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Book Review

“The Existence of God: Mulla Sadra's *Seddiqin* Argument versus Criticisms of Kant and Hume”

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Ayatollahy Hamidreza. (2005). *The Existence of God: Mulla Sadra's Seddiqin Argument vs Criticisms of Kant and Hume.* Tehran: Sadra Islamic Philosophy Research Institute (SIPRI) Publication, first edition, iii 181pp. ISBN: 964-7472-65-X, 12€

The existence of God has always been a challenging question for philosophers and philosophy of any type. In the intellectual history of Islam, great labors are devoted to this issue. However, among others, the presence of a priori arguments for the Existence of God in Islamic philosophy remained an unknown commodity in the western scholarship for a long time. Only in the past several decades has English language scholarship begun to come to terms with such fascinating argument through research into two versions of this argument – those of Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra. This tradition has continued to this day through the influence of the latter's school of thought, embracing the great Persian philosophers. Generally speaking, as the argument in question has begun to become an object of Western scholarship, research in the West has

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turned in rather different directions. While the original name of the argument in this respect is *Seddiqin* argument, this type of argument is characterized in the western scholarship as an ontological proof as with ideas crossing cultures more familiar parallels are inevitably sought. Such an analogy has its limits given the facts that this is not a native taxonomy and the limited resemblance the *Seddiqin* argument bears to the so-called ontological argument. Be this as it may, the *Seddiqin* argument reveals a rich tradition within the Islamic philosophy treating the Existence of God as an *a priori* and a necessary truth. This argument rests on a philosophical understanding of God's true fundamental nature. As such, God is not simply an existent. Rather God is Existence Itself. Obviously, Existence exists and needs no extrinsic reason or cause to exist because Existence is its very nature. This is indeed the core of the *Seddiqin* Argument which indicates that "existence exists." God is Pure, Absolute, and Infinite Existence. As such it is absurd to say God does not exist, as this is to say existence does not exist. Thus Existence exists and exists in-and-of itself as Existence is its very nature; all other things come along with this truth.

Historically speaking, it was with Mulla Sadra in seventeenth century that such an argument came to its full fruition. A number of expositions of Sadra's argument are available in English.(1) However, a fully devoted book concerning Sadra's version of the argument was not appeared in the English scholarship. It is, then, a good delight to see now that Dr. Ayatollahy's present work contributes to make it up for English readers of Mulla Sadra's philosophy. He tries to explain "the main purpose of the *Seddiqin* argument that is proving the existence of God in the views of Mulla Sadra and his disciples."

Ayatollahy's book is directed towards two important lacunae in the study of Mulla Sadra's argument for the existence of God. The first of these themes which is brought out in the title of *Seddiqin* Argument, provides readers with a systematic exposition of the argument, its foundations and developments including a comparison between Sadra's and Ibn Sina's formulations of the issue. The second theme, made explicit in the sub-title of the book, deals with the systematic criticisms against the arguments for the existence of God. Within this theme, Ayatollahy tries to show that Sadra's version of *Seddiqin* argument successfully replies these criticisms. The addressing of both of these themes is important and timely for current scholarly interest in Islamic philosophy as well as modern philosophy of religion.

The book is composed of three parts, which are in turn combined with

the mentioned themes. Part One introduces Mulla Sadra and his philosophical school. In this part, Ayatollahy tries to show the place and the importance of Mulla Sadra within the history of Islamic philosophy. It is in Part two that the most valuable aspects of Sadra's version of the argument come in force. This part is composed of three chapters. In the first chapter, the metaphysical foundations of *Seddiqin* argument are exposed. These foundations are discussed under three categories: existence, causation, and necessity-possibility. The novelty of Sadra's theory of existence in the history of Islamic philosophy is presupposed here and a systematic description of this theory is outlined to introduce the reader into the heart of *Seddiqin* Argument which is sketched in the second chapter. The second chapter is probably the most useful section of the book because the core of the argument is exposed in detail through an elaborated discussion. A comparison between Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra is made up on the issue to show the advantages of Sadra's version of the argument over Ibn Sina's. This chapter ends with later developments of Sadraean versions in the hands of Sabzevari and Tabataba'ii. The third chapter undertakes a very crucial remark on three differences between the ontological and *Seddiqin* argument, insisting that (a) the former concerns with the meaning of existence while the latter with its reality, (b) the proposition the former proves is "God or necessary existence exists" while the latter proves "the pure existence or reality is God and others are His representations," and finally (c) while the former is silent of the relation of God with His creatures, the latter provides us with a "suitable view" on this issue.

Part Three of the book is devoted to the criticisms against the argument. Ayatollahy outlines all the objections in this literature in seven proclamations. Trimming down them to the familiar formulation of the ontological argument in the western thought, he tries to show that they are not corruptive to *Seddiqin* argument "because" he claims "it provide a new idea about God which is nothing but the pure truth of existence and a new argumentation that strengthens this idea".

Scholars will certainly find some new material of interest in Ayatollahy's book. However, given the potential of the subject matter and the primary source material listed in the bibliography, a more sensitive reader might also question some perplexing aspects in the format and the prose of the book. Unfortunately, a technical haze materializes on the double-title of the book which appear on the cover of the book and in its inside. While this may reflect the author's concern to highlight aspects of his book or the publisher's aim at attracting a

wider readership it is troubling nonetheless. Again, the present reviewer at least has reservations about "Conclusion" part at the end of the book which contains nothing but a sketch of the book. Such sketch would be better to come at the outset to prepare the reader for more details, while we hear nothing of the actual process and the nature of the study at its beginning. But this criticism should not detract from the scholarship presented here. The pedagogical exposition by Ayatollahy is admirable and reference to primary source material would also have made this book more useful to western specialists.

Note

1. Indication of this argument could be read in English translations of Mulla Sadra works including: Sadr al Din al Shirazi, *The Wisdom of the Throne*, Tr. J. W. Morris, Princeton University Press, Princeton: 1981, Sadr al Din al Shirazi, *The Metaphysics of Mulla Sadra*, Tr. P. Morewedge, Society for the Study of Islamic Philosophy and Science, New York: 1992. Also, there are some introductions on Sadra's *Seddiqin* argument: Ayatullah Murtadha Mutahhari, *The Causes Responsible for Materialist Tendencies in the West II of IV*, tr. M. Husayn, Ahul Bayt Digital Islamic Library Project 2002 Ayatullah Jawadi Amuli, *A Commentary on Theistic Arguments*, tr. H Allahyari, Ansariyan Publications, Qum: 2002; Also Fazlurrahman's work on Philosophy of Mulla Sadra has a chapter on this issue.