Causality in Mullā Ṣadrā’s Philosophical Text al-Ta‘līqāt ‘alā Sharh Hikmat al-Ishāq

Hossein Ziai, UCLA, USA

I

Introductory Remarks

The tradition of philosophy in Islam, which started in Baghdad during the 9th c, has had a dynamic history ever since. For the most part, however, but with a few notable exceptions\(^1\), western scholarship on the history of philosophy has not examined this tradition after Avicenna. At least not systematically, nor from the standpoint of genuine analytical approaches to philosophical arguments. Islamic philosophy after Avicenna from the 12th c on warrants careful, analytical examination. Such generalized descriptions of this period’s thinking as “mystical,” “theosophical,” and the like, does not serve well its analytical nature and thus does not lead to interest by contemporary philosophers in philosophical texts of this important period. It is during this period that we observe the emergence of holistic philosophical systems distinct from the Peripatetic. The first such system is the Philosophy of Illumination, and thanks to the studies of Max Horton, Henry Corbin, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ibrahimi Dinani, and several others during the past decade, this novel system has been at least introduced to western scholar-

\(^1\) The exceptions are scholars such as Max Horton and Henry Corbin.
ship. The continuation of Illuminationist tradition, and its impact on the development of creative philosophical endeavor (predominantly in Iran), however, has not been studied seriously. There are two main obstacles that have to be removed in order to facilitate scholarship on this important side of Islamic philosophy. First is the unavailability of the texts. From among many Illuminationist texts and commentaries, only one or two have been published in critical editions. Second is the unavailability of translations. Very few, if any, technical translations of Arabic and Persian texts of this tradition have been published to date, which is a serious impediment to philosophical studies of this tradition. It is in this regard that the work done by the Mullâ Sadra Congress should be commended, with the hope that results of such conferences as the present one will initiate a genuine philosophical activity that will bring about a deep understanding of philosophical texts of the period after Avicenna in Islamic philosophy, specifically those composed by the great Iranian philosopher Mullâ Sadra. One of his most philosophically sophisticated texts is the hitherto unpublished text of al-Ta’lqāt ‘alâ Sharh Hikmat al-Ishrag. While his magnum opus text, al-Asfar al-Arba’a, has been published and is known to some extent in western scholarship, Mullâ Sadra’s al-Ta’lqāt as has not yet received much attention. This text, which, in my view is one of the latest purely philosophical works by Mullâ Sadra is now in press, I am happy to report here. In my discussion today I will refer to my edition of this text, and I have provided selected sections that are directly relevant to my discussion as an addendum to this paper. Pertinent to the theme of this conference I have chosen to examine selected topics associated with the problem of causality in Mullâ Sadra’s text of al-Ta’lqāt.

II
Causality

Philosophical investigation of “causality” is concerned with epistemological processes and structures that describe ways of knowing how a thing causes another. The question “why a thing,” the relation between two things, the cause (C) and the effect (E) such that necessarily and by some stipulated set of conditions when C exits, then E will exit, priority, rank, and order of C in relation to E, definition and types of connection between C and E, and so on, are all discussed when examining causality. It is well established that Aristotle was the first philosopher to systematically examine and define causality. In his Metaphysics he defines four causes: the material, formal, efficient, and final. In his Posterior Analytics we find the first discussion of “why” and “how” related to cause presented in the analysis of syllogistic reasoning. In his Physics we find discussion of “form” and “nature” associated with causality. Aristotle’s general view of causality, and specifically his view of the cause of causes, impacted Islamic philosophy’s formative period beginning with Kindi, followed by Fârâbî and then by Avicenna. Emanationist theories of Fârâbî and Avicenna was an attempt to uphold, or to harmonize, Aristotelian necessary causality with religious and theological precepts that called for the will of God as ultimate in the “free” creation of the world. Logical order explains the emanation of existent entities from the Necessary Being in the scheme of emanation. This view, however, was thought by theologians to be contrary to religious views teachings on creation, and Ghazâlî in his Tahâfût al-Falâsifa rejects as invalid the philosophical position of necessary causation, and hence the Aristotelian principle of causation. Ghazâlî established a distinctive and in some ways novel view of causality in Islamic philosophy. He simply argues that empirically, the necessary connection between the natural efficient cause and its effect cannot be proven, and God’s Will is the direct cause in the
creation of all events. In chapter 17 of Tartash al-Falâsifa, Gazâlî asserts that:

The connection between what is habitually believed to be a cause and what is habitually believed to be an effect is not necessary according to us. But with any two things, where "this" is not "that" and "that" is not "this" and where neither the affirmation of one entails the affirmation of the other, nor the negation of one entails negation of the other, it is not a necessity of the existence of the one that the other should exist, and it is not a necessity of the nonexistence of the one that the other should not exist.

Thus, Ghazâlî denied the necessity of the relationship between cause and effect, upholding that divine will, without any logical necessity, directly created all natural events and entities.

The anti-rationalist position of Ghazâlî, it is believed, is the prevailing Orientalist position, impacted all later development of theology and philosophy in Islam to the point that the earlier Peripatetic theories of causality were eclipsed altogether. While Ghazâlî’s impact on Islamic theological thinking, and even on the “textbook” genre of philosophical compositions that form the core of the scholastic tradition, cannot be denied, the novel and holistic reconstruction of philosophy by Suhrwardî does did allow for the continuance of philosophical investigation not relegated to the position of “handmaiden of theology.” Mullâ Śadrâ’s thinking, and his al-Ta‘līqât, which aims to refine and augment Suhrwardî’s philosophical discourse, indeed is testimony to this fact. Al-Ta‘līqât is in every respect a philosophical work, and is not bound by the limits posed by anti-rationalist theological presuppositions. While I do not claim that the range of Mullâ Śadrâ’s work all uphold a strictly rationalist philosophical position, this is certainly the case in his al-Ta‘līqât. A brief examination of selected topics in this text relating to causality will, I hope, illustrate this point.

There are many sections in Mullâ Śadrâ’s al-Ta‘līqât where various topics and questions relating to the set of problems: cause, causality, relation between cause and effect, “betweenness” (baynîna) of cause and effect, types of priority in causality, and so on, are examined. In every case, Mullâ Śadrâ’s approach includes first a careful examination of the Illuminationist position on the question, which he analyses in relation to Averroes’ views, followed by his own re-statement of the question, which often includes major refinements of the arguments as well as additions to the earlier views. Among the set of terms used by Mullâ Śadrâ in his discussions of causality, in addition standard terms associated with the “Four causes” and causality, the term and concept of “essential cause” (‘illa dhâtiyya) distinguished from “accidental cause” (‘illa ‘aradiyya) is to be noted as specifically significant in terms of the philosophical expression of al-Ta‘līqât.

I will now present a brief examination of Mullâ Śadrâ’s arguments of this significant philosophical issue. The Third Discourse (al-Mağāla al-Thalitha) of Part One (al-Qism al-Awwal) Suhrwardî’s text, Hikmat al-Ishrâq, is devoted to a highly sophisticated theoretical discussion of fallacies and philosophical disputations concerning Illuminationist vs. Peripatetic philosophical positions regarding selected topics and problems taken from logic, physics, and metaphysics. In a short, but remarkably well argued Ta‘līqât in this section we find Mullâ Śadrâ discuss the distinction between essential and accidental cause, paraphrased as follows:2

Cause is either essential or accidental. An essential cause is such as the agent, the final, the material, and the final cause. Accidental cause is such as when an impediment to the existence of some effect be removed. The conditions that satisfy accidental cause are such as when the agent acts essentially, but another effect may ensue. An example is Saqmîniyâ, which

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causes coldness accidentally, but essentially causes increase in the Yellow Bile, which in turn causes the lessening of heat. The point here is that the agent itself does not act directly, but removes an impediment thus causing the observed effect.

The essential cause is what is sought in science, and in the section in al-Ta’līqāt corresponding to Suhrawardî’s discussion of subjects pertaining to the Posterior Analytics, mainly demonstration and the method of science, we find a highly refined analysis of causality. The discussion is set forth by Suhrawardî, who following Aristotle, stipulates that demonstration is the true method of science. In this section a chapter is devoted to defining and examining the “why demonstration” (burhān lima, also called explanatory syllogism) and the “assertoric demonstration” (burhān anna). This chapter includes a significant point, which is that the Middle Term of syllogism (al-hadd al-awsat) is the cause of the relation between the two terms Major and Minor, and that this a cause both “ideally” (dhīhnn) as well as “really” (aynān). As we shall see, the notion of an “ideal” cause, or “illa ‘aqliyya” may indeed be an innovative one first fully stipulated by Suhrawardî and subsequently further refined by Mulla Ṣadrā. In what follows I will summarize Mulla Ṣadrā’s analysis of the question.

Syllogisms are two kinds: one where the Middle Term is not the cause for the existence of the Major Term essentially and that the Major Term exists because of the Minor Term. This syllogism is called the “why/explanatory syllogism.” The other kind is when the Middle Term is the cause for the existence of the Major Term, because of its existence in the Minor Term. This one is called the “assertoric syllogism.” Of this latter kind there are two further types: When the Middle Term and its existence is the cause of the Major Term in the Minor Term and is itself not the case of the Major Term, which is simply because of it. Or, when the Middle and the Major Terms are both related and/or effects of a single cause. In the first type the Middle Term is simply called “reason for” (dāli), and the second is named “assertoric demonstration,” simply.

Subsequently Mulla Ṣadrā enumerates five “problematic issues” (ishkālāt, i.e. problems that need be addressed) associated with, must have been his understanding of the standard Peripatetic as well as the Illuminationist philosophical view of the position of cause in the Aristotelian scientific method. They are:

1. Reasoning (istidāl) from the effect to the cause does not lead to certitude (yaqīn) in knowledge.
2. Knowledge of what has a cause is only obtained first with respect to knowledge of its cause.
3. It is not possible to demonstrate the Necessary Being, because It is necessarily itself not an effect.
4. Reasoning based on two things related to one another is incorrect.
5. It is not correct to designate as cause the Middle term for the Major Term. Such as the fallacy: “This is a human, and all humans are animals, therefore this is an animal.”

Problems (1) - (5) together indicate Mulla Ṣadrā’s rather distinct Illuminationist epistemological position, which posits a fundamental priority to Knowledge by Presence, and for him is the most prior in obtaining knowledge of a thing, tantamount to knowing a thing’s cause. Thus, in this scheme Knowledge by

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4 See al-Ta’līqāt, pp. 194 ff.

5 We note that here that he discussion corresponds to Posterior Analytics (1.7 74af), where the notion that syllogistic reasoning establishes the causal connection between an axiom and conclusion is explained by the First Teacher himself.
Presence has priority over acquired knowledge through syllogistic reasoning, and this is most true of the fundamental principles as well as knowledge of the Necessary Being. For one thing, Knowledge by Presence takes place when the knowing subject (al-mudrik) is “related” (al-idāfa/al-idāfa al-ishrāqīyya) to the object (al-mudrak), where the relation is not extended in time. That is, this type of knowledge takes place in a duration-less “moment” (ān). The very moment when Knowledge by Presence is obtained the “cause” is known. In this way the critical problem associated with the how of temporal priority of cause and effect is also solved. Because, as we shall see the Illuminationist position stipulates that there is no temporal priority of cause over effect.

The next topic here examined concerns the types of priority, as it informs of the question of causality. This is also one of the significant philosophical topics that has been presented since Aristotle’s works in the discussion of cause and its relation to effect. Let us first look at the text of Hikmat al-Ishrāq:

We mean by “cause” that whose existence immediately and without conceivable delay necessitates the existence of something else. Conditions and the removal of impediments also enter into cause; for if the impediment is not removed, the existence of the thing is still contingent in relation to what was assumed to be its cause. If [impediment’s] relation to the thing partakes of contingency without reaching the condition of sufficient reason, there can be no relation of cause and effect. This is not to say that nonexistence does something; it only means that nonexistence enters into causality in the sense that, when the mind consider the necessity of the effect, it cannot do this without considering the nonexistence of the impediment. The cause has an intellectual but not a temporal priority over the effect. They may be simultaneous in time, as in breaking and being broken, but we still say, “He broke it, so it broke,” and not the opposite.

There also is a priority that is temporal, as well as a priority of place or position—as in bodies—or of nobility in attributes admitting of being more or less noble. A part of the cause may be temporally prior or intellectually prior.

This scheme of priority is most crucial to the discussion of causality, and as we shall see the notion “intellectually prior” associated with cause and effect seems to be a novel Illuminationist position here. But let us first examine Aristotle on priority, and then turn to the notion non-temporal priority of cause over effect. Of course a problem of “togetherness” (ma’iyya) of cause and effect as well as what of the “in-between-ness” between them does arise, but I will these problems for another occasion.

Aristotle on Priority:
In the Categories (14a 26 -b15), Aristotle argues that one thing is called prior to another in four way:

1. “In respect of time as when one thing is called older or more ancient than another.
2. “What does not reciprocate as to implication of existence. For example, one is prior to two because if there are two it follows at once that there is one whereas if there is one there are not necessarily two, so that the implication of the other’s existence does not hold reciprocally from one; and that from which implication of existence does not hold reciprocally is thought to be prior.
3. “A thing is called prior in respect of some order, as with science and sciences. For in demonstrative science there is a prior and posterior in order, for the elements are prior in order to the constructions (and in grammar the elements are prior to the syllables; likewise with

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6 See, The Philosophy of Illumination, edited and translated by J. Walbridge and Hossein Ziai (Utah, 2000), pp. 43-44.
speeches, for the introduction is prior in order to the exposition.

4. “What is better and more valued is thought to be prior by nature: ordinary people commonly say of those they specially value love that they ‘have priority.’

In addition to the above four types of priority, Aristotle considers cause as another type of priority, he argues “For of things which reciprocate as to implication of existence, that which is in some way the cause of the other’s existence might reasonably be called prior by nature. And also, in his Posterior Analytics (71b11) Aristotle shows that the knowledge of cause is the essence of scientific knowledge.

Avicenna On Priority

بالقياس إلى الوجود فجعلوا الشيء الذي يكون له الوجود أولا وإن لم يكن الثاني والثالث لا يكون له إلا وقد كان الأول وجوداً متقدماً على الآخر مثل: الولد، فإنه ليس من شرط الوجود للولد أن تكون الكثرة موجودة، ومن شرط الوجود الكثرة ان يكون الواحد موجوداً وليس في هذا أن الواحد يفيد الوجود للكثرة أولاً يفيد، بل إنه يحتاج إلى حين يغادر للكثرة وجود بالتركيب.

 anthem the cathedral’

الفصل الأول ص 126-127

"المشهر عند الحمير هو المقدم في المكان والزمان، وكان التقدم والقيل في أشياء لنا ترتيب... وقد يكون هذا التقدم المرتني في: من أمور بالطبع، كما أن الجسم قبل الحيوان بالقياس إلى الجوهر ووضع الجوهر مبدأ.

لا مور لا بالطبع، بل بالصياغة كفغم الموسيقي.

"فاذن وجود كل مطلب واحيب مع وجود عناه، وجود عناه واحيب عنه وجود المطلب. وهما معنا في الزمان أو الدهر أو غير ذلك، ولكن ليسا معا في القائل إلى حصول الوجود، وذلك لأن وجود ذلك لم يحصل من وجود هذا، وذلك له حصول الوجود ليس من حصول وجود هذا ولهذا وجود هو من حصول وجود ذلك، لذلك أقدم القائل إلى حصول الوجود."
Mulla Sadra on Priority

We now turn to Mulla Sadra’s discussion of the types of priority in *al-Ta’liqat*, where his discussion commences in his response to Suhrawardi’s statement: “The priority of cause over effect is a mental one and not a temporal one.”

Mulla Sadra commences by explaining “priority” as:⁷

When two things exist such that one may exist without necessitating the other, but the other is necessitated only when the first (al-a’wval) is necessitated. This is because the necessity of the second (al-thani) is because of the necessity of the first. Mulla Sadra here states that in addition to the “famous five types” of priority there are other types he will add. The first significant additional type of priority is what we are told Mulla Sadra has himself designated “priority in terms of Truth” (taqaddum bi’l-haqq), which is distinguished from priority of the constituents of a real thing, such as genus and differentia in terms of meaning and concept, over the concept what-is the real thing itself without any consideration of the thing’s existence. Priority in terms of Truth is said to be the priority of ranks of being generated from The First down to the lowest level of existence. Now in a way this is the same type of priority Suhrawardi had named “noble priority” (taqaddum bi al-sharaf), yet Mulla Sadra wants to distinguish his “priority in terms of Truth” to be distinct from all other types. His intentions here are to harmonize causality with creation and perhaps with his own views of emanation and what his teacher, Mir Dâdâd, had designated creation to be Hudith Dahri. He does this by arguing that noble priority does not entail inclusion of what is lower “in” the

higher. He also argues that the order and rank of emanated entities are not subject to the standard view of causal priority, by saying that their priority is not simply by essence and simple causality. The priority of emanated entities, he further argues, are not in terms of position and place, nor by rank, nor temporal. In effect he is here saying is that neither causal priority, nor priority in terms of temporal nor spacial extension, nor mathematical priority, none of them serve to properly describe priority of the rank of created beings. He finally states that this type of priority by Truth (taqaddum bi’l-haqq) is something “apparent” (zâhir)⁸ and known by those who are resolute in Tawhid. But, what is Taqaddum bi’l-Haqq? If it can not be related to any causality, neither essential, nor natural, nor mathematical, then it can be known only by the subject’s own understanding of Haqq. In this way we may in fact see that Mulla Sadra is anticipating Hume’s rejection of rationalist concept of causality, by arguing that there is neither a real nor constructed (logical or metaphysical) relationship between two things (cause and effect), rather a subject’s own understanding is what determines “causality” and hence what defines priority in being. However, there seems to be a distinction between Mulla Sadra’s position and that of Hume, in that Mulla Sadra does accept “real priority” (taqaddum bi’l-haqiqa), which he states to be priority of a thing over what-is the thing existent because of it. Thus, by implication Mulla Sadra’s view of “natural causality” and the notion of Taqaddum bil-Haqq which define the relation between two things (equivalent to describing “causality”) is not confined to Hume’s “perception” as the only observed “relation” between two things. Yet further, it seems to me that Taqaddum bil-Haqq is still given to equivocation, and is thus not essentially distinct from the Illuminationist position on equivocal being and the ensuing sense of Taqaddum bi’l-Sharaf. While Mulla Sadra’s

⁷ See *al-Ta’liqat*, pp. 280 ff.

⁸ This is fundamental Illuminationist position that “evidence” in being is the primary determinant of its knowability.
position on causality of the relation between two entities, say X and Y, does favor the "religious" view of creation and the necessity of knowing the Truth (Haqq) in order to determine the "causal" connection/relation of X and Y, yet his acceptance of essential causality still places his thinking within philosophy rather than religion. He certainly accepts such essentially philosophical notions as temporal priority (at least among certain ranks of existent entities) as well as contiguity of X and Y in space and time (his notion of X and Y as mutadāʾīfān), and also of the continuity/ connection/ conjunction of X and Y, as he has upheld the Illuminationist position of al-ittiṣāl fī l-wujūd.

Selections on the Topic "Causality"

Taken From

Mullā Șadrā

al-Taʿliqāt ʿalā Sharḥ Hikmat al-Ishrāq

Edited by

Hossein Ziai

التعليقات على شرح حكمة الإشراق
لصدر الدين محمد بن إبراهيم الشيرازي
وهي الحاشية على شرح حكمة الإشراق السهوريدي
للعلامة قطب الدين الشيرازي

تصحيح وتعليق

د. كرير حسين ضيائي تريبين
Causation in Islamic and western philosophy is a complex issue that operates at many levels. This book will introduce an ontological and epistemological approach on cause and causation and describe some of the divisions of causation. This book discusses the relationship between causation and key philosophical doctrines.

The present book consists of 17 articles, divided into 6 chapters, concerning comparative studies on causation.


The articles are written by scholars from Asian, European and American universities.

Salamon-Azadeh
Publication

Edited by Seyed G. Safavi