A DEFENDER OF AN “EXISTENCE”:
MULLÄ ŞADRA ON MUMKIN

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Abstract

Untuk memudahkan pembahasan tentang penggunaan filsafat (ontologis dan metafisik) terma “mumkin” dalam wacana Mullä Şadra, dalam tulisan berikut ini akan disajikan pengetahuan historisitas ide dimulai dari penggunaan konsep tersebut dalam struktur bahasa; terutama sekali adalah makna kata mumkin secara ontologis dan metafisik. Termasuk dalam pembahasan berikut adalah terma “mumkin” jauh sebelum terma tersebut dimasukkan dalam wacana Mullä Şadra, seperti dalam karya-karya filsaf Yunani: Aristoteles, Neoplatonisme dan filsafat Islam klasik. Historisitas ide mumkin dan konsekuensi konsepnya akan dipaparkan. Mumkin versi Mullä Şadra sendiri akan dikupas terakhir setelah perbandingan-perbandingan dengan konsep mumkin yang mendahului Mullä Şadra dinunjuk.

Keywords: existence, possibility, preponderance, quiddity
A. Mumkin: Etymology

In common non-philosophical use, the very simple root \( m-k-n \) of \( mumkin \) in the Arabic language denotes the position taken by a lizard or locust in hatching its eggs as well as that of a bird.\(^1\) Thus, in its simplest form \( m-k-n \) relates to the position of a creature in hatching eggs. In common expressions the root was later developed to describe a man's position, as in the statement "the men occupied his dwelling (\( sakānatibih \)), houses (\( manāzilatibih \)) and places (\( makanātihim \))." In the Qur'ān, we find the verse, "act based on your position [\( i'umalū 'alā makanātkum \)]." This probably means, "your field of work or ability". Meanwhile, in more sophisticated usage \( m-k-n \), is closely related to position of a thing generally speaking.\(^2\) Of course it would be wrong to think the lexical root of \( mumkin \) can determine the philosophical import of \( mumkin \). Nevertheless, the reference to the position in common usage of the word parallels its technical meaning. For example, among early and well-known philosophers, Abū 'Ali al-Ḥusayn Ibn Sīnā (979-1037)\(^3\) uses \( tamakkun \) in the sense of occupying a place, this may relate to the term \( ευ τοπω \) (\( είννηχ \)) in Aristotelian philosophical discourse, according to Goichon's findings.\(^4\) It was on this basis that the root came to be used to describe the position of beings in terms of whether their existence was necessary, contingent or impossible.

\(^1\)The position of a bird while hatching its eggs is commonly related to this root \( m-k-n \), as may be seen in the tradition of the Arabs in \( jābihay \) times watching a bird while it hatched its eggs and to observe towards which side it fell. Thus, when the bird fell to the right side it meant a good future, and when to the left side, unlucky one. The Prophet Muhammad prohibited this tradition for he saw it as amounting to \( shirk \) (polytheism), Ibn Manṣūr, \( Lisān al-’Arab al-Muhīt \), eds. Yousef Khayat and Nadir Merachi, vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār al-Lisān, [n.d.]), p. 517.

\(^2\)Ibn Manṣūr, \( Lisān al-’Arab \), pp. 516-517.


B. Possibility: Western Usage

In the Western philosophical context, the discussion of possibility has continued ever since the time of Aristotle. In Aristotelian philosophy, possible is illustrated in the following proposition. "It is possible that \( p \)," means "it is not necessary that \( \neg p \)." Through distinguishing between formal and relative possibility, Aristotle spoke mainly in terms of potentiality, which had a considerable impact on the later Islamic philosophy, most of all that of Ibn Sinā. One illustration of this sense of potentiality is man's ability to read, which makes it possible for him to be a potential reader. To put it differently, it is possible for him, based on his ability in reading, to be a reader or not. Among Aristotle's successors, Neoplatonists believed that possibility is not a fact or state of affairs but a thing lying within \( \text{nous} \) (intelligence), and that this awaits being actualized into existence. Since these ideas are in the divine mind, they will be actualized according to the perfection of that mind. From this understanding of possibility, roughly speaking, combining of the potentiality of Aristotle and the world of ideas or forms of Plato was an obvious step to take. We also find the topic addressed by medieval and modern Western philosophers such as Aquinas (1225-1274), Hobbes (1588-1679), Descartes (1596-1650), Spinoza (1632-1677), and Hume (1711-1776). However, it would misleading to discuss them all here, for our main focus is Islamic philosophy and particularly that of Mulla Ṣadrā.


Ibid., p. 420.

We will present briefly their notion of possibility. 1. Aquinas relates possibility with God's creation. Creation involves the idea of selection of some ideas, but not all-possible things are actual, and all actual things are not necessary. 2. Hobbes expanded the idea, adding that when we do not know the cause of the existence of a thing, as its existence requires cause, we call it contingency. This contingency opposes necessity. 3. Descartes argues that what is clearly and distinctly conceivable is possible. 4. According to Spinoza impossibility is that an object's definition could contain contradiction. 5. For Hume, a possible object corresponds to logical consistency. According to him, contradictory things are still possible, but we cannot conceive of them. In fact, these things never imply contradiction, so we have to differentiate between what is possible and what is conceivable. See, Ibid., pp. 419-424.
Perhaps the first Muslim philosopher to respond to Aristotle's theory of potentiality was Abū Yusuf Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq al-Kindī (d. 866) who nevertheless did not take seriously the whole issue of possible existence. For him, it is merely a fanciful concept. The affinity between possibility in Aristotelian thought and that of Ibn Sīnā is discussed at length by Goichon in his Vocabulaires comparés d'Aristote et d'Ibn Sīnā. According to Goichon, one of the forms of m-k-n, i.e., imkān, in Ibn Sīnā's philosophy, which refers to possibility, closely corresponds to δύναμις. More properly speaking this sort of possibility refers to qunwah (potential). Moreover, mumkin for Ibn Sīnā simply represents the opposite of "necessary," and this corresponds to τὸ ἐνδεχόμενον in Aristotle. In addition, Ibn Sīnā saw necessity as being of two kinds: positive necessity (wujūb) and negative necessity or impossibility. In this sense, possibility is the opposite of impossibility [δυνατός; τὸ δυνατόν] as it was for Aristotle as well.

C. Mumkin: Islamic Philosophical Tradition Prior to Mullā Ṣadrā

Al-Jurjānī (1340-1413) in his Ta'rifat, gives logical reasons for supporting the opposition of possibility and impossibility (mumtani‘), by defining mumtani‘ as a thing which requires the nonexistence of its essence. He divides mumkin into three, 1. mumkin bi al-dhāt, 2. al-ammah, and 3. al-khāṣṣah. The first type is illustrated by this world itself, whose existence does not require another's existence or non-existence. The possible gist of this simplest form of mumkin is that since the world is evident in our eyes, so it is easy to admit the possibility of its existence. The mumkin al-‘ammah is in direct opposition to absolute necessity (īḥāb). For example, saying that fire is hot means its hotness is not a necessity (mumkin), or saying that no


10Goichon, Vocabulaires comparés, p. 33.
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fire is cold, means its coldness is not a necessity (mumkin). The final type, namely khāṣṣab, is the opposite of both ijab and mumtani’. For instance, when we say that every man is a writer, this implies the two possibilities of being a writer and not being a writer. So the position of this kind of imkān falls between ijab and mumtani’ hierarchically, to be or not.11 The third kind of mumkin has a parallel with that of Ibn Sīnā’s imkān which means "potential." The difference is that Ibn ʿInān clearly refers to this using the technical term imkān, whereas al-Jurjānī does not differentiate between mumkin and imkān but uses the terms ‘ām and khāṣṣab. One reason for this difference is that the only basis for al-Jurjānī’s mumkin is that of logic, whereas Ibn ʿInān takes a philosophical point of view, and of course analyzes the topic much more deeply than the former.

Ibn ʿInān’s contingency is closely related to the most disputed question among the philosophers of medieval Islam, namely, the issue of existence (wujūd) and quiddity (maḥīyāt). Three terms were critical to this discussion: wajib, mumkin and mumtani’. Before attempting to define them, however, it would be helpful to explain what Ibn ʿInān meant by existence [wujūd] and essence/quiddity [maḥīyāt]. The easy way to understand these two technical terms, is that when one sees a thing one will immediately perceive its two inseparable aspects, existence and quiddity. A horse, for example, embodies the idea of the horse which exists in one’s mind and its shape, form, and color in the external world; existence and essence are thus combined in the one horse. Both existence and essence are always together, so that every object in the Universe which has quiddity has an additional existence, but this is in the mind. However, for Ibn ʿInān, as Nasr puts it: “although the existence of a thing is added to its essence, it is the existence which gives each essence, or quiddity, its reality and is therefore principal (aṣb). The quiddity of a thing is in fact no more than its ontological limitation abstracted by the mind [italics mine].”12


In practice, however, we cannot separate the discussion of existence and essence and the threefold division of necessity, possibility and impossibility. The three terms may be defined as follows:  

1. Since the quiddity of an object cannot stand alone without existence, then when the quiddity is in one's mind and "it cannot accept existence in any way," the object itself cannot possibly exist. One illustration of this case is the concept of a second principle of the Universe which is absurd metaphysically. 

2. The so-called potential to exist, or the possibility of existing or not, applies to all creatures in our Universe. All creatures have the same possibility of existence or nonexistence. In other words, each possible thing has the potential to be either necessary or impossible. The latter implying either that it is not necessary or that it is absent now but might exist at any time in the future. 

3. In the last category, where quiddity and existence are so closely related that they cannot be separated, and non-existence is impossible, then the existence is necessary (wājib). This case is Absolute Being, God, since it is only He whose Essence and Being are the same. The relationship between His Essence and Being is reciprocal, that His Being is Essence and Essence is Being. Necessary Being is unique in the sense that He has Existence in himself and self-subsistence.

Absolute Being is different from all other existences whose existence is added to their essence. The existence of all creatures in the Universe ranks no higher than the second case of contingency, in that they have possibility to exist or not and yet depend on the Absolute Existence who shines continuously His light on them. In addition, in the sense of their potentiality to exist the difference between "possibly existent being" and "necessarily existent being" is evident. To quote Herbert Davidson's description, the former has no necessity "for either its existence or nonexistence ('adam); alternatively it is such that whether assumed not to exist or to exist, no impossibility result." Whereas the latter perforce exists;

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15Nasr, Three Muslim, p. 27.
alternatively, it is "such that when it is assumed not to exist, an impossibility results."\footnote{Davidson, "Avicenna's Proof", p. 172.}

Muḥyī al-Dīn Abū `Abd Allāh Muḥammad ibn `Alī ibn Muḥammad Ibn al-`Arabī (1165-1240),\footnote{For more account about Ibn al-`Arabī's life and works, see A. Ates, "Ibn al-`Arabī," Encyclopædia of Islam, 2nd ed., vol. 3, pp. 707-711; Brockleman, Geschichte vol. 1, p. 441, sup. 1, p. 790; A. Kautsar Noer, Ibn `Arabī Wahdāt al-Wujūd dalam Perdebatan (Jakarta: Paramadina, 1995); Izutsu Toshihiko, A Comparative Study of the Key Philosophical Concepts in Sufism and Taoism: Ibn `Arabī and Lao-Tzu, Chuang-Tzu (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1966).} a famous sufi, follows the basic threefold division of the necessity, possibility and impossibility of things. To preserve the uniqueness of the position of the necessary Being, both possible and impossible are assumed to be inferior to and dependent on the necessary Being. In dealing with possible things (mumkināt), he sets these in opposition these to the necessary Being (wajib al-wujud), which the latter "cannot not be," in that the former, as is the case in Ibn Sīnā's thought, may or may not exist in the cosmos.

Hence, regarding the mumkinat of existence or nonexistence, instances of each are at the same level. When they are an "immutable entity," they remain at the level of nonexistent possible being. Their existence is dependant on circumstances, and of course, ultimately, on God's will. If He assigns tarjīḥ (preponderance) of existence to nonexistence, they become existent possible being, such as is the case with our world.\footnote{William C. Chittick, The Sufi Path of Knowledge (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), p. 12.} Furthermore, an impossible thing can exist in one's mind or God's in a certain way but cannot come into existence. All possible things, even before becoming into existence, are archetypes or prototypes in the mind of God called a'tūn thabītab.\footnote{Netton, Allah Transcendent 277; A.E. Affifi, Mystical Philosophy of Muhyid Din Ibnul Arabi (Lahore: Muhammad Ashraf, 1964), p. 47.} Ibn al-`Arabī states: "If the possible thing were an existent which could not be qualified by nonexistent, then it would be the Real. If it were a nonexistence which could not be qualified by existence then it would be impossible."\footnote{Ibn al-'Arabī, al-Fatīhah at-Makkiyyah, ed. O. Yahia, vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Šādir, n.d.), p. 275.5. trans. William C. Chittick, The Sufi Path, p. 82.} All the possible things
whether they have come into existence or not are part of the cosmos. As their existence is dependant upon the will of God through given preponderance, their existence and their nonexistence are still possible things, and thus their nonexistence does not influence their status of being part of the cosmos. So everything other than God must be included in the cosmos and defined as possible, while He himself is Necessary existence. Ibn al-'Arabī also employs these three categories—necessary, possible and impossible—to prove God's existence. The imkān (possibility) argument is rational enough to prove that there is God, whose existence is necessary and his nonexistence is impossible. 21

Unlike Ibn Sīnā who maintains the superiority of existence over quiddity, Shīhāb al-Dīn Abū al-Futūh Yaḥyā ibn Ḥabash ibn Amīrak al-Suhrawardī (1153-1191) 22 positioned himself against Ibn Sīnā on this point. For the former, quiddity is asīl (fundamentally real), whereas existence is i'tibār (mentally posited). For al-Suhrawardī, in defending the asīl of quiddity and criticizing the theory of existence of Ibn Sīnā, existence and essence are the same thing; these two components essentially differ at the level of conceptual analysis. Accordingly, this mental difference does not mean real difference. An attempt to differentiate between existence and quiddity is absurd. Furthermore, existence relates to the spatial or temporal as in the following expression, "a thing exists in the house," "in the mind," "in reality," or "at any point in time." 24 So this relationship between things

21Ibid., p. 82.


23Izutsu concludes that in post-Ibn Sinian thought there were three views regarding positioning existence and quiddity: 1. both are fundamentally real (asīl), 2. existence is asīl while quiddity is mentally posited (i'tibār), and 3. Quiddity is asīl and existence is i'tibār. The first category is the weakest position since it does not explain how both existence and quiddity are in the same position. This doctrine was held by Shaykh Ahmad Ahsā'ī. The second position is defended by Mullā Ṣadrā, and the last one by al-Suhrawardī and Mullā Ṣadrā's own teacher Mir Dāmād (d. 1631). Toshihiko Izutsu, The Concept and Reality of Existence (Tokyo: The Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1971), p. 100.

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in certain times or places is a product of our reasoning, whereas this relation is added to the quiddity itself which is in the external world, and, of course, real. Another argument made by al-Suhrawardi is that if existence constitutes external reality, then existence itself has to exist as a second existence, and as a third, and so forth ad infinitum. Therefore, existence is an absurd concept. The emphasis on the āsīl of quiddity over existence is closely related to mumkin, our focus in this paper. As the notion of existence has no the external form connecting it to our real world, neither does imkān (contingency), which is a kind of existence, while existence itself is an attribute of essence. Al-Suhrawardi holds that existence and possibility are only attributes of quiddity. To quote Suhrawardi’s own words in his Kitāb al-Mashāri' wa al-Muṣṭabarā (in Izutsu’s translation):

From the fact that the judgment we form on a thing that "it is possible in objective reality" is right, it does not necessarily follow that the "possibility" of that thing is an objective external fact. Nay, "that it is possible in objective reality" is the content of a judgment which formed by the mind. In a similar way, "that it is possible in the mind (i.e. conceptually)" is also the content of a judgment. Thus "possibility" is but a "mental attribute" (ṣifah dhīmīyah) which the mind attributes sometimes to what is in the mind and sometimes to what is in the objective reality. Sometimes the mind even forms unconditioned judgments having a neutral relation to both the mind and the objective reality [italics mine].

Thus, whereas al-Kindī viewed the Aristotelian potentiality as fanciful, al-Suhrawardi attacked Ibn Sīnā for taking Aristotelian potentiality too seriously, saying that existence including possible things is just a mental construct and an attribute of quiddity. Thus al-Kindī and al-Suhrawardi share similar opinions, in this case.

25Izutsu, The Concept and Reality, p. 114. In another occasion Izutsu quotes al-Suhrawardi’s words, "I readily admit that "existence", "possibility" and the like are (conceptuality different and distinguishable from the "realities" (i.e. "quiddities") to which they are attributed. But I can never accede to the view that these distinguishable elements have their own concrete forms in the extra-mental world [emphasis mine]." (The Concept and Reality, p. 113). For another discussion of Mullā Ṣadrā’s concept of existence see also, M. Nazami, "Causality and its Relation to the Unity of Existence According to Mullā Ṣadrā’s View" (M.A. Thesis, McGill University, 1994) especially chapt. 2-3, pp. 14-61.
D. "The Existentialist Revolution"\textsuperscript{26}

From the peripatetic approach of Ibn\emph{ Sinā}, the theosophy of Ibn\emph{ al-\'Arabi}, and the illuminationism of al-Suhrawardī,\textsuperscript{27} we come to the eclectic approach to \textit{mumkin} favored by Şadr\emph{ al-Dīn Muḥammad}, called Akhūnd Mullā Şadrā (1572-1640),\textsuperscript{28} who was born in Shiraz, Isfahan. He is most famous for his attempt at synthesis, which involved his selecting from his predecessor's ideas in the various fields mentioned above, and of course, his accepting or criticizing these ideas. However, Mullā Şadrā had his own contribution to make to the discussion of \textit{mumkin}, one that is significant issue of the study of Islamic philosophy generally and particularly the issue of \textit{mumkin} itself.

Before dealing with our subject proper, we have to begin with the issue of \textit{wujūd} (existence), to which \textit{mumkin} is closely associated. To begin with, it is worth noting that Mullā Şadrā's concept of existence is in itself revolutionary, as noted by Herman Landolt\textsuperscript{29} and Henry Corbin. The latter points out that:

Nous savons à considérer que, par métaphysique de l'être donnant de plein droit la primauté à l'acte d'exister, Mullā Şadrā opère une révolution qui détrône la vénérable métaphysique de l'essence, dont le règne

\textsuperscript{26} This section echoes Herman Landolt's designation for Mullā Şadrā, see his "Ghazāl and "Religionswissenschaft", "Asiatische Studien Études Asiaïques 45 no. 1 (1991), p. 57.

\textsuperscript{27} For this claim see Rahman, The Philosophy, p. 10.


\textsuperscript{29} However, we find an argument using the doctrine of existence to prove God's existence before Mullā Şadrā brought by ʿAyn al-Quḍāt al-Hamadānī (executed 1131). See Landolt, "Ghazālī and "Religionswissenschaft,"", pp. 55-57.
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durait depuis de siècles depuis Farābī, Avicenne et Sohrawardi [italics mine].\(^{30}\)

This revolution was begun when Mullā Šadrā received special guidance from God (\(\text{hadārī rabbī}\), which opened his spiritual eyes to see clearly (\(\text{fa-inkāshafī li ghāyat al-inkīshaf}\)). Through God’s demonstration (\(\text{burban}\)) he finally achieved the truth, that existence is a primary reality whereas quiddity is an archetype (\(\text{a’yān thābitah}\)). Existence is illuminated by true Light and then to it is added essential properties and intelligible qualities. The former is self-subsistent and while the latter simply is, quiddity.\(^{31}\) Refusing al-Suhrawardi particularly as well as other predecessors, he insisted that quiddity is an element which is far from possessing true Reality; it is a shadow, a reflection, and a similitude of reality, while reality is in fact existence.\(^{32}\) This existence is a self-subsistent entity, whereas quiddity has species and individuality which makes things differ from each other. Quiddity of things makes us possible to give them a definition, genera, and differentiae and distinguish them from one

\(^{30}\) Henry Corbin, "Introduction" of his translation of Le livre des penetrations 62. The reason given by Corbin is that "Car il commande toute la structure de sa doctrine: la présence de l’acte d’exister sur la quiddité conditionne la notion de l’existence (wojūd) comme présence (huzūr, hozūr); celle-ci s’exprime en gnésologie comme l’unification du sujet de la perception (à ses trois degrés: sensible, imaginative, intellective) avec l’objet de la perception; chez le penseur shī‘ite, elle permet un approfondissement de l’imamologie qui dégage tout ce qu’imprime la qualification des imāms comme Témoins de Dieu (être témoin, être présent à); finalement elle conduit à une métaphysique de l’Esprit, de l’Esprit-Saint créateur, où le sens premier de l’être se révèle non pas comme l’être substantiel (l’étant), ni comme l’être à l’infini, l’acte d’être), mais comme l’être à l’impératif."

\(^{31}\) Mullā Šadrā, Kitāb al-Mashā’ir (Téhéran: Département d’Iranologie de l’Institut Franco-Iranien, 1964) 35, no. 85, with its trans. by Corbin, Le livre des Penetration 152; I also used Izutsu’s translation, The Concept and Reality, p. 104.

\(^{32}\) Šadrā, Kitāb al-Mashā’ir 4, no.4 : "Wa ihbat annab al-asl al-thābit fi kull manjūd, wa huwa al-baqīqah; wa ma’ adāb ka’aks wa qi’ll wa shab [Corbin, Le Livre 90: Et par démontrer que l’être est le principe positif dans chaque étant (manjūd), c’est-à-dire qu’il est la réalité (baqīqat). Tout ce qui est autre que l’être est comme un reflet, une ombre, un simulacre; Izutsu: "Existence" is what primarily real in every "existent"; it is the "reality." Everything other than "existence" (i.e. "quiddity") is, on the contrary, like a reflection, a shadow, or similitude]. Other Mullā Šadrā’s criticism for Ibn Sinā and al-Suhrawardi, see for example, Bilal Kuspinar, "Mullā Šadrā’s Criticism of Ibn Sinā and al-Suhrawardi on the Problem of God’s Knowledge," Islami Arastirmalar 5, 1 (1991) pp. 45-55.

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another. Existence is all a single actualization, which has various stages in terms of higher or lower.33

If al-Suhrawardi states that the notion of existence is nothing more than an abstraction of the mind or the product of our reasoning, Mullā Ṣadrā expresses a contrary view that nothing is real other than its existence and that the reality of everything is its existence.34 Existence is self-subsistence which has no genre (jins), no species (naw), and no accident (ard) but is comprehensive including everything.35 On another occasion he emphasizes that we cannot assign any categories to existence, and that existence is the only existence and there is none other outside it. There is no rational existence (dhibā), particular existence (juz), universal existence (ʿām), or proper existence (ḥaṣṣ).36

To those who would ask how one can recognize this truth about existence, Mullā Ṣadrā answers that it can be known only by Gnostics (ʿurafa, pl. of ʿarif or al-rāsiḵbān fī al-ʿilm [those who are given deep-rooted knowledge], Q. 3: 5).37 Nonetheless, although it is reserved only for Gnostics, Mullā Ṣadrā in fact refers to many sources in addition to Gnostic intuition, such as logical deduction, the Qurān and traditions of the Prophet.38

We have seen how al-Suhrawardi points out that existence is only in the mind, and that it must be associated with a real thing, i.e., quiddity. Ṣadrā however argues that al-Suhrawardi is inconsistent in depicting God as pure existence or necessary existence, since for him, on the one hand, existence is not real, while on the other, God is necessary existence, i.e., not necessary quiddity. Therefore, for Mullā Ṣadrā existence is a primordial reality, and cannot be said to exist independently of its essence, which will

34To quote Ṣadrā's Masha'ir 9, no. 16: "Ann baqiqah kull bshay huwa wujūdah [Corbin, Le livre p. 107: La réalité de chaque chose, c'est son acte même d'être]."
35Ṣadrā, Kitab al-Masha'ir 8, no. 12; Corbin, Le livre, p. 103.
36Ṣadrā, Kitab al-Masha'ir 7, no. 9; Corbin, Le livre, p. 101.
37Q. 3: 7, but Corbin refers to Q. 3: 5.
result in the development of many more existences. We cannot treat existence as unreal due to its abstraction, since quiddity itself is an abstraction too, in the sense that both are immaterial and can be understood only by abstraction. The dynamism of existence later creates essences which are in the mind. Based on their different emphases on whether essence or existence is real, Landolt suggests that it is fair to designate al-Suhrawardi as a type of "essentialist," and Mullâ Sadra as an "existentialist."  

The confusing problem of the relationship between existence and essence of Mullâ Sadra, has led us to question whether the existence is real and essence is added to it, and consequently whether there is a sort of existence of real existence itself, and the existence of essence, ad infinitum. The answer is that existence is the existence of essence itself. Existence is only one

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39Sadra, Kitâb al-Mashâ'ir 12, no. 22: Al-mâhiyyah qad takûn mutahâsâilan dhiban wa layât bi manâyidh fi al-khârij [Corbin, Le livre, p. 110: Puisqu'il arrive que la quiddité soit actualisée dans la pensée, sans pour autant exister in concreto].

40Landolt, "Ghazâlî "Religionswissenschaft", p. 57. Izutsu points out the difference between the use of existence in the existentialism of the West and in that of Islam. The discussion of existence in the West is mainly focused on the question of the existence of "I," "you," "he/she," as a personal being, vis-à-vis this world. Generally speaking, the concern has been caused by the mechanical nature of everything in the industrialized West resulting in the loss of human identity. Therefore the meaning of human for the individual is very crucial, where is the position of the individual as "I," "you," and "he/she"? And what is the meaning of being individual vis-à-vis the world that surrounds it. What is the limitation of being individual vis-à-vis others? By contrast, in Sadra's philosophical point of view, with respect to the existent, everything that surrounds us exists. "It is a table," "It is a chair," etc (Izutsu, The Concept and Reality, pp. 26-32). Another very crucial difference is what Nasr refers to as that the discussion of existence in the West regarding the limitation of human being's life. It has to do with the individual who lives in the world among other individuals, ending with his death (The Islamic Intellectual, p. 285). In other words, as the individual will end his existence in the world when he dies, so does his existential discussion. The Individual does not exist, using Hediggerian ontology, when he is not among us. On the contrary, roughly speaking, the discussion of existence, in Sadrian ontology, begins before the birth of human beings and continues after their death. We may summarize that existence in Western existentialism refers to that of human beings, whereas in Islamic philosophy it is wider, in the sense that it includes human beings, all of nature, and even God himself. Nonetheless, despite this different use of existence, we are right to use the "existentialist" designation for Mullâ Sadra, I think, in opposition to the essentialism of al-Suhrawardi (Landolt, "Ghazâlî and "Religionswissenschaft", p. 57).
and is real. There is no other existence of outside of real existent itself, nor existence of essence. Rahman explains it thus: "existence is simply the status of being real, not an attribute of something which is in its own right already something real." 

E. Mumkin Effect of Mulla Ṣadrā's Revolution

Mulla Ṣadrā does not revolt against his predecessors' division of wujib, mumkin and muntani', as it is noted by Nasr, as a division is found since Ibn Sinā. Since the real thing is existence, these three divisions are part of its discussion.

To begin with, Necessary Existence can only be attributed to God. Describing this as Absolute Existence, he states that it is impossible to define it (ta’rīf), since to give a definition means to restrict Him by description or definition itself. Furthermore, it is impossible to give Him any definition for He cannot be described in terms of genus, differentia, and has no limitation. Inspite of our inability to describe Him, however, He is much more evident than any description we could attempt, for God is simply existent and, of course, He exists. His existence is the most real existence (anmiyyat al-wujūd), which is much greater than and incomparable to anything else. It is simply that God's existence is necessary and of course anything other than Him occupies a lower position in terms of existence, an existence which moreover is not necessary.

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44Ṣadrā, Kitāb al-Maša‘īr 6, no. 5-7; Corbin, Le livre, p. 100.
In dealing with Mullâ Şadrâ’s contingency, we have to discuss his concept of creation. In doing so, we may recall the subject of 1. necessary existence, 2. unfolded existence (wujûd munbasîf), 3. contingent existence itself, 3. As well as we have to deal with the position of existence and essence at the level of Necessary Existence’s emanation, which produces other existences, such as unfolded existence and contingent existence.

To begin with, when the Necessary existence, God, reflects on Himself, this is on the level of God’s existence and results in His first effulgence. The action of self-reflection takes place but once, and not repeatedly. In the sense that His existence and this first effulgence are pure and absolute existence, the two seem to be identical. However, they are different since the latter is God’s actualization, not Himself. This first existence is called unfolding existence (wujûd munbasîf), the breath of the

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45Mullâ Şadrâ presents many concepts of the creation of universe. 1. It is a natural process (tab‘) for materialism, 2. It is based on the will of God (qâdî) for Mu’tazilites or without His will for other theologians; 3. God’s riḍâ (voluntary) for peripatetic (ishrâf); 4. inayah (divine providence) for philosophers (ḥukmâ), 5. It is God’s self-manifestation (tajallî) for sufí. See, Kitâb al-Mašâ‘ir p. 58 no. 123, Corbin, Le livre, p. 203.

46Mullâ Şadrâ presents a variety of evidence for creation: 1. Traditions of Prophet mentioning that God creates, first, either al-‘aql (intellect), qalam (pen), or nûrî (light), 2. Quoting Saffâr Qummi (Abû Ja’far or Abû al-Ḥasan Muḥammad ibn Ḥasan al-Farukhî) (d. 903) in his Kitâb Başâ‘ir al-Darqâjât, that creation begins with riḥ (spirit), but riḥ itself is only known by God, 3. This is then supported by another opinion, that of Ibn Bâbûyî al-Qummi or Abû Ja’far Muhammad (d. 991). Creation begins with spirit which consists of holy souls (nûjûm al-muqaddas) 4. As a synthesis, Mullâ Şadrâ presents the five kinds of spirit: (a). al-qâdî (holy) or al-‘aql al-ja‘al (actual intellect) which is with God; (b). al-iman (faith); (c). al-qawwâh (potential), e.g., nasiqah (intellect) of human; (d). al-shabwâh (lust), e.g., animalism; (e). al-mudarrîj (inserted), e.g., in the nutritious and growing process. Finally, Şadr emphasizes that all spirits are lights, but vary in degree of intensity, all are one existence which has a gradation of intensity. See, Kitâb al-Mašâ‘ir, pp. 58-63, no. 124-136; Corbin, Le livre pp. 204-209.


48At the level of God’s throne (‘ârsh), there are three kinds of existence: 1. The existence which does not need others—free existence; 2. The existence which relates and
Merciful (nafs al-rahmānī) which spreads into everything (raḥmah wasi`at kull shay′), or al-ḥaqq al-makhlūq bīh (created reality). This pure existence then manifests itself in various forms, producing all possible beings which are still existence but not yet essence. This manifestation of first existence is also described as a light which shines its light into contingency. They are all still in the form of existence not in the external reality (in concreto); then contingency manifests itself as quiddity. However, the relationship between quiddity and existence at this level (since existence has various degrees), is of the nature that the more existence something has, the less quiddity there is in it. Since God is pure existence, He therefore has no quiddity. Hence unfolded existence is the fullest existence compared to other existences, and it has the least quiddity.

Contingent beings are related directly to the absolute existence, unfolded existence, or the Breath of the Merciful. They are realities, since they are pure existences without essence. They are actualities not potentialities, since potentialities are more properly applied to matter. However, the mind cannot conceive of how they could exist being sustained by the Creator (jā`īl), clearly they are dependant on God and have no independent existence. Nor can the mind can conceive of them depends on others, such as intellect, celestial body, elementary nature, soul, matter; 3. Unfolded existence, which is the source of all possible things. Ṣadrā, Kitāb al-Mashā`ir, p. 40-1, no. 97; Corbin, Le livre, pp. 161-162.

50Q. 7: 55.
51Ṣadrā, Kitāb al-Mashā`ir, p. 8, no. 12; Corbin, Le livre, p. 103.
52Ibid., p. 36, no. 87: Inn an-nawwāl fī dhawāt al-mahyāt la yakhītiṣ biinna`l, bal in kān lah zikhtiyūla, sa bi-ta`akkud wa taza`infs [Corbin, Le livre, p. 153: L’existence dans les choses qui possèdent une quiddité, ne diffère point quant à l’espèce. Non, se l’existence se différencie, c’est par l’intensification et par l’affaiblissement]."
53Ibid., p. 49, no. 109: "Anna wujižd tamām al-asba`a`, wa wujād al-wujūdāt, wa nūr al-anwar [Corbin, Le livre, p. 176: Existence Nécessaire est la perfection plénière des choses; il est l’existence des existences (l’être des êtres); il est la Lumière des Lumières]."
54Ibid., p. 41, no. 97: "Wa huwa [nafs al-rahmānī] al-ṣadiq al-anwāl fi al-mumkinat...wa huwa `as/wujud al-`a'am wa hayātuh wa marīth al-sānī `ī jami` ma `ī samāwāt wa al-arzūn [Corbin, Le livre, p. 162: C'est cet être, cette existence qui, parmi les êtres non-nécessaires, est par essence et en vérité le Première Emané de la Cause Première,...Cette première existence émanée est la source et principe de l’existence de l’univers; elle en est la vie et la lumière, pénétrant dans la totalité de ce qu'il y a dans les Cieux et sur les Terres."
55Rahman, The Philosophy of Mulla Ṣadrā, p. 86.
without their manifesting themselves in quiddity. Before the light of existence illuminates their contingency, our mind cannot determine whether they exist or not. Obviously, prior to this, they are concealed in their original nonexistent state.\(^55\)

Having done this, we cannot say that existence and essence are united altogether, for essence has no reality and is an element of existence, whereas existence contains some reality or is reality itself;\(^56\) besides, existence itself at the level of contingency creates the essence by which our mind can conceive it. In the sense of whether it is real or not, an existence is pure light and real, whereas an essence is darkness and unreal.\(^57\) On the other hand, essence here functions as a bridge connecting contingency and self-unfolded existence, which also acts as a bridge to our understanding.

Mullā Ṣadrā gives the clearest definition of the relationship between the created and Creator; it is like that of perfect and imperfect.\(^58\) Both are very different, and are in fact virtually opposed.

In comparison with contingent existence, God's existence is pure, unaffected and unmixed with any essence, whereas the contingent existence is mixed with essence and is therefore lower in its degree. Of course, the latter is far lower than the existence of God or even that of

\(^{55}\)Ibid., p. 30; Ṣadrā, Ṣafar, vol. 1, 1, p. 87; idem, Kitāb al-Mastabār, p. 13, no. 24: "Ann al-Mahṣūḥah idbā i'tabarat bi dhāṭāthā muṣarradah 'an al-wujūd, faḥṣya ma'dumah wa kadhiba idbā i'tabarat bi dhāṭāthā ma' qat'i al-nadhr 'an al-wujūd wa al-ʾadam [Corbin, Le livre, p. 111: la quiddité en ell-même, indépendamment de l'acte d'être, elle est non-existence. De même lorsqu'on la considère en elle-même, en faisant abstraction aussi bien de l'existence que de la non-existence]."

\(^{56}\)Mullā Ṣadrā, Kitāb al-Mastabār, p. 34, no. 82: "Inn al-wujūd kays ʾillā kawn al-shay' la kawn shay' li-shay' [Corbin, Le livre, p. 151: l'existence n'est rien d'autre que l'acte d'être de la chose elle-même, non pas l'acte d'être de quelque chose d'autre pour cette chose elle-même]."

For example, we may say: **man is man** [insān huwa insān],
but impossible to say: **man and his existence** [insān wa manjūdah].

\(^{57}\)Rahman, The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā, p. 33.

\(^{58}\)Ṣadrā, Kitāb al-Mastabār, p. 44, no. 102: "Ann nisbat al-majāʾil al-mahdāʾ li al-jāʾil nisbat al-majāʾil taʾlā al-tamām, wa al-qāẓila taʾl al-qawwah [Corbin, Le livre, p. 170: Le rapport de l'instauré à l'égard de son Instaurateur est le rapport de la déficience à l'égard de la perfection, de la faiblesse à l'égard de la puissance]."
unfolded existence, for contingent existence manifests in essence.\textsuperscript{59} God, as pure existence without any essence, cannot be conceived by human mind. Contingency on the other hand is perceivable because it is manifested in essence.

The unfolded existence, compared to all contingent existences, is the highest in terms of the degree of its existence, and the lowest in terms of material content, while the lowest existence is the material reality which is itself a shadow of unfolded existence. We may also say that the material existence is at the zero level of actuality, since it is pure potentiality, while the unfolded existence is full of actuality. The contingent existence, which is full of potentiality, produces a multiplicity of concepts and quiddities, which then can be conceived by our minds.\textsuperscript{60}

From the discussion above, we have to be careful not to assume that contingency is existence itself or quiddity.\textsuperscript{61} Recalling the process of actualization, when the absolute existence, the Breath of the Merciful, actualizes into another kind of existence, the latter then needs to be actualized into another essence. Hence, contingency arises at the end of the process of actualization. However, we can say that contingency belongs more to a quiddity—\textsuperscript{62}—but not quiddity itself—which we cannot describe as existent or nonexistent, while the existence which is associated with an essence itself flows purely from a higher existence, the Breath of the Merciful.\textsuperscript{63}

Finally, all existences are part of\textsuperscript{64} and contained in the lower level of Necessary Existence, particularly this universe which is at the lowest level


\textsuperscript{60}\textit{Ibid.}, p. 87; Mullā Ṣadrā, \textit{Kitāb al-Mashā'ir}, p. 8, no. 12.

\textsuperscript{61}Mullā Ṣadrā, \textit{al-Ḥikmah al-Mutāḥādah}, vol. 1, p. 275.

\textsuperscript{62}As Ṣadrā himself called Mahīyyah kullīyyah īmānīyyah or mahīyyat īmānīyyat not ważūdīyyah īmānīyyah see \textit{Kitāb al-Mashā'ir}, p. 8, no. 11 and 9, no. 14.

\textsuperscript{63}Rahman, \textit{The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā}, p. 89.

\textsuperscript{64}Nasr says that Necessary Existence in Sadrian discourse is multiplicity in unity and unity in multiplicity (\textit{The Intellectual Tradition}, p. 280); whereas Rahman, based on Sabzawārī's commentary, calls it diversity in unity not unity in diversity, in the sense that everything has to return to Him, but He is unique and not everything (\textit{The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā}, p. 39).
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of contingency because it has the highest level of physical matter, and is hadith zaman (new in terms of time), since prior to it is either existence or nonexistence. Every material being including body, always follows the pattern of the renewal process (muntajaddid). In making this claim Mullâ Şadrâ bases himself on a number of Qur'anic verses, such as Q. 50: 14, 56: 61, 27: 90, 14: 22, 35: 17, 39: 67, 19: 41, 55: 26-27, 19: 94-5. This process of renewal is also quite foreign to Necessary Existence which is permanent and not subject to change, whereas all existences and contingent beings are continuously changing. All contingent existences are in transubstantial motion (harakah jawbarîyab) and are in the process of perfection (istikmâl) till they reach the One Reality. Every existence, since its creation is derived from the One, has to return again to its Creator.

F. Comparative Reflection and Evaluation

Although, Mullâ Şadrâ cannot avoid dealing with the topic of contingency on the basis of the conventional threefold division of wajib mumkin and mumtani, he positions himself uniquely as a result of his revolutionary views on existence, as Landolt noted earlier. His belief in the aqli of existence as being superior to quiddity results in the concept of change and so-called contingency. It is obvious, when compared with his predecessors, that Mullâ Şadrâ offers a new kind of contingency.

Al-Jurânî discusses mumkin simply in logical terms particularly in putting this concept in opposition to concept of "impossible" and "necessary." For this very reason, al-Jurânî's view of course, is the shallowest of all those who admit the existence of mumkin especially when compared to Mullâ Şadrâ. It is likely that al-Jurânî in this sense follows the conventions of Aristotelian logic, while other Muslim philosophers dealing with mumkin are comparable to Neoplatonic thinkers who associate this concept with nous (‘aqîl/intellect).

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Of course, Mullā Šadrā is at the opposite extreme from of al-Kindī who views the idea of possibility as fanciful, and from al-Suhrawardī who holds that possibility is a product of mental abstraction and is therefore unreal.

Ibn Sinā equates contingency with potentiality, where something has the potential to exist at some time in the future. But, when existence is then added to quiddity, it becomes an existence, such as our universe. However, Ibn Sinā still admits that there are things outside existence, quiddities without existence. Although it is impossible for them to exist, they do so in a sense, as illustrated by the so-called second principle of the Universe which is metaphysically absurd. This is very different from what Mullā Šadrā says in emphasizing existence over essence, that the first thing that emanates from God is unfolded existence which is pure existence, creating the second existence which then through acquiring its quiddity may be said to be contingent. For Mullā Šadrā, there is nothing outside existence, for reality is existence itself. For him, contingency itself occurs in the manifestation of existence in essence. This is in contrast to Ibn Sinā, who holds that contingency occurs when the quiddity accepts its existence.

Ibn al-‘Arabī more or less holds the same opinion as Ibn Sinā; he supports Ibn Sinian ontology and metaphysics in the sense that for him the possible thing depends on its existence or nonexistence, and both are at the same level of possibility. He differs from Ibn Sinā however in his advocacy of the concept of tarjīḥ (preponderance). If God desires to give preponderance of existence over nonexistence, nonexistence becomes existent possible being, our universe is sort of this. Furthermore, the impossible thing exists as an archetype or prototype in the mind of God called a’yān thabītah, before coming into existence. In addition, both nonexistence and existence include the cosmos, as the cosmos includes everything other than Necessary existence. And of course, Ibn al-‘Arabī in this respect contradicts Mullā Šadrā’s claim that existence is the beginning of everything, and that other than existence there is nothing. The key point differentiating Mullā Šadrā from Ibn al-‘Arabī in this sense is that when God contemplates Himself, this results right away in unfolded existence, and not impossibilities, as the latter holds. To become an existence, for
Ibn al-'Arabī, involves a longer process. Impossibility is given its preponderance from the will of God, then finally comes into possible existence, whereas for Mullā Ṣadrā it involves a much simpler process. The result of God's contemplation is pure existence, which later creates possible existence with its quiddity.

The two philosophers, Ibn Sīnā and Ibn al-'Arabī, share the same basic concept. For Ibn Sīnā and Ibn al-'Arabī contingency can be quantified as a quiddity which has 50% existence and 50% nonexistence. For Ibn Sīnā this 50% nonexistence will become existence if God adds existence to it. It remains nonexistence, however, if God does not. Likewise, for Ibn al-'Arabī, if God gives quiddity a preponderance of existence over nonexistence, it becomes existence. By contrast, it remains nonexistence if God does not choose to do so. Mullā Ṣadrā differs completely from them in his treatment of mumkin. As he believes that there is nothing outside existence, since existence is the original reality, and the first thing created by God through His manifestation, then contingency is not the sum of 50% existence and 50% nonexistence, but is rather the end result of the process of existence's manifestation in quiddity.

However, one may find some weaknesses in Mullā Ṣadrā's argument. One is that Mullā Ṣadrā does not define the impossibility (muhāl, mumtani) as the opposite of mumkin in his definition. For Ibn Sīnā and Ibn al-'Arabī the mumkin comes into being through the addition of existence, and for this both can define what is impossibility (the opposite of mumkin), which is a thing which has no existence (for Ibn Sīnā) or is not given preponderance (for Ibn al-'Arabī). Mullā Ṣadrā, on the other hand, does not provide an explicit definition of impossibility, but from his formulation of contingency we can conclude that impossibility is existence without essence, or existence which does not manifest in essence. If so, we may raise

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67Of course this weakness is viewed from logical statement point of view not from his other epistemology such as dhawq, 'ilm al-hudūrī, or Gnostic intuition, for we are not in that level.

68There is Mullā Ṣadrā's explanation about mumtani and maˈdūn as the opposite of existence (al-Hikmah al-Mutaˈāfiyabh, vol. 1, pp. 374-377), saying that nothing is outside existence. However, we cannot find the mumtani and muhāl as the opposite of mumkin.
him the following question: Does God, as a pure existence for having no manifestation in essence, include impossibility? This is clearly impossible.

The following diagrams describe *mumkin* according to the philosophies of Ibn Sinā, Ibn al-ʿArābī, al-Suhrawardi, and Mullā Ṣadrā:

1. Ibn Sīnā

![Diagram 1](image1)

The diagram does not include the concept of creation, for more about Ibn Sinā's concept of creation see, Netton, *Allah Transcendence*, p. 165.

2. Ibn al-ʿArābī

![Diagram 2](image2)
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The diagram does not include the concept of creation, for more about Ibn al-ʿArabi’s concept of creation see, Netton, *Allah Transcendence*, p. 284.

3. al-Suhrawardi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Existence/Possibility</th>
<th>Quiddity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstraction of human mind</td>
<td>Real</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The diagram does not include the concept of creation, for more about al-Suhrawardi’s concept of creation see Netton, *Allah Transcendence*, p. 267.

4. Mulla Șadra

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>God's self manifestation</th>
<th>Unfolded existence</th>
<th>Possibility</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Existence</td>
<td>Quiddity</td>
<td>Human mind</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nothing

Higher level of existence and Lower level of quiddity/matter

Higher level of quiddity/ matter Lower level of existence
G. Conclusion

Mulla Ṣadrā’s existentialist revolution resulted in a new definition of mumkin, featuring a departure from the common opinion of the aslīl of essence over existence and insistence of the aslīl of existence over essence. In our discussion on Islamic philosophers prior to him we found two tendencies in dealing with mumkin, 1. The first was to view it as merely a fancy and a pure abstraction of our reason, the position taken by al-Kindī and al-Suhrawardī. The latter especially held that possibility, existence and the like are unreal, and that reality lies in quiddity; 2. The second tendency involved treating the concept of mumkin seriously, something that both Ibn Sinā and Ibn al-`Arābī certainly did, as one half of the equation that makes up contingent existence. Mulla Ṣadrā offered a new solution in which mumkin is part of the process of the manifestation of existence in essence. However, he chose not to define impossibility (muntani`/muḥāl) as the opposite of mumkin. Mulla Ṣadrā, as mentioned above, took issue with al-Suhrawardī over treating existence as unreal, demanding to know how an existence could be unreal if God is Necessary Existence. In the same way, we may question "impossibility" as an implication of Mulla Ṣadrā’s definition of mumkin. If "possibility" is existence which manifests itself in essence, impossibility (as the opposite of possibility) is existence which does not manifest itself in essence. This inludes God. Does impossibility then include God?
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