Causality in Mullā Ṣadrā's Philosophical Text al-Ta'līqāt 'alā Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq

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I
Introductory Remarks

The tradition of philosophy in Islam, which started in Baghdad during the 9th c, has had a dynamic history ever since. For the most part, however, but with a few notable exceptions[1], western scholarship on the history of philosophy has not examined this tradition after Avicenna. At least not systematically, nor from the standpoint of genuine analytical approaches to philosophical arguments. Islamic philosophy after Avicenna from the 12th c on warrants careful, analytical examination. Such generalized descriptions of this period's thinking as "mystical," "theosophical," and the like, does not serve well its analytical nature and thus does not lead to interest by contemporary philosophers in philosophical texts of this important period. It is during this period that we observe the emergence of holistic philosophical systems distinct from the Peripatetic. The first such system is the Philosophy of Illumination, and thanks to the studies of Max Horten, Henry Corbin, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Ibrahimi Dinani, and several others during the past decade, this novel system has been at least introduced to western scholar-

[1] The exceptions are scholars such as Max Horten and Henry Corbin.

ship. The continuation of Illuminationist tradition, and its impact on the development of creative philosophical endeavor (predominantly in Iran), however, has not been studied seriously. There are two main obstacles that have to be removed in order to facilitate scholarship on this important side of Islamic philosophy. First is the unavailability of the texts. From among many Illuminationist texts and commentaries, only one or two have been published in critical editions. Second is the unavailability of translations. Very few, if any, technical translations of Arabic and Persian texts of this tradition have been published to date, which is a serious impediment to philosophical studies of this tradition. It is in this regard that the work done by the *Mullā Ṣadrā* Congress should be commended, with the hope that results of such conferences as the present one will initiate a genuine philosophical activity that will bring about a deep understanding of philosophical texts of the period after Avicenna in Islamic philosophy, specifically those composed by the great Iranian philosopher *Mullā Ṣadrā*. One of his most philosophically sophisticated texts is the hitherto unpublished text of *al-Ta'līqāt* 'alā Sharḥ *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. While his magnum opus text, *al-Asfār al-Arba'a*, has been published and is known to some extent in western scholarship, *Mullā Ṣadrā*'s *al-Ta'līqāt* as has not yet received much attention. This text, which, in my view is one of the latest purely philosophical works by *Mullā Ṣadrā* is now in press, I am happy to report here. In my discussion today I will refer to my edition of this text, and I have provided selected sections that are directly relevant to my discussion as an addendum to this paper. Pertinent to the theme of this conference I have chosen to examine selected topics associated with the problem of causality in *Mullā Ṣadrā*'s text of *al-Ta'līqāt*.

II
Causality

Philosophical investigation of "causality" is concerned with epistemological processes and structures that describe ways of knowing how a thing causes another. The question "why a thing," the relation between two things, the cause (C) and the effect (E) such that necessarily and by some stipulated set of conditions when C exits, then E will exit, priority, rank, and order of C in relation to E, definition and types of connection between C and E, and so on, are all discussed when examining causality. It is well established that Aristotle was the first philosopher to systematically examine and define causality. In his Metaphysics he defines four causes: the material, formal, efficient, and final. In his Posterior Analytics we find the first discussion of "why" and "how" related to cause presented in the analysis of syllogistic reasoning. In his Physics we find discussion of "form" and "nature" associated with causality. Aristotle's general view of causality, and specifically his view of the cause of causes, impacted Islamic philosophy's formative period beginning with Kindī, followed by Fārābī and then by Avicenna. Emanationist theories of Fārābī and Avicenna was an attempt to uphold, or to harmonize, Aristotelian necessary causality with religious and theological precepts that called for the will of God as ultimate in the "free" creation of the world. Logical order explains the emanation of existent entities from the Necessary Being in the scheme of emanation. This view, however, was thought by theologians to be contrary to religious views teachings on creation, and Ghazzālī in his Tahāfut al-Falāsifa rejects as invalid the philosophical position of necessary causation, and hence the Aristotelian principle of causation. *Ghazālī* established a distinctive and in some ways novel view of causality in Islamic philosophy. He simply argues that empirically, the necessary connection between the natural efficient cause and its effect cannot be proven, and God's Will is the direct cause in the

creation of all events. In chapter 17 of *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* *Gazālī* assert that:

The connection between what is habitually believed to be a cause and what is habitually believed to be an effect is not necessary according to us. But with any two things, where "this" is not "that" and "that" is not "this" and where neither the affirmation of one entails the affirmation of the other, nor the negation of one entails negation of the other, it is not a necessity of the existence of the one that the other should exist, and it is not a necessity of the nonexistence of the one that the other should not exist.

Thus, *Ghazālī* denies the necessity of the relationship between cause and effect, upholding that divine will, without any logical necessity, directly created all natural events and entities.

The anti rationalist position of *Ghazālī*, it is believed by the prevailing Orientalist position, impacted all later development of theology and philosophy in Islam to the point that the earlier Peripatetic theories of causality were eclipsed altogether. While *Ghazālī*'s impact on Islamic theological thinking, and even on the "textbook" genre of philosophical compositions that form the core of the scholastic tradition, cannot be denied, the novel and holistic reconstruction of philosophy by *Suhrawardī* does did allow for the continuation of philosophical investigation not relegated to the position of "handmaiden of theology." *Mullā Ṣadrā*'s thinking and expression in his *al-Ta'līqāt*, which aims to refine and augment *Suhrawardī*'s philosophical discourse, indeed is testimony to this fact. *Al-Ta'līqāt* is in every respect a philosophical work, and is not bound by the limits posed by anti rationalist theological presuppositions. While I do not claim that the range of *Mullā Ṣadrā*'s work all uphold a strictly rationalist philosophical position, this is certainly the case in his *al-Ta'līqāt*. A brief examination of selected topics in this text relating to causality will, I hope, illustrate this point.

There are many sections in *Mullā Ṣadrā*'s *al-Ta'līqāt* where various topics and questions relating to the set of problems: cause, causality, relation between cause and effect, "betweenness" (*baynīna*) of cause and effect, types of priority in causality, and so on, are examined. In every case, *Mullā Ṣadrā*'s approach includes first a careful examination of the Illuminationist position on the question, which he analyses in relation to Avicenna's views, followed be his own re-statement of the question, which often includes major refinements of the arguments as well as additions to the earlier views. Among the set of terms used by *Mullā Ṣadrā* in his discussions of causality, in addition standard terms associated with the "Four causes" and causality, the term and concept of "essential cause" (*'illa dhātiyya*) distinguished from "accidental cause" (*'illa 'araḍiyya*) is to be noted as specifically significant in terms of the philosophical expression of *al-Ta'līqāt*. I will now present a brief examination of *Mullā Ṣadrā*'s arguments of this significant philosophical issue. The Third Discourse (*al-Maqāla al-Thālitha*) of Part One (al-Qism al-Awwal) *Suhrawardī*'s text, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, is devoted to a highly sophisticated theoretical discussion of fallacies and philosophical disputations concerning Illuminationist vs. Peripatetic philosophical positions regarding selected topics and problems taken from logic, physics, and metaphysics. In a short, but remarkably well argued *Ta'līqa* in this section we find *Mullā Ṣadrā* discussion the distinction between essential and accidental cause, paraphrased as follows:[2]

Cause is either essential or accidental. An essential cause is such as the agent, the final, the material, and the final cause. Accidental cause is such as when an impediment to the existence of some effect be removed. The conditions that satisfy accidental cause are such as when the agent acts essentially, but another effect may ensue. An example is *Saqmīniyā*, which

[2] See *al-Ta'līqāt* 'alā Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq, edited by Hossein Ziai (In press, Tehran: Mullā Ṣadrā Congress), pp. 395ff.

causes coldness accidentally, but essentially causes increase in the Yellow Bile, which in turn causes the lessening of heat. The point here is that the agent itself does not act directly, but removes an impediment thus causing the observed effect.

The essential cause is what is sought in science, and in the section in *al-Ta'līqāt* corresponding to *Suhrawardī*'s discussion of subjects pertaining to the Posterior Analytics, mainly demonstration and the method of science, we find a highly refined analysis of causality.[3] The discussion is set forth by *Suhrawardī*, who following Aristotle, stipulates that demonstration is the true method of science. In this section a chapter is devoted to defining and examining the "why demonstration" (*burhān lima*, also called explanatory syllogism) and the "assertoric demonstration" (*burhān anna*). This chapter includes a significant point, which is that the Middle Term of syllogism (*al-ḥadd al-awsaṭ*) is the cause of the relation between the two terms Major and Minor, and that this a cause both "ideally" (dhihnan) as well as "really" (*'aynan*). As we shall see, the notion of an "ideal" cause, or "*'illa 'aqliyya*" may indeed be an innovative one first fully stipulated by *Suhrawardī* and subsequently further refined by *Mullā Ṣadrā*. In what follows I will summarize *Mullā Ṣadrā*'s analysis of the question:[4]

Syllogisms are two kinds: one where the Middle Term is not the cause for the existence of the Major Term essentially and that the Major Term exists because of the Minor Term. This syllogism is called the "why/explanatory syllogism." The other kind is when the Middle Term is the cause for the existence of the Major Term, because of its existence in the Minor Term. This one is called the "assertoric syllogism." Of this latter kind

[3] See the text of *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, edited by H. Corbin (Istanbul, 1954), sec 38: "*fi Mawādd al-aqīsa al-burhāniyya*." Cf. *sharazūrī's Commentary on Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, edited bu Hossein Ziai (Tehran, 1995), pp. 119 ff. See also, *al-Ta'līqāt*, pp. 179 ff.

[4] See *al-Ta'līqāt*, pp. 194 ff.

there are two further types: When the Middle Term and its existence is the cause of the Major Term in the Minor Term and is itself not the case of the Major Term, which is simply because of it. Or, when the Middle and the major Terms are both related and/or effects of a single cause. In the first type the Middle Term is simply called "reason for" (dalīl), and the second is named "assertoric demonstration," simply.[5]

Subsequently *Mullā Ṣadrā* enumerates five "problematic issues" (ishkālāt, i.e. problems that need be addressed) associated with, must have been his understanding of the standard Peripatetic as well as the Illuminationist philosophical view of the position of cause in the Aristotelian scientific method. They are:

(1) Reasoning (istidlāl) from the effect to the cause does not lead to certitude (yaqīn) in knowledge.

(2) Knowledge of what has a cause is only obtained first with respect to knowledge of its cause.

(3) It is not possible to demonstrate the Necessary Being, because It is necessarily itself not an effect.

(4) Reasoning based on two things related to one another is incorrect.

(5) It is not correct to designate as cause the Middle term for the Major Term. Such as the fallacy: "This is a human, and all humans are animals, therefore this is an animal."

Problems (1) - (5) together indicate *Mullā Ṣadrā*'s rather distinct Illuminationist epistemological position, which posits a fundamental priority to Knowledge by Presence, and for him is the most prior in obtaining knowledge of a thing, tantamount to knowing a thing's cause. Thus, in this scheme Knowledge by

[5] We note that here that he discussion corresponds to Posterior Analytics (1.7 74aff), where the notion that syllogistic reasoning establishes the causal connection between an axiom and conclusion is explained by the First Teacher himself.

Presence has priority over acquired knowledge through syllogistic reasoning, and this is most true of the fundamental principles as well as knowledge of the Necessary Being. For one thing, Knowledge by Presence takes place when the knowing subject (*al-mudrik*) is "related" (*al-iḍāfa/al-iḍāfa al-ishrāqiyya*) to the object (*al-mudrak*), where the relation is not extended in time. That is, this type of knowledge takes place in a duration-less "moment" (ān). The very moment when Knowledge by Presence is obtained the "cause" is known. In this way the critical problem associated with the how of temporal priority of cause and effect is also solved. Because, as we shall see the Illuminationist position stipulates that there is no temporal priority of cause over effect.

The next topic here examined concerns the types of priority, as it informs of the question of causality. This is also one of the significant philosophical topics that has been presented since Aristotle's works in the discussion of cause and its relation to effect. Let us first look at the text of *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*:

We mean by "cause" that whose existence immediately and without conceivable delay necessitates the existence of something else. Conditions and the removal of impediments also enter into cause; for if the impediment is not removed, the existence of the thing is still contingent in relation to what was assumed to be its cause. If [impediment's] relation to the thing partakes of contingency without reaching the condition of sufficient reason, there can be no relation of cause and effect. This is not to say that nonexistence does something; it only means that nonexistence enters into causality in the sense that, when the mind consider the necessity of the effect, it cannot do this without considering the nonexistence of the impediment. The cause has an intellectual but not a temporal priority over the effect. They may be simultaneous in time, as in breaking and being broken, but we still say, "He broke it, so it broke," and not the opposite.

There also is a priority that is temporal, as well as a priority of place or position--as in bodies--or of nobility in attributes admitting of being more or less noble. A part of the cause may be temporally prior or intellectually prior.[6]

This scheme of priority is most crucial to the discussion of causality, and as we shall see the notion "intellectually prior" associated with cause and effect seems to be a novel Illuminationist position here. But let us first examine Aristotle on priority, and then turn to the notion non-temporal priority of cause over effect. Of course a problem of "togetherness" (ma'iyya) of cause and effect as well as the what of the "in-between-ness" between them does arise, but I will these problems for another occasion.

Aristotle on Priority:

In the Categories (14a 26 -b15), Aristotle argues that one thing is called prior to another in four way:

1. "In respect of time as when one thing is called older or more ancient than another.
2. "What does not reciprocate as to implication of existence. For example, one is prior to two because if there are two it follows at once that there is one whereas if there is one there are not necessarily two, so that the implication of the other's existence does not hold reciprocally from one; and that from which implication of existence does not hold reciprocally is thought to be prior.
3. "A thing is called prior in respect of some order, as with science and speeches. For in demonstrative science there is a prior and posterior in order, for the elements are prior in order to the constructions (and in grammar the elements are prior to the syllables; likewise with

[6] See, The Philosophy of Illumination, edited and translated by J. Walbridge and Hossein Ziai (Utah, 2000), pp. 43-44.

speeches, for the introduction is prior in order to the exposition.

4. "What is better and more valued is thought to be prior by nature: ordinary people commonly say of those they specially value and love that they 'have priority.'

In addition to the above four types of priority, Aristotle considers cause as another type of priority, he argues "For of things which reciprocate as to implication of existence, that which is in some way the cause of the other's existence might reasonably be called prior by nature. And also, in his Posterior Analytics (71b11) Aristotle shows that the knowledge of cause is the essence of scientific knowledge.

Avicenna On Priority

الإلهيات (الطبع القاهرة)

الفصل الاول ص١٦٣-١٦٥

"والمشهور عند الجمهور هو المتقدم في المكان والزمان. وكان التقدم والقبل في أشياء لها ترتيب ... وقد يكون هذا التقدم المرتبي في:

١. امور بالطبع ، كما أن الجسم قبل الحيوان بالقياس الى الجوهر ووضع الجوهر مبدأ.

٢. امور لا بالطبع ، بل بالصناعة كنغم الموسيقى.

٣. ثم نقل الى اشياء اخرى فجعل الفائق والفاضل والسابق ايضا ولو في غير الفضل متقدما ... ومن هذا القبيل ما جعلوا المخدوم والرئيس قبل، فان الاختيار يقع للرئيس وليس للمرؤوس، وإنما يقع للمرؤوس حين وقع للرئيس فيتحرك باختيار الرئيس.

٤. بالقياس الى الوجود فجعلوا الشئ الذي يكون له الوجود أولا وإن لم يكن للثاني والثاني لا يكون له إلا وقد كان الأول وجوداً متقدماً على الآخر مثل: الواحد، فانه ليس من شرط الوجود للواحد أن تكون الكثرة موجودة. ومن شرط الوجود للكثرة ان يكون الواحد موجوداً. وليس في هذا أن الواحد يفيد الوجود للكثرة أولا يفيد، بل إنه يحتاج إليه حتى يفاد للكثرة وجود بالتركيب....

٥. فالعقل مع وجود الحركتين معا في الزمان يفرض لأحدهما تقدما والآخر تأخراً إذا كانت الحركة الاولى. ولا يبعد أن يكون الشئ مهما وجد وجب ضرورة أن يكون علة لشئ. وبالحقيقة فإن الشئ لا يجوز أن يكون بحيث يصح أن يكون علة للشئ إلا ويكون معه الشئ. فإن كان من شرط كونه علة نفس ذاته، فما دام ذاته موجوداً يكون علة وسببا لوجود الثاني، وإن لم يكن شرط كونه علة نفس ذاته ، فذاته بذاته ممكن أن يكون عنه الشئ وممكن أن لا يكون وليس أحد الطرفين أولى من الآخر.

(أيضاً ص١٦٧)

" فاذن وجود كل معلول واجب مع وجود علته، ووجود علته واجب عنه وجود المعلول. وهما معا في الزمان أو الدهر أو غير ذلك، ولكن ليسا معا في القياس الى حصول الوجود. وذلك لأن وجود ذلك لم يحصل من وجود هذا ، فذلك له حصول الوجود ليس من حصول وجود هذا ولهذا وجود هو من حصول وجود ذلك، فذلك أقدم بالقياس الى حصول الوجود.

Mullā Ṣadrā on Priority

We now turn to *Mullā Ṣadrā*'s discussion of the types of priority in *al-Ta'līqāt*, where his discussion commences in his response to *Suhrawardī*'s statement: "The priority of cause over effect is a mental one and not a temporal one"

للعلة على معلول تقدم عقلي لا زماني

Mullā Ṣadrā commences by explaining "priority"as:[7]

When two things exist such that one may exist without necessitating the other, but the other is necessitated only when the first (al-awwal) is necessitated. This is because the necessity of the second (al-thānī) is because of the necessity of the first. *Mullā Ṣadrā* here states that in addition to the "famous five types" of priority there are other types he will add. The first significant additional type of priority is what we are told *Mullā Ṣadrā* has himself designated "priority in terms of Truth" (taqaddum bi'l-ḥaqq), which is distinguished from priority of the constituents of a real thing, such as genus and differentia in terms of meaning and concept, over the concept what-is the real thing itself without any consideration of the thing's existence. Priority in terms of Truth is said to be the priority of ranks of being generated from The First down to the lowest level of existence. Now in a way this is the same type of priority *Suhrawardī* had named "noble priority" (taqaddum bi al-sharaf), yet *Mullā Ṣadrā* wants to distinguish his "priority in terms of Truth" to be distinct from all other types. His intentions here are to harmonize causality with creation and perhaps with his own views of emanation and what his teacher, Mīr Dāmād, had designated creation to be Hudīth Dahrī. He does this by arguing that noble priority does not entail inclusion of what is lower "in" the

[7] See *al-Ta'līqāt,* pp. 280 ff.

higher. He also argues that the order and rank of emanated entities are not subject to the standard view of causal priority, by saying that their priority is not simply by essence and simple causality. The priority of emanated entities, he further argues, are not in terms of position and place, nor by rank, nor temporal. In effect he is here saying is that neither causal priority, nor priority in terms of temporal nor spacial extension, nor mathematical priority, none of them serve to properly describe priority of the rank of created beings. He finally states that this type of priority by Truth (taqaddum bi'l-ḥaqq) is something "apparent" (*ẓāhir*)[8] and known by those who are resolute in Tawḥīd. But, what is Taqaddum bi'l-Ḥaqq? If it can not be related to any causality, neither essential, nor natural, nor mathematical, then it can be known only by the subject's own understanding of Haqq. In this way we may in fact see that *Mullā Ṣadrā* is anticipating Hume's rejection of rationalist concept of causality, by arguing that there is neither a real nor constructed (logical or metaphysical) relationship between two things (cause and effect), rather a subject's own understanding is what determines "causality" and hence what defines priority in being. However, there seems to be a distinction between *Mullā Ṣadrā* position and that of Hume, in that *Mullā Ṣadrā* does accept "real priority" (taqaddum bi'l-ḥaqīqa), which he states to be priority of a thing over what-is the thing existent because of it. Thus, by implication *Mullā Ṣadrā*'s view of "natural causality" and the notion of Taqaddum bil-Ḥaqq which define the relation between two things (equivalent to describing "causality") is not confined to Hume's "perception" as the only observed "relation" between two things. Yet further, it seems to me that Taqaddum bil-Ḥaqq is still given to equivocation, and is thus not essentially distinct from the Illuminationist position on equivocal being and the ensuing sense of Taqaddum bi'l-Sharaf. While *Mullā Ṣadrā*'s

[8] This is fundamental Illuminationist position that "evidence" in being is the primary determinant of its knowability.

position on causality of the relation between two entities, say X and Y, does favor the "religious" view of creation and the necessity of knowing the Truth (Ḥaqq) in order to determine the "causal" connection/relation of X and Y, yet his acceptance of essential causality still places his thinking within philosophy rather than religion. He certainly accepts such essentially philosophical notions as temporal priority (at least among certain ranks of existent entities) as well as contiguity of X and Y in space and time (his notion of X and Y as mutaḍā'ifān), and also of the continuity/ connection/ conjunction of X and Y, as he has upheld the Illuminationist position of *al-ittiṣāl fi 'l-wujūd*.

Selections on the Topic "Causality"

Taken From

Mullā Ṣadrā

al-Ta'līqāt 'alā Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq

Edited by

Hossein Ziai

التعليقات على شـــرح حكمة الإشـــراق

لصدرالدين محمد بن ابراهيم الشيرازي

وهي الحاشية على شرح حكمة الاشراق السهروردي

للعلامة قطب الدين الشيرازي

تصحيح وتعليق

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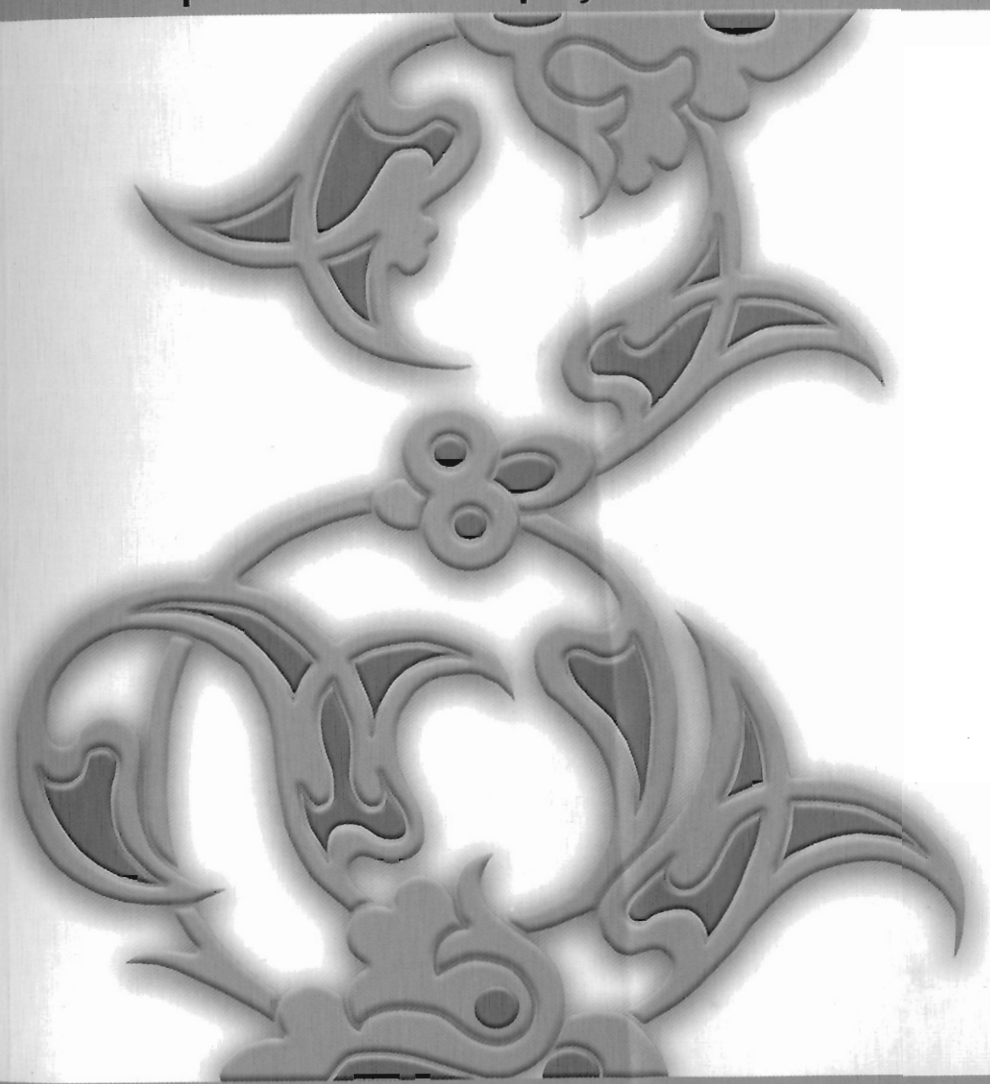
Mulla Sadra & Comparative Philosophy on Causation



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Causation in Islamic and western philosophy is a complex issue that operates at many levels. This book will introduce an ontological and epistemological approach on cause and causation and describe some of the divisions of causation. This book discusses the relationship between causation and key philosophical doctrines.

The present book consists of 17 articles, divided into 6 chapters, concerning comparative studies on causation.

The chapters of the book are "Causation in Islamic Philosophy", "Causation in thought of Mulla Sadra", "Causation: A Comparative philosophical Approach", "Prophecy and Psychology", "Causation and the World Process", "God and Causation".

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