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## **Compatible Corruptibilities: Death in Physical Theory, the Pauline Epistles and the Philosophy of the Iranian Illuminationists**

David Kuhrt  
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*I realise: all the external revolutions have changed nothing... there is only one last possible revolution, the spiritual one [which] can change the face of mankind". Tiziana Terzani<sup>1</sup>*

### **Abstract**

In an essay on the contemporary philosopher and mathematician Wolfgang Smith, Caner Dagli<sup>2</sup>, discussing the epistemology of the Iranian philosopher Mulla Sadra Shirazi, says that “when one sees a red billiard ball, he sees a red spherical object. After subjecting his object to various sorts of measurement and observation ... he is able to say that this thing is a rigid sphere with such and such a radius, of a certain density, possessing a determinable mass”. According to the linguistic terms of the discussion that follows, it appears that Dagli, whose purpose is to refute what he calls a ‘Cartesian’ dualism between intuited objects in ordinary experience and their abstract representation by the use of scientific methods, understands Smith to refer to the existence of not one, but *two* billiard balls; for he tells us: the “difference between these two billiard balls is that the first is directly perceptible by us, while the second is only accessible to us through the methods of scientific observation”. Though Dagli goes on to say that this does not accord with the epistemological position of Mulla Sadra (his subject of discussion), the terms of Smith’s description do not at all entail the dualism he alleges.

**Keywords:** death, physical theory, Pauline Epistles, Iranian Illuminationists, philosophy, Mulla Sadra, Ishraq, Wolfgang Smith, Caner Dagli

## Introduction

Here, in order to illuminate the matter of corruptibility, we intend to question the grounds on which the philosophy of Descartes, to whom the origin of such a dualism is ascribed, is supposed to be dualistic, and to show (with reference to correspondence between concepts of being in Paul the Apostle and in Mulla Sadra Shirazi) that supposed dichotomies of viewpoint in East-West dialogue have always concerned not the essentials of being-in-and-for itself but its competitive political dimension; for although there is no doubt about the existence of dualism in the general narrative of the Western sciences since the time of Francis Bacon, the mind-body problem we are speaking of concerns the whole fabric and economy of Western civilisation in its institutional development: if, by the turning point of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, human existence becomes a marketable commodity, as far as dualisms are concerned, it is hardly by chance that at a point when industrial technologies are first applied to the means of production, Karl Marx explains the role of capital in affirming that existence as the product of material process. In as far as this concerns Descartes, we may anticipate our further argument by citing Noam Chomsky's *Cartesian Linguistics*, in which he points out that Descartes, far from positing a mind-body dualism, regards the possession of mind "as beyond the limitations of any imaginable mechanism".<sup>3</sup>

Smith the mathematician, concerned with the physical being of that billiard ball in space-time, has simply pointed out that, to discover how and on what experiential plane the measurable dimensions of a physical existence are invisible to ordinary experience, we engage not *passive* but *enacted thought* in the analysis of relations between things external to our bodies and ourselves. In this enactment of joining, or redeeming, the whole the thinker is the human agent of

Being-in-and-for-itself. This agency which Descartes calls the *cogito* is the one mediator (that *logos*) on which all subjective experience depends; for those same quantifiable factors separating the supposed two billiard balls also apply to the being in space-time *of our own bodies*; it is at this point of view alone that an intuited experience of the world is first given and then uttered *as word*.

If it is clear to Descartes that the very fact of our being conscious where the body is constitutes what he calls the *cogito*, then there can be no dualism between that *cogito* and the world with which it is cognate: the being-present of that *cogito* is necessarily *metaphysical*; and in a civilisation whose ruling powers prefer a submissive population, the drift of the Western narrative, through time and in the language of its institutions, reduces that metaphysical identity to the same realm of the predictable phenomena it inhabits with its body.

If, according to Dagli, Wolfgang Smith “seeks to prove the error of Cartesian bifurcation” (in his book *The Quantum Enigma*) then Dagli misunderstands Descartes by attributing to him a dualism to which Descartes did not subscribe. We base this denial of dualism in Descartes on the opening proposition of his *Discourse on Method*, which is that “common sense is the thing most widely distributed” in the universe. He means that, without the cognitive faculty (the activity of his *cogito*) in which the phenomena are present to the observer, nothing at all can be known, whether it be the self-evident billiard ball he knows intuitively or its so-called ‘objective’ counterpart, known strictly in terms of a so-called ‘scientific’ discourse. Since we conclude that the cognitive faculty present in the activity of our thinking cannot be identified exclusively with either the *content* of thinking or with its object (on the grounds that no reciprocal acts of knowledge between person and world could then occur), then the duality of which Descartes is accused cannot exist. We shall illuminate this proposition further with reference to the epistemological position of Mulla Sadra

Shirazi and in the broader context of the sayings of Paul the Apostle because of their proximity to ordinary discourse outside philosophy.

### **The Political Problem Posed by Objectivism**

To begin with, referring to Dagli's account of Smith's 'two' billiard balls, we observe that he calls one "directly perceptible", saying that we are cognate with the other only after applying scientific methods of observation. He evidently believes that this 'other' billiard ball is not identified by any given structure of intelligence in the observer. The *cogito* is therefore excluded. However, if it is intuition (of the world) which grasps the billiard ball in the hand, it does so because an innate intelligence given by the evolutionary process corresponds naturally to the world given by the senses. As for the 'other' billiard ball, this is *an idea*, a concept *abstracted from* the data of experimental observation by the thinker. But (as we have already observed) the activity of the thinker in abstraction evidently *presupposes* the existence of the 'directly perceptible' billiard ball as its object in order then to abstract the idea. Instead, Dagli's observations about Smith entail the belief that the real ball is present *either* in the 'objective' phenomena outside the thinking observer *or* in the projection of his subjective thought<sup>4</sup>, but not in both. According to the grammatical sense of Dagli's account, either conclusion is valid; this attests to the fact that he has failed to distinguish between the logically necessary existence *a priori* of the object (before being seen intuitively in ordinary experience by the observer) and its apparent existence independently of the observer when scientific methods are applied.

It is in fact noteworthy that the marketed notion of scientific truth contradicts the natural presupposition that in ordinary experience things have a veridical presence, so that populations in the West have come to doubt the truth of their own intuitions in ordinary experience. This condition of 'ontological insecurity' is then conveniently in the hands of the state and its therapeutic agents, leaving the field open to the manipulators of political opinion and

taste in the interests of market predictability in both sectors: how else do we explain a majority taste among consumers for unmade beds and 'Hotspots' by Hirst at the expense of the great masters of fine art from antiquity to the present?

With regard to the real presence of things in ordinary experience, the logical problem Dagli fails to address is that the 'other' billiard ball (whose presence he attributes to Descartes and which is the object of scientific enquiry) is then *any* billiard ball: it will be impossible to show that the objectively-existing archetype<sup>5</sup> corresponds with the one actually seen in experience. Indeed, certain knowledge of the ball in any sense as a particular individual existence and known by the observer at a particular time and place in the history of the universe is impossible according to the dominant trend in the Western narrative: we know only the either-or of two interactive but forever separated worlds. This presupposition of reality in ordinary experience, which must always defer to the so-called positive and experimental judgements of "The Scientific Attitude",<sup>6</sup> obscures the crux of the epistemological problem: that *in speech*, prior to the reporting of experimental data in any written account, an intended meaning about the signified object necessarily *precedes* every analysis of what is being signified. Positivism however, presumes the verity of a scientific account as if no meaning were intended by an existing subject, and yet it is his (that subject's) presence in the moment when the signifier and the indicated world are one, on which the cognitive acts of scientific enquiry *a posteriori* depend.

As Derrida informs us, this *cutting* of the experience from its context in the act of knowledge "marks the impossibility that a sign, the unity of a signifier and a signified, be produced within the plenitude of a present and an absolute presence ... [so that *then*] "one must ask the question of meaning"<sup>7</sup>. Although Dagli, discussing the dualism of the ball intuited in ordinary experience and the universal dimension of its abstract presence does not address this issue, Derrida's description of the problem of meaning



(that it necessarily precedes the quantification and positive definition we call knowledge) is clarified in Sean Gaston's expository account of his work<sup>8</sup>: meaning precedes the written account - its breaking down, its gaps - *in the speech-act*. He says: "Speech, Derrida writes, is 'a logos which believes itself to be its own father'; the Christ of language". If not, "the coherence and continuity of perception" are lost in that dualism of a world intuitively grasped and its abstracted essence.

Associated with this dualism is the paradox that, until very recently, in the English-speaking world (whose culture, in terms of East-West differences, is so closely identified with what is called 'Western' because that language is the instrument of global intercourse), issues concerning social justice and the community on the one hand, and the matter of productivity in terms of capitalisation on the other, have been identified with 'left' and 'right' political policy; to the point that the politically conservative values of the right have traditionally adhered to a religious perspective while the narrative of the left - as if matters of justice were inimical to religion - has recently voiced its radical secularism in Christopher Hitchens' polemic on the death of God.<sup>9</sup> Thus the fact that the light we speak of in the vernacular saying "I've seen the light" has both a real spatio-temporal sense *and* a real metaphorical sense (that both dimensions are, epistemologically-speaking, logically necessary in constituting our relationship with the one unitary reality) has become almost impossible to grasp in the intellectual consensus currently dominating English usage.

That this occurs at a moment when, as far as East-West dialogue is concerned, immanent military action against Iran by the US/Israeli axis seems likely to be tolerated by the West, is hardly accidental. The Iranian culture includes not only the philosophers of the Illuminationist tradition (*Ishraq*) to which Mulla Sadra belongs but also the history of Mani (and before him Zarathustra) whose concepts of enlightenment have been crucial not only in the

development of Christian metaphysical perspectives, but in the tradition of dissenting metaphysical narratives.<sup>10</sup>

### **The Oat of Vime**

The ‘accidents’ in the metaphysical philosophy of Mulla Sadra are the being-present-in-time of the divine and enduring Forms (or archetypes) so that we see ‘the world’; that is, a world composed of existences perceived sentiently in space-time which derive from the presence of those Forms. Thus the existence of the sphere Smith quantifies in terms of physical theory (and recognises as the one he holds in his hand) is given by the being that is inherent in that form, *not* by the quiddity it shares with all other billiard balls in time. So, Mulla Sadra explains: “Know that the accident is of two kinds: there is the accident [he means ‘of individualisation’] which derives from coming into existence and the accident which comes of quiddity [the replication of an existent species such that both the tree and the wood are real. DK]. The accident of coming-into-existence is, for example, the appearance *in concreto* of white colour in a body ... or again of the coming-into-being of universality in the reality of the human species, or of the genus in the case of the animal. The accident of quiddity is [then] for example the becoming of specific difference within the genus or of individuation within the species”.<sup>11</sup>

Concerning the concept of individuation, we note that although the modern Western currency of the term concerns the psychology of individual persons and their subjectivity, we might reflect on the fact that neither the oriental culture Mulla Sadra’s 17<sup>th</sup> century nor that of his European contemporaries were yet troubled by the psychological problems of subjectivism!

The issue concerning the nature of accidents and of existence and being in time, is further elaborated by Mulla Sadra in chapter 11 of *The Asfar*: “I say: it is necessary to know that the form of a plant when cut from its root, or [when it] becomes dry, ... goes to the

world of Forms having measure without matter and from there it ends in the Intellectual (or noetic) world ... so that the great philosopher (ie Aristotle) said ‘Every natural form in this world is in that world, except [that] over there it is of eminent and higher species. That is because it is here attached to matter’ ... We say: As for the plant, we are able to say that over there it is living because here it is also living ...” (and Mulla Sadra means that we only know of its endurance there in the metaphysical reality because we have first experienced it here). “That is because the plant is a ‘Word’ bearing the life. If the ‘Word’ of the material plant is living, then it is surely also the soul. So it is more appropriate to say that it’s being is in the plant which is in the higher world. This is the first plant ...”<sup>12</sup>

We understand clearly from Mulla Sadrā’s citation of Aristotle that the actualisation of Being in time depends on the attachment of Being, in the process of becoming, to its temporal foundation in matter; and here (in spite of the compendium of Heidegger’s work on the subject of actualisation, it is to the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead we must turn; for Whitehead’s account of the metaphysical reality post-dates the discovery in modern physics of how our experience in time depends on the indeterminacy of the relations between finite particles composing the material substratum of our existence; that is, the firmament of both the ‘external’ world and of our being in it. In fact, our knowledge of that ‘being in it’ is inseparable from the cognitive acts by which we divine (sic!) the complexity of its structure; for, in all acts of cognition, the one who knows is the expression of that very being whose presence is given to us *a priori* in the ordinary experience of a world we inhabit with our bodies; and if it follows that this same unitary being is then also the object of scientific enquiry, we must if an enquiry which excludes the concepts of being and becoming can properly be called a science. If we are divided in our experience of the world, the purpose of our existence is clearly to redeem, in our cognitive acts, the unitary nature of that being whose existence *in time* it is given to us to grasp.

To be in time then, for humanity, is to experience the physical embodiment of being in-and-for-itself. Furthermore, the recovery, in our enacted thinking, of that unitary being during, and for the duration of, a separated physical embodiment entails every possible precept of our moral interactivity with each other: whether we express that interactivity in religious or political terms, the unitary goal of our being together *in time* is identical. However, the Tempter - like Lucifer in the narrative of the Book of Genesis or Ahriman in Zarathustra - poses the very problem whose solution is essential to our existence: the Book of Knowledge is opened to us at the moment that we fail to acknowledge the rules on which existence depends. Then, contradictions appear: either/or appears to be the only option, whereas salvation depends on the realisation that it is given to us not to operate according to the rule of law which, independently of ourselves (and before human existence) upholds the status quo, *to decide where we stand* with regard to the conception we form of our being present within that flux. Thus, in his *Science and the modern World*,<sup>13</sup> in the chapter titled ‘Religion and Science’, Whitehead explains the problem (the false problem of which billiard ball we are seeing when the thing is unitary) with reference to the origin of our modern knowledge about the nature of light; and let’s not forget that, in the Biblical narrative, the being of Lucifer is a figure of that light as it appears to us in terms of an either/or dilemma: do we leave it to nature as she is given by the gods, or do we eat of the Tree of Knowledge? As we shall see, that question is the essence of Zarathustra’s teaching.

“Since the time of Newton and Huyghens in the seventeenth century” Whitehead tells us, “there have been two theories as to the physical nature of light. Newton’s theory was that a beam of light consists of a stream of very minute particles or corpuscles, and that we have the sensation of light when these corpuscles strike the retinas of our eyes. Huyghens’ theory was that light consists of very minute waves of trembling in an all-pervading ether, and that these waves are travelling along a beam of light. The two theories are

contradictory. In the eighteenth century Newton's theory was believed, in the nineteenth century Huyghens' theory was believed. Today there is one large group of phenomena which can be explained only on the wave theory, and another large group which can be explained only on the corpuscular theory. Scientists leave it at that, and wait for the future, in the hope of attaining some wider vision which reconciles both".<sup>14</sup>

In the meantime, let us return to the import of our previously established argument to the effect that the being of the individual, in his acts of cognition with the world, has no given or necessary relation with either the physical phenomena (including his own body) or the realm of pure forms from which their existence emanates. In consequence of embodiment, he has a physical (and literal) standpoint in space-time; in consequence of being (being transcendent of that condition, so that he knows and is conscious *of* it) he is not bound or fixed by that standpoint: on the contrary, his being, from the focus of that point given by embodiment, *moves*, like the *cogito*, within being itself. He does not actually incarnate being as it is manifest at other standpoints in time (between birth and death I recognise you, but, embodied as I am, I cannot become you) but his being-in-time evolves; and while that enlightenment (*his* relations, where he is, with that light) cannot be fixed by the standpoint of his body, it is nevertheless only because of that embodiment that he experiences it at all.

This phenomenology of the spiritual perspective in acts our of knowing illuminates the paradox of the wave and corpuscular theories of light described by Whitehead: both the being of the light as we experience it, and the existence of the world it illuminates, depend on that polarity between finite location and the unitary nature of everything. Whether the dilemma is between two billiard balls or between corpuscles and waves, if (as Whitehead says) "We are told by logicians that a proposition must be either true or false", the paradox throws a very clear light on the nature and purpose of human identity in an evolutionary perspective: it raises the question,

underlying all reductionist accounts of physical theory and quantum mechanics, of our relationship, as beings embodied in that material state, *with time*, and the question of *what time is*.

Imagine the industry (insurance for example) in our contemporary world, whose profitability depends on investment in the expectation that, like all life-forms, we are ‘here today and gone tomorrow’. Industry whose profitability depends on our attachment to present states proceeds for the most part irrespectively of any religious belief in an afterlife, and yet the discovery of relativity and indeterminacy in the physical condition and the advent of quantum theory overturns the drift of a narrative in Western civilisation about time which has called the tune since the time of the Roman Empire; a narrative whose edifice, founded on the notion of temporality, depended on the use of Christianity (in particular, by Calvin) to serve the interests of secular power in the present at the expense of any possible transcendent being-in-and-through time of a human Essence; an essence which, according to that form of Christianity only the death of the body could redeem at the end of time. Though “the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us”, that being-present of Being in-and-for-itself effectively became a heresy with revolutionary implications for all forms of temporal power. Thus it was that when Cromwell’s army gathered in an open forum for debate at Putney, after the ending of monarchy with the beheading of King Charles, the Leveller Gerrard Winstanley, and others with him, proclaimed ‘A Declaration to the Powers of England and to all the Powers of the World’; in the course of which he explained to Cromwell and to the rank and file that “We, being like Jews and in expectation of the Promised Land ... did not believe that God had made the greater part of mankind with saddles on their backs and bridles in their mouths and some few booted and spurred to ride the rest”.<sup>15</sup>

Time, then, which passes, is not a commodity to be lost at the expense of being while gains from the input of labour accrue in the form of capital to be re-invested by those who acquire it at the

expense of the disenfranchised producers of the common wealth. Time is a dimension, given by the corporeal condition of discrete existences within the substratum of matter, which extends the present from here and now towards the unitary condition of all existences together. The theoretically discrete particles whose composite movement in the material foundation provides the vehicle and viewpoint for the presence of the seer (the one who sees it) serve the creation of time as a subjective experience *only to that human observer*. Though all others existences are governed by those same material conditions, time is the projected experience of the human condition whose function, within evolution, is to articulate the whole. That is: *to speak it*, to say those words (*that Word*) which redeems all temporal existence within the perspective of unitary being; for “According to Mulla Şadrā, there is every moment a movement from one modality to higher one. This fundamental and evolutionary movement, which Sadrā calls ‘substantive movement’ ... takes place in every individual existent ... As a result of this movement, there arises a new concept, i.e. time. Therefore Sadrā rejects the reality of time. It’s modality is mental”. He means, of course, not that the experience of time is unreal but that, since it is a condition given by relativity between bodies, it is a condition of existence and not of Being.

The foregoing account of Sadrā, by Alparslan Açıkgenç<sup>16</sup> accords with the description given above of time as a construct of the human presence within the material substratum;<sup>17</sup> except that it seems a pity to reduce an experience which for Sadrā was certainly essential to all ordinary experience (i.e. never mind the philosophy!) to the discovery of “a new concept” and call its modality “mental” - a word which, in the English, has become the attribute of the passive intellectual by-stander for whom a contemplated existence external to himself reduces to a simple matter of fact. Time is a binding force within the material firmament and the *cogito* (yes, even Descartes’ *cogito*) moves within it as human agent to grasp the essence of unitary being which, in the Western world, for the most part escapes our mental preoccupations.

## The O atter of the Word

As we have said in our preceding commentary, Mulla Sadrā sees, following Aristotle, the human agent who is the source of the Word in the world, as ‘ensouling’ the existences he perceives together with his own in, so that together they (we) are *being the World*. That is, he articulates *their* being, and *that* being, with the use of the Word. The cognitive act is thus constitutive of both world and soul, so that the Essences within Being are then embodied *in time*.

In time, bodies mutate and are corruptible, so that the redemptive activity of the *cogito* (which saves, so to speak, the essence of things as they are perceived in that temporal condition which corrupts and passes) is, in the writing of St. Paul, the activity of love. When he says: “Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, without love, I am like sounding brass or tinkling cymbal”<sup>18</sup> he means that, eloquent as we may be in our description of the world, if the thing we articulate is not informed with a knowledge of its eternal essence, we remain as transient in our passage through time as the things themselves, for they are, as he calls it, ‘corruptible’. Thus he says “Behold, I show you a mystery: we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye”<sup>19</sup>; and though he goes on to say that this transformation occurs “at the last trump” (which the commentators of church history conveniently postpone until the end of time which is experienced at the moment of physical death), the whole tendency of Paul’s narrative is to describe that death as the moment not of a physical passing but of redemption, a change in the nature of the cognitive act, a point in time at which we grasp not the corruptible nature of the things but their being in an essential and enduring form; that is, in precisely the same epistemological perspective that we have described in the work of Mulla Sadrā.

In the achievement of this redemptive perspective, Paul continues “... this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on



incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"<sup>20</sup> And the 'sin' (in the following verse) which he calls 'the sting of death' originates in an adherence to law in our understanding of the phenomena at the expense of illumination; thus (for example in Newtonian physics), with regard to the illusion of reality given by the measurement of law, which reduces the reality to its corruptible form, *prior to that illumination* we inhabit the darkness of a material world governed by mortality. Of this problem, like Mulla Sadrā, Paul is fully aware: "For now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known".<sup>21</sup> In other words, according to the purely physical determinations of time in our Western civilization<sup>22</sup>, a human society is composed of entirely separate and competing identities whose true corporate and productive value together creates the capital value on which institutional powers thrive. Meanwhile, our seeing and knowing, as individuals of the subject population, is conformed to the rule of law upholding that temporal status quo. To imagine the conduct of a society whose order is given voluntarily by individuals who are enlightened so that Promised Lands are possible, not at the end of time but *now*, in the moment of each cognitive act, becomes, in such circumstances, an act of sedition.

In closing, although the subject deserves a paper on its own, something further needs to be said on the common ground we have presupposed between the writings of Paul the Apostle and those of Mulla Sadrā Shirazi; because a close reading of both these authors reveals the more distant but weighty influence of the *Gāthās* of Zarathustra. According to the introduction to his translated Hymns (the *Gāthās*)<sup>23</sup>, Zarathustra, who probably lived in a pastoral society of the steppe in north-eastern Iran between the Caspian sea and the Indus valley in the sixth century B. C., assimilated the spirit of the Avesta and was familiar with the concept of *maya*, which is essential to the philosophy of the Upanishads. In the person of

Zarathustra however, this ancient enlightenment with its emphasis on the yoga of surrender became a doctrine infused with the notion of conflict, in the temporal realm, between light and darkness; a conflict equated with the real encounter in human experience of good and evil. Furthermore, the being of that light identified with the good, becomes, with Zarathustra, the being called Ahura Mazda whose light, in the material firmament, is opposed by the being he calls Ahriman; so that while Zarathustra's main teachings about human conduct in society depended on a doctrine of overcoming the presence of evil in social encounters (as the writer of the introduction explains) Zarathustra's role in a nomadic society was that of one whose teachings were directed towards settlement, the husbandry of nature and social harmony: "Zoroaster understood that the essential act, for every man, is to choose between good and evil [and at the point of his cognitive acts]. The notions of good and evil, of order and error, did not exist before him ... like all our acts, the act of choosing had, for him, a prototype at the beginning of time, in the mythical reality. Two spirits met and chose, one good, the other evil, thus bringing about a general cleavage of the universe".

The effect of this cosmology is to deprive the gods of their power over our human condition so that the evolutionary destiny is firmly in our hands; even though, in default of enlightenment, it is the being-in-and-for-itself of the light (Ahura Mazda) who upholds the transcendent and enduring order in which all existences enter and exit in their corruptible forms. These existences in time are given by the darkness in the material substratum; which is to say, with regard to the concepts of law in both Paul and Mulla Sadrā, that the constraints given by environmental circumstance, physical law and heredity are the inertia of that darkness. This inertia may be redeemed by the enlightenment of a single thought, a cognitive act performed in the light of a relation with the Being of the light in-and-for-itself. Thus when, in the terminating *Yasna* of the Gâthâs, the very last verse, we read that "Corruption fastens on the unbelievers", we can be sure that Zarathustra, hearing of a

renowned philosopher two-and-half thousand years after his death who believed life is a bitch and then we die, would have relished the verity of his observation; for, whereas this philosopher does indeed *believe* in the victory of death, it is (as we have shown above) in default of a truly scientific knowledge.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Interviewed by Peter Popham, *The Independent Review*, 21 April 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Caner K. Dagli, *Mulla Sadra's Epistemology and the Philosophy of Physics*; in *Transcendent Philosophy*, vol. 1 no. 2; Sept. 2000. (Or vol. 2? check issue/vol. no.).

<sup>3</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Cartesian Linguistics*; University Press of America, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of how the identity of the person, negotiating this apparent divide, is constituted in the enactment of his being by intentional acts, see: Edmund Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations*; Martinus Nijhoff, 1960. *Inter alia*: "Only an uncovering of the horizon of experience" (the subject thinker must know where he stands) "ultimately clarifies the 'actuality' and the 'transcendancy' of the world [showing it] to be inseparable from transcendental subjectivity" (p 62).

<sup>5</sup> Note: not an 'archetype' in the Platonic sense ( in Plato, it has being) but an abstract idea.

<sup>6</sup> C. H. Waddington, *The Scientific Attitude*; Pelican Books, 1948. This book - my first serious introduction to the problem of knowledge and of positivism in the sciences - I read in 1962 while studying for a degree in the applied arts. Waddington's account is admirably British in its even-handedness: its description of the problem is common-sense and although he is concerned to extol the product of the sciences and not with the problem of being, he does not attempt to deny transcendence in ordinary experience: "Goodness is a perfectly ordinary notion which comes into every field of experience ... and one may be willing to leave the absolute and Essential Good to the philosophers ... for example, in the world of typewriters with which I am having some trouble with at the moment, goodness means a high capacity for carrying out the functions proper to typewriters, namely making a certain set of symbols on paper".

<sup>7</sup> Jaques Derrida, *Linguistics and Grammatology*; in *Substance* (a review of theory and literary criticism); issue 10, Madison 1974.

<sup>8</sup> Sean Gaston, *The Impossible Mourning of Jaques Derrida*; Continuum, 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: the case against religion*; Atlantic Books, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> See for example: Roger Arnaldez, *Révolte contre Jéhovah*; Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1998. Hugh Schonfield, *Essene Odyssey*; Element Books, 1998.

Richard Seddon, *Mani : his life and work* ; Temple Lodge, 1998.

<sup>11</sup> *Le Livre des Pénétrations Métaphysiques* (Third Penetration), Molla Sadra

Shirazi (trans. Henri Corbin) ; Éditions Verdier, 1988. (my English translation).

<sup>12</sup> *Spiritual Psychology*, Mulla Sadra Shirazi; translated, introduced and annotated by Latimah-Parvin Peerwani; ICAS Press, 2008. Note: *The Afar*, and not ‘Spiritual Psychology’ is Iranian title of this work, the publication title presumably having been chosen by the translator. Insertions in square brackets in the quoted passages are my own in cases where the translator’s English syntax compromises clarity. DK

<sup>13</sup> Science and the Modern World”, Alfred North Whitehead;

<sup>14</sup> With regard to that hope, Whitehead knew nothing of the Illuminist tradition whose commentators are so well aware of implications of contemporary physical theory. In his *The Intuition of Existence* (International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, Kuala Lumpur, 1990) Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas puts it like this: Each moment of itself is discontinuous, a moment which is its ‘being- existent’: it only is in that atomic duration ... its creation retains its unity and identity as that particular thing owing to its reality or archetype, over which, and in which form, Existence expands from the level of its absoluteness to the levels of its determinations and individuations in ever more concrete forms”. See also the Second International Conference on Mulla Sadra, *Causation According to Mulla Sadra: Abstract Book*; Institute of Islamic Studies, 2001.

<sup>15</sup> James Duke, *1649: an Historical Outline*; Coptic Press, 1967.

<sup>16</sup> Alparslan Açıkgenc, *Being and Existence in Sadrā and Heidegger*; International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation, Kuala Lumpur, 1993.

<sup>17</sup> matter itself being the presence of the Mother, as in the Sumerian attribute given to the Goddess Ishtar/Inanna; a subject however which is beyond the scope of the present text.

<sup>18</sup> First Letter to the Corinthians ch. 13 vs. 1

<sup>19</sup> *passim* ch. 15 vs. 51

<sup>20</sup> *passim* ch. 15 vs. 53

<sup>21</sup> *passim* ch. 13 vs 12

<sup>22</sup> As far as “purely physical determinations of time” are concerned, the most recent work of the philosopher John Gray, *The Immortalisation Commission: Science and the Strange Quest to Cheat Death*<sup>22</sup> (Allen Lane, 2012) is reviewed in the Independent under the heading “Life’s a bitch, and then we die”. The reviewer tells us that Gray is a lover of wisdom, so that his “debunking of theology’s grip on ethics is ... timely and timeless”. How it can be ‘timeless’ if life is a bitch and then we die is not said. This is the

epistemological problem for which the works of Mulla Sadrā provide and answer, but the separation of the epistemological issue between something called 'philosophy' and something called 'theology' does not apply to the discourse of the Illuminationists which is called *Ishraq*.

<sup>23</sup> The hymns of Zarathustra; trans. with an introduction and commentary by Jaques Duchesne-Guillemin, and thence into English by Ms M. Henning; John Murray, 1952.