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CONTEMPORARY REFLECTIONS ON ŞADR AL-DĪN ŞĪRĀZĪ'S TRANSCENDENT PHILOSOPHY: CONDITIONS AND PERSPECTIVES

Abstract. The inquiry into the relationship between philosophical thoughts and their era and contexts is a fundamental question. Like all traditions, philosophies are fundamentally shaped by their cultural context and temporal requirements. Without understanding this relationship and without considering how these philosophies relate to the demands of other times, their investigations can lead to misunderstandings and confusion. When revisiting pre/non-modern philosophical traditions, the most important question is how we perceive and refer to them in different circumstances and contexts. Scholars in these fields must first articulate their perception, interpretation, and expectations of such intellectual legacies before any investigation. “The Transcendent Philosophy or Wisdom” (*al-Ḥikmah al-muta'āliyah*) of Şadr al-Dīn Şīrāzī (Mullā Şadrā) and its major expositors from the 17th century to the present form the greatest philosophical tradition in Iranian thought and culture. The persistence of such a role raises questions about the status of this tradition in contemporary Iran and the global intellectual sphere. This paper initially describes and critiques three different approaches to the transcendent philosophy or wisdom in Iranian contemporary intellectual history: instrumentalist, authenticist, and reflexive interactionist. It is argued that among these approaches, the third one, deemed suitable for contemporary intellectual conditions, is particularly effective in engaging with this tradition and others like it. Furthermore, it is illustrated that this approach aligns with a recent philosophical paradigm known as intercultural philosophy in a more fundamental analysis.

Keywords: Mullā Şadrā, the Transcendent Philosophy, Islamic Philosophy, Intercultural Philosophy, the Reflexive Interactionist Approach, Modern Islamic Thought.

Introduction

Philosophy has a deep relationship with its time. This connection is perfectly encapsulated in Hegel's statement: "Philosophy is the spirit of its time expressed in thought" [Wuchterl, 1987, 178]. In Hegel's philosophy, this statement holds a unique significance. At its most fundamental level, it highlights the profound connection between any philosophical thought and the period in which it emerged and was formulated. Philosophical traditions, like all other intellectual and spiritual traditions, are intrinsically linked to the eras in which they were formed. The transcendent wisdom or philosophy of Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad Ṣīrāzī (1572–1641) follows this rule. Certain conditions and necessities had to arise for these ideas to be formulated and developed.

The question of the status and role of the transcendent wisdom in the contemporary era invites us to reexamine it. Those engaged in exploring this philosophy, as well as contemporary Iranian philosophy, must first address the questions: what relevance does the transcendent wisdom have in our time? Why and with what approach should we engage with it? Examining the various related efforts made in Iran in recent decades can provide a clearer answer to the primary questions of this paper.

A comprehensive review can categorize prevailing approaches to the transcendent wisdom in contemporary Iran into three types:

1. The Instrumentalist Approach;
2. The Authenticist Approach;
3. The Reflexive Interactionist Approach.

Upon initial observation, it appears that scholars in the field of the transcendent philosophy or wisdom (*al-Ḥikmah al-muta'āliyah*) have not deliberately employed such designations for their methodologies and approaches. However, through their works, such approaches and tendencies can be identified and demonstrated. In Iran, a multitude of diverse works focusing on the development, elucidation, and expansion of Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy have been published in recent decades. This has positioned the transcendent philosophy as one of the most frequently cited philosophical trends in contemporary Iranian academia and intellectual discourse. The International Conference on Mullā Ṣadrā in 1999, for instance, was one of the most significant philosophical events in this regard. The three approaches introduced in this paper are most prominently demonstrated in the collection of articles from this conference and similar events held in subsequent years [Collected Articles of the World Conference on Mullā Ṣadrā, 2001].

We now explain each of the three approaches in more detail.

The Instrumentalist Approach

In the instrumentalist approach, the transcendent wisdom and Mullā Ṣadrā serve as means to achieve or strengthen other goals and agendas. Those who seek to defend the entirety of Islamic teachings, reinforce and revive the historical spirit of Iranian and Islamic culture, or highlight a rich cultural and intellectual legacy by drawing on this heritage and tradition belong to this group. Likewise, those who, driven by fascination with modern thought, either affirm or negate Mullā Ṣadrā's wisdom fall into this category. The latter group sometimes cite Mullā Ṣadrā (as a means) to justify what has originally emerged in modern thought, while at other times they critique it to demonstrate the stagnation and infertility of Islamic philosophy.

Among proponents of this approach, there is a strong inclination towards venerating Islam and its historical and cultural heritage or boasting about national identity, religiosity and ethnic pride. Given that the transcendent philosophy is predominantly pursued by clergies and graduates of religious sciences in seminaries or universities, two subgroups can be distinguished within this category. Those who utilize it to rationally justify Islamic teachings form the majority. However, within these clergies and scholars, another group has emerged. After acquainting themselves with modern philosophical ideas, they increasingly lean towards regarding philosophical thought as inherently valuable for intellectual and cultural life in general, independent of religious affiliations and contents. This second group has been growing in recent years. From the works of this group, it is evident that they do not believe in the intrinsic value of the transcendent wisdom but consider it an important legacy of Iranian-Islamic culture. The instrumentalist approach to the transcendent wisdom is not an official or dominant stance or a specific intellectual movement, but many scholars and students of philosophy hold this view of the tradition.

A wise expression of this stance might be:

For the educated Iranian society, Mullā Ṣadrā is not only a symbol of this country's cultural unity, but his school of thought and works nurture the hope that one day, based on the very rich thought of this great sage, the possibilities of an authentic culture can be created, preserving tradition while ensuring the originality and actualization of future and present thought [Mojtahedi, 2003, 1–2].

Morteza Motahhari (1919–1979), one of the most influential religious scholars in recent decades, embarked on a strenuous and prolonged effort to defend Islamic culture and thought by using the transcendent wisdom as his foundation. Despite having a consistent direction throughout his endeavors, Motahhari can always be found in a state of dialogue and integration. On one hand, he based himself on the transcendent philosophy, and on the other, he remained open to new ideas and philosophies.

As a religious scholar and theologian, Motahhari felt a responsibility towards his society, which required him to adapt his role accordingly. However, his method of fulfilling this role was influenced by his profound intellectual engagement and openness to new thoughts and philosophies. From his exposition on realism to his extensive commentary on the philosophy of Mullā Hādī Sabzāvarī (1797–1873), a long and meaningful path is traversed. One implication of this is the possibility for changing approaches and perceptions towards Islamic philosophy.

Some prominent scholars of Islamic philosophy in contemporary Iran show no inclination to distance themselves from their intellectual traditions or view them from an external perspective. Among such Islamic scholars are ‘Abdullah Jawadi Amuli (1933–p.t.) and Hassan Hassanzadeh Amoli (1928–2021). Despite his extensive teaching and writing on Islamic philosophy, especially the transcendent wisdom, Jawadi Amuli has not addressed the central question of this paper. Although he is the most open contemporary Sadrian philosopher, his manner of teaching, and intellectual engagements can put him easily in the instrumentalist approach to the transcendent wisdom. For example, in two articles published in the “Sadra Wisdom Journal”, despite the expectations set by the titles, the reader finds little in response to the questions and perspectives this paper aims to explore [Jawadi Amuli, 1996; Jawadi Amuli, 1999]. This approach to the transcendent wisdom and Islamic philosophy can be seen as both instrumentalist and somehow authenticist.

The Authenticist Approach

In the authenticist approach the transcendent wisdom (*al-Ḥikmah al-muta‘āliyah*) is considered the supreme thought and idea for any era and the highest or at least the most important philosophical system derived from the spirit of Islamic teachings. Advocates of this essentialist approach exhibit a kind of exaggeration and adherence to something that may no longer hold such a status. Those who regard the transcendent wisdom as one of the perennial philosophies or the sole knowledge of the core truth of the Quran and revelation fall into this group.

In the preface to the collection of articles from the Mullā Ṣadrā conference (2001), one can observe an example of the authenticist approach. Ayatollah Seyyed Mohammad Khamenei initially explains the reasons for the renewed importance and attention to the “Transcendent Wisdom”:

Unfortunately, unlike Islamic philosophy, Western schools of thoughts and philosophies not only fail to facilitate rational and constructive interaction but often cause chaos in thought and intellectual disorder, preventing the proper development of philosophy, leading to confusion, and even promoting irreligiosity (and secularism) in religious communities [Mullā Ṣadrā and Comparative Studies, 2001, 3].

The author, referring to the current global situation, writes:

The current and prevalent philosophies in the West do not bring blessings and goodness to our society. We should approach them cautiously and engage in mutual dialogue, testing them with the criteria of [Islamic] logic and wisdom, benefiting from their useful experiences, expanding the space for thought, and exploring unknown horizons that Western philosophy has achieved with its boldness and adventurous spirit. In return, we should open the doors of the treasure of [Islamic] wisdom, Islamic philosophy, and especially the transcendent wisdom, which Iranian and Islamic sages have labored over for centuries, to Western thinkers, guiding them to this heavenly fresh water stream that can heal and resolve the deep-seated problems of contemporary Western philosophy” [Mullā Ṣadrā and Comparative Studies, 2001, 4].

The author believes that by introducing Mullā Ṣadrā to Western thinkers, many global issues and crisis will be overcome, and continuing this effort is considered a duty: “Today introducing Mullā Ṣadrā and his philosophy to the West is the prime duty for us. Mullā Ṣadrā should be introduced to Western thinkers”. The author views what has been done so far as “a drop in the ocean and far from a comprehensive and global introduction of this sage” [Ibid.]. He considers Western philosophy as characterized by unrest, rebellion, and adventurousness, and thus facing it requires a strong barrier, a role that the transcendent wisdom can certainly play. Up to this point, this analysis falls within the second approach. However, by mentioning other aspects of modern philosophies, other questions arise, bringing the author closer to the third approach. After acknowledging the virtues of Western philosophies, such as “escaping imitation, skepticism, and not easily submitting to others’ opinions”, it is concluded that “with such a nature and talent found in Western thinkers, it is very appropriate to present the dynamic, lively, and innovative school of the transcendent wisdom to them” [Ibid., 5].

However, if we truly seek to present our traditions, including the transcendent wisdom, to Western thinkers, we must first find a common language for dialogue with our audience. Achieving this requires understanding the audience. A common language and understanding the audience necessitate entering another’s world and time. The term “world” refers to the essential components of life and existence for each thinker. “Time” does not refer to chronological time but to the time associated with the existence and being of thought. The difference between thinkers lies in their differing worlds and times. We must be aware that once we seek to engage in dialogue using the *al-Ḥikmah al-mutta‘aliyah*, addressing issues in our world that were not pertinent in Mullā Ṣadrā’s time, we are no longer in Mullā Ṣadrā’s time. Our world is different: neither is our world Mullā Ṣadrā’s world, nor is our audience’s world. This phrase supports this view: “It is regrettable that this valuable and beneficial commodity remains hidden in the minds and hearts of Muslim philosophers or in the corners of libraries and school corners while so many eager hearts around the world long for and need it” [Ibid., 5]. This raises the question

of why this philosophy has remained hidden, unknown and inactive. Is it not because we have sought the precious commodities hidden in our minds and hearts and chosen the transcendent wisdom among them, indicating new conditions? Shouldn't we first question the causes and conditions of this situation? For a philosophy to be updated and part of the constructive elements of a culture, primary it must be related to other elements of the culture and developed alongside them in a historical context. With this condition, can the transcendent wisdom be the philosophy of contemporary Iranian life and culture? Does this philosophy represent the Iranian world and intellect today? Does it embody the rationality of Iranian culture and intellect in our time, or does it hold a higher status?

Some preachers and interpreters of the *al-Ḥikmah al-muta'āliyah*, despite adopting this intellectual approach, emphasize its humanistic and context-based nature and consequently its insufficiency for all times. For instance, Mohammad Taqi Mesbah Yazdi (1935–2021) writes:

There is no doubt that Islamic philosophy is a human knowledge and thus subject to the common laws among all human sciences and knowledge. Islamic philosophy is neither an infallible collection nor has it reached its ultimate goal. The philosophical heritage of our predecessors, with all its greatness and glory, does not answer all the philosophical questions of the present and future, nor are all its answers the most complete and accurate possible" [Mesbah, 1996, 19].

Mesbah Yazdi emphasizes the need for constant review and interrogation of this intellectual heritage:

Islamic wisdom, like any other human artifact, always requires correction and completion. This is perhaps doubly necessary for a discipline like Islamic philosophy because its principles and propositions are not neutral or indifferent to the content of the primary sources of Islam, namely the Quran and the Sunnah. One of the fundamental concerns of a Muslim philosopher is the compatibility of his philosophical and rational beliefs with the contents of religious Islamic resources and texts" [Ibid.].

Despite this precision, he does not explain the state and position of Islamic philosophy or the criteria and standards by which to enhance the philosophical thought of the time. It is entirely correct that "any effort to purify and complete Islamic philosophy without deep reflection on its current temporal situation will be fruitless and sterile" [Ibid.]. Between the positions of authenticist and reflexive interactionist approaches, statements like these also can be found: "Mullā Ṣadrā's transcendent wisdom can be proudly presented internationally as one of the closest humanist thoughts to reality in the contemporary world" [Kadivar, 1998, 87].

A significant article on Islamic philosophy, particularly the transcendent philosophy, is extensively discussed in the "University of Tehran's Philosophy Journal". The article claims that what is conventionally called Islamic philosophy is: "Islamic

philosophy in the sense that the spirit governing it is consistent and compatible with the spirit governing Islamic culture and derived from the guidance present in sacred texts, not a philosophy lacking a cohesive spiritual connection and merely attributed to individuals who, for reasons other than the content of this philosophy, are Muslims” [Ghaffari, 2000, 96]. The author first discusses the background and origin of Islamic philosophy, which is ancient Greece. He believes that the translation movement was “a scientific movement based on prior selection and ordering. The determinants of this selection and ordering were either practical needs or the cultural interests and preferences prevailing in the Islamic society” [Ibid., 71]. He proves that Greek philosophy is divine, meaning it relies on a divine and immaterial realm to explain the system of nature and human existence, believing in God and His names and attributes. Thus, “the interaction between Islamic thought and Greek thought is the interaction between two compatible systems” [Ibid., 75]. Socrates, from this perspective, is the first martyred teacher of wisdom with a divine stance, and Plato is the greatest philosopher of all times [Ibid., 76–77]. The author then provides detailed evidence to prove Socrates’ prophethood, concluding: “Acknowledging this prophethood from an Islamic perspective is not only difficult but necessary and general, given the Quranic verses indicating the necessity and spread of the prophets’ call among different peoples and throughout successive ages” [Ibid., 117]. The author explains that the purpose of this explanation is to show the divine origin of philosophy and its alignment with the mission of the divine prophets: “The serious initiator of philosophy in Greece, and in a sense world philosophy, was a person with a special divine message, like and aligned with other prophets throughout history, namely Socrates the prophet. Socrates’ philosophy is prophetic philosophy, and his rationality was celestial and sacred” [Ibid., 118]. He then shows that the disciples of this sage prophet, namely Plato and Aristotle, “were philosophers in the full sense of the word, deified and monotheistic” [Ibid.].

The result of Ghaffari’s analysis and approach is that Islamic philosophy, in terms of its origin, growth and development context, and depth and richness of content, represents the highest form of human thought. Its religious and divine backing gives it a divine and sacred aspect. Hence, in a sense, Islamic philosophy and the transcendent wisdom are the most authentic thoughts possible in human-being history.

Henry Corbin (1903–1978) played a crucial role in drawing attention to Islamic philosophy, particularly Illuminationist (*Išrāqī*) philosophy and the transcendent wisdom in contemporary Iran, with a distinct intellectual perspective on the dignity and role of Islamic philosophy in the modern era. Karim Mojtahedi (1930–2024) has addressed Corbin’s views in this regard in an article:

According to Corbin, Mullā Ṣadrā belongs to a very extensive intellectual and philosophical family that has existed in various temporal and spatial contexts. He not only inherits their legacy in the conventional sense but indeed revitalizes

this very authentic intellectual heritage, preserving its resilience and potency. Corbin regards Mullā Ṣadrā not only as the most significant thinker of his specific and defined period, articulating a highly precise and intriguing form of philosophical tradition peculiar to our land and era, but also as the culmination of the essence of philosophy in its pure actuality in his time. Hence, this thinker is not merely confined to the conventional material, political, and social history of his time; rather, understanding him requires looking beyond history and even evaluating history itself on these grounds. A thought that does not respect its noble history, even if it originates from within history, cannot be deemed authentic [Mojtahedi, 1997, 36].

Furthermore, in elaborating on Corbin's position regarding Mullā Ṣadrā, Mojtahedi writes:

Mullā Ṣadrā is a key figure who not only follows in the footsteps of previous masters and inspires subsequent philosophers and sages but also, in a broader sense, resides within the spiritual horizon of those souls capable of safeguarding their inner world from any form of external historical transgression, thereby perpetuating a unified spiritual and moral legacy. This legacy serves as the sole torch that allows each individual, as opportunities arise, to discover their true existential essence through the unity or coherence that they master... Corbin's introduction of Mullā Ṣadrā transcends history, placing him at the forefront and presenting him as the bearer of perennial and universally applicable wisdom. Such wisdom, found in various cultures, requires spiritual and moral readiness and preparations. If we accept such a claim, the perennial wisdom of Mullā Ṣadrā is a jewel concealed within history. While humans live within history, they can potentially transcend it only through proximity to eternal wisdom. The enduring works of sages like Suhrawardī and Mullā Ṣadrā can prepare us for such proximity [Ibid., 36–37].

Mojtahedi emphasizes that Corbin, in his effort to understand and introduce sages like Mullā Ṣadrā, aimed to foster mutual understanding and harmony among thinkers across different cultures. His primary audience comprises thinkers who have embraced philosophical ideas up to contemporary times.

Effort here is not merely about presenting the authentic characteristics of Oriental thought but more importantly, it seeks to identify potential commonalities between Eastern and Western traditions. Based on these commonalities, a dialogue can be established among those thinkers who, despite vast temporal and spatial distances, belong to a unified spiritual and moral family — a type of dialogue that results from harmony [Mojtahedi, 1997, 40].

In another article exploring a comparative study between Mullā Ṣadrā and Hegel, Karim Mojtahedi articulates his interpretation of such inquiry. He explains the purpose of comparative study: "In comparing two great philosophers, the aim is not necessarily to prove one's view at the expense of the other. Rather, through careful contemplation

of one's thoughts, it is possible to better understand the other as well, thereby deepening the mind of the comparer regarding both" [Mojtahedi, 2003, 2].

Mojtahedi believes that what matters in philosophy is dialogue. "Every great philosopher needs dialogue and conversation... Philosophy thrives on dialogue". Based on this premise, he sees his work in this article as an attempt to foster dialogue between Mullā Ṣadrā and Hegel. "Mullā Ṣadrā and Hegel can deeply engage in conversation without necessarily proving one's position and refuting the other's, but rather, one can even imagine that real depth in each thinker's thought requires careful consideration from another perspective" [Ibid., 4].

However, the approach that Corbin introduced to Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy in Iran led to the formation of a new wave among philosophers, wisdom seekers and lovers, and all those interested in Iranian culture. Perhaps, in one era, this was the strongest current that introduced this tradition to the contemporary world. Corbin, in the course of his intellectual evolution, arrives in Iran, finding the Iranian wisdom tradition, especially Sufism, Illuminationist (*Iṣrāqī*) philosophy, and the transcendent wisdom, a valuable guide and remedy for the wounds inflicted by the dominance of Western ideologies. Yet, this perception of Corbin resonates differently among Iranian thinkers. Thus, Corbin influences in various forms strangely. His translation of some of Mullā Ṣadrā's works into French and subsequent efforts by Toshihiko Izutsu (1914–1993) and Seyyed Hossein Nasr (1933–p.t.) have sparked renewed interest in the Islamic-Iranian philosophical heritage. In recent years, Nasr has extensively introduced Islamic philosophy and the transcendent wisdom to Westerners and the Islamic world. On this basis, he has provided new foundations and frameworks for critiquing the foundations of Western culture and philosophy.

The Reflexive Interactionist Approach

In the reflexive interactionist approach (*ṭarīqī*), time is considered the essential factor, and the answers to the issues and problems of each era are provided by the thinkers of that era. The effectiveness and impact of a thought depend on its relevance to the times and its ability to create new horizons when addressing contemporary issues. If philosophical traditions follow such a path, they might play an intermediary and interactive role. This principle can be applied to the transcendent wisdom (*al-Ḥikmah al-muta'āliyah*) as well. If teachers and scholars in this field strive in this direction, its effectiveness can be gradually revealed.

Within the reflexive interactionist approach (*ṭarīqī*), various tendencies can be distinguished. Some, while reflecting on the present time, have reached the necessity of reviving the religious spirit in contemporary humans and communities and regard the transcendent philosophy as a worthy example that can provide valuable lessons to contemporary thinkers. Others, considering the conditions of the modern era which necessitate the use of various cultural heritages, aim to present the *al-Ḥikmah*

al-muta'āliyah as one of the important traditions of Iranian and Islamic culture, interrogating it in the context of contemporary issues and crises.

Numerous books and articles written in Iran over the past four decades, focusing on Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy, have examined these capabilities in various ways. Among these works, some have tended to label their research as comparative. For instance, in the collection of articles from the "Mullā Ṣadrā Congress" (2001), one is titled "Comparative Studies". The discussions undertaken in this article highlight the educative nature of such efforts. In this collection, it is evident that the authors strive to establish a dialogue between parts of this tradition and elements of other cultures with different histories. Before considering the authors' efforts and conclusions, one must pay attention to their intellectual space and, more precisely, their world. The articles reveal worlds in which the authors are constantly moving back and forth between two different times and histories. The authors are divided into two groups. Some have approached the *al-Ḥikmah al-muta'āliyah* from the standpoint of Western philosophies, while others, after learning Islamic philosophy and Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy, have turned to Western philosophies.

For example, in this collection, there is an article titled "Reconstruction of the Transcendent Method". The author, a professor of Islamic and Western philosophy, writes at the beginning: "The overall goal of this article is to reconstruct a method that Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad Ṣīrāzī implicitly used in developing his theory of the primacy of existence" [Mullā Ṣadrā and Comparative Studies, 2001, 171]. This statement clearly shows that the author approaches Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy from the outside, aided by what has been experienced in modern philosophy as reconstruction and method. This back-and-forth movement, reflecting the author's mind and world, is evident throughout the article. In another article, the author compares Hegel's view with Mullā Ṣadrā's on "the relationship between motion and perfection". In this article, it is evident that only by considering the history of European thought and Hegelian philosophy can certain parts of Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy be articulated and perceived as containing new ideas.

Another author, an Arab by origin, in this collection (2001) compares the concept of "substantial motion" (*ḥarakah ḡawharīyyah*) in Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy with that of Whitehead, addressing two philosophers separated by about four hundred years with completely different histories. What benefits do such comparisons offer to contemporary thinkers? These efforts lead us back to the central question of this paper: what compels us to compare and correlate elements from two (or multiple) cultures? Why, and for what purpose, do we engage in these comparisons? Does our era necessitate such comparisons? Reflecting on the historical conditions of societies like Iran, shouldn't we first consider the circumstances that have led us to think in this manner? Perhaps only by examining these conditions can we understand our current fragmentation — some striving to revive the past, others advocating for the abandonment of tradition in favor of modern thought and culture, and still others attempting to merge the two. If contemporary thinkers avoid these questions, they risk criticism

for neglecting the essence and clinging to the periphery, which is far from profound philosophical inquiry.

Philosophy begins with questions. The life of philosophy lies in confronting questions. Philosophical questions are intertwined with the philosopher's soul. A contemporary thinker cannot merely repeat the questions of past philosophers. This point is another expression of the intrinsic relationship between time and philosophy. Therefore, even when a philosopher is revisited in philosophical thought, that philosopher is actually being rethought. In other words, the contemporary thinker has their own specific issues, and if they refer to a philosopher from the past, it is to seek assistance from them in addressing today's questions. With this in mind, giving precedence to a philosopher who lived in another time and world does not have a clear meaning.

It is essential to seriously consider the question of what to expect and pursue if the transcendent wisdom (and other Iranian and Islamic intellectual traditions) continues to be taught, reflected upon, and investigated. Looking at the experiences of non-European nations, we see that similar trends towards reviving pre-modern traditions have emerged and intensified over the years. For example, the emergence of the Kyoto School in Japan and the effort to revive Zen Buddhism and Shintoism were attempts that gave rise to modern Japanese philosophy [Mosleh, 2005]. Recently, thinkers known as "intercultural philosophers" have followed this path more than others. For instance, professor Adher Mall, an Indian philosopher residing in Germany, has shown in his works that philosophy is not limited to what Europeans say. He has introduced and explained Indian and Chinese philosophical terms and concepts. The number of books written in recent years to introduce forgotten aspects of modern thought based on the principles of Daoist, Hindu, Orthodox Christian, and Islamic mysticism is substantial. The goal of such authors is to demonstrate the diversity of cultures and, consequently, the diversity of philosophies. The next step is to show the necessity of dialogue and to create grounds for dialogue, understanding, and cooperation, as Adher Mall has effectively articulated [Mall, 1995].

In recent decades, scattered efforts in the same direction have been observed in the intellectual sphere of Iran. These efforts have not yet been seriously attentive to the foundations and methods, but evidence suggests that this orientation is increasing and gaining strength. The effort known in recent years as "comparative philosophy" can be also considered a local and incomplete form of intercultural philosophy. Comparative studies in the field of philosophy require more extensive examination and critique.

Towards a Reflexive Interactionist Approach (*Ṭarīqī*)

Mehdi Ha'eri Yazdi (1923–1999) was a renowned scholar of Islamic philosophy and the transcendent theosophy (*al-Ḥikmah al-muta'āliyah*). After studying Islamic philosophy under the leadership of the most prominent figures of this tradition in Iran,

he traveled to the United States to study analytical philosophy. Upon his return to Iran, Ha'eri offered a unique interpretation of the transcendent theosophy. Utilizing literature and principles of analytic philosophy, he sought to elucidate the unique aspects and distinctive features of the *al-Ḥikmah al-muta'āliyah* compared to other traditions. According to Ha'eri, the *al-Ḥikmah al-muta'āliyah* should be regarded similarly to "metalanguage" in analytical philosophy. He believed that only in this way we could demonstrate the "superiority of *al-Ḥikmah al-muta'āliyah* over other philosophies that have been available to philosophers and scholars from the time of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle to the present in both the East and West" [Ha'eri, 2005, 160].

Inspired by the new semantics, Ha'eri aimed to illustrate the superiority of the *al-Ḥikmah al-muta'āliyah* over other forms of wisdom and philosophy. He first introduces a prelude by explaining the difference between object language and metalanguage. This distinction has helped modern logicians in various fields, including ethics and logic. Ha'eri uses this achievement to explain the relationship between the transcendent philosophy and other philosophies. "The prefix 'meta' signifies a higher language (metalanguage) through which discourse on the subject matter takes place. In object language, however, the terms, rules, and issues themselves are the object of discussion, not the means of understanding" [Ibid., 161]. Therefore, with metalanguage, we discuss objects, whereas with object language, the subject matter (object) itself is discussed. Applying this terminology to the transcendent philosophy, we can assert that in philosophies like Peripateticism, Illuminationism and Sufism, the language used is object language, whereas in the transcendent philosophy it is metalanguage. Ṣadr al-Dīn Šīrāzī

employed two languages for his advanced philosophical teachings: one termed metalanguage or the transcendent philosophy, through which he articulated his philosophy, yet this language is not discussed as a default. The other is object language, which is the primary language of philosophy such as Masha' and Illuminationist (*Išrāqī*) philosophies, and other schools of thought that have been the subject of his philosophical discussions [Ibid., 162].

Ha'eri advocates a path towards perfection in philosophical thought, particularly in Islamic philosophy. This trajectory has reached such maturity and perfection that this tradition can have a metalanguage. "The language of philosophy has progressed and evolved so much throughout history that it can easily represent the primary levels of that metalanguage with accepted postulates used to solve complex issues and theories of the object language of philosophy" [Ibid., 163]. Ha'eri considers this interpretation of the position of *al-Ḥikmah al-muta'āliyah* important: "If this interpretation is appreciated by genuine philosophers, who are quite rare, it not only exonerates Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy from the accusation of eclecticism and instability but also enables the justification and reconstruction of his innovations contributions within a logical system based on postulates that possess unparalleled order" [Ibid.].

Ha'eri, in other passages of his articles, has pointed out distinguishing aspects of Islamic philosophy from Western philosophy, which are essential for understanding his perspective on the position of Islamic philosophy in the contemporary world and his response to the questions posed in this paper. For example, he writes: "One of the advantages of Islamic philosophy is the lack of dualism in its history. Unlike Western philosophy, where this dualism is very tangible and noticeable in the form of two branches and even two methods of human thought. From this perspective, Western philosophy is divided into classical and modern philosophy" [Ha'eri, 2005, 38]. With this statement, Ha'eri makes a fundamental distinction between classical and modern philosophy, a claim that seems difficult to prove. Almost all major thinkers and philosophers in the history of philosophy have attempted to trace and demonstrate the roots of modern philosophy and thought in the Middle Ages and ancient Greece. Christian philosophy is Greek philosophy combined with elements of Christian thought, and modern philosophy, originating from Descartes, has deep roots in the Middle Ages. In the history of Western philosophy and culture, there have been great transformations and crises, but no jumps and discontinuities. What does the duality in history really mean? The unity in Islamic philosophy seems correct in the sense that this history has not undergone a major transformation like the one that occurred in the modern era. In contrast, the Islamic world, culture, and civilization have not undergone such major transformations. However, the profound transformations in worldviews, thought, relationships, political and social institutions, as well as in science and technology, represent an unprecedented shift in human history experienced primarily by Western societies. Consequently, comparing Western philosophy with Islamic philosophy and discussing the stability of thought in Islamic philosophy versus the transformation and diversification of thought in Western philosophy is no longer straightforward and easy. "Contrary to the dispersion and transformation of opinions in Western philosophy, Islamic philosophy has taken a different path from the beginning, pursuing it uniformly to the point of perfection, and has been preserved from these intellectual disarray and deviations in Western philosophy" [Ibid., 39].

Many questions arise in response to the claims of Ha'eri. Does he truly overlook the relationship between history and the status of philosophy amidst historical conditions and temporal changes? Is philosophy independent of temporal transformations? By what criteria do we deem one philosophy complete and superior, and distort others? Does philosophy always pursue a particular aim or purpose? Other arguments from Ha'eri can be brought as answers to some of these questions:

Islamic philosophers have well assessed that if philosophy is the knowledge of the truths of things and claims nothing but truth-finding, and Islam is indeed the true religion that exactly corresponds to the truths of nature and the truths of the realities of existence, then they will ultimately not differ (the difference is only in method and interpretation), and they successfully proved this by discovering

the common ground between philosophy and the authentic religion of Islam, which has been a great service to Islamic societies and Islam itself [Ha'eri, 2005, 41].

It seems that Ha'eri sees no fundamental difference between philosophy and religion, especially as they are integrated in the Islamic world. He then judges what has happened in the West based on this premise. Has philosophy truly been understood in this way throughout the history of Western thought? Let us recall the understanding of the nature and purpose of philosophy among the great Western philosophers. Descartes, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and numerous other philosophers each had their own conception of the meaning, purpose, and issues of philosophy. At most, Ha'eri, by adopting his own definition of philosophy and its purpose and issues, has analyzed and evaluated philosophies that understood philosophy and its purpose in the same way. Despite the turbulence in Ha'eri's analyses about Mullā Ṣadrā's philosophy, his overall effort to connect this philosophy with contemporary modern philosophy can be considered a reflexive interactionist approach (*ṭarīqī*).

Some contemporary scholars in Iran, including Morteza Motahhari, regard one of the aspects of the superiority of Islamic philosophy over Greek philosophy to be the greater number of philosophical problems introduced and addressed in the Islamic world compared to those in Greek philosophy. He sees this expansion and increase in two directions in his account of the history of philosophy in Islam. One is that the same subjects and problems have elaborated and expanded in terms of how they are articulated and proven, and the other is that entirely new subjects and problems have emerged in philosophy [Motahhari, 1992]. Can we not regard the trajectory of Western philosophy as the trajectory of increasing philosophical problems with the same view? Although this perspective is insufficient for engaging with contemporary philosophers, it is at least a gateway to addressing the issues and problems of the time.

Ebrahim Dinani is another contemporary philosopher in Iran who was trained in the traditional Islamic philosophy education system and has endeavored to introduce and promote this tradition by listening to contemporary modern thought. Dinani considers Ṣadr al-Dīn Šīrāzī's position in the Islamic world to be unparalleled. "All the great theosophists of the world pale in comparison to the grandeur of Mullā Ṣadrā, and I claim this. Among the gifts that God granted Mullā Ṣadrā was that he was the heir to a thousand years of Islamic culture" [Dinani, 2003, 23]. The enlightened aspect of Dinani's works can be found in his own words: "The human mind has such unity and comprehensiveness that by returning and paying attention to the past, it can explore and evaluate its future possibilities. Therefore, it can be said that someone who has no connection with the past does not deeply and profoundly look to the future. Neglecting the past leads to living in day-to-dayness" [Ibid., 2]. As Dinani's phrase implies, thinking essentially relates to time, but understanding the present and future depends on understanding the past. However, "returning to the past is impossible, and the recreation of the past in the present is also considered impossible,

but dialogue with the past, which can be regarded as a kind of seeking for existence, is always possible for humans” [Dinani, 2003, 2]. Dinani’s approach to Islamic philosophy considering the relationship between past and future can be considered an example of a reflexive interactionist approach (*tarīqī*).

A philosopher, while constantly looking to the future, also pays attention to the past. That is, philosophical thought involves both ascent and return, and by looking deeply at the past, always takes steps forward. Some people look to the past to return, while others return to take steps forward. A philosopher looks to the past for a new leap and always strives to explore new horizons in the future. A philosopher is a historical being, and at the same time, his gaze is to the future [Ibid.].

Islamic philosophy, including the *al-Ḥikmah al-muta‘āliyah*, holds a deep religious attribute. Without delving into the relationship between philosophy and Islam here, we initiate a thought-provoking query based on Karim Mojtabehi’s analysis, closely related to the primary question of this text. Mojtabehi distinguishes between identity and difference. According to him, “an identity that negates difference is not identity” [Mojtabehi, 2006, 323]. Identity and difference can only be sustained through their interrelation. “Identity is inheritance and difference is creation; identity is memory and difference is will. If we forget the past, we will lose the future. To maintain cultural difference, both memory and will are necessary” [Ibid.]. Thus, to preserve and harmonize identity and difference, we must understand what constitutes our identity and their relationship.

Mojtabehi further emphasizes the role of religion in the inner layer of our difference. “We are born into our religious culture and nurtured by it. Our religion places us in the tradition of our spiritual culture, and if a community remains faithful to it, this spiritual state becomes natural and intrinsic to the individuals of that society, not only as a secondary state but as a primary one” [Ibid., 322].

According to Mojtabehi, “one of the great cultural tragedies today is not only the unknown original identity and foundation of humans, but also the distortion and mere pretense of what has merely become a verbal and transferred aspect” [Ibid., 322]. His warning is directed towards the roots that are the source of all thoughts and actions of a group of people. If the will of the people is deprived, everything is taken away from them. Conversely, any authentic thought and action can only be in relation to the will and freedom. Thus, in understanding each group of people, one must inquire about the relationship of their will to their thoughts and actions. Every people have roots from which they are born and grow. The significant point is the correspondence of people’s will with their thoughts and current life. Every people have a history and have become accustomed to thinking and living. When the era revolves around the will and desire of another [group] people and changes all relationships, people confronted with new conditions and circumstances will inevitably face conflicts. The only way to resolve

conflicts is the effort of these groups of people to create harmony between their will and the demands of the new situation. In other words, identity verification consistent with will and era. This process can only result from the initiation of a dialogue based on need and with the aim of understanding and assimilating new elements. The religious element inherent in the identity and difference of people is an element that, naturally, does not lend itself to dialogue. Mojtabehi writes:

Religious commitment is, of course, entirely justified and should not be considered a form of negative prejudice. However, in this regard, any fundamental dialogue is blocked from the outset, as if the positions of the parties are pre-determined, without this aspect being explicitly stated. The implication is that the parties implicitly accept that Moses follows his religion, and Jesus follows his religion, whereas in philosophy, dialogue and the search for understanding are approached differently from the beginning [Mojtabehi, 2006, 322].

Therefore, in the two components of our topic, Islamic philosophy (and more specifically, the transcendent wisdom, which also contains the elements of both philosophy and Islam), we must ask how this combination forms and what each of its constituent parts entails.

Ha'eri Yazdi argues that

Islamic philosophy is not an additional combination but rather a combination of attribute and attributed. However, this attribution or description does not imply that Islamic philosophy adopts the content of, for example, the Quran and Sunnah, or purely Islamic sources and methods. It is merely a historical sign. That is, the philosophy that has been discussed and debated in Islamic world historically, the philosophy that has shone in Islamic countries, is a philosophy that originates fundamentally from Hellenistic philosophy. One can say that Islamic philosophy is essentially Hellenistic philosophy, which has been developed through interpretations and translations by figures like al-Fārābī, Ibn Rušd, or Ibn Sīnā and translated into Islamic languages. Therefore, this attribution or description is purely historical and not substantial. It is not the case that this philosophy is exclusively associated with Islam [Ha'eri, 2005, 386].

If we consider the interpretations of these Islamic philosophers as the foundation, Islamic philosophy, due to its roots and essence in rationality and its language as a universal human language, can be among the potentials within Islamic cultural traditions that facilitate dialogue between thinkers of the Islamic world and Iranian intellectuals with others. This interpretation provides a ground for a reflexive interactionist approach (*tarīqī*) to Islamic philosophy and the transcendent wisdom. This perspective is crucial because merely having faith and submission to a religion does not necessarily foster the desire for dialogue and understanding. The essence of faith is devotion, while the essence of philosophy is continuous exploration and

inquiry. According to Mojtahedi, “understanding between these two co-religious [groups] is a form of complete spiritual union and, in a meaningful sense, it excludes foundational discourse without conversation and without the possibility of doubt, but in philosophy, there is more of an invitation to understanding. Philosophy necessitates a kind of continuous questioning and exploration” [Mojtahedi, 2006, 320].

The enduring companionship and profound overlap between philosophy and Islamic faith and beliefs highlight a prominent feature of the Iranian spirit: the ability to navigate between the realms of faith and rationality. The rational aspect, manifested in various philosophical paradigms and even in theological or legal schools such as *'Usūl al-fiqh*, can today traverse between modern and contemporary philosophies on one hand, and Islamic philosophies and other cultural traditions like mysticism (*'Irfān*), speculative theology based on *Kalām* and exegesis (*Tafsīr*) on the other. Islamic history and traditions demonstrate the potential of this culture for deep and rational dialogue aimed at understanding the “Other”. Islamic thinkers can engage in dialogue with the “Other” while preserving their faith, striving for mutual understanding. Preserving roots, which are the source of will, does not conflict with rational and philosophical inquiries. Identity is fluid and dynamic, lacking any indication of rigidity in character. Throughout history, no nation has maintained a fixed personality and identity. The challenging issue lies in abnormalities and ruptures in the history of a nation, which thinkers must address. The prevailing trend across all vibrant nations is a commitment to their own identity, living in a searching, understanding, and exploratory manner. This approach can serve as fundamental characteristics of a nation.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion it becomes apparent that the culmination and outcome of the aforementioned approaches are leaning towards a third approach. This indicates that many scholars and practitioners of Islamic philosophy and the transcendent philosophy, whether consciously or subconsciously engaged in teaching and research within this realm, have shown responsiveness to the spirit of their time and the questions arising from it. Perhaps in the future, we will witness a deeper engagement and impact of this attention. Accordingly, the transcendent wisdom represents a comprehensive manifestation of past philosophical forms of wisdom. It can serve as a reference point for contemporary philosophical thought. However, any effort to strengthen or revive these traditions in contemporary times must be mindful of the current state of thought and fundamental issues of this era. The issues of any time are inherently those of that particular time. Traditions that have exerted significant influence in the past, both materially and spiritually on humanity, can inspire new forms under different circumstances. Nonetheless, they cannot resurrect past roles. Such perspectives on past traditions in contemporary thought are termed “revision” and “rethinking”, which involve reinterpreting these traditions. Traditions such as

the philosophy of Şadr al-Dīn Şīrāzī can be revisited and re-interpreted in the modern world, contributing alongside other traditions in shaping future thought, aligning with the exigencies of the time. However, a prerequisite for participation in any form remains the avoidance of self-absolutism. These considerations and foundations have informed the direction of intercultural philosophy¹ in recent decades.

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