

Mullā Ṣadrā's use of Ibn Sīnā's logic

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Prishtina, May 2016
wilfridhodges.co.uk/arabic54.pdf



Ibn Sīnā c. 980–1037. Mullā Ṣadrā 1571–c. 1640.
Two high points of Persian philosophy.

I am a retired mathematical logician, working on the logic of Ibn Sīnā.

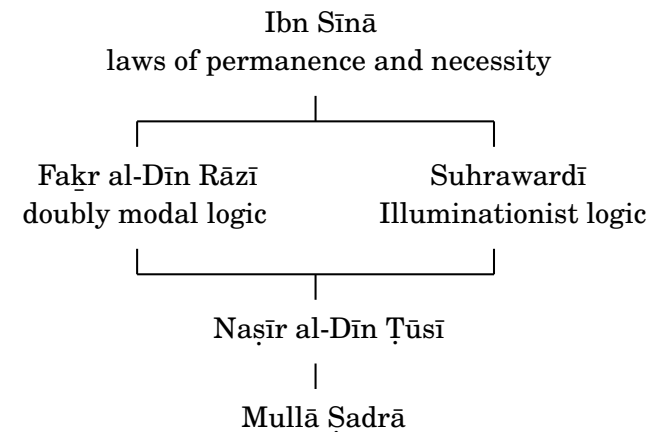
Recently people – both Kriste Shtufi and people in Tehran – have asked me to comment on the logic of Mullā Ṣadrā.

Not easy. No published discussions of Mullā Ṣadrā's logic are available in any language that I can read, and I have only partial access to his major works like *Asfār*.

In 2010 Hossein Ziai (died 2011) published an edition of Mullā Ṣadrā's commentary on Quṭb al-Dīn's commentary on the logic of Suhrawardī.

Ziai was very encouraging when I began work on Ibn Sīnā, so I'm doubly happy to be able to use this edition.

Sketch of development of logic in Persia:



Mullā Ṣadrā wrote about almost everything, including logic.

Besides the Suhrawardī supercommentary we also have his logical text *Tanqīh*.

On the Suhrawardī supercommentary, Ziai says:

Reading and analyzing the details of Ṣadrā's philosophical arguments and constructions in areas that include semantics, formal logic, material logic . . . will indicate clearly that this is a philosophical text of a refined nature [and] a high standard in philosophical analysis and expression. And, philosophy did not die in Iran.

He says in the preface to the supercommentary that

two premises don't entail a conclusion; they are just a preparation, and what gives the conclusion is a separable substance.

It seems this means that the rules of logic apply only if we are in a fit mental state to apply them. Also the question whether the subject of an affirmative proposition has to be nonempty

is a matter of interpretation and not of essence.

I.e. you can make up the rules to fit what you want. I would not expect a person who expresses these attitudes to be a reliable logician.

First conclusion

Mullā Ṣadrā was a refined philosopher but not a reliable or original logician.

For example in *Tanqīh* he is careless about combining the logics of Rāzī and Suhrawardī.

He follows literally the view of Suhrawardī, that 'we can leave lengthy discussions to the logicians' (Suhrawardī *Hikmat al-iṣrāq* (26)).

Second conclusion

Mullā Ṣadrā's account of the eternal existence of the soul and its union with God is strongly indebted to Ibn Sīnā's account of the nature of logic.

In fact the connection was already made by Ibn Sīnā. But Mullā Ṣadrā redraws it in his own way, adapting it for example to allow that any soul can be eternal, not just the intellectual elite.

Mullā Ṣadrā shows some bias against the intellectuals, because they fill their minds with generalities.

For Ibn Sīnā the issue was that an eternal entity is unchanging and hence can't literally *become* something else. That's how Sūfis talk, he said.

This is paradoxical for logic, because logic is about meanings, which are eternal, but logic involves some becomings.

For example a meaning becomes the subject of a proposition, or a proposition becomes the conclusion of a syllogism.

In his *Madkal* Ibn Sīnā compared the situation with building a house. The house is a compound, just as propositions in logic are compounds.

Before the house is built, the parts must be 'prepared' (*musta'idd*) for their roles in the house. The same is true in an eternal sense for meanings in a proposition: they must be prepared for being subjects etc. by being put into what he calls 'second *wujūd*'. This is done by the intellect (*ʿaql*).

Of course the house is built in real time.

We have to understand that the second *wujūd* is a timeless state, so that in real time our intellects recognise it rather than create it.

Ibn Sīnā's analysis was that in such cases, the entity 'becomes' something else by 'existing as' attached to something else.

For example the meaning 'becomes' the subject of the proposition by being in a form of existence (a *wujūd*) in which it is a part of the proposition.

Now compare with Mullā Ṣadrā *Asfār* 8 p. 450ff on what happens when the soul (which begins as a created offshoot of the body) becomes eternal.

When the soul ascends ..., its *wujūd* becomes a *wujūd* that is separated and intellectual, and therefore has no need of the body and its features and its ways of preparing [the soul]. ... The soul gains an attachment, since its created *wujūd* is not its eternal *wujūd*. ... The changing of the soul into a separable substance (e.g. the agent intellect) is really the same thing as the soul's being connected to that separable substance.

Mullā Ṣadrā is here reporting, but in his own words and with his full endorsement, a discussion by Ṭūsī (which I haven't seen). This is a natural channel for Ibn Sīnā's ideas to come down to Mullā Ṣadrā.

But we know that Mullā Ṣadrā read Ibn Sīnā. Jules Janssens has collected evidence that 'Mullā Ṣadrā himself was quite familiar with many of the Avicennian works'.

I think we have evidence that Mullā Ṣadrā read the section of *Madkal* mentioned above more carefully than most modern commentators. But I won't explore that here.

Most Western logicians and linguists today would say that when W is the subject of the sentence S , then strictly what is the subject is not W but an *occurrence* of W in S . (There might be another occurrence of W in S that is not the subject.)

A precise definition of an 'occurrence' of W counts it as a compound involving both W and S . The definition is set-theoretic, taking symbol strings as basic. (This is a standard approach, following Chomsky.)

This gives a modern slant to Ibn Sīnā's notion that W becomes a subject by being attached to something.

But I think there is a big difference between our attitude and that of Ibn Sīnā and Mullā Ṣadrā.

For these Persian scholars, the facts about symbol strings are a reflection of deeper facts about meanings and the world of intelligible entities. These deeper facts apply equally to the propositions used in logic, and to immortal souls.

And the Persian scholars are right to this extent: we can ask what it is about human beings that allows their minds to discover and use purely a priori rules of reasoning, and whether symbol strings are essential for these activities.

Today this starts to become a scientific question, under the aegis of artificial intelligence.

Most of the speculations of Ibn Sīnā and Mullā Ṣadrā were probably too crude to be of any direct help to researchers in artificial intelligence.

But as progress is made, we shouldn't be surprised if it sometimes seems that Mullā Ṣadrā and the modern researchers are looking at the same facts about reasoning.

Thank you