Mulla Sadra’s philosophy, the peak of Iranian traditional philosophy, is known for asserting the principality of being. This dissertation expounds Mulla Sadra’s thesis of the principality of being in the light of the work by Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle and Kant.

Among all philosophers there has been none who asserted that both essence and being are equally real in the objective world. Because if both were real, it would follow that every single thing would be two different things. When we look at a red rose we do not see two different realities composing of being and essence. Conceptualization is a mental action, otherwise in the real world a red rose or every other thing is a single reality. Then, fundamental question is: Is the principality of a thing in the real world its essence or its being?

For Sadar, ‘being’ is the most fundamental and the most universal of predicates that are not included in any categories. With this prospect to being, he could solve many logical,
metaphysical and theological difficulties which he had inherited from his predecessors. His philosophy has brought together Peripatetic, Illuminations and Gnostic philosophy, in such way that it is compatible with his Islamic revelation and his mystical experience of reality. This sort of reflection has been explained by Morise as below:

“This sort of reflection is not theoretical in the sense of culminating in some final self-sufficient system of metaphysical truth or belief. Instead, the theoretical consideration of these issues at the symbolic and self-consciously conceptual level always presupposes the most intimate and ongoing connection with living experience (both of transcendence and of the other forms of knowledge in question) and with the real conflicts and uncertainties emerging from that experience….the constant dialectical interplay of experience and understanding that is at the heart of sadra’s philosophy is summarized in what he calls the necessary of *tahqiq*: that verification of the symbolic and conceptual expression of the truth (*al-haqq*) which is inseparable from its immediate realization in experience”\(^1\).

Mulla Sadra's metaphysics is based on ‘being’ as the fundamental of reality, and rejects ‘quiddities’ or ‘essences’ in

the external world. For him ‘being’ is a single unity, graded, attentive and the source of both unity and diversity. Through these fundamental principles we can understand his ideas about other philosophical problems. To make more clear what he means by ‘being’ we compare it with ‘being’ in Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle and Kant.

The very first question for early Greek thinkers was “what stuff is reality made of?” They successively attempted to reduce nature in general to water, to air, to fire, until one of them hit upon the right answer to the question by saying that the primary stuff which reality is made of is being. Parmenides speculated that whatever else the source of nature maybe, all at least have in common is this property, i.e. that they are. He presented a series of logical dichotomies between being and none being; that all of that which is, is being and every thing is different from being, is not. There is no intermediate condition between being and non-being, “being is”, and “it is impossible that non-being is not”, in other words; either being exists or it does not exist.

“Further it is unmoved, in the hold of great chain, without beginning or end, since generation and destruction have
completely disappeared and true belief has rejected them. It lays the same, abiding in the same state and by itself; accordingly it abides fixed in the same spot. For powerful necessity hold it in confining bonds which restrain it in all sides. Therefore, divine right does not permit being to have any end; but it is lacking in nothing, for it lacked anything it would lack every thing.¹

The corollary of Parmenides’ philosophy is a denial of change and motion, denial of many different types of being including sensible and insensible beings and a denial of many different levels of knowledge. Parmenides tried to have a union of being in bodily mass, so he denied every other being.

The theory of gradation of being is the solution to Parmenides’s mistake in considering being as only an intellectual perception and neglecting sensible perception. Sadra said that in so far as we talk about things as actually existing; being is predicated of all things that exist. In this most generic sense, being applies to things univocally, signifying their common state of existence. He goes on to argue that the

predication of being takes place with varying degrees of “intensity” and gradation (tashkik)\(^1\).

Plato considers that the being is always a basic reality made up of “forms” shared in many properties that Parmenides has not elaborated. Instead of being and non-being of Parmenides- that is- reality and appearance, he argues even in appearance there is a measure of reality or the being. There are degrees of reality or beings proportioned to the degree of knowledge. Later, we will discuss the correspondence between his ontology and epistemology.

He believes in the relativity of sense and sense perception. For him knowledge and real being or the object of knowledge must be real and absolute. True knowledge is infallible and attainable, but sense perception is fallible and unreliable, because its objects are always in a state of becoming. The object of true knowledge must be stable and abiding, fixed, grasped clearly i.e. universal.

He asks what relation real beings or Ideas have to particulars or things in this world, and what relation they have

\(^1\). Asfar, I. P. 36-7
to each other. Plato considers that Ideas can be understood through an intelligible effort, but they are neither depending on our mind nor on sensible things. There is scarcely other way for Plato to prove transcendence of Ideas by saying that they are in things, instances embody them, copy of them, partake of them, manifest them in different degrees. As much as they are in particulars, they are outside of them.

There is a hierarchy communion between the Forms, the generic Form pervades the subordinate specific Forms, combining with each other, yet retaining its own unity. The higher Form is richer containing more Forms, while it is most abstract. The highest is the Form, the Good, the Beauty and the One are in union and all identical. Plato is more concerned with solving the problem of the unity in the many in the world of Ideas than in the world of particulars. He tried to solve this problem in the world of Ideas by creating a descending hierarchy process.

The implications of Plato’s philosophy are: first, Ideas do not explain why the things exist, even if the existence of things is explained by ideas, their motion and becoming is not explained. Second, he put the essence, the Ideas, outside of
things. Third, he has not justified the relation of Ideas to particulars, except by metaphor.

According to Sadr’s philosophy Plato’s Idea or real being is a mental state. Plato could not ignore sensible things; therefore, dualism remains in his philosophy.

Sadra analyzes whole existence as union and as a single reality. “He saw the whole of existence not as objects which exist or existents but a single reality (Wujud) whose delimitations by various quiddities (mahiyyat) gives the appearance of a multiplicity which exists within various existences being independent apparently of each other.”¹ He analyzed cause and effect relation in a one-side relationship as illumination relation, in that effects have their effectual degree while we look at them, but they are in a pure annihilation and being in comparison their relation to the cause. In this case it does not leave any room for duality.

Since, for Aristotle, being is the subject of the science of metaphysics (Metaphysics1031a) he discusses of being in different parts of his Metaphysics as “being qua being”, but it is not very clear what exactly he has in mind when he speaks of it.

¹. Hossein Ziai, In A History of Islamic Philosophy, Majid Fakhry, P.646
The first distinction is between” being qua being”, which is the subject of metaphysic, and the individual beings, which are the subject of other sciences. This is the view in *Metaphysics* (*1003a*), but Aristotle is not consistent on the point. Else where (*Methphysics1026a; Physics192a, 194b*) he states that metaphysics studies being that is separate and unmoving, being is defined not univocally or generally, but analogously through all the categories, being is like ‘One’ and ‘Good’; elsewhere he says being is some thing essential which falls within the categories.

We can say there is no contradiction on this issue in Aristotle. Sometimes in *Metaphysics* he has mentioned that subject of Metaphysics is the whole being and sometimes he says it is the first causes of reality and rarely he illustrates it is an independent being as certain part of reality.

Aristotle is against Plato in many important points, “not only of details, but of method and outlook, where Plato is rationalistic, dogmatic and contemptuous of the world of sense, Aristotle is empirical, cautious, and anxious to consult all relevant facts and opinions before making up his mind”¹. Aristotle becomes close to Plato by saying that Plato was correct in supposing that the

¹. O’Conner, P. 47
only possible objects of genuine science must be general or universal, but he goes far from Plato by saying that, these objects cannot exist apart from concrete substances. For him fundamental realities are individual things, which are, required for the existence of species and in the various categories.

When Aristotle speaks of reality and real being, what he has in mind is something quite different from Plato’s Idea. To him reality is what he sees and what he can touch: this man, this flower. It is usually believed that Aristotle contradicted himself when he states, that the individual object, the compound of universal and particular, is substance, but later on allows a real, superiority to the universal or “form” and like Plato says that the universal is what alone is absolutely real, that is, the universal is substance.

Substance has no contrary and the most distinctive mark of substance appears to admit variation of other categories. It is different from Ideas of Plato that admit degree. In Aristotle one substance cannot be more or less truly substance than another. No single substance admits of varying degrees within it. For instance, one particular substance, ‘man’, cannot be more or less man either than himself at some other time or than some
other man. One man cannot be more man than another, as that which is white may be more or less white.

One implication of Aristotle’s philosophy is dualism which was a failure of Plato. Aristotle realizes it and attempted to overcome it. Then he says that the universal and the particular do not lie apart in different worlds. They are inseparable, embodied in substance in the form of matter and Form. God is absolute form. But if Aristotle wants to show that there is matter and form in substance, “he must establish that matter necessarily comes out from Form and is produced by it, otherwise, they are two entities equally ultimate, prima, existing side by side from all eternity. If this world is combined of matter and form, Aristotle must show that all causes, formal, final, efficient and matter causes can be identify, but he leaves matter cause as potential and does not show that matter must deduce from other causes, “where does this matter come from? This is the last resort this dualism of sense and thought, of matter and Idea, of ultimate and limiting.”

1. Stace, P. 281
He is called materialist because the matter in his philosophy remains as eternal substance, also his philosophy has estimated\(^1\) as idealism, because ultimate reality, that first principle, from which the entire universe flows, the end, is the principle of absolute form.

Sadra’s Being is not an investigation of the properties of things grounded in abstract considerations of existence, but a doctrine of being (\textit{al-Wujud}) in its principality. Sadra says that the principality of being is obvious and axiomatic. He gives rational proofs of the truth of principality of being in sixth ways. For instance he says that being (\textit{Wujud}) is the reality of every things and effects them, then consequences of things are derived through it, so being for its self-realization does not need of any other reality while other things including quiddities need being to be objective and come to external world through being. Being exits in virtue of itself, not by other being. So the matter does not in any way lead to an infinite regress\(^2\).

\(^1\) Stace, P. 281
\(^2\) For more details in this subjects look at: \textit{Mulla-Sadra and Comparative Studies, Islam-West Philosophical Dialogue}, Vol. 5, P-P. 230-245
Sadra says there could be “degrees in gradual increase of intensity in existence, whereas grades can not occur in quiddities. This may be explained as follows: A body which has bright red color may move towards dark red color, like an apple which is pale and little by little in an intensive and constructing movement becomes dark red, from weak color to strong color.

All movements are continuous and every continuous allows for an infinite number of limits being posited in it. If quaddity is principle, necessarily there must be various infinite species and degrees bounded between to limited parts, i.e. between the beginning and the end of a movement, but as it proved quiddity can not be different and there is no grade in it.

“On the contrary if being does have reality, it would be like a thread bringing the scattered “quidities” into order and keeping them from dispersion”.

In contrast to the ancients like Aristotle and Plato, who emphasized on the being qua being- the being-in itself, Kant tried to understand how it is scientifically possible to know things in their relationships to one another. By this shift, Kant focused on epistemology- the ability of human cognition-

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instead of the ontology, which the ancients emphasized in order to find out the nature of the being, the things-in-themselves. Reality and real being, therefore, turned from the being-in-itself and independent of men’s mind to the ability of men’s cognition.

Kant says: is it possible for metaphysics to find the same method, which is used in mathematics and natural science to achieve the certainty? It is necessary to make clear which method is acceptable in metaphysics as those two other sciences. Kant said that it is not true “we may have more success in the task of metaphysics if we suppose that objects must conform to our knowledge”.¹

He says all concepts in metaphysics and the sources of metaphysical cognition could not be empirical. Its principles must never be derived from experience, but beyond it, “and can not be analytical. Analytical proposition merely elucidate the meaning of terms and do not give any new knowledge, and cannot be deniable without any contradiction. Metaphysics is scientifically possible in a priori synthetic judgments i.e. as long as its priory concepts in our understanding can be applied to our experience. Concepts like “being”, “soul” and “God” can

¹. Kemp Smith, PP. 21-22
not be discussed scientifically, because they do not arise from experience. Metaphysical problems may will be discussed scientifically if its impression arises from experience, and then applied to our sensitive forms (space and time) and the categories in the faculty of understanding, in other words, some parts of this knowledge start from experience and some parts of that are what we receive through our own mind. He concluded that the realm of scientific metaphysics restricts to apriori synthetic judgments and if we extend our knowledge beyond that is a state of uncertainty and contradiction.

He says ‘Being’ is obviously not a “real predicate, that is, it is not a concept of something which could be added to the conception of a thing It is merely the positing of a thing, or of certain determinations, as existing in themselves. Logically, it is merely the copula of a judgment.”¹ The small word “is” adds no new predicate, but only serves to posit the predicate in its relation to the subject.”²

“By whatever and by however many predicates we may think a thing- even if we completely determine it. We do not make the least additional to the thing when we further declare

¹. Kemp Smith, B 627, P. 504
². Ibid
that this thing is. Otherwise, it would not be exactly the same thing that exists, but something more that we thought in the concept, and we could not, therefore, say that the exact object of my concept exists.”

The consequences of Kant’s philosophy is that we have no warrant for establishing a real correspondence between the worlds of reality and world of mind. Therefore, knowledge which is possible to acquire by the understanding is confined to the appearance (phenomena) of things and does not extend beyond it to things-in-themselves (noumena) and its objectivity is in accordance to structure of mind (categories and schema). Kant made a false start when he assumed in his criticism of speculative reason that whatever is universal and necessary in our knowledge must come from the mind itself, and not from the world of reality outside us, and because of this prospect, objectivity becomes subjective in his philosophy. It is true that existence does not add any concept to its object in the real world, but it increases our knowledge; if we come to know that things exists or does not exist our knowledge of that thing and its relation in things in universe will be extended.

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1. Ibid. B 628, P 565
Sadr says that it is true whenever we analyze meaning of an object with all its characters, it is obvious that meaning of the existence is not contained in its object, otherwise we may not ask whether that thing exists or not. Existence and other characters are two different concepts in our thought, when they combine one existence in the real world. Hence, we agree with Kant that existence does not add any concept to the object in real world, because their combinations are composition by way of unification and not as Kant supposed by way of annexation. There is difference between the concepts of existence with concept of other characters of that object merely in the thought. Existence is not inherent in the concept of object; otherwise the object does not need any cause for its existence. Hence, existence is not just a copula.

Generally, we can say the problem of neglecting ‘different levels of being’ in Parmenides, restricting real being in ‘Ideas,’ ‘substance’ and ‘categories’ in Plato and Aristotle, and ‘copula’ in Kant is discussed in principality of being, union and gradation of being in Sadr.