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A Phenomenological Assessment of Mulla Sadra's View of the Individual Mind[1]

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Research Article

Abstract

This article examines the theory of mind proposed by the esteemed Islamic philosopher, Mulla Sadra Shirazi, through a phenomenological lens. We specifically focus on how Mulla Sadra's framework addresses the question of the individual human mind and its intricate relationship with the body. While Mulla Sadra presents concepts that resonate with some of Husserl's 'monadological-phenomenological' reflections, we argue that strict adherence to phenomenological methodology precludes acceptance of the metaphysical implications he draws concerning the individual mind's connection to the totality of existence, including a presumed divine reality. Nonetheless, our comparative analysis with Mulla Sadra's thought illuminates key aspects of Husserlian monadology and highlights the limitations of a rigorously phenomenological approach to purely metaphysical inquiries.

Keywords

Mulla Sadra, phenomenology, individual mind, substantial motion, consciousness, mind-body problem, teleology, Husserlian monadology.

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Introduction

The nature of human existence and its intricate relationship with the mind has been a central and persistent inquiry throughout the history of philosophy, captivating thinkers across diverse traditions. In this context, Mulla Sadra stands out as one of the most influential Islamic philosophers, renowned for his innovative theories regarding the individual mind and its connection to the broader domains of existence and being. His work emphasizes the transcendence of the mind and its enduring nature, challenging conventional boundaries between material and immaterial existence. Through his philosophy, Mulla Sadra engages with profound issues related to personal identity and the dynamics of conscious experience.

The aim of this article is to undertake a phenomenological assessment of Mulla Sadra's views on the individual mind, seeking to analyze his theories through the lens of Edmund Husserl's phenomenology. Phenomenology foregrounds the significance of conscious experience, positing that understanding any phenomenon necessitates direct engagement with experience, unencumbered by metaphysical assumptions. Consequently, our primary inquiry centers on whether Mulla Sadra's theories about the mind—characterized by an emphasis on transcendence and independence—can be reconciled with phenomenological tenets and deemed valid from this perspective. By doing this, we will also become able to appreciate some of the limits of phenomenological inquiry as regards metaphysical issues.

To achieve all of this, we begin with a concise overview of Mulla Sadra's philosophical stance regarding the mind and its relationship with existence. We will only sketch some of his main ideas and theses concerning the individual human mind, while referring to other works for more full-fledged explanations and analytical expositions of them, as well as for a more philological description. Subsequently, we analyze several pivotal aspects of Mulla Sadra's theory, particularly the notions of inner transcendence and mental independence, from a phenomenological perspective. In particular, we will first focus on some Husserlian ideas concerning monadology. We will not offer a full-fledged account of Husserl's phenomenology and philosophy–which would clearly go beyond the limits of a paper, and in fact also of any single book–and will leave aside several important topics such as lived corporeality, time constitution, the genesis of full-fledged self-consciousness, the relationship between ego and consciousness, or the overall relationship between consciousness, knowledge, and existence. We will also leave aside the inner development of Husserl's

thought.[1] We will rather sketch a "phenomenological monadology" that is as inwardly consistent as possible, and we will do this independently of philological concerns.[2] Our aim, here is not to tell the story of Husserlian thoughts on monadology. Our scope will be much narrower: we will simply consider some of Husserl's speculations on a monadic understanding of experience that most incline towards metaphysical stances, in order to assess whether, if carried out in a rigorously phenomenological manner, they would agree with some of Mulla Sadra's ideas and theses or not. By comparing Mulla Sadra's philosophy with some phenomenological principles at work in a possible phenomenological monadology, we will elucidate both the similarities and the fundamental divergences that arise between Mulla Sadra's views and a quasi-metaphysical development of some phenomenological views. Acknowledging existing problematic issues, we aim to demonstrate how certain elements of Mulla Sadra's thought may align with phenomenological principles, while also identifying areas where they diverge.

Ultimately, this article aspires to provide an analysis that opens new avenues for philosophical research concerning the individual mind from a cross-cultural perspective. By examining some of Mulla Sadra's views from a Husserlian-phenomenological standpoint, we intend to clarify the complexities and challenges inherent in the philosophy of mind, ultimately assessing the viability of Mulla Sadra's insights as a credible foundation for a phenomenological understanding of the individual mind, and for targeting the metaphysical issues phenomenology itself could perhaps be unable to.

1. In this regard, it should be noted that there is no general agreement about how to draw a general picture of Husserl's path of thought in which different phases would be sharply distinguished from one another.
   Usually, most scholars acknowledge a distinction between a "static" and a "genetic" phase. Where the borderline lies is, however, a matter of debate. One could also believe that there are even more phases in Husserl's thought. However, this issue is, for the purposes of the present article, fully irrelevant. For a careful and philosophically engaged "history" of Husserl's overall development, see De Boer 1978; Mohanty 2008 and 2011.
2. For this reason, we will offer some characterizations of some core ideas we can derive from Husserl's writings about intentionality and intersubjectivity without carrying out any detailed analysis of his (extremely abundant) writings on these issues, and also leaving aside a thorough confrontation with the (even more abundant) interpretative literature on these topics.
   We will only refer to some works in the secondary literature that we find more in line with our proposal.

Mulla Sadra's view on the mind[1]

Throughout history, the essence and reality of the mind have been approached with various theories. Among Muslim philosophers, the discussion on the mind and related matters has been widely discussed and has experienced many fluctuations. In the views of the philosopher Ibn Sina, this discussion falls within the realm of physics, while in the views of scholars like Mulla Sadra, it constitutes a part of theology and is placed under the subset of the discussion on resurrection (*maʿād*). This is because, for Mulla Sadra, the issues examined in the discussion on the mind have an inseparable connection with theological discussions. This means that the issue of the mind does not have direct relevance to physical discussions until its metaphysical and theological status has not been clarified (Fayyazi, 2014, p. 48 & Ahmadizade, 2024, p. 109).

The advancements in various sciences such as neuroscience, biology, physics, etc., have challenged our understanding of metaphysical issues like the mind. Especially during the last decades of the last century and, until today, advances in neurosciences have highly enriched the discussions about the mind. Many preconceptions about the mind have changed. However, it should be noted that Muslim philosophers have always devoted a part of their discussions on the mind to the examination of the brain in order to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the mind. In particular, they have offered abundant and interesting reflections on the relationship between the

1. "Soul", "self", and "mind" are three distinct concepts in Islamic philosophy. The term "soul" refers to the material subtle body (vaporous soul) which is spread throughout the body via the nerves. The "self" refers to the spiritual nature of humankind; it is the incorporeal essence of a person, known as the "human self." This "self" is the source of life for the material substance (the body) and is the cause of specific behaviors in matter and the governing of bodily activities. Therefore, in Islamic philosophy, other kinds of "self" are also defined, such as the "animal self" or the "vegetative self." The "mind" refers to some of the incorporeal abilities of the "self", such as thought and reasoning.

In recent literature and in *Kalām*, the soul and the self are sometimes considered the same as the spiritual nature. When I use the terms "soul" or "self" or "mind", I am referring to the incorporeal essence of the human being, unless another concept is specifically emphasized. To better present the interpretations of Muslim philosophers, I use the term "mental" when referring to mental properties. This term corresponds to the soul in Islamic philosophy, as I noted in the previous footnote.

In the view of most Islamic philosophers, the mind has two main characteristics: one is its independence from space and time, and the other is its independence from matter, especially in terms of its survival or in certain aspects of its functionality. The incorporeality of the mind refers to its abstraction from physical substance. The mind is not a material substance, and it has no existential dependency on matter.

body and self-consciousness. According to many of them, human perceptions imply consciousness[1], and that it is so is simply a self-evident fact. To reach this understanding, that is, to know this fact, one has to and can only rely on self-intuition. This, in turn, provides a form of self-knowledge. The latter, thus, is experiential, personal, and subjective. In this regard, it can hardly be considered as a universal science, because such a kind of intuition cannot be communicated to others. Instead, one can only infer from the signs and behaviors of others that they also have such a form of consciousness and self-consciousness (Fayyazi, 2014, p. 49).

From this perspective, Mulla Sadra has proposed that the essence of human consciousness is synonymous with the mind, that is, the mind *is* consciousness. Indeed, in defining the human mind, Mulla Sadra asserts: "The first perfection of the organic, natural, living body with potentiality is that which comprehends general matters and performs intellectual actions" (Shirazi, 1984, p. 514). Considering this definition, it is evident that in Mulla Sadra's perspective, the human mind is a spiritual essence that is actually alive, and the life of the human mind is a cognitive and intellectual life. Based on what we have mentioned above, Mulla Sadra considers the existence of the human mind to be self-evident. Through intuition and immediate knowledge, we find within ourselves not only thought, which is the clearest manifestation of the mind but also, according to the definition we have provided, the very reality and essence of the mind itself. The latter, therefore, is not a matter of speculation or reasoning, but, as said, of (self-)intuition (Fayyazi, 2014, p. 54). We intuit that we think, and this intuition provides knowledge not only of our existence but also of our essence.

In this regard, it is interesting to confront Mulla Sadra's view with that of Ibn Sina, who believes that the mind is identical to the simple intellect, and is separate from the body. The relationship between mind and body is only of concomitance. What is certain is that simple intellects are created when bodies are created and do not perish (Mesbah Yazdi, 2012, p. 408).

1. In discussing the relationship between the body and self-consciousness, the text highlights how Muslim philosophers have traditionally examined the brain to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the mind. This perspective aligns with contemporary debates on consciousness, as articulated by Robert Van Gulick in his article (2024). Van Gulick addresses the existence of subjective facts as defined by Thomas Nagel and argues that while these subjective facts might initially seem to support an anti-physicalist stance, they can actually be consistent with non-reductive physicalism and teleo-pragmatic functionalism (Van Gulick, 2024). This contemporary viewpoint complements the historical reflections on consciousness by suggesting that our understanding of the mind is enriched by integrating both historical and modern perspectives.

Mulla Sadra has a different view on this matter. From Mulla Sadra's perspective, the mind at the beginning of its emergence is dependent on the body and does not have a reality beyond matter. "At the beginning of its creation, the mind was a single form of the beings of this world. However, through its potentiality, it gradually ascends to the world of the celestial realm. Initially, it is the form of a physical being, and in its potentiality, it accepts intellectual forms" (Shirazi, 1981, vol. 8, pp. 230-231).

Therefore, the mind, at the beginning of its creation, has a reality that is apparently dependent on matter. However, according to Mulla Sadra, between mind and matter, there is no relationship of dependence in the strict sense because matter is rather the lowest form of the existence of the mind itself. Moreover, the fact that it has a material reality at this level does not negate other aspects of the mind, as the mind has other dimensions. In other words, one aspect of the mind is its material form, which is basically the beginning of its creation. Its further development coincides with that of her self-knowledge, that is, the more the mind develops, the more it knows itself, and it finally realizes the knowledge of God: "Therefore, its physical, contingent aspect and its spiritual, eternal aspect are completed and emerge from potentiality into actuality" (Shirazi, 1981, vol. 8, p. 233.). Life is a movement from potentiality to actuality, and the highest form of one's self-knowledge is divine knowledge, in relationship with which all other forms of knowledge are contingent, in as much as they do not fully disclose one's essence.

All this implies that for Mulla Sadra the mind cannot be simply summarized in one rank, as Ibn Sina seems to believe. It rather has levels, and attention must be paid to other levels of the mind as well. It can be said that the mind has various forms and stages of existence: it exists before creation as a cause precedes its effect; it exists during creation as a form that is corporeal and has something potential to actualize; and it has the supreme form of existence that it attains upon full actualization: "For complete minds of the human kind, some are part of nature, some pre-natural, and some post-natural" (Shirazi, 1981, vol. 8, p. 233.)

"In the first stage, these minds possess a collective and rational existence and are in their own causative rank, which is before nature. In the next stage, they enter the world of nature, which is accompanied by material nature. Ultimately, upon completing the journey of perfection and separating from the material body, they enter the world of incorporeal beings."[1]

1. See, Mesbah Yazdi, M. T. (1996). *Sharḥ-i jild-i hashtom-i asfār*. (M. Saeedi Mehr, Ed.). Imam Khomeini Publications, vol. 2, p. 227.

All this shows that Mulla Sadra's perspective on the human mind is remarkably comprehensive and ingenious. According to his viewpoint, the human mind goes through stages of existence that must be considered when one tries to offer a full account of it. Initially, the human mind is entirely physical and material and lacks any reality beyond material form. However, this very material mind has the capability to evolve and gradually transcend the material form during the stage of material nature, approaching the immaterial realm–that is, it is potentially mental/conscious. Ultimately, upon reaching the ultimate stage of its evolutionary journey, it becomes detached from its material attributes. Therefore, it is not possible to view the mind within a single dimension; the mind is multidimensional yet remains the same unified essence. "The human mind, in its initial stages of existence, is purely physical and material like all other material forms. Then it becomes immaterial, existing in essence but not in action. Eventually, it becomes detached from dense, material bodies both in essence and in action upon death. It is either happy or miserable based on its relationship with those bodies. If it remains attached to them, it suffers; if it detaches completely from them and their relationships, it finds bliss" (Shirazi, 1999, p. 290).

Therefore, according to Mulla Sadra's explanation, the mind and its states are viewed from the perspective of the existential essence, where the states of the mind are existential matters with which the mind becomes united. On the other hand, Mulla Sadra also offers a critical view of the mind. In this perspective, the physical and material aspect of the mind converges with its spiritual and transcendent nature because, from Mulla Sadra's viewpoint, the mind is the perfect form for the sensory corporeal type and has the capacity to perceive objects. Thus, the human mind can conceptualize all sensory objects sequentially (Shirazi, 1999, p. 290).

To summarize, according to Mulla Sadra, the mind has different levels: a material level, characterized by sensory and partial perceptions; an imaginal level, characterized by the perception of imaginary forms; and an intellectual level, characterized by the perception of general and intellectual entities. The human mind, in its evolutionary journey, begins its complementary stages from the material body and ultimately reaches complete transcendence from matter at the intellectual level, which is the final destination of the mind in its complementary stages (Shirazi, 1981, vol. 8, pp. 383-384.) The initial material stage, however, is not a mere basis for the mind, as if it were something ontologically different from it, but it is rather a form of the mind itself. This is why the mind, as it gradually intensifies in its evolutionary path towards

transcendence, maintains its relationship with the body. The origin and cause of the superior stages of the mind with all its different capabilities are also found in this very material body.

Assuming one accepts this perspective, one must now understand the reason why Mulla Sadra can claim that the mind is not only not reducible to physical reality, but cannot even be regarded as an epiphenomenon of it. In this regard, it is necessary to return to the assertion that the mind is consciousness, to understand what this properly means and what consequences follow from it.

Mulla Sadra's view on consciousness and the unity of the mind

Central to Mulla Sadra's system, known as Transcendent Theosophy or *al-Ḥikmat al-Muta'āliyah*, are the concepts of consciousness and the unity of mind, which are deeply intertwined with his metaphysical and epistemological doctrines. Mulla Sadra views consciousness (*āgāhī*) as an intrinsic aspect of the human soul (*nafs*). In his philosophy, the soul is seen as an immaterial and dynamic entity that undergoes a process of substantial motion (*al-ḥarakat al-jawharīyyah*), evolving from a material, corporeal state to a fully immaterial, intellectual state. It is the essence that governs and unifies all human faculties, including thought, perception, and action and is considered the seat of consciousness and self-awareness. He argues that consciousness is not merely a passive reflection of the external world but an active, dynamic process that evolves through the soul's journey. This journey is marked by the doctrine of *substantial motion* (*al-ḥarakat al-jawharīyyah*), which posits that all substances, including the soul, are in a constant state of flux and transformation. According to Mulla Sadra, substantial motion means that the soul evolves and perfects itself through an intrinsic motion. This evolution is not just physical but also spiritual and intellectual, leading to higher states of consciousness. Indeed, Mulla Sadra posits a *hierarchical ontology* where beings are arranged in a continuum from the most material to the most immaterial. Human consciousness progresses along this continuum, moving from sensory perception (*al-idrāk al-ḥissī*) to imaginative perception (*al-idrāk al-khiyālī*) and finally to intellectual perception (*al-idrāk al-'aqlī*). Each stage represents a higher degree of being and awareness. Finally, Mulla Sadra's philosophical system affirms the *unity of the perceiver and perceived*: in Mulla Sadra's framework, the act of perception is a unifying event where the perceiver and the perceived become one. This unity is a core aspect of consciousness, indicating that knowledge is not separate from the knower but

integrally connected.[1]

This latter aspect of Mulla Sadra's view of consciousness is connected with his more general view of the unity of mind (*waḥdat al-dhehn*), which refers to the ultimate integration and harmony of the soul's various faculties and aspects. This concept is grounded in his broader metaphysical vision of unity (*waḥdat*), which involves:

1. Unity of Existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*): all beings are manifestations of a single reality. Applied to the human soul, this principle implies that the mind and its faculties are different manifestations of the same underlying substance.

2. Integration of Faculties (*wahdat al-quwā*): The human soul comprises various faculties, such as the rational, the imaginative, and the sensory. Mulla Sadra argues that these faculties are not disparate entities but integrated aspects of a unified whole. The unity of mind is achieved as the soul ascends through substantial motion, integrating and harmonizing these faculties into a cohesive consciousness.

3. Perfect Man (*al-insān al-kāmil*): the concept of the Perfect Man in Mulla Sadra's thought represents the culmination of the soul's journey. The Perfect Man exemplifies the highest degree of unity of mind, where intellectual, spiritual, and moral dimensions are fully integrated. This state of perfection is characterized by complete self-awareness and unity with the divine reality.

From all the above said, it is clear that Mulla Sadra's philosophy presents a comprehensive vision of consciousness and the unity of mind, rooted in his doctrines of substantial motion, the unity of existence, and the integration of the soul's faculties. He proposes an understanding of the evolving, dynamic nature of human consciousness and the ultimate unity and harmony that the soul strives to achieve. Indeed, only if we consider that the mind and consciousness are the same, the "evolutionary" idea of the mind can make

1. Mulla Sadra's doctrine of the unity of the perceiver and the perceived suggests that in the act of perception or knowledge, there is a deep ontological connection between the knower and the known. However, this unity does not imply that the object itself undergoes a transformation as the knower's knowledge evolves. Rather, Mulla Sadra posits that the soul's intellectual progress corresponds with a deeper understanding of the reality of the object, not necessarily with the object's physical change or evolution. For example, gaining knowledge about how the lungs function does not mean the lungs themselves evolve as knowledge progresses. Instead, it means the knower's perception and intellectual grasp of the lungs deepens, reflecting the soul's journey toward higher levels of understanding. The "progress of knowledge" in this sense is the transformation of the knower's soul, aligning with Mulla Sadra's emphasis on the evolution of the soul through substantial motion. Thus, while the known remains ontologically stable, the knower's ability to comprehend and engage with it evolves as part of the soul's intellectual ascent.

sense. Only then, one can believe that human self-consciousness is the highest degree of actualization of what is potentially there in pre-conscious being.

Can we accept the views of Mulla Sadra sketched above from a phenomenological perspective?

Mulla Sadra's views before phenomenology

In some of his manuscripts, Husserl himself has spoken of a *teleological* unity of being. In them, he considers the idea that the life we find in ourselves as self-conscious beings somehow derives from lower levels of consciousness that already manifest at the level of non-self-conscious organisms, such as plants and bacteria (Husserl, 1973b, p. 270ff.). However, we must recognize that such speculations are merely tentative, and little phenomenological support can be found for the thesis that there is only *one kind* of reality and even less for the thesis that *the whole is a single entity*. In this regard, phenomenology cannot answer the ontological question concerning monism or pluralism, and, subsequently, can apparently neither accept nor reject views like the one of Mulla Sadra. Let's see why. After that, we will be able to offer a phenomenological (and partial) assessment of some of Mulla Sadra's ideas concerning the mind.

First of all, we should distinguish between the ontological question concerning *how* something somehow conscious can be derived from something fully unconscious from the phenomenological questions concerning how one is conscious of something unconscious, and whether we can experience everything as a lower form of consciousness. Recently, panpsychism has become a, probably still minoritarian, but very trendy position. One of the arguments in favor of it has been expressed by Galen Strawson in the following terms:

> It is built into the heart of the notion of emergence that emergence cannot be brute in the sense of there being absolutely no reason in the nature of things why the emerging thing is as it is (so that it is unintelligible even to God). For any feature *Y* of anything that is correctly considered to be emergent from *X*, there must be something about *X* and *X* alone in virtue of which *Y* emerges, and which is sufficient for *Y*(Strawson, 2006, p. 18).

"Classical" phenomenology cannot offer any argument either in favor or against Strawson's claim. It can, however, say something about what Strawson considers to be the most evident and undeniable (by a sane mind) truth we are

capable of, namely that experience exists, or that there is experience. Strawson has no trouble recognizing the Cartesian flavor of this statement. He, in fact, disputes Cartesian Dualism, but not the apodictic evidence of *ego sum*.[1] Indeed, Strawson can be said to attempt to show that, if taken seriously, the Cartesian evidence consistently leads to panpsychism (or pan-experientialism, as Strawson prefers to say).

Phenomenology, or at least its "father," Edmund Husserl, also acknowledges the fundamental value of Descartes's insight into one's own existence as a conscious being. In a way, Husserlian phenomenology tries to work out this evidence by examining all its *phenomenological* elements, namely how it appears, what it evidently contains, which different forms it assumes, and, eventually, what it seems to imply, both directly and indirectly. A full-fledged treatment of the implications, however, stretches beyond the limits of phenomenology and should be left to further metaphysical and epistemological reflections. To our aims, we will have to keep this in mind in order to carry out a phenomenological assessment of the ideas of Mulla Sadra we briefly exposed above.

So, first of all, phenomenologically one can ascertain the existence of oneself as a self-conscious being. The kind of self-awareness one has of oneself is of two kinds: pre-reflexive and reflexive. We are pre-reflexively conscious of ourselves anytime we do not have ourselves as objects of our consciousness, but we are anyway conscious of something, be this an apple in front of our eyes, a mathematical formula, or the sound of a train on our back. The something we are conscious of can even be an "internal" episode, such as a pain in the shoulder. In this case, although the pain could be considered as a part of us, we do not "reflect" on us, nor necessarily "on" it, when we just *feel* it, as it were. On the other hand, anytime we properly think of ourselves, we are reflexively self-conscious. Thinking of ourselves can happen in many forms: we can try to understand who we are, that is, what kind of person we are; we can try to remember something about what we have done or thought; we can try to imagine ourselves in a different situation, or to get an image of ourselves "from without", physically or emotionally (what kind of effect do I do on others?), etc. It goes without saying that, in trying to *reflexively* grasp ourselves, we can fail, and not understand ourselves (what do I really feel for

1. In fact, Strawson doubts that Descartes actually intended to argue for a dualism of substance as this has mostly been interpreted in the 20th century, and he refers to Clarke (2003) for an alternative interpretive option.

Pete? Do I really want to eat this sandwich? Did I like the movie or maybe I am just believing so now in order to please Maud?). That we are trying to grasp ourselves, is anyway undoubted.

One way of being reflexively self-conscious is that enacted by phenomenology. In this mode of self-awareness, we seek to observe, among other things, the structure of different modes of being conscious–even at the pre-reflective level[1]–and their reciprocal relationships, as well as the relationships between their contents. Thus, phenomenology focuses on the fundamental modes of experience and, especially, those of an "intentional" nature. The phenomenologico-Husserlian theory of intentionality is an enormous topic by itself, and we can here only address it partially, in order to point out some of his basic features that can contribute to our confrontation with Mulla Sadra's concept of mind.

First of all, we should point out that any *intentional* experience is the experience of something *other* than the experience itself. There is, of course, a complication in the case of reflexive self-consciousness, and we will partially come back to this in the next section. However, all other forms of intentional consciousness are directed towards something else than oneself, and that is immediately experienced as other than the experiencing of it. Intentional experience can occur in many forms, or, more correctly, in many qualities: one can be directed toward something by perceiving, remembering, desiring, hating, imagining, guessing, etc., it. In turn, what one is directed towards can be of *phenomenologically* different kinds: purely material objects, animals, abstract entities, persons, events, physical properties, artifacts, institutions, values, etc. For our purposes, it is important to notice that only a (relatively small) part of what appears to consciousness appears as "minded" or conscious. When we think about the future of the economy, the economy does not appear as a sentient being, and when we pick up a fork, we do not experience it as experiencing me, nor as feeling anything, not to mention thinking anything. Of course, we could be wrong, and it could be that everything is animated in the sense of being somehow "minded" but our naïve (phenomenological) ontology

1. Complications concerning the possibility of being reflexively conscious of what is happening at the pre-reflective level have been abundantly addressed in the phenomenological tradition. Husserl already mentions them in *Logical Investigations*, mostly trying to set them aside as harmless for his purposes in that work. Sartre would in turn take them very seriously, arguing in favor of the fact that, in some way, the motive that impels us to self-examination always prejudices, at least in part, what will be found.

seems to incline towards a non-panexperientialist view.[1]

Let's leave aside the epistemological question concerning the possibility of being wrong when we ascribe consciousness to the entities we experience as non-us, and of our capacity to "understand" them or to "feel" them. Let us now just consider that something can appear as *another* conscious being. Probably, the most famous phenomenological attempt to systematically understand the experience of other consciousnesses is represented by Husserl's phenomenological account of intersubjectivity in terms of monadology. This is not the place to fully explore this issue, but we can summarily draw something from Husserl's reflections that can contribute to our phenomenological assessment of Mulla Sadra's ideas.

Before doing so, however, we must consider the articulation of intentional experiences that Husserl has been highlighting since *Logical Investigations*. To make a long story short, and merging the view and the terminology, every intentional experience consists of two main parts, which are themselves internally articulated. Here we are concerned only with the *reell*, that is, the 'actual' or properly immanent component, which is experienced and lived (by the experiencing subject) as immanent to the experiencing subject, and the intentional or *real* part, which is properly experienced as belonging to that which is referred to in the experience under scrutiny.[2] All this implies that in the sphere of intentional consciousness, something is experienced as transcendent and that what is experienced and understood as transcendent and what resides in the sphere actually internal, so to speak, to the experiencing subject are not, at least in full intentional consciousness, confused with one another.

We can now go back to the issue of Husserlian monadology, and immediately notice that a fundamental difference between the Husserlian conception of the monad and the Leibnizian conception has often been

1. This does certainly not mean that there is a more "primitive", in the sense of original, encounter with the surrounding (physical) world that is somehow more "animistic". However, we believe that also in such a view, one can find a distinction between animated and not-animated items. For a sober and empirically well-informed understanding of the "animistic view", see Severi (2017). Moreover, we will leave aside the *epistemological* issue of "understanding" other minds, empathy, mind-reading, etc. We simply take as a phenomenological *datum* that certain "objects" appear as subjects, and others do not.
2. For a clarification of Husserl's concept of "*reell*", see Altobrando (2023), which focuses on Husserl's understanding of the internal composition of intentional experiences in Husserl 2001a and 2001b. For more encompassing views of Husserl's understanding of intentionality, see, Smith and MacIntyre, 1982; Mohanty 1986; Beyer 2000.

identified by critics in the fact that, contrary to Leibniz's claim (1875-1890, vol. 6, p. 607), the Husserlian monad would have "windows." In this regard, it is worth noting that in fact, Husserl states both that the monad has windows (e.g. Husserl, 1973a, pp. 470ff.) and that the monad has no windows (e.g. Husserl, 1973a, p. 7; Husserl 1973b, pp. 260, 357ff.). The question is whether in doing so he simply contradicts himself or whether he points to two different aspects of the issue. The Husserlian manuscripts allow many answers in this regard. The following proposes one that seems most consistent with a methodological view of phenomenology that carefully distinguishes between ontology and epistemology. Since, moreover, the topic of intersubjectivity is extremely complex, we will limit ourselves to considering the issues relevant here in an extremely schematic way, for the sole purpose of offering some elements to understand the compatibility of the Husserlian monadological conception with the recognition of the importance of intersubjectivity, while maintaining the impermeability and mutual exteriority of monads, and, thus, allowing us to understand to which extent Mulla Sadra's views can agree, but also exceeds, a phenomenological view on the mind. As a matter of fact, only by understanding the reach and the limits of the phenomenological "gaze" into the self's and others' consciousness, can we comprehend to which extent Mulla Sadra's metaphysics of mind is phenomenologically justifiable.

In line with what we said above about the Husserlian-phenomenological understanding of intentionality, we must thus underline a kind of closure of the monadic whole. This means, on the one hand, that in intentional experiences of a non-reflexive kind, the objects one experiences do not *effectively* (*reell*) enter consciousness, and, on the other, that from them does not depart some sort of effluvium that would then go into consciousness, delivering to it an image of things. Objects are other than consciousness, except in cases in which moments of consciousness itself are objectified, that is, made thematic; for example, by placing as one's object of (reflective) observation a sensation, a memory, a desire, etc. In this respect, the agreement with Leibniz (Leibniz, 1923ff, VI, iv B, pp. 1570-1571; Leibniz, 1875-1890, vol. 6, p. 607) is almost total and no further consideration is necessary here.

This is all the more valid in the case of the experience of other subjects, that is, of other monads. The existence of the other monad is posited from one's own sphere of evidence. As for the specific question of how one can know about other subjects, that is, the age-old question of empathy and knowledge of other minds, we must here simply note that it, in itself, does not violate the epistemic self-sufficiency of the individual monad. The other monad,

in fact, presents itself as having its own sphere of *reelle inhalte* (effective or immanent contents), although we do not properly *intuit* them–and this is the puzzle of empathy, on which we cannot indulge here.[1] The other's immanent contents do not appear within the "empathizing" monad, although they are somehow "felt" and, therefore, the other's immanence is somehow present by means of feelings within the empathizing monad and this allows a kind of knowledge of the other within one's own sphere of immanence. Whenever possible, knowledge concerning the existence of other subjects is thus rightfully included in the immanence of the individual monad, but not the other as such, neither other monad itself, nor a part of it.

Monads are distinct from each other and cannot exchange their parts. Each stream of consciousness consists of non-independent parts, that is, moments, which it can never have in common with other streams. Each monad is, yes, a complex and, in a sense, composite unit, but it is not made up of "parts" that are extractable from it. It is, therefore, not possible for there to be an actual exchange of elements between monads, because that would mean that what they are when they are "made" is extractable from one and insertable into another. Nor, strictly speaking, can we speak of a "sharing" of moments of consciousness by different conscious wholes. When we say, for example, that "we share the same memory," we cannot by that really mean that "in me" and "in you" there are the same experiences, but rather that we have experiences that refer to the same object or event, and that they are, in case, qualitatively similar, but not numerically identical. Otherwise, we would be the same stream of consciousness or, possibly, different parts of one stream.

Experience of the other monad implies that it is experienced as having a real sphere of experience that is unknowable to me as it is not experienced on an intuitive level.[2] If there are other monads, they are themselves composed of an *"*internal*"* side. The internal side of each monad is, however, something that by essence cannot be intuited by another. Even if empathy is admitted, it does not imply that the feelings, sensations, and emotions of the other monad enter the empathizing monad. An empathized feeling or sensation is such only if experienced in that sphere one experiences as not one's own. Whatever "empathic" understanding is, and assuming that it allows one to feel the

1. For the issue of empathy from a phenomenological perspective, see, Smith, 1989; Agosta, 2010.
2. Famously, Husserl talks of "Zugänglichkeit des original Unzugänglichen" (Husserl, 1950, p. 144), namely of an "accessibility of what is originally (i.e. directly, in the first-person) inaccessible". Bernhard Waldenfels has devoted careful reflections to this paradoxical statement in several of his works: see, in particular, Waldenfels, 1997.

feelings, emotions, and sensations of others, it cannot place them as part of one's own real sphere, otherwise, they would be lost as experienced by others. Unless we admit some kind of empathic superpower–which, by the way, would be in contradiction with the very experience of *otherness*–then, it seems rather sensible to admit the existence in each subject of an immanent sphere inaccessible to other monads, except by way of expression, thus, in a broad sense, by means of signs and communication. The latter, in any case, does not mean a transmission of parts of consciousness between one monad and another, but a mutual presenting of the different monads in their respective intentional spheres.

The intentional sphere of the other monad is distinct from mine, but the objects to which it refers can be shared. Insofar as noemes enter rightfully into the field of immanence that the monad is, it does not turn out to be possible for the noematic side of one monad or any part of it to be transferred to another. However, it has been seen that the transcendent world is not reducible to the system of its appearances, be that of the single monad or of all monads, since to say that the world is not something beyond its appearance does not imply that the world is its appearance. So, it is possible for different systems of monads to have the same object reference, that is, to be appearances of the same object.

What does all this tell us about the phenomenological tenability of Mulla Sadra's views?

Conclusions

To answer this question, we must go back to the three main theses that characterize Mulla Sadra's philosophy of mind, and which we listed above.

1. Unity of existence: We note here that the idea of an "underlying" substance is phenomenologically untenable because it considers the substance as *not* what properly appears. The Husserlian idea of the monad as a substance derives from the *independence* of the consciousness one discovers *to be* from anything else. The monadic whole is a substance from an epistemic point of view, in as much as it does not need anything else besides what it finds within itself–that is, a realm of experience, and the respective contents–in order to know itself and its structure, as well as the means to recognize the objectivity of its claims to knowledge with respect to the "outer" world. However, this idea does not commit us to assert that the phenomenological monad is *ontologically* self-sufficient. The possibility remains that something allows consciousness to occur and to exist, that is not within the scope of

consciousness itself. Whether this *other* thing is itself conscious or not, cannot be answered as long as one rigorously keeps within a phenomenological attitude. In addition, Husserlian monads are somehow "Humean" ones, and to speak of a unique underlying substance is phenomenologically inappropriate. To be true, one could perhaps admit that Mulla Sadra's idea, according to which all beings are manifestations of a single substance, finds a partial correspondence with Husserl's phenomenological monadology, in as much as, within the latter, each monad can be considered as a field of appearance of one unique world. Each monad is a perspective on the world, and, subsequently, in each monad, we find pieces of a unique objective and intersubjective reality. However, in the Husserlian monads, we also find experiences of something "internal" that does not necessarily belong to the intersubjective world.

2. Integration of faculties: At first glance, phenomenology has nothing to say against this view. Mulla Sadra's view could seem compatible with a phenomenological stance, and analysis: the mental faculties (the rational, the imaginative, and the sensory) are intertwined with one another and could be considered as aspects of a unique process of consciousness. However, at a second glance, one realizes that the unity of mind is not something one should achieve, but it is rather given, and the mind is never a non-unified whole. That said, one could reinterpret this in the sense of a more *harmonious* unity, in which, for instance, all one's beliefs reach coherence and consistency. This does not imply that, if coherence is not achieved, one is not a unity. Also, contrast, and even contradiction, in order to be experienced, must occur between *pieces* of the same whole. The kind of normative view Mulla Sadra proposes, according to which the different faculties are to be integrated more and more into a "cohesive consciousness", does not seem to have any phenomenological evidence. It is well possible that the different faculties do not reach a harmonious unity, and more arguments should be offered to show why they *should* reach it. Phenomenologically, we can only say that the contrary is not only possible but almost the rule.

3. The perfect human being: This statement of Mulla Sadra's is probably less acceptable from a phenomenological viewpoint. First of all, because, as said concerning the previous point, a mind is always a unity, although its pieces can be in tension and contrast with one another. Second, and consequently, there is no apparent reason to assert that all conscious beings tend towards that kind of "integrated" unity we allegedly find in the human mind. The mind of a squirrel, assuming it has one, is a specific kind of unit that has no need or, as far as we know and can see, inclination to become like

"ours". One could certainly carry out a refined phenomenological analysis into the strives and motions of the monadic *human* consciousness, and investigate its teleological aspects. However, there is no phenomenological evidence that other forms of life and consciousness strive for the form of self-consciousness realized in human beings. Finally, as for the idea of the soul's journey towards complete self-awareness and unity with the divine reality, it seems quite remote from a phenomenological insight into the (dynamic) structure of self-consciousness. In addition, we should also notice that the kind of individuality that characterizes human self-consciousness is achieved only in cooperation with otherness-consciousness, and this does not seem to be compatible with the view according to which complete self-awareness would correspond to unity with the divine reality–unless such a unity does not imply identity, that is, a kind of fusion with the divine reality. One could then hypothesize that all monads strive towards a universal harmony with all other monads, and this would mean a kind of "divine whole." Husserl seems to speak about this in some manuscripts (see e.g., Husserl, 1973b, p. 300ff; 1973c, pp, 387-407, 597ff.), but the phenomenological plausibility of such an ideal remains questionable, and one could at most consider it as a kind of regulative idea.

Conflict of Interests

The authors have no competing interests.

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