

Mulla Sadra's Theory of Perception

Afifeh Hamedi

Assistant professor, Department of Philosophy of education, Islamic Azad University, Bushehr branch, Bushehr, Iran

Email: hamedi.a2010@gmail.com

Abstract: Perception has been one of the important issues in Muslim philosophical discussions. Mulla Sadra criticized Avicenna and Suhrawardi's explanations of knowledge and perception. He has a particular theory in this field. He believed that the origin of perception is existence but not essence. Mulla Sadra has divided perceptions into three types: Sensible perception, imaginary perception, and rational perception. Contrary to Avicenna that regards sense perception as material, He believes that although the origin of all perceptions is external object, but all human perceptions are immaterial. Mulla Sadra considers all types of man's perceptions as the acts of the soul, as the soul is immaterial, all its perceptions are immaterial. According to him, man's perception is not in the form of the indwelling and presence of the form of external object in the mind, rather, it is a kind of creation that is manifested in the form of emanation from the soul. He believes that man's soul enters the world of the sense through the perception of sensible, the world of Ideas through imaginary perception, and the world of intellects through the perception of intellect. This paper deals with Mulla Sadra's view on man's perception and its stages.

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Introduction

In Islamic philosophy, particularity in Mulla Sadra's school of thought, the issue of perception and knowledge has an important situation. In Islamic philosophy, theory of knowledge is realistic and is based on man's achieving to real information. Sadra's concept of knowledge is based on two fundamental elements of his ontology, which are primary (asalah) and gradation of being (tashkikal-wujud). Sadra's definition of knowledge as a mode of being represents a rather new perspective within the Islamic intellectual tradition and requires a close study of his metaphysical ontology. Mulla Sadra's epistemology is directly related to that of Suhrawardi and the school of illumination in general. In the transcendent philosophy, there is no separate discussion on epistemology and the compatibility of human knowledge with the outside world. It has rather been discussed under issues such as knowledge, mental existence, immateriality of the soul, and mental quality. In Ibn Sina's view perception is divided into four main categories: 1. Sensory, 2. Imaginary, 3. Illusory, 4. Intellectual. Mulla Sadra accepts philosophers' classification of perception into sense, imaginal, rational, and estimative perceptions. However, he does not agree with the way that they have qualified, and ultimately, maintains that perception is three types: sensible perception, imaginal perception, and rational perception. Mulla Sadra believes that the origin of all perceptions is the external objective, which immediately after entering the mind, obtains some degree of immateriality. He

adds that, all human perceptions are immaterial, and do not depend on a specific matter in the brain or the body for their existence. In Islamic philosophy, knowledge and perception are divided into two groups: 1. Acquired knowledge 2. Presental knowledge. Acquired knowledge, consists of what is acquired through the five senses. Presental knowledge, is a direct kind of knowledge that involves the characteristics of the perceived existent. Mulla Sadra's doctrine of perception, including sense perception, imaginal perception and intellectual perception, is based on external things and the essences of existents. (al-Asfar, vol.2, p.80)

The stages of perceptions:

Mulla Sadra considers all the stages of perception, consisting of a series of immaterial bodily and psychic phenomena as being originated from the external material existent (object). Unlike some idealist philosophers, who view mental categories as the main source of perception, or rationalist philosophers, who believe in a prior knowledge, or Hegel who takes the idea as the origin, he believes in the correspondence between mental knowledge and the external object. He also maintains that there is a relation between man's perception and external realities and that our knowledge and imaginations have their roots in our senses. 1-Sense perception According to Mulla Sadra there are different stages for the sense perception: First stage: This stage consists of the reflection of external facts by the five senses. Second stage: In this stage it is the human souls that turn gain knowledge from

these images. There are important elements which are necessary for sense perception: attention and awareness. Attention is a psychological phenomenon, and has nothing to do with the body. Attention is the result of man's attention to those things which have presence for him. Awareness is the very presence of external objects in man's mind. Sadra calls this attention and awareness of the the soul as present knowledge. Third stage: This stage is important stages of the sense perception. Here, the soul through its power of creativity, and through making a model of those signals, reconstructs the essence of the perceived object for itself, and substitutes it for the essence of that external existence. So, man's perception is not in the form of the indwelling and presence of the form of external objects in the mind, rather, it is a kind of creation that is manifested in the form of emanation from the soul. This interpretation of sense perception is solving the problem of the correspondence between the external world and knowledge (khamenei, 2004:92/93). "Mulla Sadra does not deny the error of the senses, however, he believes that what is known as the error of the senses is in fact, an error in making correspondences and judgements. He maintains that man's estimative faculty interferes with his judgements, and leads him towards committing errors" (Ibid, 95).

2- Imaginal perception

According to common people. Imagination means a series of free images which have no share of reality. Peripatetic philosophers considered imagination as one of man's internal faculties. His external perceptions were obtained through the five senses, and his internal perceptions included common sense. They believed in the existence of two worlds for man: world of sensible and world of intelligibles. Suhrawardi believed that there is an intermediate world between the world of the sense and world of the intellects. He called this world, world of Ideas. So he added the world of imagination to the world of sense and intellect. Mulla Sadra also, believes in the three-fold worlds. He agrees with Peripatetics concerning the world of intelligibles, but unlike them who did not believe in the immateriality of imagination, he considers it as the acts of the soul and immaterial. Although imagination is a psychological phenomenon in man, in Sadra's view, it is neither in the imaginal faculty nor in the brain, rather, it is a creation of the soul and depends on the immaterial aspects of man's soul. In contrast to Illuminationists, Mulla Sadra maintains that imagination exists in man and in the soul, and is dependent on it, rather than in the external world depending on itself. Illuminationists called this type of imagination Idea or disjunctive imagination, accordingly, Sadra's imagination has been called conjunctive imagination.

3-Rational perception

Intellectual perception means the presence of the

universal form of any intelligible before the mind. Intelligible is divided into three groups: primary intellect, secondary philosophical intellect, and secondary logical intellect. Primary intellect, that consist of those universal principles and known facts which are abstracted and inferred from external objects and phenomena (Ibid). Sadra considers all types of man's perceptions as the acts of the soul for which the senses and other perceptive faculties function as tools. As the soul is immaterial, all its perceptions are immaterial and needless of the body. Through his faculty of imagination, man can create forms which resemble God's innovative creation in every respect (khamenei, 2004:98).

Gradation of perception and knowledge

According to Mulla Sadra, the reality of knowledge is reversible to formal existence. He divides existence into: perfect, sufficient, and imperfect ones. The perfect existence is the world of pure intellects, which are also called separate forms. Such forms are free from the extensions of bodies and matter. The sufficient existence is the world of animal souls and is referred to as the world of imaginal beings and disengaged apparitions. The imperfect existence is the world of subsistent forms belonging to substances that are also called sensory forms. Each of the levels of knowledge, due to its ontological status, possesses its specific cognitive forms. Accordingly, possible perceptions can be divided into four types: 1. Perfect existence and knowledge, including the intellects and actual intelligibles. Such perceptions, due to their intensity of existence and essential glow are free from corporeal effects, apparitions and numbers. They exist in a single and collective existence while being multiple. There is no difference among such realities, since all of them are immersed in the ocean of divinity. 2. The world of heavenly souls in peripatetic worlds and the world of disengaged apparitions and quantitative images in illuminations worlds. This group of perceptions is to some extent sufficient by essence and relies on their rational bases. Moreover, through their connection to the forms of the perfect divine existence, they compensate for their imperfection and mix with them. 3. The specific world of the sense and the lowest dominion, whose objects are the actual sensible forms that are perceived by intelligence and the senses. As long as they exist in this realm, their existence is imperfect, unless they free themselves from the world of apparitions and manage to promote themselves to the higher world in the light of the perfection of the human soul. 4. The world of corporeal substance, whose known forms are changing and destructible. The existence of such forms is always in fluctuation between potentiality and actuality, on the one hand, and stability and

annihilation, on the other. Their stability is the same as their annihilation, and their unity and collection is the same as their separation (Dehbashi: 8). Unlike Muslim philosophers, Sadra equates perception and knowledge with being that enjoy a kind of gradation. Moreover, he believes that all levels and grades of existence, including sensory, imaginary, and rational perceptions, are non – material (Mulla Sadra, 1383:287). "Man's soul has three rational, imaginary, and sensory modes and is in unity with the intellect, imagination, and the sense. Thus the soul becomes the same as the senses in the perception of sensible, and the senses affect the sensible as an instrument of perception through participating in their situation" (Ibid:378). It is worthy to mention that at the stage of sensation, MullaSadra believes that not only the effect of any external sense through an individuated external object is one of the necessary conditions, but also the truth of sense perception is related to the soul, itself. Therefore, if the soul plays the main role at the weakest level of perception, i.e., sensation, the matter, the object, and the effect of the senses, all, function as the preparing causes for sense perception, not as a perceiver. At higher levels perception, such as imagination and intellection, the soul plays a more important role, since at higher levels of perception, the soul becomes needless of external factors and preparing causes and becomes involved in the process of perception directly. Although the soul is in union with the intellect, the senses, and images at all levels, its unity with the intellect at the level of intellection is stronger than its union with images at the level of imagination or its unity with the sense at the level of sensation(Asfar, 383). "MullaSadra believes that the origin of all perceptions is the external object, which, immediately after entering the mind, obtains some degree of immateriality. He says that basically, all human perceptions are immaterial. The mind, which, according to some philosophers, is like a receptacle for knowledge, is nothing other than the very perceptions and pieces of knowledge that man's soul, creates through its specific power of creativity" (khamenei, 2004:91/92). He agrees with Peripatetics and other philosophers concerning the world of intelligible, and with Suhrawardi and Ibn-Arabi concerning the world of imagination or Idea. In his book, he refers to imagination as one of man's internal perceptions; nevertheless, he disagrees with these two schools in certain respects:

Knowledge as a mode of being

In Sadra's view, philosophers have spoken very differently concerning knowledge, the intellect and the intelligible. For example, Ibn-sina considers intellection sometimes as a negative issue, sometimes as certain forms imprinted on the substance of the

intellect, sometimes as pure relation, and e.t. Shaykh al-Jshraq view knowledge as manifestation. If an object has the knowledge of its own self, it is light for itself. An objects knowledge of other than itself consist of the relation between the two luminous objects along with their Ishraqi correlation (Dehbashi, p.1). "Unlike his preceding philosophers, Sadra, does not believe knowledge as an acquired form or as the very concept or the disengaged form of an object in the mind. He defines knowledge as the mode of the abstract existence of matter in the abstract the mind. For him, the ultimate object of knowledge is being particularized through a myriad of modes, states and instances. In fact, in many places, Sadra defines knowledge simply as a mode of being (Nahw al – wujud): when we say that we know something, we affirm or deny the existence of something, and this can not be other than being. In this generic sense, being is the standing condition of all knowledge and precedes the discursive considerations of the knowing subject. That is why Sadra makes knowledge of being indispensable for a proper understanding of knowledge" (Ebrahim Kalin:89)

He says: If someone is ignorant about the question of being, he is of necessity ignorant about all of the principles of knowledge and foundations because it is through being that everything is known, and it is the beginning of all description (tasawwur) and more known than anything that provides description. When someone ignores it, he ignores everything besides it. As we have mentioned before, the true knowledge of being comes about only through unveiling (Kashf) and withenssing (mushahadah). It has thus been said that he who has no unveiling has no knowledge. (Mulla Sadra,1981:14) "Mulla Sadra believes that the object of perception is the existence of things. By existence, he does not mean one which is in a specific situation, state, and position in the outside. Rather, he means an existence that is free from any taint of non – existence, position, direction, and the like. This is because no unity can be found in the object in such transitory and relative states of oneness. Moreover, the conception of unity in the perceived object is, in a sense, a necessary condition for perception. Therefore, a being that is the object of perception is not among the beings to hinted by the senses. Besides, a form that is perceived by the senses is not among sensible qualities, which can be hinted by the senses. A sensible existence is the same as the existence of the sensor: Sadra considers this mode of existence as its sensibility, as he views the existence of the intelligible as its intelligibility in essence" (dehbashi, : 8)

Unity of intellect, Intelligible and Intelligent

This issue partly is concerned to relation between man and his knowledge. In this part, MullaSadra respond to the following question: Is our knowledge separate from us and only a mirror _ like reflection of external objects in our mind and senses? As we know, there are several ideas about knowledge in preceding and modern philosophical schools in the west which suffer from certain shortcomings and are not supported by any logical arguments. However, to demonstrate the essential relation between knowledge, knower, and known, MullaSadra has presented a number of rational arguments. In the light of his theory, Sadra proves that the perceiver, the mentally perceived object, and knowledge, are one. As he says, the intellect, the intelligent, and the intelligible are in unity with each other. It should be added that, by the perceived object (or the intelligible), he means the same form which has been produced in man's mind, which is referred to as the directly known rather than the external object which is called the indirectly known(Asfar,1373:300/304). "The issue of the unity of the intelligent and intelligible is basically related to the unity of the knower or the perceiver with directly knowledge, i.e., the same mental existent and the same intelligible and known in man's mind, rather than its external existence. This is because it is a certain fact that objects never enter our mind exactly as they are through our perception and knowledge of them" (Asfar, 1363:52). MullaSadra's arguments concerning this issue have been based on his other principles, such as: the principality of existence, the trans – substantial motion, soul's creativity, gradation of existence, and the difference between primary and prevalent predications. Sadra's arguments in this regard, one should first perceive the meaning of unity. Obviously, unity in the sense of having two different existents, objects, concepts, or quiddities became one is impossible and absurd. Clearly, two separate things or two contradictory concepts are always two things and will never become one. This is the same objection than Ibn-sina and others advanced against this issue, because they assumed that the unity between the intelligent and the intelligible is of this type(Ibid,vol3: 312). The question is whether the existence of each form of the perceived object is separate from the existence of the perceiver, or in unity with it? The response to the above question is that if the existence of each were different from the other one, each of them had to be conceivable without the others. So, perception and the form that is perceived are not something else other than the mind and the soul, so that they would have to appear before it. So, they are the same as the existence of the soul and presented for it(Ibid). Another argument here is that there is a mutual relation between the perceived object and the perceiver, which is technically referred to as

correlation. This mutual relation, at all times and in all cases, makes it necessary for one side to come into existence or be assumed if the other side is in existence or is assumed. According to Islamic philosophy, two correlatives are identical and commensurate in terms of their existence, non-existence, and potency and act. So, if there is a perceiver, there is also a perceived, and it is absurd for one of them to exist actually while the other is non-existence. Since, the relation between the perceiver and the perceived is of the type of correlation, both of them have the same existence.

Perception (knowledge) ←→
known and the perceived

On the other hand, no act is separable from its agent that is existence of the perceiver is in unity with existence of his knowledge and intelligence.

Perception ←→
(knowledge) perceiver (knower)

The conclusion of the above relation is that the knower and the known also are in unity, with each other (khamenei, 2004:89/90).

Perceiver ←→ Perceived

MullaSadra considers the union of the perceiver, perception and the perceived as the most basic principle of knowledge at all levels. To him, any essence enjoys three ontological aspects at different levels of intensity. There is a third world between the two intelligible and material aspects of the world that the soul, itself, creates. This is because the soul functions, in fact as an image of the creator in terms of its essence, attributes, and acts. This third world is the very dominion of the soul or mental existence and imaginary manifestation (Asfar, vol.8:500/507)

Conclusion

In Mulla Sadra's view, perception and knowledge have the same meaning, and perception is divided into rational, imaginal and sensory ones. He considers knowledge as belonging to the category of existence and since existence is graded, knowledge will also enjoy the same feature. According to Sadra, the world of possibility, in general, and the world of matter, in particular cannot be conceived unless in the light of inhering existence. Therefore, considering the hierarchy of existence, he regards the inhering existence of the world of possibility as being finally connected to the existence of the truth through ontological horizontal and vertical grades and tools. According to Sadra on the basis of presental knowledge, mind do not accept forms, but bring them to the existence. Contrary to Avicenna and Suhrawardi, he considers faculty of imagination and imaginal perception as immaterial. To him it is human soul that creates imaginary forms with its Godly creativity and imanation of the world of ideas and

observation of ideal forms. MullaSadra considers the union of the perceiver, perception and the perceived as the most basic principle of knowledge at all levels. Any essence enjoys three ontological aspects at different levels of intensity. Between the two intelligible and material aspects of the world, there is a third world that the soul, itself, creates. This is because the soul functions, in fact as an image of the creator in terms of its essence, attributes and acts. This third world is the very domination of the soul or mental existence and imaginal manifestation.

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