

Reconciling the Fundamentality Dispute of Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi, and Mulla Sadra

I. Introduction

Suhrawardi is famous for his theory of knowledge by presence (*'ilm al-Hudoory*), however, upon closer inspection we shall see that despite his departure from the Peripatetics on numerous issues, the theory of knowledge by presence was inspired by Ibn Sinian principles. Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi share some of the same epistemological concerns; they both recognize the limits of knowledge through sense perception and maintain that self-knowledge is direct and immediate through intuition. First, I will guide the discussion through the formation of knowledge by presence, explaining how Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi arrive at self-consciousness or self-knowledge, which is both a priori and the necessary condition for all knowledge. With this epistemological foundation in place, a framework that Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi, and Mulla Sadra each employ in their respective systems, the ontological question regarding fundamentality will be addressed. It shall be apparent that subscription to knowledge by presence necessarily entails mutual consensus on the issue of fundamentality, and thus any conflict between the three philosophers with respect to this issue is merely semantic in nature.

Traditionally, the fundamentality dispute has been an issue of advocating the primacy of either essence or existence. As Morewedge and El-Bizri note, Ibn Sina has been misinterpreted in the past, having been classified as an Essentialist, while he actually declares being (*hasti*) as primary; Suhrawardi advocates essence, while Mulla Sadra also chooses being. However, after examining what each philosopher means by the words 'essence', 'existence' and 'being', it will be obvious that the three philosophers are not using all of these terms in the same way. Moreover, I will argue that the

ambiguity of the term *wujud* in the Arabic works, which is used for both ‘existence’ and ‘being’, is the prime cause of the confusion. Although Ahmad Ahmadi identifies the fundamentality dispute between Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra as a semantic dispute by virtue of their subscription to knowledge by presence, neither he nor anyone else has extended this criticism to include Ibn Sina. Conversely, while Morewedge and El-Bizri are among those who have discussed the numerous linguistic issues surrounding the misinterpretation of Islamic philosophers, notably misinterpretations of Ibn Sina, they have not explicitly declared the fundamentality dispute a semantic issue caused by ambiguous language. By uniting these two ideas, I argue that the fundamentality dispute between Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi, and Mulla Sadra is the result of the dual meanings of *wujud* insofar as they must necessarily agree on the issue of fundamentality. It seems that clarifying how philosophers use the term *wujud* is the best way to reconcile this confusion and promote valid interpretations.

II. Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi’s Knowledge by Presence

Suhrawardi’s develops his theory of knowledge by presence after commenting on the limits of knowledge through sense perception and knowledge by definition, which relies upon the senses. Suhrawardi criticizes the Peripatetics for claiming that we can know the essence of something, i.e., what something is, by mere definition. They make the distinction between ‘genus’, a general essential or type, and ‘differentia’, a specific essential of an object, or what is essential of an individual token. An essential definition must contain both the general and specific essentials. Moreover, they say that the unknown can only be grasped through the known. However, Suhrawardi objects that this is not possible. For how could we grasp the essence of that which we do not know? If

we grasp the essence of something foreign to us, then we must have grasped it in some other way than definition. If we say that the reality of something is known once all of its attributes are known, then we cannot properly define an object because we can never know all of its attributes.¹ Thus knowledge by definition can only give us a partial understanding.²

Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi's epistemology begin to look more similar through how they respond to Aristotle's model of sense perception by relying upon a priori concepts as a foundation of knowledge. For Aristotle, knowledge of something is to grasp its causes. Knowledge thus begins with sense perception, which yields memories, and in turn culminates to form experience. From experience we gain universal knowledge, e.g., the skill of a craftsman and the knowledge of a scientist.³ They both agree that the most difficult knowledge to understand is universal knowledge because it cannot be grasped through sense perception alone.⁴

These are the assumptions which are warranted neither by reason alone nor by senses alone but which can be known by the two working together. Thus, when the senses always find the same behavior in a given thing, or see the same state always having the same outcome, reason can recognize that this is by no means the result of chance. Otherwise, the same pattern would not be repeated, and the

¹ This is a skeptical claim. Conceptually, there are infinitely many attributes and it is impossible conceive of every one.

² Suhrawardi, Shihab al-Din (1999a). *The Philosophy of Illumination. A New Critical Edition of the Text of Hikmat al-Ishraq*, with English trans., notes, commentary and intro. J. Walbridge and H. Ziai, Provo (UT): Brigham Young University Press. p. 10-11.

³ Mehdi Aminrazavi, "How Ibn Sinian Is Suhrawardi's Theory of Knowledge?" *Philosophy East and West*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (April 2003): 205.

⁴ Morewedge, Parviz. *Metaphysica of Avicenna (ibn Sina) a critical translation-commentary and analysis of the fundamental arguments in Avicenna's Metaphysica in the Danish Nama-i 'Ala'i (The book of scientific knowledge)*. New York: Columbia UP, 1973, p. 111.

observed pattern would not be the commonest. Examples are the burning of fire and the purging of bile by scammony.⁵

Ibn Sina responds that Aristotle is relying upon primitive concepts that allow us to perceive and make inferences, i.e., he is reducing empiricism to rationalism. Without such primitive concepts we could not recognize patterns and determine cause and effect.⁶

Suhrawardi's response pertains to qualia. We can only gain knowledge of colors through sense perception, not by analysis or description. "The truth is that blackness is one simple thing. It can be intellected and has no unknown part. It cannot be defined as it is to someone who has not beheld it, but anyone who has beheld it has no need for a definition. Its form in the mind is like its form in sensation. Such things have no definition."⁷ Thus knowledge of qualia and phenomenological experiences is private and non-verifiable by others. Since he has now demonstrated the limits of the Peripatetic's knowledge by definition and knowledge by sense perception, his next move is to argue for the existence of a priori concepts.

It is Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi's support for rationalism, their reliance upon a priori concepts that leads them to positing their respective theories of knowledge by presence. They both have ontological proofs for the existence of God, who cannot be known through the senses; thus since we know God, God must be known through some other way. Ibn Sina supports Rationalism in two ways. He first argues that induction is just the process of universalizing finite experiences, which neither leads to universally true conclusions nor implies necessity. Moreover, rational knowledge cannot reside in the

⁵ Ibn Sina, *Danish Nama-i*, ed. Muhammad Mishkat and Muhammad Mu'in (Tehran: Tehran University Press, 1975): 111. As cited in, Aminrazavi 205. (I was unable to find this passage in Morewedge's translation).

⁶ Aminrazavi 205.

⁷ Suhrawardi, *Philosophy of Illumination*, 52.

physical body because it is indivisible while the body is physical matter and hence divisible.⁸ Suhrawardi's argument is one of necessity. Something completely unknown can never be known. Thus in order to know something we must first know it at least partially, and what is known must come from prior knowledge and experience. This leads to an infinite regress and is impossible. Therefore, there must necessarily be innate ideas that provide us with the required prior knowledge.⁹

So far Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi have described how knowledge of the external world is determined through knowledge by definition and sense perception, and the limitations of this type of knowledge. But in order to prove the existence of God, Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi say we must first attain knowledge of ourselves. Knowledge by presence is how we acquire self-knowledge, which is the necessary condition for all knowledge. As Mehdi Aminrazavi notes, Ibn Sina's explanation is not as refined as Suhrawardi's, but is an early form of the view.

The first principle of Ibn Sina's proto-knowledge by presence is the distinction between consciousness in itself (*al-shu'ur bi'l-dhaat*) and consciousness through consciousness (*al-shu'ur bi'l shu'ur*). Aminrazavi explains:

One's self-consciousness, Ibn Sina argues, is a continuous stream whose beginning and end are unknown. "Our self-consciousness occurs in an unqualified sense," Ibn Sina states, and he goes so far as to say that "my self-consciousness is my very existence." This is a major claim since it implies the following:

- A. Self-consciousness is that which constitutes the identity of a person.
- B. To be conscious of one's self is "to be".¹⁰

⁸ As cited in Aminrazavi 206-207, from Ibn Sina, *Al-Shifa': De Anima*, ed. And trans. Fadl al-Rahman, vol. 2 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952).

⁹ Aminrazavi 206-207.

¹⁰ Aminrazavi 208.

Ibn Sina then addresses the questions of how it is that one is conscious of one's self and by what means self-consciousness is the consciousness of the self. The argument that Ibn Sina gives is similar to Suhrawardi's when he makes the distinction between consciousness and consciousness through consciousness. Ibn Sina says that perceiving oneself as oneself is not empirically verifiable, neither by oneself, nor by others. Yet we still claim to know who we are. So it must be the case that we have a priori conceptual knowledge of the self through intuition. Even if we recognize ourselves through our accidental and physical attributes, we still must be able to know that oneself corresponds to one's body. This knowledge must be present at all times. Therefore, self-knowledge is primary, an a priori concept that we gain through intuition. We know ourselves through ourselves without any sort of mediation or mental instruments. With this we arrive at consciousness through consciousness. For if we do not know ourselves through ourselves, then must know ourselves through something else, which is not ourselves. This something else would also be known through a different something, and this would lead to an infinite regress.¹¹ Yegane Shayegan concludes, "... 'self-consciousness' is a pre-judgment state of grasping of existence and 'consciousness through consciousness' is the judgment of cognition of existence."¹²

Ibn Sina's proto-knowledge by presence is characterized by his explanation of consciousness through consciousness. Suhrawardi expounds upon this principle with three arguments for knowledge by presence. The first can be called the I/it distinction. If my knowledge of myself (e.g., my knowledge of my mental states) is not direct and

¹¹ Aminrazavi 208.

¹² As cited in Aminrazavi 208, from Yegane Shayegan, "Avicenna on Time" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1986), p. 24.

unmediated, then I know myself through something other than myself; let us call this X. X is only a representation of I-ness, not the true I or the reality of I-ness. This is a contradiction because the X could never be I-ness, it will always be a representation of I-ness. Thus if I do not have knowledge of myself directly, then I am not apprehending myself, I am apprehending a representation of myself. Therefore, it must be the case that I know myself directly and immediately.¹³

The second argument demonstrates that if the self is to be known at all, precognitive knowledge of the self must be known necessarily. He says that if the self is not known directly, then it must be known indirectly through X. However, it follows that when I grasp X, I realize that this is a representation of the self, which means that I must have known myself previously; otherwise, I would not have realized that X was a representation of myself. Moreover, one can never know that which is completely foreign and unknown. We are able to grasp knowledge of thing 'A', because our a priori knowledge was such that we had the requisite information to ascertain that what we found is in fact 'A'. Thus the self is either completely or partially known to itself. Furthermore, if the self knows itself through representation X, then how does the self know that X represents itself? If self-knowledge via X were not direct, then it would be through representation Y. But we can ask the same question for representation Y; this would lead to a regress. Suhrawardi concludes from this that the self necessarily knows itself through its very presence.¹⁴

The third argument for knowledge by presence is essentially a reformulation of the first and second arguments and deals with knowledge through attributes. If I know

¹³ Aminrazavi 209, from Suhrawardi, *Opera Metaphysica et Mystica*, 2:111.

¹⁴ Aminrazavi 209.

myself through a representation of myself, then I perceive the representation to be myself. Trivially, I-ness must be by itself, and the representation, i.e. the perception of something other than myself, must also be by itself. But this is absurd; I am not identical with something else. Further, knowledge of oneself through representation is knowledge of one's attributes. But if I am to know of my attributes and correspond them to myself, then this entails that I must have prior knowledge of myself before the knowledge of all my attributes.¹⁵ Thus Suhrawardi concludes once more that self-knowledge is direct and is only grasped through oneself, much like Ibn Sina.¹⁶

Despite the obvious differences in language and explanation, which is a result of their different philosophical traditions, both Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi subscribe to the same epistemological framework. Both are motivated by the limitations of knowledge gained via definition and sense perception, and advocate that self-knowledge is direct and immediate. Ibn Sina uses the principle of consciousness through consciousness to explain how we have a priori knowledge of the self, while Suhrawardi advances this line of reasoning with the development of knowledge by presence.

III. Ibn Sina on Modalities and Fundamentality

Ibn Sina makes the distinction between essence and being, but he does not explicitly declare one as fundamental. Morewedge comments on the essence-existence confusion by noting that:

¹⁵ As cited in Aminrazavi 209-210, from Suhrawardi, *Opera Metaphysica et Mystica*, 2:111.

¹⁶ It may seem as if these three arguments are reiterating the same point, but I read them as making slightly different claims: (1) apprehension through something other than myself is merely a representation of myself, and not the actual self, (2) if the self is to be known at all, then precognitive knowledge of the self must be known necessarily, and (3) I am myself and *not* a representation of myself, thus, if I can relate myself with my representation then I must have a priori knowledge of myself.

Ibn Sina's basic concern in this issue is not whether or not essences are more or less fundamental than existents; rather, his interest lies in conveying the following. If one asserts that an essence has an instance, then one must not only justify this assertion beyond the more conceptual analysis of the essence, but also observe the subject matter in question. ... In sum, "existence" is not a non-logical predicate for Ibn Sina, but is a means by which we can relate conceptual essences and actual entities, with the notable exception of the concept of the Necessary Existent.¹⁷

So regardless of whether one proclaims essence or existence as fundamental, both terms appear to refer to a common subject matter and this is what should be examined.

However, he does classify three types of existents: necessary, possible/contingent, and impossible. After looking at these, we shall find that many have misinterpreted Ibn Sina and that he concerns himself with actual entities; essence and existence are merely epistemological and ontological concepts that describe actual entities.

Ibn Sina's tripartite division of existents is simply a modal distinction. As hinted in the Morewedge passage above, Ibn Sina is not a realist with regard to universals; he is in fact more Aristotelian than some commentators care to acknowledge.¹⁸ Ibn Sina describes the necessary existent as, "...the existent, which when posited as not existing, an absurdity results," which contrasts with the possibly existent, as "...the one that, when posited as either existing or not existing, no absurdity results."¹⁹ Moreover, the necessary existent may exist through itself or it may exist through another, in either case, the necessary "*must be*". The necessary existent exists through itself when it does not rely

¹⁷ Parviz Morewedge, "Philosophical Analysis and Ibn Sina's 'Essence-Existence' Distinction," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 92, No. 3 (Jul. – Sep., 1972): 431-432.

¹⁸ For a further elaboration see Morewedge, *Metaphysica of Avicenna (Danish Nama-i)*, Commentary Part 2 §II, p. 156.

¹⁹ McGinnis, Jon, and David C. Reisman, trans. *Classical Arabic Philosophy An Anthology of Sources*. The Salvation, "Metaphysics," I.1.1, (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub Co Inc, 2007), p. 211. Translated from, Ibn Sina, *An-Najat (The Salvation)*, "Metaphysics," Ed. Muhammad Danishpazuh. (Tehran: Danishgah-yi Tihiran, 985): I.1.1.

upon any other substance for its existence, nor depend upon a foreign cause for its existence. Conversely, the necessary existent that does not exist through itself is reliant upon a foreign cause. For example, the number '4' necessarily exists through another when '2+2' or '3+1' are posited. Similarly, burning necessarily exists through another when the causes for burning are united with an object that can be burned.²⁰

However, an existent cannot simultaneously exist through itself and through another. If the other were removed from the equation, the existence in question will either remain necessary, demonstrating that the existent did not exist through the other, or the necessity of the existent will not persist, demonstrating that the existent only existed through the other, and *not* through itself. The former scenario is a case of over-determination, while the latter stems from an observational error. Thus whatever exists necessarily through another exists possibly in itself. This is because the object that is necessary through another is only necessary by virtue of its association or relation to the other.²¹

All objects must exist necessarily, possibly, or impossibly. An object whose existence is impossible through itself, is neither through itself nor through another. In other words, whatever is impossible cannot actually exist because its causes do not exist and it is not self-caused. With the exception of the Necessary Existent, which exists necessarily through itself and not through another, objects do not exist necessarily through themselves, but rather, through another. Thus the object exists possibly through itself. In relation to its causal factors, it exists necessarily through another. And if all its

²⁰ Ibid. I.1.1-2, p. 211.

²¹ Ibid. II.2.1-2, p. 212.

relations and associations to other objects were removed from the equation, the object itself would be impossible, i.e., necessarily non-existent.²²

Scholars are divided on whether Ibn Sina declared essence or existence as fundamental. Morewedge and El-Bizri are among those who note that the confusion of how to interpret Ibn Sina on this issue stems from (1) linguistic difficulties in early translations, which led to inaccurate interpretations, and (2) scholars not engaging themselves in the original texts, but only these inaccurate secondary sources. In addition to the difficulty of translating abstract philosophical concepts from Indo-European languages to Semitic languages, many medievalists of the Western world were only exposed to Ibn Sina through the ambiguous Latin translations. It is excusable that the Western medievalists did not learn Arabic and Farsi in order to read the primary Islamic philosophy texts. However, these philosophers thus adopted various misinterpretations and passed them on to the future generations.^{23 24} It is a fairly recent endeavor in the Western world to devote attention to the translations of Islamic philosophers, both of careful and diligent re-translations in response to inadequate translations made previously, and of never before translated material. A complete examination of the mistranslation lineage is outside the scope of this paper, but a treatment of Ibn Sina's use of 'being' is crucial to disproving past interpretations of Ibn Sina's as an essentialist. As we shall see, Ibn Sina's system appears more Aristotelian than past interpretations would allow.

²² Ibid. II.2.3, p. 212.

²³ Morewedge, *Metaphysica of Avicenna (Danish Nama-i)*, Commentary, p 156-186.

²⁴ Ibid. 156-186

Morewedge addresses *prima facie* difficulties in the translation of the concept of ‘being’ in the commentary of his English translation of Danish Nama-i: (a) the Greeks were not entirely clear on their use of ‘being’ and commentators have been divided ever since, (b) translating abstract ideas between Indo-European languages and Semitic languages has proven difficult, a noteworthy example of this is that Indo-European languages have temporal verb tenses and use the verb ‘to be’ as a copula as well as meaning ‘to exist’, while Semitic languages do not have temporal verbs nor do they include a copula, (c) Ibn Sina uses multiple terms to refer to the same concepts, sometimes interpreted as having slightly different meanings, and (d) Ibn Sina uses the word *wujud* to refer to both ‘being’ and ‘existence’ in his Arabic texts, while in his Persian works, he maintains *wujud* for ‘existence’ but uses the purely Persian word *hasti* for ‘being’.²⁵ Problems (a), (b), and (c) are beyond the aims of this paper, and so I will move to (d) and discuss the role of ‘being’ (*hasti*) in Ibn Sina’s *Danish Nama-i*. Morewedge and El-Bizri recognize that several linguistic issues have led to the misinterpretation of Ibn Sina as an Essentialist,²⁶ but the significance of the dual meanings of *wujud* in the Arabic tradition has yet to be sufficiently addressed. Morewedge and El-Bizri are among those who acknowledge the difficulties involved with translating the term *wujud*, as well as the effects that this has had on the interpretations of individual philosophers, namely, Ibn Sina. However, I wish to investigate some further effects that the ambiguity of *wujud* has had throughout the

²⁵ Nader El-Bizri, “Avicenna and Essentialism,” *The Review of Metaphysics*, Vol. 54, No. 4 (Jun., 2001): 753-778.

²⁶ El-Bizri 765-766. Notably, El-Bizri argues that the occasionally implied nuances between *mahiyya* (external essence) and *dhat* (internal essence) played a major role in the misreading of Ibn Sina as an Essentialist.

broader philosophical tradition. I will argue at the end of the paper that the fundamentality dispute between Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi, and Mulla Sadra is a semantic dispute that is caused by confusion over the dual meanings of *wujud*, insofar as their adherence to knowledge by presence necessarily entails mutual agreement on the issue of fundamentality.

Ibn Sina introduces being in the following way, “Being (*hasti*) is recognized by reason itself without the aid of definition or description. Since it has no definition, it has neither genus nor differentia because nothing is more general than it. Being does not have a description since nothing is better known than it.”²⁷ Morewedge notes two distinctions of Ibn Sina’s notion of being. The first is *hasti-i khass* which means ‘a being’ and second is *hasti-i ‘amm* which means ‘being in general’. The former is the being of “Any actual, particular substance, any accident of such a substance, or concept.” The second meaning of being is not a determinate entity or any feature thereof; rather, it is the most determinable concept and it is presupposed by all concepts. If an object ‘x’ has existence (*wujud*) then it necessarily has being (*hasti*), but not conversely. It is possible that ‘x’ has being (*hasti*) but not existence (*wujud*).²⁸ Thus a being is either necessary, possible/contingent, or impossible. The necessary being, which is only the Necessary Existent (*al-wajib al-wujud*), necessarily has existence. The contingent being may or may not have existence, while the impossible being will never have existence.

With Ibn Sina’s general notion of being in place, we will now examine the essence-existence distinction. Existing things are divided into two classes, essences intelligible in existence and essences perceptible in existence:

²⁷ Morewedge, *Metaphysica of Avicenna (Danish Nama-i)*, 15.

²⁸ Morewedge, *Metaphysica of Avicenna (Danish Nama-i)*, 168-169.

Essences intelligible in existence are those that have neither matter nor any consequential accidents of matter. They are intelligible in themselves precisely because no operation is needed to make them intelligible, and because they cannot be perceived by the senses in any way. Essences perceptible in existence are those that are not in themselves intelligible but rather perceptible by the senses. However, the intellect makes them such that they become intelligible, because it abstracts their true nature from the consequential accidents of matter.²⁹

An example of an essence intelligible in existence would be the number '4'. Numbers are not perceptible and can only be made intelligible through intellection. An example of essence perceptible in existence would be 'humanity'. We observe humans in the world and abstract the concept of 'humanity' in the mind. This passage holds two important features of Ibn Sina's view: the first is that he is a realist with respect to universals and thus not a Platonist, and the second is that essence does not generate its own substance.³⁰ Ibn Sina makes his realist view of universals more explicitly known, "Such a universality which is supposed to be a single idea and analogous to many others does not exist, of course, except in the imagination and in man's thought."³¹ Thus universals are mental concepts, which the intellect abstracts from actual entities in the world. Moreover, since essences are universals, they are independent of existence insofar as they are separate and distinct types of beings. We can think of Unicorn-ness regardless of whether unicorns exist in the actual world, and so they must be separate entities. Furthermore, we can also intellect universals that have instances in actuality, such as blackness or humanity. The distinction between essence and existence is thus a conceptual difference that resides in

²⁹ McGinnis, Jon, and David C. Reisman, trans. *Classical Arabic Philosophy An Anthology of Sources*. The Cure, "Book of Demonstrations" III.5.6, (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub Co Inc, 2007), p. 154. Translated from, Ibn Sina, Ash-Shifa', al-Burhan. Ed. by 'Abd ar-Rahman Badawi. (Cairo: Association of Authorship, Translation and Publication Press, 1966).

³⁰ This is a claim against Essentialism. Since Ibn Sina holds being as primary, it is being that generates its own substance.

³¹ Morewedge, *Metaphysica of Avicenna (Danish Nama-i)*, §12 p 32-33.

the mind; it is crucial to note that he is not distinguishing between them in the actual world. Thus we abstract the concepts of existence and essence from the concrete being in reality.

Since the essence-existence distinction is merely conceptual, we do not know if a being exists merely by intellecting an essence. In order to know if an essence corresponds to an existent, we must know if there is an actual object or subject matter of which the essence is a predicate.³² As El-Bizri advances, existence for Ibn Sina can be described as a “happening”, and that “...existence is taken to be external to the substantial structure of beings. It is what happens to them.”³³ Thus with respect to the fundamentality dispute, Ibn Sina is definitely not an essentialist, as past commentators have made him out to be.³⁴ But he does not present himself as a pure existentialist either. Rather, he regards being or being-qua-being as primary, and that being can exist in one of three modes: necessary, possible/contingent, or impossible. Thus, what is fundamental for Ibn Sina is the objective being or reality that is the source and cause of its effects and can be recognized in modalities.

IV. Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra on Essence and Existence

This section will include Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra’s views regarding essence and existence using their own language and terminology. I will make the case in the following section that the fundamentality dispute of Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi, and Mulla Sadra is purely semantic, i.e., it stems from a confusion between epistemology and ontology.

³² Ibid. §12, p. 33.

³³ El-Bizri 760.

³⁴ Ibid. 765-769.

As outlined previously, knowledge by presence or intuitive knowledge is the foundation for Suhrawardi's epistemology. On this account, to apprehend something is to understand it, thus when we introspect and apprehend ourselves, we know ourselves directly through intuition; in fact, he says that we are never unconscious of our essence (*dhat*).³⁵ Suhrawardi establishes the primacy of light in the same way that Ibn Sina establishes the primacy of being. "Anything in existence that requires no definition or explanation is evident. Since there is nothing more evident than light, there is nothing less in need of definition."³⁶ Ziai and Walbridge suggest that "evident" may also be translated as "manifest". "Suhrawardi is arguing here that light is a self-evident conception and can thus be a basic concept of a science. He is also establishing, as a fundamental principle of his system, that our knowledge of the world is based on direct contact with real things – with lights as directly manifested to us."³⁷ The establishment of light as brute and fundamental sets up Suhrawardi's framework of knowledge by presence and also demonstrates that knowledge of the world is based on the direct presentation of external (non-mental) objects, even in mystical experiences.

A complete explication of Suhrawardi's metaphysical account of lights and their ontological hierarchy is outside the scope of this paper, but it is worth mentioning the distinction between accidental lights and pure lights in order to see Suhrawardi's motivation for departing from Ibn Sina's use of existence as a modality. Accidental light is a physical light that can subsist in barriers (physical bodies) or in pure light. Pure light apprehends its own essence (*dhat*) and therefore knows itself directly. Humans are pure

³⁵ Suhrawardi, *Philosophy of Illumination*, 80.

³⁶ *Ibid.* 76.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, Notes, 181.

lights since we can never be unconscious of our essence or the apprehension our essence. Moreover, if we introspect carefully, we will find that the ‘self’ is merely that which apprehends its own essence, the “ego” (*ana-iyah*).³⁸ Thus, there is nothing more to one’s essence than being evident and being light; we apprehend our essence as being pure light and every light is evident to itself.³⁹ Similarly, self-knowledge consists of one being evident to its essence.⁴⁰

The Light of Lights plays the role of the Necessary Existent in Suhrawardi’s emanation system. A problem he addresses is how to explain the perfection of the Light of Lights, since other lights possess the same essence (*dhat*) of light, yet they are obviously not the Light of Lights. He responds by saying that the essence of luminosity is a mental universal, and that it is not particularized in the external world by virtue of it being a universal.⁴¹ The universal does not exist because if it did, the universal would then be particularized and given an identity from which it would be distinguished between other objects. Since the universal is supposed to hold “universal meaning” that is held by many, it would be a contradiction for the universal to exist outside the mind.⁴²

A considerable portion of Part One in *Hikmat al-Ishraq* is devoted to refuting doctrines held by the Peripatetics; of central importance to this discussion are Suhrawardi’s arguments for the primacy of essence (*mahiyah*). Suhrawardi describes existence (*wujud*) as a “being of reason” that has a single and general meaning referring to many objects, and then makes the distinction between ‘existence’ (*wujud*) and

³⁸ Ibid. 80.

³⁹ Ibid. 82.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 89.

⁴¹ Ibid. 92.

⁴² Ibid. 7-8.

‘existent’ (*mawjud*). Existence must have a general meaning (not a specific meaning) in order to refer to multiple objects as a universal concept. If its meaning were more general than substantiality then it would either subsist in substance or it would be independent in itself. If it were independent in itself then substance could not be described by existence; existence would hold the same relation to substance as it does to everything else. If existence subsists in substance, then existence would be actual (realized) in substance, and this actuality or instantiation would be existence. And if existence were actual (in the world), then it would be an existent. These two words do not refer to the same concept because an existent *has* existence, while existence itself simply *is* existence; this demonstrates how existence is a general term and can be predicated of multiple objects. Further, if blackness is nonexistent, then its existence is not actualized; thus its existence is not existent, and its existence is nonexistent. But if blackness were to now exist, then we might say that its existence was not yet actual, and that it is now actual. However, if we say that its existence oscillates between being actualized and not actualized, then the actuality of existence would not be existence itself (as shown above), and thus the existence of blackness would have its own existence, and *this* existence *its* own existence, ad infinitum. But an ordered infinity of attributes is absurd.⁴³ Thus existence must be a general term, which is not actualized in objects. The Peripatetics who claim to intellect existence while doubting its actualization in concrete objects, are faced with the infinite regression of existence shown above.⁴⁴

Moreover, “It is clear from this that there is nothing in existence which is itself the quiddity of existence; for as soon as we conceive its concept, we may wonder whether

⁴³ Ibid. 45.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 46.

or not it has existence,” which leads to the regress.⁴⁵ Similarly, if quiddity has existence, then this would be by a relation. This relation would also have an existence, and this existence would have a relation, *ad infinitum*. Another concern is that if existence were actually in concrete objects then it would be a state within the objects and not its own independent substance. That is to say, the locus of existence would be actualized, but existence would exist before its locus insofar as existence is a mental universal. Existence could not become actualized after or simultaneously with its locus; this would be absurd because its locus must exist *by* existence. Moreover, to use the terminology of the Peripatetics, existence as a state in a substance would be a quality. But they also assert that the locus is prior to any accident, e.g., a state or quality. This implies that the existent is prior to existence, which is impossible. This would mean that existence would not be the most general term, i.e., fundamental, insofar as quality or accidentality would then be more general. However, if existence was an accident, it would subsist in a locus, i.e., it would require a locus for its realization. But since it is obvious that the locus is existent *by* existence, the Peripatetics attempt to explain existence as superadded to concrete objects is circular.⁴⁶

The Peripatetics also claim that we can intellect man without existence, but that we cannot intellect man without a relation to animality. However, the relation of animality means nothing more than this being existent in man, either in mind or reality. Yet “they posit two existences in the relation of animality to humanity: one belonging to the animality which is in him, and the second, that which becomes existent in humanity

⁴⁵ Ibid. 46.

⁴⁶ Ibid. 46.

by reason of the existence of humanity.”⁴⁷ Thus even though the Peripatetics ground their system of metaphysics in existence (*wujud*), i.e., the most general and well-known, they posit multiple existences in the relation of animality to humanity. Animality has its own existence in us, and we have our own existence by virtue of being human. If existence is supposed to be fundamental then the Peripatetics have a problem since they also use existence as a quality.

The contingency of an object must be intellected prior to its existence, for the very reason that contingencies are first contingent and later come into existence or become actual. It is a categorical mistake to say that they exist and then become contingent. Thus contingency is accidental to quiddity and describes it. Unlike the necessary existent, which requires no relation to other objects for its existence, the contingent object cannot be something self-subsistent or independent by virtue of the meaning of contingency. Quiddity is also prior to necessity, for necessity is just an attribute of existence. If necessity were added to existence and were not self-subsistent, then it would be contingent in addition to being necessary, which is absurd. This would mean that the necessity of an object would be prior to it and would thus not be the thing itself (the actual existent); objects do not exist and then become necessary. For if an existence has necessity, then its necessity must also have an existence, which leads to a regress and is impossible.⁴⁸

Suhrawardi says that substantiality is also not something added to existent bodies, rather, it is just the “perfection of the quiddity of the thing such that it subsists

⁴⁷ Ibid. 47.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 48.

independently of a locus.”⁴⁹ The Peripatetics define substantiality as an existent, not a subject, but this cannot be the case, for to make a thing is also to make it a substance. Thus Suhrawardi concludes that there are two classes of attributes. The first class is for attributes that have a form in the intellect in addition to being found in concrete entities. Examples of these would be black, white, and motion. The second class is for those attributes that only exist in the mind and are not found in reality. Some ‘mind-only’ attributes are contingency, substantiality, existence, and color-ness. We can observe motion and black objects, but we cannot observe black-ness or contingency. Thus these ‘mind-only’ predicates are not parts of concrete quiddities; they can only be attached to mental quiddities.⁵⁰

Therefore, existence is a predicate for Suhrawardi. “Existence does not enter into the reality of the thing,”⁵¹ insofar as, “The reality is known only when all its essentials are known.”⁵² Rather, existence is a “being of reason, what the thing receives from its emanating cause is its identity.”⁵³ He criticizes the Peripatetics for positing fundamentality of existence, while at the same time utilizing existence as a quality or state; this only demonstrates the opposite position that essence is fundamental. If existence is a predicate, then any attempt to also use existence as fundamental will result in an infinite series of attributes or contradiction. What Suhrawardi advances is that essence is primary, and that existence is a “being of reason” predicated onto essence.

⁴⁹ Ibid. 49.

⁵⁰ Ibid. 51.

⁵¹ Ibid. 60.

⁵² Ibid. 11.

⁵³ Ibid. 123.

Mulla Sadra advocates the primacy of being (*wujud*), and although he uses the term *wujud* in his Arabic texts, he indicates in his *Kitab al-Masha'ir* that he is using *wujud* for the Persian term *hasti* (being).⁵⁴ He also admits that he used to be an essentialist like Suhrawardi and his followers, but was enlightened and revised his beliefs accordingly.⁵⁵ In his responses to the Essentialists, Mulla Sadra points out that their definition of existence is mistaken, i.e., existence is not a predicate, and that it is this mistake that leads them astray. He argues that it is neither existence nor essence that is fundamental; rather, it is being, the union of existence and essence in reality, such that existence is an “act of being” and essence is a ‘being as’ something.⁵⁶ In Mulla Sadra’s system, knowledge and intellection are not properties of the knower; rather, they are modes of being, insofar as knowledge composes one’s identity. Thus knowledge by presence is the direct, immediate self-evidentiality of one’s being, to which Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi also attest, is the foundation for all knowledge.⁵⁷

Mulla Sadra grounds his metaphysics in being, since being is the most general entity, “The realization (literally: inner-reality) of existence in its presence and revelation is the most evident of all entities, where as its essence is the most hidden in concept and in its inner-being.”⁵⁸ Being is the most general entity with respect to extension, and it is the richest of all terms with respect to definition. We differentiate between objects based

⁵⁴ Mulla Sadra *The Metaphysics of Mulla Sadra (Kitab Al-Masha'ir) (Islamic Philosophy Translations Series)*. Minneapolis: Global Publications Associations (New York), 1992, §40.

⁵⁵ Ibid. §85

⁵⁶ Ibid. §9-21

⁵⁷ Ibrahim Kalin, “Mulla Sadra’s Realist Ontology of the Intelligibles and Theory of Knowledge,” *The Muslim Word*, Vol. 94, No. 1 (Jan. 2004): p. 30-32.

⁵⁸ Mulla Sadra, *The Metaphysics of Mulla Sadra (Kitab al-Mashai'r)*, §5.

on their being or inner-realities, insofar as a thing is determined by its inner-reality.⁵⁹ Being cannot be described by definition because all attempts to define it will make it less general and miss its mark. Mulla Sadra's explanation of being may sound similar to what Hegel later describes as sense-certainty, that being 'is', but that is not what Mulla Sadra is advancing. Hegel's notion of being gained through sense-certainty is similar to the functions of demonstrative terms, e.g., the word 'this' is generally defined by its linguistic character, something to the extent of 'the object' or 'the object presented', and usually requires a gesture or demonstration in order to individuate its referent. However, any attempt to define 'this', including the ones stated above, only serve to subtract from the word's universal and general meaning. Sense-certainty is the richest in definition insofar as we gain knowledge of the presented object, but it is also the most general, and so we do not gain knowledge of particulars.⁶⁰ Mulla Sadra's being is not a universal that refers to particulars; rather, being is a unity of essence and existence.

Being is a concrete existence, or a 'happening' (*'arad*), but we cannot say that being itself exists. For example, in saying 'the man exists', we assume the existence of the book in addition to asserting existence as a predicate, thus asserting that the book exists before we grant it existence. We cannot say that being exists because existents have being, this would be a presupposition. With regard to the phrase 'the man exists', Mulla Sadra would describe this as, "the entity in the external [determined realm] is a man, not that something external is in existence."⁶¹ Mulla Sadra argues that being is not a quality or an attribute given to an object; being is an object's reality that constitutes its

⁵⁹ Ibid. §5-6.

⁶⁰ Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. § Consciousness.

⁶¹ Mulla Sadra, *The Metaphysics of Mulla Sadra (Kitab al-Mashai'r)*, §19.

identity. It is the unity of the actual concrete object and its quiddity, the ‘being as’.

There is no form that corresponds to being inasmuch as it has no genus, differentia, nor definition.⁶² “Whereas [by existent] is meant [by us] the simple meaning [sense] expressed in Persian by the word ‘hast’ and its synonyms. Then, it [i.e., existence] is an existent. Its being existent consists in being in the determined [state] in its inner-reality.”⁶³ With this Mulla Sadra affirms being as fundamental and turns to refute the misconceptions held by Suhrawardi and other Essentialists.

A concern of Suhrawardi’s is that we cannot intellect existence while doubting the actualization of the object. For him, this would entail that existence is a predicate and that leads to a regress when we conceptualize the existence of existence. Mulla Sadra replies that the reality of existence is not realized in thought because existence is not a universal. An external entity cannot be mental; moreover, the existence (or being) of an existent is identical with its determined state in the external world. We can also reverse the Essentialist’s objection regarding the existence of existence – what if we intellect essence while doubting its existence, or at least being unaware of its existence? We are obviously aware of the essence in thought, yet they claim that existence is an added attribute of essence. But this cannot be the case, for as shown, existence conceptually must come prior to essence.⁶⁴

Another objection is that if being exists in the external realm and is not a substance, then it will be a quality. But existence would be said to exist before the existence of the quality, and this would also lead to an infinite regress. Mulla Sadra

⁶² Ibid. §5.

⁶³ Ibid. §40.

⁶⁴ Ibid. §56-58.

responds by clarifying the definitions of the terms in question. Substance, quality, and the like, are kinds of essence. They have universal meanings, e.g., genus, species, being essential, and being accidental. However, the realities that exist in the world are “concrete determined inner-natures and specific inner-realities,”⁶⁵ and are not universals by virtue of their individual self-constitution. The Essentialists who claim that existence is an accident of essence are using existence in the sense of the verb ‘to be’ or as copula, not as the actual reality of existence. The existence of accidents is the existence for their subjects, whereas the existence of the subject is the actual existence of the subject; the subject only depends on itself for its existence to be realized.⁶⁶

Another Essentialist objection pertains to the existence of relations and universals. If there is existence for an essence, then existence has a relation to essence. But this relation must also have an existence to its essence, and this relation another existence, ad infinitum. Mulla Sadra reformulates the definition of being as a unity and explains that, “existence is identical with essence in the external [realm] but different from it mentally. Therefore, there is no relation between them except in intellectual consideration.”⁶⁷ The relation is identical with its inner-reality in the mind, but different from it in the external world. The regress will cease to be once one grasps the reality of the relation.⁶⁸ Existence is prior to essence in the external world, but essence is prior in the mental or in thought. Essence is predicated of existence in the external world in accordance with the existent’s inner-reality and forms a unity with it. But essence is the source or prior entity with respect to meaning, which is in thought, and is the source of mental propositions.

⁶⁵ Ibid. §60.

⁶⁶ Ibid. §60-66.

⁶⁷ Ibid. §68.

⁶⁸ Ibid. §67-68.

The mind abstracts essence and existence from an existent or being. Essence is prior in thought because it is a mental universal that must be realized in the mind. Conversely, existence is obtained prior to essence in the real world because of its concrete mode of being. From an existent or being, the intellect abstracts its essence and existence and asserts the priority of one over the other in the mind and in concrete reality.⁶⁹

Mulla Sadra three ranks of existence: the first is necessary existence, that which does not depend on anything for its existence; the second type of existence depend on other things (in the sublunar world) for its existence; and the third is true reality as we know it, i.e. this existence is The First Cause from the Necessary Existent in His emanation scheme. Knowledge of the third realm is only attained through mystical awareness; it is the source of the existence in our world and it is accordingly beyond the comprehension of the uninitiated.⁷⁰ Mulla Sadra says that the world is given to us embedded with meaning and it is in this sense that he asserts knowledge as a mode of being:

It seems that knowledge is among those realities whose ipseity (*inniyyah*) is identical with its essence (*mahiyyah*). Realities of this kind cannot be defined, for definition consists of genus and difference, both of which are universals whereas being is a particular reality by itself. It cannot be made known through complete description either because there is nothing more known than knowledge as it is an existential state of consciousness (*halah wijdaniyyah*) which the knower, being alive, finds in his essence from the very beginning without veil or obscurity. It is not [in the nature of knowledge] to allow itself to be known by something more apparent and clear because everything becomes clear to the intellect by the knowledge it has. How does then knowledge become clear by anything other than itself?⁷¹

⁶⁹ Ibid. §77.

⁷⁰ Ibid. §97.

⁷¹ Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi (Mulla Sadra), *al-Hikmat al-muta'aliyah fi'l-asfar al-'aqliyyah al-arba'ah (al-Asfar)*, ed. by M. Rida al-Muzaffar (Tehran, 1383 A.H.) I, 3, p. 278. This passage was translated by Ibrahim Kalin in "Mulla Sadra's Realist Ontology of the Intelligibles and Theory of Knowledge," p 15.

This definition of knowledge may seem circular and unsatisfying, but as Kalin explains, “...when we say that we know something, we affirm or deny the existence of something, and this cannot be other than being.”⁷² Since being is the fundamental entity of reality, it is also the sole condition for all knowledge; everything is known through being and knowledge is a state or mode of being.⁷³

Knowledge by presence would hence be knowledge of a concrete existent’s inner-reality. “The knowledge of the reality of existence cannot be except through the illuminative presence and an intuition of the [immediate] determined [reality]; then there will be no doubt about its nature.”⁷⁴ Knowledge by presence is still the foundation for all knowledge insofar as it is the knowledge of being, which is fundamental. ‘Presence’ (*hudur*) implies that the knowledge gained through experience is of something concrete and particular. Perception of concrete entities is immediate and self-evident to the self, which demonstrates how knowledge is an affirmation of the presence of being.⁷⁵

With respect to fundamentality, it may appear as if Suhrawardi is diametrically opposed to Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra. Having discussed how each of the three philosophers implements essence, existence, and being into their respective systems, some similarities are undeniable. All three rely upon direct a priori knowledge of the self as the foundation for their epistemology, and all three advocate the primacy of external concrete objects. The obvious difference is that Suhrawardi adheres to the primacy of essence, while Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra adhere to the primacy of being. After

⁷² Kalin 15.

⁷³ Ibid. 14-16.

⁷⁴ Mulla Sadra, *The Metaphysics of Mulla Sadra (Kitab al-Mashai’r)*, §57.

⁷⁵ Kalin 32.

examining how each philosopher is implementing his terminology, it will be evident that their discussion of fundamentality is a semantic dispute.

V. Why This Dispute is a Semantic Dispute

In this section I will present Ahmad Ahmadi's interpretation that the fundamentality dispute between Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra is a semantic dispute, i.e., it is a confusion between epistemology and ontology. In light of the similarities between the three philosophers, I wish to extend Ahmadi's criticisms to include Ibn Sina using the interpretation that Morewedge and El-Bizri endorse, i.e., that Ibn Sina declares being (*hasti*) as fundamental. At this point it will be clear that despite differences in terminology, all three philosophers declare being (*hasti*) or the reality of concrete existents, as fundamental.

As we have discussed, the three philosophers view knowledge by presence as the foundation for all knowledge. This begins with the direct and immediate arrival at self-knowledge, followed by knowledge of things through the union of the self and the object. The term presence (*hudur*) implies concrete existence and thus this type of knowledge is of concrete objects in reality, not mere ideas of objects; further, it is the external reality of a thing that is primary (*asalah*) and the source of effects. After comparing the many definitions of essence and existence, we shall observe that the general notion of being (*hasti*) is the term more aptly-suited what the three philosophers consider fundamental.

Having realized the significance of knowledge by presence and what this entails, it may seem strange to consider essence (*mahiyyah*) as fundamental, since the common usage of the term does not illicit an ontological definition, but more of an epistemological definition. Ahmadi outlines four possible definitions for the term 'essence':

1. “That which is said in answer to ‘What is it?’ (*mahiyyah*). Regardless of the nature of the subject matter in question, the answer to this type of question will always be the essence of quiddity of the object.
2. Essence is that by virtue of which a thing is what it is, i.e., thing-ness. An object will be identified as a book if it possesses the sufficient properties for qualifying as a book.
3. (Suhrawardi) Essence refers to the external, objective, and independent reality that is the source of effects. Essence in this sense is reality, identity, object in the external world, being, one’s inner reality (*inniyyah*).⁷⁶
4. (Mulla Sadra) Essence refers to how we know something, the way in which a thing is. Essences refer to universals, whereas being is not determined by universals. In this sense, essence is the limit of being, insofar as being is the most general term and is self-determined due to its inner-reality. Essence is the bearer of meaning in thought and is the source of mental propositions.

Next, are three possible definitions for ‘existence’ (*wujud*):

1. (Suhrawardi) Existence is the description of being or the ‘being as’ something. It is the nominalization of being such that existence describes the being, e.g., greenness, eight-ness, being a human, or being a book. The external reality consists of the real objects, whereas existence is a subjective construct of the mind that assigns conditions of being.
2. (Fayadi Lahiji) Existence is being found. The Arabic word for existence/being is *wujud*, which is the passive form of the verb *wajada*, ‘to find’. If something is found in thought, it is a mental existence, and if it is found outside of thought, it is external existence. What is found in the external world is a thing,⁷⁷ but what is found in thought is essence/quiddity. Lahiji also says that being found is synonymous with being.
3. (Mulla Sadra) Existence is reality, the concrete and objective being. It is the source of effects and the identity of a thing.⁷⁸

There should be no discrepancy over the use of the terms fundamentality or primacy (*asalah*). We take fundamentality to mean an entity that is objective and the source of effects, which serves as the basic principle for a system of metaphysics. As shown above, the third definitions for both essence and existence are the same and coincide with

⁷⁶ Oddly enough, this is what Mulla Sadra means by ‘being’.

⁷⁷ Ahmadi notes that Lahiji’s use of “thing” is ambiguous; it is unclear whether this is an external thing or a mental thing.

⁷⁸ Ahmad Ahmadi, Translated by Muhammad Legenhausen, “The Fundamentality of Existence or Quiddity: A Confusion Between Epistemology and Ontology,” *Topoi*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (2007): 217-218.

our definition of fundamentality; what Suhrawardi calls essence, Mulla Sadra calls being (*wujud* or *hasti*). Thus it is evident that the fundamentality dispute between Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra is a semantic dispute, i.e., a confusion between ontology and epistemology.

As seen in Ibn Sina's *Danish Nama-i, hasti* is the fundamental entity. It is the most general term and it is beyond definition or description. He does not distinguish between essence and existence in the external world; rather, this is a conceptual distinction made in the mind. By comparing Ibn Sina's definitions of terms to the list above, we shall see that his views are in accordance with Mulla Sadra; who as demonstrated, is in agreement with Suhrawardi. Ibn Sina uses similar terminology to Mulla Sadra, which makes a comparison between the two very easy. Both agree that *hasti* is fundamental and that the essence-existence distinction is conceptual. Existence is an instantiation of being, and essences are mental universals that the mind abstracts from the being or existent. In other words, being is the unity of existence, an "act of being", and essence, the 'being as'. Since Ibn Sina is in agreement with Mulla Sadra, and thus with Suhrawardi by association, it follows that all three are advocating the primacy of being or the reality of an external object.

VI. The Three Philosophers Must Agree with Respect to Fundamentality by Virtue of their Subscription to Knowledge by Presence

Ahmadi rightly acknowledges the role of knowledge by presence that is lurking in the background of the fundamentality dispute. He asserts that since Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra subscribe to knowledge by presence, what they consider to be fundamental

must be concrete reality or being.⁷⁹ However, the basic principles of knowledge by presence are found in Ibn Sina's works as well. I argue along the same line as Ahmadi, that Ibn Sina's proto-knowledge by presence necessarily entails his declaration of being as fundamental. This must be the case insofar as knowledge by presence is the union of the perceiver with the perceived object, and in the case of consciousness through consciousness (*al-shu'ur bil shu'ur*), to be conscious of one's self is to be conscious of one's inner-reality or one's being. For Ibn Sina, self-consciousness is an a priori concept of being that we gain through intuition, a concept to which we are always intimately attuned. For if we do not know ourselves through ourselves, then we must know ourselves through something else, which is not ourselves. But then this something would be known through something else, which would lead to an infinite regress. So it must be the case that we have direct and immediate access to our being. Thus, adhering to this epistemological framework determines one to give primacy to objective reality or being, which is neither essence nor existence. Therefore, the three philosophers must necessarily agree on the fundamental entity by virtue of their subscription to knowledge by presence.

If the epistemological views of the three philosophers determine mutual consensus on the issue of fundamentality, then it seems as if this semantic dispute is the direct result of the dual meanings of the Arabic word *wujud*. Morewedge recognizes several instances of linguistic slippage in his commentary of *Danish Nama-i* and gives an in-depth analysis of the way in which these terms were used and throughout the Ancient, Medieval, and Early Modern eras, as well as many difficulties that arose with translations

⁷⁹ Ahmadi 213-219.

and misinterpretations.⁸⁰ But no term has more serious consequences than the ambiguity of the Arabic term *wujud*, which is used for both ‘existence’ and ‘being’. In most discussions, such a nuance would not be a big deal, but it is definitely a problem when discussing the foundation for a theory of metaphysics. Ibn Sina and Mulla Sadra make use of the term *hasti* (being) when writing in Farsi, but there is no distinction between ‘existence’ and ‘being’ in the Arabic works. Distinctions may be alluded to, e.g., when Mulla Sadra expresses that his use of ‘existent’ is equivalent to what is meant by ‘*hasti*’,⁸¹ but for the most part, the Arabic works maintained the use of *wujud* for both ‘existence’ and ‘being’.

VII. The Ambiguity of *Wujud* and Concluding Remarks

We have demonstrated the relevance of knowledge by presence to the fundamentality dispute, and also how reliance upon such a view necessarily entails the primacy of being, but I wish to make the further claim that the lack of an Arabic term in the Islamic philosophy tradition that solely denotes ‘being’, is the leading cause for the confusion. Ahmadi’s claim is that the fundamentality dispute is a semantic dispute by virtue of the subscription to knowledge by presence. He identifies and explains the semantic issue, but he doesn’t offer a reason for the confusion. Morewedge and El-Bizri identify numerous problems related to the terminology that past philosophers have used, and how these confusions have led to misinterpretations, especially of Ibn Sina; but neither has explicitly identified the fundamentality discussion⁸² as a semantic dispute. A proper reconciliation of the problem would be to emphasize the distinction between the

⁸⁰ Morewedge, *Metaphysica of Ibn Sina (Danish Nama-i), Commentary*, 156-195.

⁸¹ Mulla Sadra, *The Metaphysics of Mulla Sadra (Kitab al-Masha’ir)*, §40.

⁸² I am referring to the fundamentality discussion between Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi, and Mulla Sadra.

two meanings of *wujud*; and in the case of ‘being’, either by indicating *hasti* alongside *wujud* or by using a different word. An elucidation such as this would avoid future confusion and misinterpretation while facilitating progress in the field.