Proclus and Mulla Sadra on First Effusion

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Abstract:

Mulla Sadra
Mulla Sadra’s philosophical system is built upon the belief in unique origin of world to which all diversities can be reduced. Then First Effusion debate can be taken on in this system. According to the principle which reads “from the One nothing is effused but One”, contingent beings could not have been emanated from the Necessary Being in a horizontal fashion due to their diversity. Rather they have been effused from the Necessary in a vertical fashion and through a hierarchy of causes and effects. The first stage of the hierarchy is being represented by the First Effusion. Pre-Sadraeian theosophers regarded the First Effusion the first intellect in vertical chain of intellects. Mulla Sadra have two theories of the First Effusion. In some of his books he introduces the first intellect as the first entity effused from the Necessary keeping his pace with his own predecessors. But in some other works like Asfar he describes the Ever-unfolding existence as the First Effusion and takes it to be his final position. Having replaced existential gradation with causation and also individual unity of existence with existential gradation, Mulla Sadra asserts that the First Effusion could only be the Ever-unfolding Existence which is a manifestation of Divine Essence not an independent existence. It is indeed nothing but the Divine Essence although in the form of its first manifestation. Thus the Ever-unfolding Existence has three distinguished attributes which make it qualified to stand in direct relationship with Divine Essence.

1- Existential (and not conceptual) universality and comprehensiveness which enables this existence to include the other manifestations.
2- Lack of particular limitation and determination; this is why it can reveal itself to every being in its own peculiar existential terms.
3- Having unity while being imbued in diversity and being diversified while having unity (due to its true but shadowy unity) (Rahimian, 1383: 187).

First Intellect and the Ever-unfolding Existence differ in some points as follows:

I- The Ever-unfolding Existence is the first manifestation not the first effect.
II- Theosophers state that First Intellect gets effused first and then it comes to other intellects down to the world of nature. While in Mulla Sadra’s view the first and the last effusions are both the Ever-unfolding Existence which is unique in the sense of true and shadowy unity.
III- The existential mode of Ever-unfolding Existence is relational as conceived in Transcendent Theosophy. While First Intellect has an independent existence as theosophers claim.

Proclus
Proclus is one of the most important neo-Platonists after Plotinus. His key contribution to neo-Platonism is shedding light on a new stage between the One and intellect called existence which is the first effused from the One in Proclus’ view. The existence which Proclus describes as the first effused from the One has the following qualities:
1- This existence stands between the One as the First Origin and Intellect which is followed by soul and nature in the hierarchy of worlds.
2- As the First Effusion, existence has the quality of unity in diversity and diversity in unity.
3- The One as the origin of existence and other stages of hierarchy stands above the existence as such.
4- Existence as the First Effusion has the simplicity and purity which an ever-comprehensive entity needs to contain all perfections of other beings which are supposed to follow it as their source of effusion. Existence has the quality of enjoying unity along with diversity and vice versa and this makes it qualified for being the effusing source of other beings.

Comparative Remarks

Similarities: 1- Both have innovations as regards to the issue of First Effused as compared to their predecessors. Neo-Platonists before Proclus did not believe in a stage called existence. Before Mulla Sadra theosophers regarded the First Intellect as first effused although the Ever-unfolding existence had been already broached by mystics but Mulla Sadra approached it in discursive terms and articulated its philosophical requirements. 2- Both philosophers believe in the principle of “from the One nothing is effused but one” and the principle of cognition of cause and effect. 3- Both believe in the “Simple Truth” maxim. 4- The ever-unfolding existence of First Effused, according to Mulla Sadra and Proclus, has the significant quality of unity in diversity and diversity in unity.

Differences: 1- Mulla Sadra’s discourse on the First Effused is more discursive than that of Proclus. In fact Proclus discusses the issue in descriptive terms. 2- Mulla Sadra claims that from the Necessary Being just one thing has been effused and that thing is an ever-unfolding existence which unfolds itself in the stage of intellect in the form of intellect, in the stage of soul it becomes unfolded in the form of soul and so on and so forth. While Proclus believes in a causal order where though existence is the first effused but after it stands the stage of intellect then comes the stage of soul and final stage is that of nature. These whole stages are all independent from existence as the First Effused.

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