

Unfolding Reality: Hegel, Mulla Sadra, and the Progressive Revelation of Truth – A Brief Reflection

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Hegel and Mulla Sadra are two prominent philosophers, each representing a culmination of Western and Eastern philosophical traditions, respectively. They embody two distinct schools of thought on the dynamic nature of reality, offering relevant and thought-provoking perspectives. Any serious approach to exploring aspects of Bahá'í philosophy cannot overlook these towering figures, as their ideas provide rich insights into the nature of existence, change, and the evolution of thought.

Exploring Bahá'í philosophy through the lenses of Hegel and Mulla Sadra could not only enrich Bahá'í thought but also foster a deeper understanding of philosophy's future trajectory. By critically engaging with their concepts of dialectics, substantial motion, and metaphysical hierarchy, Bahá'í scholars could bridge Eastern and Western traditions, contributing to a more integrated philosophical discourse that aligns with the Bahá'í emphasis on unity, the spiritual dimension of existence and its evolution, and the harmony of science and religion. Such an approach would not merely synthesize ideas but could pave the way for a transformative vision of philosophy, where material and spiritual realities are seen as complementary dimensions of a unified existence.

Hegel's dialectic and Mulla Sadra's transcendent philosophy (al-hikmah al-muta'aliyah) both offer dynamic views of reality, but their metaphysical foundations, epistemological approaches, and ultimate objectives differ significantly. Hegel's dialectical process involves thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, where contradictions drive progress toward the Absolute Spirit (Geist). His epistemology is historical and conceptual, with knowledge advancing through dialectical negation to achieve self-consciousness. Importantly, Hegel's philosophy also encompasses ethical and political dimensions, culminating in the concept of "ethical life" (Sittlichkeit), where Spirit's self-consciousness is realized in concrete institutions and practices. Teleologically, Hegel sees history, culture, and philosophy as arenas where the Spirit realizes itself, interpreting change through contradiction and negation (Aufhebung). His concept of God is immanent, emerging

within historical, ethical, and philosophical development rather than as a personal or transcendent being.

In contrast, Mulla Sadra's philosophy is existential and metaphysical, focusing on existence (*wujūd*) as a dynamic, hierarchically graded reality (*tashkīk al-wujūd*). His epistemology emphasizes knowledge by presence (*al-‘ilm al-hudūrī*), where truths are realized through direct existential transformation rather than through conceptual dialectics. The teleological aim in Mulla Sadra's thought is union with the Divine, achieved through spiritual purification and intellectual ascent. Unlike Hegel's historical determinism, Mulla Sadra envisions change through substantial motion (*al-harakat al-jawhariyyah*), where the essence of things evolves toward higher levels of existence. His theistic worldview portrays God as the absolute necessary being (*wājib al-wujūd*), with all existence flowing from and returning to the Divine. While Hegel's dialectic is conceptual, ethical, and conflict-driven, Mulla Sadra's system is hierarchical and spiritually transformative, advocating an inward journey toward metaphysical perfection.

Bahá'í teachings align with both Hegel and Mulla Sadra in rejecting a static view of existence, seeing reality as undergoing a process of gradual unfolding and self-realization. The common ground is the idea that reality is in a constant state of becoming—never static, but continuously evolving toward higher levels of self-expression and understanding.

However, the Bahá'í worldview leans more strongly toward integrating elements of Mulla Sadra's philosophy, particularly his concepts of gradational existence and substantial motion, where change is not driven by conflict but by existential intensification. In this view, reality unfolds as a continuous process of spiritual and intellectual evolution, with transformation occurring through the deepening of understanding, refinement of character, and the progressive realization of divine truths.

More similar to Mulla Sadra, Bahá'í philosophy rejects a strict dualism (soul vs. body) and instead views the human being as a single existential reality that gradually transforms from lower to higher states. The body and its impulses are not in eternal conflict with the soul but rather serve as stages in the soul's development. Furthermore, the human soul initially emerges in a

material state (linked to the body) but, through substantial motion, gradually becomes more immaterial, attaining self-awareness and spiritual realization.

Abdu'l-Bahá also refers to substantial motion and spiritual growth, explaining how the human soul evolves from a vegetative stage (nutrition, growth) to an animal stage (sensation, desire) and then to a rational stage (intellect, morality), ultimately reaching spiritual and divine realization. This transformation is not a dialectical conflict but a process of existential intensification, akin to a flame growing in strength. The movement from inorganic matter to plants, animals, and humans follows a natural progression within this metaphysical system, where lower forms of being are not entirely separate from higher ones, but rather stages of a continuous process leading toward greater perfection.

In this process, physical impulses such as desire, anger, and attachment to material life are not seen as evil forces in conflict with the soul. Instead, they are necessary stages of growth that must be refined and integrated into higher forms of being. As the soul ascends, it becomes less dominated by material impulses, not by negating them, but by transcending and transforming them.

Additionally, the human soul itself evolves through substantial motion. The development of human existence begins with a material soul, then becomes capable of sensation and movement, and finally reaches the stage of a rational soul, characterized by intellect and self-awareness. This process resembles an inner spiritual evolution rather than Darwinian evolution, though it shares the idea of development through stages. 'Abdu'l-Bahá further explains that, unlike modern evolutionary theory, which is often viewed as random, evolution is teleological, meaning it is goal-oriented. The ultimate purpose of evolution is the perfection of being and the attainment of a higher existential state, culminating in spiritual proximity to God.

Similar to the Bahá'í perspective, Mulla Sadra's view holds that existence is fundamentally good, and what is perceived as evil is merely a privation or deficiency in existence rather than an independent force. For example, light represents existence and perfection; the stronger the light, the more visible and clear things become. Darkness, on the other hand, is not an entity in itself

but simply the absence of light. When light is dim or absent, darkness appears, yet it does not possess an independent reality—it is merely a lesser degree of light.

From this perspective, evil is not an independent or opposing force but simply the absence or deficiency of good. Rather than viewing good and evil as two equally real and opposing entities, reality is understood as a continuum, where evil signifies a weaker or diminished state of being. Consequently, overcoming evil does not require direct confrontation with an opposing force but instead necessitates the cultivation of goodness, knowledge, and perfection—just as darkness naturally recedes in the presence of increasing light.

Both the Bahá'í perspective and Mulla Sadra's philosophy affirm the principle of moral responsibility, which arises from human free will—the capacity to choose between a higher existence (virtue) and a lower existence (vice). Evil and injustice are seen as failures to actualize one's potential, indicating that those who violate moral virtues have opted for a path of deficiency and are therefore morally accountable for their actions.

In Mulla Sadra's philosophy, there appears to be a lack of a systematic framework connecting ontological necessity with moral justification, raising critical questions about how historical and moral events should be judged within his metaphysical system. While his ontology of existence, substantial motion, and the gradation of being offers a profound metaphysical model, it does not fully articulate an ethical or historical framework that clarifies how moral responsibility operates in a world where both good and bad contribute to transformation.

This leads to a fundamental question about the moral judgment of historical events in Mulla Sadra's philosophy. Since historical occurrences reflect different degrees of existence and moral virtue, a critical dilemma arises: *If good, lesser degrees of good, and even bad all contribute to shaping reality, by what criteria can historical events be evaluated in terms of their moral significance or justification?*

Mulla Sadra's philosophy is primarily metaphysical and mystical, meaning it does not fully develop a political or legal system for applying justice within a social framework. In contrast, Hegel's dialectical approach explicitly justifies institutions such as the state, law, and history as integral to the development of Spirit, presenting a more concrete theory of historical justice

beyond mere metaphysical ascent. While Mulla Sadra's framework presents a dynamic view of reality, it faces a philosophical challenge due to its ambiguity in establishing a historical system of justice and defining the criteria for moral judgment and accountability. It remains unclear how moral responsibility operates in a world where both good and bad contribute to transformation.

The apparent tension between the nature of being and the evolving demands of moral action in Mulla Sadra's philosophy could stem from his commitment to Shia Islamic orthodoxy, which upholds the finality of Prophet Muhammad. He integrated prophethood into a gradational ontological framework, where prophets receive divine knowledge according to their existential rank. Within this view, Muhammad could be seen as the culmination of this process, marking the end of the prophetic cycle. Consequently, Sadra's argument that the finality of prophethood (*khatm al-nubuwwah*) negates the need for further divine laws suggests that all essential religious truths have already been revealed and completed.

To further illustrate this point, it is crucial to understand that in Mulla Sadra's philosophy, God is the ultimate origin of existence, and therefore, the source of substantial motion. This pervasive motion extends throughout the universe, encompassing matter, life, and the human soul. Unlike Aristotelian physics, which posits stable substances with only external changes, Sadra argued for the constant, fundamental evolution of all beings. Given this universal dynamism, why wouldn't prophets also be subject to this evolutionary process?

From a Bahá'í perspective, it is argued that the renewal of revelation is essential to bridging the gap between ontological necessity and moral justification in Mulla Sadra's philosophy. A metaphysical framework based on successive revelations offers not only a dynamic view of reality but also a clear system for ethical and historical judgment, particularly in explaining how moral responsibility functions in a world where both good and bad contribute to transformation. This suggests that the concept of "Progressive Revelation"¹ could serve as a corrective

¹ The concept of *Mazhariyyat* (مظهريت) in Bahá'í theology refers to "Manifestation of God," a central idea that explains how divine guidance is progressively revealed to humanity through divinely chosen figures. The term derives from the Arabic "mazhar" (مظهر), meaning "manifestation" or "appearance," signifying that these figures reflect the divine attributes and serve as the link between God and humanity. Unlike traditional notions of prophethood or sainthood, *Mazhariyyat* in the Bahá'í Faith represents a unique

mechanism, providing the moral, social, and legal structures necessary to complement and refine philosophical thought, ensuring that ethical frameworks remain relevant to evolving human conditions.

Mulla Sadra's system explains how reality evolves, but it may not fully articulate a comprehensive framework for morally judging historical events. There is a need to connect history with ontological ascent, recognizing that human civilization does not evolve in isolation. Rather, it is shaped by both substantial motion and continuous divine guidance, ensuring that

theological framework in which Manifestations of God act as direct channels of divine knowledge, appearing at different points in history to guide humanity according to its evolving needs.

Each Manifestation of God ushers in a new dispensation, renewing spiritual laws and social teachings while reaffirming the unity of all religious truth. This concept moves beyond the Islamic notion of the "finality of prophethood" (khatm al-nubuwwah) by emphasizing the continuous unfolding of divine guidance through successive Manifestations, ensuring that humanity receives ongoing spiritual enlightenment suited to its evolving needs.

In Christian theology, the opening verse of the Gospel of John—"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God"—holds profound theological significance. Within Christian belief, the "Word" (Logos) is understood as Jesus Christ, affirming His divinity. Further in John 1, it is stated that "through him all things were made," establishing the Logos as the agent of creation, reinforcing Christ's divine authority and cosmic role.

While this Christian perspective resonates with aspects of Bahá'í teachings, the Bahá'í understanding of divine revelation diverges from the view that Jesus Christ is the singular and ultimate revelation of God to humankind, the central figure around which all of history revolves. Instead, Bahá'í theology posits that divine revelation is an ongoing process, in which Manifestations of God appear throughout history, each bringing progressive guidance in accordance with humanity's spiritual and social maturity.

According to Bahá'í teachings, a Manifestation of God is neither God incarnate nor an ordinary prophet but a perfect mirror reflecting divine attributes. While God remains unknowable and transcendent, the Manifestations reveal His will in a manner comprehensible to humanity. In this sense, a Manifestation of God is distinct from God yet inseparable from Him in function—akin to how the sun is separate from its reflection in a mirror, yet the mirror perfectly reflects its light and warmth.

The concept of Mazhariyyat in Bahá'í theology offers a dynamic and evolving understanding of divine revelation. It reconciles divine transcendence with human experience by proposing that God, though unknowable, continually manifests His will through successive teachers and lawgivers. Unlike the doctrine of finality in revelation, Mazhariyyat asserts the continuity of divine guidance, affirming that religion is a progressive and unfolding process that continues to shape humanity's spiritual and moral evolution. Thus, while each Manifestation of God brings teachings relevant to a specific age, they ultimately serve the same divine purpose: guiding humanity toward unity, justice, and moral refinement.

progress is not merely a passage through time but a movement toward truth, justice, and ultimate perfection. In this context, the concept of progressive revelation could provide a framework for maintaining the relevance of moral and social principles, preventing moral relativism in an ever-changing world.

This idea serves as a bridge between ontology and ethics. If historical events play a necessary role in transformation, then new revelation could help humanity interpret and respond to these changes more effectively. Without ongoing divine guidance, there is a risk of misinterpreting historical struggles, for example, viewing injustice as an inevitable aspect of transformation rather than something to actively resist. Revelation provides clarity on moral accountability, defining acceptable actions, the application of justice, and the role of free will in shaping human destiny. A static religious or philosophical system may struggle to address evolving ethical dilemmas, whereas renewed revelation could adapt moral principles to new human realities.

In the framework of progressive revelation, moral accountability is not merely an adaptation of social laws to changing historical conditions; rather, it is a necessary component of reality's unfolding process, ensuring that ontology and ethics remain aligned. If existence itself is dynamic—as suggested by Mulla Sadra's substantial motion—then ethical imperatives must also evolve to reflect the deepening capacity of human consciousness. Without this evolving guidance, moral principles risk becoming either rigid and outdated or relativistic and arbitrary.

Progressive revelation ensures continuity with past truths, linking them in a way that maintains the foundational coherence of moral values across dispensations. It fosters adaptability **to** human progress, refining moral laws as civilization advances. Additionally, it serves as a safeguard against ethical relativism by maintaining a transcendent source of guidance. Furthermore, it functions as a **corrective** mechanism for historical judgment, preventing injustice from being excused as a necessary phase of transformation.

Mulla Sadra's philosophy offers a profound mystical and metaphysical vision, yet it does not develop a comprehensive political or legal system. In contrast, new revelation provides guidance not only in metaphysics but also in governance, law, and justice, ensuring that moral values translate into practical social structures. Each divine revelation adapts spiritual and ethical

principles to emerging social conditions, ensuring that justice evolves alongside human civilization.

A key point of emphasis within this discussion revolves around how, in Bahá'í teachings, Bahá'u'lláh introduces a significant shift in the expression of divine unity. Traditionally, the declaration "There is no God but Him" commences with a negation, stressing the denial of all deities except the One True God. However, in this dispensation, Bahá'u'lláh states, "I have removed the negative particle from before the affirmation." This signifies a transition from a negation-based declaration to an affirmation-centered one, reflecting a more direct acknowledgment of God's presence.

From a Bahá'í perspective, the concept of progressive revelation resonates with an ontological vision in that truth unfolds gradually through direct realization, rather than through negation. Each Manifestation of God affirms the truths of past revelations while expanding humanity's understanding of reality. Spiritual evolution follows a positive trajectory—it is not about negating past beliefs but deepening their meanings and adapting them to new realities.

The shift from negation to affirmation in divine statements, as seen in Bahá'u'lláh's teachings, shares similarities with the metaphysical movement in Mulla Sadra's system, where being is seen as self-evident and ever-intensifying rather than defined through negation. Mulla Sadra's philosophy of existence, particularly his doctrine of the primacy of existence and substantial motion, seems to align with the idea of affirmation rather than negation. His approach shifts the emphasis from defining reality through what it is not to understanding it through direct ontological realization.

Regarding a Hegelian perspective, dialectic requires contradiction and negation for progress. However, upon further examination, Hegel's final synthesis, which often leads to a form of affirmation, the highest realization of Spirit, is not perpetual negation but a self-affirming, self-realizing Absolute where contradictions dissolve into unity. Thus, it presents a model of history and reality where divine truth is not revealed through perpetual opposition, but through a progressive, affirmative unfolding of spiritual and intellectual realization.

Bahá'u'lláh's statement about removing the negative particle from before affirmation could be read as a philosophical shift, suggesting that the highest realization of truth does not require perpetual conflict but rather a direct, experiential unfolding of divine knowledge. It is a position aligned with Mulla Sadra's metaphysics of existence. However, it also rejects the static continuity of traditional metaphysics and the finality of revelation. If one follows Mulla Sadra's logic to its fullest implications, one might conclude that new stages of divine guidance are necessary to correspond with the ongoing transformation of human consciousness. In this sense, his commitment to finality could be seen as a theological constraint that does not entirely align with the fluidity and openness of his metaphysical framework.

Finally, a thorough examination of Hegel's dialectics and Mulla Sadra's philosophy within the context of a potential Bahá'í philosophical framework demands extensive scholarly effort far beyond these initial reflections. It is crucial to avoid asserting a direct or simplistic synthesis between Hegelian dialectics, Sadrian metaphysics, and Bahá'í thought. Rather, this brief exploration seeks to stimulate deeper engagement, allowing for interpretive flexibility and ongoing scholarly inquiry.