



سرشناسه:	شاملی، عباسعلی، ۱۳۳۹ / ۱۹۶۰ / Shameli, Abbas Ali, 1960
عنوان و نام پدیدآور:	A comparative study concerning the Soul- Body problem in the philosophical psychology of Mulla Sadra (1571-1640) and Ibn Sina SĪNĀ(980-1037)[Book] compilation by Abbas Ali Shameli.
مشخصات نشر:	قم: نورالامین، ۱۴۰۲ = ۲۰۲۳ م
مشخصات ظاهری:	۸۸ ص
شابک:	۹۷۸-۶۲۲-۷۱۵۶-۵۹-۱
یادداشت:	زبان: انگلیسی
یادداشت:	کتابنامه: ص. [۸۵] - ۸۸
آوانویسی عنوان:	کمپرتیو...
موضوع:	ابن سینا، حسین بن عبدالله، ۳۷۰ - ۴۲۸ ق -- دیدگاه درباره جسم و جان
موضوع:	Avicenna -- Views on mind and body
موضوع:	صدرالدین شیرازی، محمد بن ابراهیم، ۹۷۹ - ۱۰۵۰ ق
موضوع:	دیدگاه درباره جسم و جان
موضوع:	Mulla Sadra Shirazi-- Views on mind and body
موضوع:	جسم و جان -- مطالعات تطبیقی
موضوع:	Mind and body--Comparative studies
رده بندی کنگره:	BF۱۶۱
رده بندی دیویی:	۱۲۸
شماره کتابشناسی ملی:	۹۱۶۲۹۳۳
این کتاب با کاغذ حمایتی منتشر شده است	

NBA13

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY CONCERNING THE SOUL-BODY PROBLEM IN THE PHILOSOPHICAL PSYCHOLOGY OF MULLĀ SADRĀ<sup>(1571-1640)</sup> AND IBN SĪNĀ<sup>(980-1037)</sup>**

**Compilation by:** Abbas Ali Shameli

**Year of publication (second Print):** 1444 AH/ 1402Sh/ 2023 m

**Publisher:** Qum: NoorolAmin

**Printing:** Almostafa's Digital Printing house / **Print-run:** 500

مطالعه‌ای تطبیقی درباره مسأله تن و روان در روانشناسی فلسفی ملاصدرا و ابن سینا

مؤلف: عباسعلی شاملی

چاپ اول: ۱۴۰۲ ش / ۱۴۴۴ ق

ناشر: نورالامین

چاپ: چاپخانه دیجیتال المصطفی ﷺ / شمارگان: ۵۰۰ / قیمت:

pub.nooralamin@gmail.com



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AND IBN SĪNĀ<sup>(980-1037)</sup>**

**Abbas Ali Shameli**

To begin and execute a research is like walking in the path of development and evolvement. When the seeds of the “questions” are planted, in the soil of the mind of the researcher, this phase initiates, and its end is culminated when the result and the outcome of knowledge and wisdom is gained.

Evidently, this end is a new chapter in itself, for growth, and announces beforehand this good news to humans. For the result of all those mental efforts will not only bring the blooming and flowering of talent and all kinds of Blessings to humans, but it also makes the mind of the researcher to ponder and shape new, more questions.

This will produce a great collection of growing plants and flowers for the seeking mind... Those “questions” are in fact, the seeds, which according to the necessities of Time and the strength of the researchers will grow and bloom by themselves. They will make Culture and Civilization to move forward.

In like manner, the increasing rate of transferring oneself from one place to another place and the decrease of the distances will make those seeds travel miles and miles, to faraway places, in order to install them inside the curious mind of other seekers. This will bring an amazing diversity and a novelty for another civilization...

It is true then, that the presence of knowledge and a good, capable management will help this project to develop itself and one has to admit indeed, that it has always played an important role...

Al-Mustafa International Publication and Translation Center, because of its global mission, and its special position among the Religious Schools and the colorful human diversity that it has developed inside itself, sees it as a moral duty to procure all the appropriate conditions for any research works, and takes its role in this matter, most seriously. To procure all kinds of necessary grounds, with an excellent management of all the existing possibilities and talents, and to care and protect all its researchers in religious fields; these are the most crucial responsibilities of the Department of Research in this International center.

We dearly hope that by being attentive to all these autonomous scientific movements, and by fortifying all the existing motives, we shall be able to witness the blooming of the Religious Culture in every part of this wide world!

**Al-Mustafa International  
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## FOREWORD

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«بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ»

“In The Name of Allah, the Beneficent, the Merciful”

«أَلْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي جَعَلَ نُورَ مَعْرِفَتِهِ نَتِيجَةَ إِيجَادِ الْأَرْوَاحِ وَ الْأَجْسَادِ، فَأَوْحَى فِي كُلِّ سَمَاءٍ أَمْرَهَا لِإِرَادِهِ أَنْوَارَ مُتَجَسِّدِهِ بِتَحْرِيكَاتِ نَفُوسٍ مَجْبُودَةٍ، يَتَنَوَّرُ بِهَا هَذِهِ الْبَقَاعُ وَ الْبِلَادُ وَ يَنْشَأُ مِنْهَا الْكَائِنَاتُ وَ يَتَزَيَّنُّ الْأَرْضُ بِالْحَيَوَانَ وَ النَّبَاتِ وَ الْجَمَادِ، وَ كَانَ الْغَرَضُ الْأَصْلِيُّ مِنْهَا نَشْوءَ الْآخِرَةِ وَ تَعْمِيرَهَا بِنَفُوسٍ طَاهِرَةٍ فَخَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ وَ خَلَقَ مِنْ بَقِيَّتِهِ طِينَتَهُ الْأَكْوَانَ.»

All praise is due to Allah who made the light of His recognition the ultimate result of creation of the souls and the bodies. Then, He revealed in each heaven a particular command in order to choose bodily lights that are moved by the immaterial souls. These lights are the source of all lights and creatures including animals, vegetables and solid beings that are the indicators of beauties in various parts of the earth. The main purpose of generation of these lights is the creation of the other world and its melioration by the purified souls. Accordingly, He firstly created Adam and generated other creatures from the reminder of his clay.

في الحديث المروي عن سيّد الأولياء عليّ عليه السلام : «من عرف نفسه فقد عرف ربّه».

It is reported in a maxim from Imam Ali (peace upon him): “He who knows his soul/self, knows his Lord”

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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I hereby wish to express my gratitude to all those who contributed to the success of this study. Most of all, I feel very indebted to the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and to all the martyrs whose sacred sacrifices have made it possible for me to continue my studies abroad. However, I am especially indebted so much to my spiritual father Āyatullah Muhammad Taqī Misbāh Yazdī, for his unswerving guidance and continuous encouragement of myself and of all the students of Ilmiyyah Seminary of Qum.

I am grateful to the faculty members of the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University, above all, Professor Hermann Landolt, my thesis supervisor. His intellectual guidance and expertise in philosophy have helped bring this project to fruition through constructive suggestions, comments and criticism. I am grateful also to Professor A. Uner Turgay, Director of the Institute, for his encouragement and valuable psychological support. Sincere thanks to the library staff of the Institute of Islamic Studies for their helpful favors. My sincere appreciation remains for my dear friend Asaad Shaker for offering his intellectual and editorial assistance and for translating the abstract into French, and to Violette Masse for her sympathetic and administrative help.

Finally, this thesis could not have been carried out without moral and sincere support of my family. I owe deep thanks firstly to my parents for their enthusiastic encouragement and endless patience. Without the tolerance and unfailing support of my dear wife Mrs. Shahnaz Yousefi, it would be very difficult for me to imagine it possible to pursue my higher education. My children Razieh, Fatimah and Alireza provided their own shares through warm and encouraging smiles.

I have dedicated this work to my hidden beloved Imām Mahdī (may the best God's regards be upon him) with heartfelt love and respect.

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## ABSTRACT

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**Author:** Abbas Ali Shameli

**Title:** The Soul-Body Problem in The Philosophical Psychology of Mullā Sadrā and Ibn Sīnā

**Degree:** M.A. dissertation

**Department:** Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University

**Research Date:** 1994-95

**Research place:** Montreal, Canada

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This thesis will partly compare the approaches and ideas of two pioneers in Islamic philosophy to the soul-body problem: the philosophical psychology of Mullā Sadrā (Sadr al-Muta'allihīn Shīrāzī 975-1050/1571-1640) and that of Ibn Sīnā<sup>1</sup> (370-428/980-1037). My main concern will be with the former, the founder of "transcendent theosophy", particularly his ideas regarding the corporeal generation of the soul.

A brief historical background of the problem is presented in the first chapter. In order to evaluate the real philosophical value of Mull Sadrā's doctrine, the thesis will investigate the soundness of Mull Sadrā's novel psychological findings. "Substantial motion" (*al-harakah al-jawharyyah*) and the "gradation of existence" (*al-tashkīk fī marātib al-wujūd*) are the two main philosophical principles formulated and implied by our philosopher regarding the elaboration of his theory on the soul's developmental process.

In my study, I discuss the nature of the soul-body relationship, the evidence that indicates their mutual interactions, and finally, the various forms of this

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1. Dear reader! Please have in mind that since various Arabic & Persian names with transliterations in this thesis are repeated numerously, it is very difficult to provide all in this form. Therefore, they are provided for the first time with transliterations but afterwards they come without that. This is only because of time-consuming problem. I hereby apologize for this in advance.



relationship. In the final chapter, I focus on the developmental process of the soul's substantial motion up to the stage of union with the active intellect. My analytical discussion is centered on whether or not the theory of the corporeality of the soul's generation yields a meaningful conception of the soul's evolution from materiality to immateriality.

Considering the serious challenges and unsolved difficulties that still remain, it is an open question whether Sadrā's theory, particularly his emphasis on the corporeality of the soul's generation, can adequately account for the soul's developmental process up to the stage of unity with the world of intellects.

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## INTRODUCTION

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The question of self-knowledge is one of the oldest problems that attracted man's attention. Both in their everyday life, and at the level of systematic knowledge, namely, philosophy and science, human beings have faced the problem of self-knowledge. Questions like, "Am I only a body with bodily organs or do I have a soul, too?"; "what is my soul if I have one?"; "does my soul have any relation to my body?" and "how is the relation?"; are some examples of what human beings have had to contend with. But in philosophy in particular, the soul-body problem has been one of the most controversial problems, one that has given rise to diverse opinions.

Based on historical sources, the discussions concerning the soul-body problem, may be traced back to the early period of philosophical inquiry in the time of Plato (427?-347 BC).<sup>1</sup> Regarding the soul-body problem, there have been two main philosophical arguments. One concerned the question whether the human beings are composed of two distinct things, namely, the soul and the body, or of only one existent, either material or immaterial. This debate led to two major doctrines. One upheld the theory of dualism, and the other took one of two antagonistic positions: idealism or materialism. Plato and Aristotle were precursors to these two opposing views that later on became known as the dualistic and monistic views of man.<sup>2</sup>

The other main discussion regarding the soul-body problem centered on the problem of whether the soul and the body come into being simultaneously or the soul is itself an eternal existent but if so, how and when does it unite with the body? This argument prompted Plato and Aristotle to take two different positions, thereby giving rise to the emergence of two distinct schools among their adherents, known in the Islamic world as the Mashāsh'iīn (Peripatetics) and the Ishrāqiīn (often referred to as Illuminationists) respectively.

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1. Jerome Shaffer, "Mind-Body problem," *Encyclopedia of philosophy*, 1967, vol. 5, p. 336.

2. Antony Flew, "Immortality," *Encyclopedia of philosophy*, 1967, vol. 4, p. 146.

It is noteworthy that philosophers and psychologists through two different approaches<sup>1</sup> have traditionally investigated the soul-body or the mind-body problem. One can, therefore, see two types of perspectives each with its own characteristics. Leaving aside the discussions about the quiddity (*mahiyyah*) of the soul and its characteristics, modern psychologists began to concentrate only on mental processes. Philosophers,<sup>2</sup> on the other hand, pursued the philosophic approach and by studying the entity of the soul and its functions created philosophical psychology (*ilm al-nafs al-falsafī*).

In order to gain a general conception of what historically emerged regarding the soul and its nature among Muslim philosophers, we have to refer to Ibn Sīnā's *Kitāb al-Nafs of Kitāb al-Shifā*. After Aristotle, no one wrote more extensively on philosophical psychology than Ibn Sīnā<sup>3</sup> (370-428/980-1037), who gathered together almost all previous ideas regarding the nature of the soul. Few can rival him in this, including al-Kindī (185-260/798-872) or al-Fārābī (259-339/870-950) or any other predecessor in Islamic philosophy before Ibn Sīnā. However, we should note that although Ibn Sīnā was the one who began to write expansively on the subject, he undertook his studies in a period when philosophical thought had already found firm root in the Islamic world, thanks to the translation movement and the exploratory works of previous philosophers such as al-Kindī and al-Fārābī.

As far as philosophical psychology is concerned, it is reported that Qusṭā ibn Lūqā (died about 300 A.H.) was the first one who wrote a psychophysiological treatise on the difference between the soul and the spirit (*al-rūh wa al-nafs*).<sup>4</sup> Al-Kindī, al-Fārābī and Ibn Miskawayh (320-421/929-1029)

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1. Despite a significant difference which exists between psychological and philosophical discussions about the above mentioned issue, in this study the terms 'soul', 'mind', and 'self' have been used interchangeably and refer to an incorporeal part of man's existence.
  2. By "philosophers" I particularly mean Muslim medieval philosophers who are distinguished from the empiricist trend in Western and modern philosophy.
  2. Ibn Sina devoted more than thirty treatises to the soul and its various aspects. Among his writings, we can see some symbolic tales such as "*Hayy Ibn Yaqzān*", "*Salāmān wa Ābsāl*" which are about the soul and its relation to the body. The significance will be clearer if we consider the relevant chapters in "*al-Shifā*", "*al-Najāt*", and "*al-Ishārāt*". See Fath Allah Khulayf, *Ibn Sina Wa Madhabuhū fī al-Nafs* (Beirut, 1974), p. 99.
  3. Ibrāhīm Madkūr, "*Tasdīr*," *al-Shifā, al-Ṭabī'iyyāt, al-fann al-sādīs, al-nafs*, vol. 2, (Qum, 1983), first page. See also Hasan Hasanzādah Āmulī, *Uyūnu Masā'il al-Nafs* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Amīr Kabīr, 1371 A.H.), p. 125.
  4. J.W. Livingston, Qusṭā Ibn Lūqā's psychophysiological treatise on the difference between the soul and the spirit..., *Scripta Mediterranea* (Toronto, 1981), vol. 2, pp. 53-77. See also Hanna al-Fākhūrī, & Khalīl al-Jurr, *Tārīkh-i Falsafa Dar Jahn-i Islāmī*, translated by A. Āyatī (Tehran, 1979), Vol. 2, p. 462.

also strove to understand the soul's nature by concentrating on Greek findings. Although one can see a considerable amount of knowledge regarding the above mentioned issue among Ikhwān al-Safā or other Muslim philosophers, Ibn Sina was the one who approached the issue in an extended way.

Turning now to Mulla Sadra Shirazi<sup>1</sup> (979-1050/1571-1640), let us begin by emphasizing his reputation as an innovative Shi'ite philosopher who introduced some interesting new ideas in philosophy. His doctrines were clearly very influential in the last three and half centuries. He founded a new school of Islamic philosophy, namely, "transcendent philosophy" (*al-hikmah al-muta'aliyah*) through which he combined pure intellectual reasoning with intuition and illumination. Mulla Sadra experienced these methods in three stages of his life, and finally settled on a new combination on which his advanced philosophical system, covering every subject properly, is based. Needless to say the roots of this new method can be found in Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, Suhrawardī (549-587/1155-1191), Shams al-Dīn Turkah (died 835 or 836 A.H.), and Nasīr al-Dīn al-Tūsī 592-672/1198-1273). Beyond this, what needs to be pointed out is that the Sufi Ibn 'Arabī also played an even more significant role in laying the cornerstone of Sadra's school of thought. This will become clear when we consider Ibn 'Arab's repeated citation in Sadra's works. Mulla Sadra, however, systematized and applied the idea of this school of thought masterfully instead of merely adopting them.<sup>2</sup>

He has also consecrated a significant position to psychology in the overall framework of his metaphysical vision. His doctrine about the soul-body problem, the physical origin of the soul's coming into being (*al-hudūth al-jismānī*) has some controversial aspects that will be examined in the course of this thesis. Examining his whole theory of philosophical psychology, S. A. H. Qazwn says that Mulla Sadra's new findings are centered on three main principles:

1. the corporeal origination of the soul and its spiritual survival (*jismniyyat al-hudūth wa rūhāniyyat al-baqā'*),

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1. His full name is Muhammad Ibn Ibrāhīm entitled Sadr al-Dīn or Mullā Sadrā and also Sadr al-Muta'allihīn (e.g., foremost among the theosophers). Among his circle of disciples he is often referred to simply as Ākhūnd. Muhammad Bāqir khwānsārī, *Rawdāt al-Jannāt* (Qum: Intishārāt-i Ismā'īliyyān, 1970), vol. 4, pp. 120-21. Muhammad Ali Mudarris, *Rayhānah al-Adab* (Tabrīz: Intishārāt-i Khayyām, 1967), vol. 3, p. 417. See also Muhammad Husayn Ṭabāṭabā'ī, "Sadr al-Dīn Muhammad Ibn Ibrāhīm Shīrāzī Mujaddid-i Falsafah-i Islāmī...", *Ydnāmah-i Mullā Sadrā*, (Tehran: Tehran University, 1340 A. H.), p. 15. See also Seyyed Hussein Nasr, *Islamic Life and Thought*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), p. 166, notes No. 7.

2. Muhammad Husayn Tabāṭabā'ī, "Sadr al-Din Muhammad Ibn Ibrahim Shirazi Mujaddid-i Falsafah-i Islami...", *Yādnāmah-i Mullā Sadrā*, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-17.

2. the overwhelming role of the soul vis-à-vis its faculties (al-nafs fi wadatiha kull al-quwa),

3. union of the rational soul with the active intellect.<sup>1</sup>

Against all previous philosophical theories, which were dualistic in nature and assumed the soul to be an immaterial thing united with the body, Mulla Sadra proposed that, based on his philosophical thesis concerning "substantial motion" (*al-harakah al-jawhariyyah*) and "systematic ambiguity of existence" (*al-tashkīk fī marātib al-wujūd*),<sup>2</sup> it is reasonable to assert that in its early generation the soul is first generated corporeally beside the body or as a bodily form; then through substantial motion it changes into an immaterial entity. Therefore, the duality of the soul and the body will have a specific meaning.

Unlike Ibn Sina and other philosophers who considered psychology or the science of the soul as a branch of natural science (*al-'āilm al-ṭabī'ī*) Mulla Sadra placed it in metaphysics (*ilāhiyyāt*). This difference was in fact a reflection of his whole view about metaphysics. He believed that the doctrine of being and the principiality of being indicate the core of all things, both in their transcendent origin and their ultimate end. This integrated metaphysical point of view enabled him to look at the universe as a unique harmonious whole and cosmos. Consequently, in his judgment about everything, he bases his idea upon its metaphysical origin rather than its own face value. Thus, we see him approach the field of psychology in a completely different way than modern psychologists have done. He traces the soul, its creation, immateriality, and immortality through a metaphysical framework rather than reducing it to a collection of mere thoughts and feelings.<sup>3</sup> Illustrating the particular position of the soul in the metaphysical version of Mulla Sadra, Professor `Abdul Haq says as below:

Tracing the origin of the human soul, Mulla Sadra asserts that the first creation of God is intellect and the last creation is he who is the bearer of this intellect, i.e., the human being. Intellect was created first as the seed of creation the synthetic fruit of which is man who possesses intellect, the same seed. Thus the bringing of man into existence is what the whole process of creation has been aiming at and man is what he is by virtue of his soul and not his body; ... It is therefore, through the creation of the human soul that God completes in the end what He has initiated in the beginning.<sup>4</sup>

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1 Sayyid Abu al-Hasan Qazwīnī, "The Life of Sadr al-Muta'llihīn Shirazi and a discussion of motion in the category of substance," *Ydnamah'-i Mulla Sadra, op. cit.*, p. 4.

2 The term "*al-tashkīk fī marātib al-wujūd*" has been differently translated into "systematic ambiguity of existence", "gradation of being" and so on. I have used various translations depending on the context.

3 Muahmmad Abdul Haq, "The Psychology of Mulla Sadra," *Journal of the Islamic Research Institute* (Karachi, 1970), Vol. 9, p. 173.

4 *Ibid.*

Although the idea of the soul's coming into being (*al-huduth*) has previously been proposed by Ibn Sina in his various psychological writings, he associated it with immateriality, whereas Mulla Sadra believes that the soul has corporeal origin and then moves toward spirituality. Mulla Sadra, however, has devoted considerable attention to refute the idea of the total materiality of the soul's nature regardless of its relation to the body. He has strongly rejected the doctrine that reduces the soul to the bodily level (*jismniyyah*) or even to the output of the bodily faculties' mixture and interactions (*mizāj*).<sup>1</sup>

Concerning the soul-body problem, the thesis will first deal with the historical background of the subject, focusing on Islamic tradition.

As far as Mulla Sadra is concerned, the focus of the discussion will be devoted to the examination of the corporeal process of the soul's createdness (*al-hudūth al-jismānī*). Since Sadr al-Muta'allihīn based this theory on two philosophical principles, namely substantial motion (*al-harakah al-jawhariyyah*) and the ambiguous hierarchy of existence (*al-tashkīk fī marātib al-wujūd*), we will approach them analytically.

The thesis will then investigate Mulla Sadra's point of view regarding the validity of the distinction between the soul and the body. If, according to him, there are two things to which these two terms can be applied respectively, we can, in those cases, ask what kind of relation they may have with one another. In order to establish this doctrine, Mulla Sadra tries to solve the problems raised in the explanations of the relation between the soul as an immaterial thing and the body as a physical thing.

This study includes also another important issue that appears when we encounter the question of how the soul becomes an immaterial independent being, at the time of death. Assuming the soul to be a physical existent in its initial generation, which possesses many potentialities both intellectual and practical, the thesis deals with the developmental process undergone by the soul up to the highest level of its perfection. Regarding the interrelationship between the soul and the body, the thesis will deal with Mulla Sadra's doctrine about the converse relation between the soul and the body. According to Mulla Sadra, along their developmental process the soul and the body will turn into two different directions. As the soul gains more perfection and independence, the body becomes weaker. Finally, the soul will leave the body and return toward its original world; the realm of immaterial intellects (*ʿālam al-tajarrud al-ʿaqlī*).

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1 See the following note at N. 44. Since *mizāj* is a corporeal phenomenon, Mulla Sadra devoted a whole chapter in his *al-Asfār* to prove that the soul in its reality is not even a *mizāj*. See Mulla Sadra, *al-Asfār*, Vol. 8, *al-bāb al-thānī, al-fasl al-awwal*, pp. 29-41. It should be mentioned that since various editions of Mulla Sadra's *K. al-Asfār* may create difficulties in finding the original Arabic texts of discussed paragraphs, bibliographical data of this book in footnotes are offered in detail.