. He believes that there is no rational path to grasping such matters (Rahiman, 2009a, p. 126). Ibn Arabi regards philosophers as people of opinion and asserts that sages do not reach the ultimate knowledge of existence. In his "Fas al-Shaibi," he explains that anyone who recognizes

themselves through this knowledge has recognized their Lord, for He has created them in His own form; rather, He is the very essence of their truth and identity. Therefore, none of the sages and scholars have attained knowledge of the self and its truth, except for the divine ones among the messengers and the great ones among the Sufis. However, the thinkers and scholars of the past, as well as the theologians, in their discussions about the self and its essence, none of them knew the truth of the self, and reasoning and thought never yield such a conclusion (Arabi, 2004, p. 189).

Therefore, the concept of unity of existence in mysticism acknowledges only one existence as real: the existence of the Almighty God, while the world manifests that existence. However, it should be noted that the unity of existence is not a belief in pantheism or an all-god theory. It does not deny multiplicity; rather, it exists in manifestations and appearances, not in existence itself. Accepting multiplicity as an undeniable reality is essential. Since, apart from the Almighty God, who is the essence of existence and has infinite existence, there is no other existence at play, or in other words, the existence of God leaves no room for another existence, and existence is confined to the divine. Thus, throughout the entire realm of existence, only one existence is realized, yet anyone who completely denies the existence of the world is outside the bounds of reason. Therefore, in a way, existence can also be attributed to the world because we know of it, and anything that is known is characterized by existence. In other words, since we know the world other than God, it is characterized by existence, and since existence is confined to God, it must be said that it is God who has manifested in the form of the world (Kakaei, 2006b).

In this regard, Hamza Fanasuri believes that the existence of anything other than God is an illusion and a fantasy. However, since he does not accept anything other than an absolute true existence, it should be noted that Hamza Fanasuri's ultimate goal is not the denial of multiplicity, as he considers the conjunction of the Divine with creation to be permanent. He perceives the existence of creation in relation to the Almighty God as true and a sign of the Divine, as indicated by the Holy Quran: "Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day are signs for those of understanding." (Surah Al-Imran, 3:190). Therefore, it can be said that the realm of imagination exists and, at the same time, is true. This means that the realm exists in one sense and does not exist in another (Rahiman, 2009b).

CONCLUSION

Among philosophers, the concept of existence is one of the most self-evident concepts that the mind abstracts from all beings. Existence is the only concept that is undefinable and simple. Essentially, it does not require proof and is, in fact, a self-evident and clear matter. This concept is inherently understood; it comes to mind without needing another concept for reasoning. The concept of existence is not only self-evident but also presents a paradox, as one of the main reasons for its recognition is that in the definition of a defining term, it must be clearer or more familiar to the audience than the defined term itself. In contrast, no more evident concept than existence can be found.

Among Muslim philosophers, discussions regarding the unity and multiplicity of existence can be categorized into three groups. The first group includes philosophers such as Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi,

and Avicenna. Although the Peripatetic philosophers believe in the primacy of existence and the conceptual nature of essence, they maintain that each has a specific existence, and every being will be essentially distinct from others, with no commonality. Necessary existence and possible beings have essential distinctions. Objects' external essence differs from one another, and their only commonality lies in a mental concept. Following Avicenna, the second group of Islamic philosophers, led by Suhrawardi, employs the concept of "light" to explain the degrees of existence. Sheikh Ishraq and Suhrawardi argue against the Peripatetic philosophers, asserting that existence is conceptual while essence is real. Proponents of the primacy of essence have provided arguments to support their theory, the most significant of which is that if existence is realized in the external world, it must exist. Suppose existence is real and essence is conceptual. In that case, an infinite regress occurs, meaning there would be another existence, and this statement about existence would repeat, leading to an infinite regress of existence, which is invalid. Mulla Sadra, one of the greatest Islamic philosophers and later thinkers, is essential for a clearer understanding of his theory. The most important aspect is to first grasp the general principles of this thought, namely the primacy of existence, the gradation of existence, and the personal unity of existence. The school of Transcendent Philosophy accepts the primacy of existence and the conceptual nature of essence and, after accepting the primacy of existence, engages in the discussion of the gradation of existence, as the issue of the primacy and identity of existence must be raised and accepted for the gradation of existence to have meaning.

In Islamic mysticism, existence holds a meaning superior to that considered by philosophers, particularly in the thought of Ibn Arabi, where existence is specific to the Divine Essence. What is observed in the world is merely Him and His manifestations. In the realm of existence, there is nothing other than the Divine Essence; actual existence is, in fact, the essence of existence itself, which sustains all levels of realization; it is neither substance nor accident. Therefore, the concept of the unity of existence in mysticism acknowledges only one true existence: the existence of the Divine Essence, while the world is its manifestations. However, it should be understood that the unity of existence is not a belief in a total divinity or pantheism. It does not deny multiplicity, but that multiplicity exists in manifestations and appearances, not in existence itself. The acceptance of multiplicity as an undeniable reality is essential. Additionally, Hamza al-Ansari believes that the existence of anything other than God is an illusion and a fantasy; however, since he accepts only one absolute true existence, it should be noted that Hamza al-Ansari's ultimate goal is not to deny multiplicity, as he considers the coexistence of the Divine with creation to be permanent, meaning that the existence of creation, concerning the Divine Essence, is actual and a sign of the Divine.

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