Contradiction in the Views of Shahid Mutahhari and Hegel
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Introduction

In various works, Shahid Mutahhari refers to the philosophy of G. W. F. Hegel (1770–1831). Because of the notorious obscurity of Hegel’s own works, the proper understanding of which requires such prerequisites as familiarity with the Enlightenment and Romantic movements at the early 19th century, and because Shahid Mutahhari did not have access to Hegel’s original works, the views of the commentators on whom he relied gave him a picture of Hegel’s philosophy that is disputable from the perspectives of more recent scholarship. Nevertheless, Shahid Mutahhari was able to make some insightful observations about Hegel’s philosophy and pioneering comparisons between Hegelian and Islamic philosophies.

Although there are interpretations of Hegelian philosophy that are inconsistent with several principles of Islamic philosophy, more recent commentaries on Hegel’s works allow for a greater degree of reconciliation than is commonly assumed to be feasible. In order to demonstrate this thesis, it would be necessary to review all of Shahid Mutahhari’s references to Hegel, his sources, and the relevant texts in Hegel’s corpus. Here, I will focus on a single short article by Shahid Mutahhari: “The Principle of Contradiction in Islamic Philosophy.” Before examining this article, I will offer a brief review of how
contradiction is treated in some of Hegel’s works.

**Hegel’s View of Contradiction**

Hegel’s fascination with contradictions begins early in his career. From 1793 to 1796, Hegel lived in Bern, and while there he wrote a long essay (published posthumously) about Christianity in which he expresses the idea that there is a conflict or contradiction at the core of the Christian religion, for its moral teachings are universal demands of reason, but they are presented in a particular historical form as requirements of a cult. He goes on to discuss how this conflict might be resolved, but inconclusively. In the same essay, he discusses several other conflicts within the Christian religion. Religion requires one to have a certain kind of emotional reaction to various events and narrations; but these emotions are supposed to be sincere, which is incompatible with making them a requirement.

This leads to a kind of self–deception in which the person is divided from herself. A couple years later, he wrote another essay, “The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate” in which the themes of conflict and deception are again prominent. Hegel finds the opening of the Gospel of John in which God and Logos are related to be deceptive and apparently contradictory. He proposes that in order to overcome the contradiction, these sorts of statements of creed need to be understood in a different way than ordinary assertions, different from the sort of analysis one finds in Kant, the work of reflective understanding, for “everything expressed about the divine in the language of reflection is *eo ipso* contradictory.” He then turns to consider how apparent contradictions are generated in language in which one may attribute to a stage of a whole attributes that properly belong to the whole. He surprisingly gives an example of synecdoche from Arabic rhetoric, which allows any given member of an Arab tribe to be taken for the tribe. He also gives other examples and points out that objective and subjective attributions may conflict. All of his efforts, however, revolve around the problem of how to think about Christian doctrines and moral teachings, especially the doctrines of the Incarnation and Trinity, in such a manner that they do not remain at the level of simple contradictions.

While puzzles over Christian doctrine provide one focus of Hegel’s early thoughts on contradiction, another focal point is Kant’s critical philosophy. In his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, Kant argued that when reason attempts to employ concepts derived from experience to make metaphysical claims, this will result in conflicts of reason, *Antinomien*. Kant called the argument from the antinomies to the admission of the limitations of reason *die transzendentale Dialektik*. Hegel, contrary to Kant, thought that the conflicts presented in the antinomies could be overcome, but to do so, one must move from dialectical to speculative reasoning.

In Kant’s first *Critique*, the contradictions exposed through the dialectic function as a kind of *reductio ad absurdum*. From the contradictions of the antinomies, we are to conclude that there was a misuse of concepts that led us to these absurdities. For Hegel, on the other hand, the contradictions reveal limitations not only in the applications of thought, but in the nature of everything that is finite. For Kant,
the dialectic results in a rejection of speculative theology, and the grounding of theology in practical reasoning. For Hegel, the interminability of the dialectic justifies the speculative acknowledgement of that which transcends the stages of the dialectic, although this justification requires the traversing of these stages; and Hegel thought there was some hint of this in Kant’s third Critique.

An early statement of Hegel’s views of the dialectic and the ability of the intellect to transcend its contradictions is to be found in a “Fragment of a System” (1800). Hegel observes that no matter what concepts one employs, it is always possible to introduce opposites that mutually exclude one another, and in doing so, to reveal their limitations. Even when one seeks to introduce an inclusive concept that will capture the whole in a synthesis of opposites, this new concept can be opposed to another defined through its negation. Hegel continues:

Reflection is thus driven on and on without rest; but this process must be checked once and for all by keeping in mind that, for example, what has been called a union of synthesis and antithesis is not something propounded by the understanding or by reflection but has a character of its own, namely, that of being a reality beyond all reflection. Within the living whole there are posited at the same time death, opposition, and understanding, because there is posited a manifold that is alive itself and that, as alive, can posit itself as a whole.7

Hegel considers Kant to have moved from reflection toward a deeper form of philosophy, speculative philosophy, in Kant’s Kritik der Urteilskraft (Critique of the Power of Judgment), because in this work, Kant discusses the limitations of reflective reasoning with regard to the natural teleology of organisms, where the parts are for the sake of the whole, although this has no mechanical explanation.8 Reasoning on the basis of reflections about empirical findings are not sufficient to explain the unity of an organism or how the parts of an organism are united in a whole so that the functions of the parts serve to benefit the whole.

In the first volume of the Encyclopedia,9 Hegel discusses three kinds of logical activity: (1) abstraction; (2) dialectic; (3) speculation. Abstraction is the ability of the mind to find similarities among various things and to unify them under a universal concept. This is the work of the understanding (Verstand), as Hegel uses this term. It is a necessary first step in logic. Dialectic is the work of reason or intellect (Vernunft) in a negative manner that exposes antinomies and tensions in the abstracted concepts given by understanding. Speculation is the positive work of the intellect that enables one to overcome the antinomies through the introduction of new concepts. So, in religion, we might begin with an abstract concept of God as a limitless being. Through dialectical reasoning, one discovers that the limitless being must be limited by the qualification of being without limits and being separate from all finite beings. Finally, speculation allows an understanding of divinity that is absolute, limitless yet transcending even the limitations of the qualification of being limitless, not separate from creatures, but not identical to them. Hegel goes on to identify speculation with mysticism:

It should also be mentioned here that the meaning of the speculative is to be understood as being the
same as what used in earlier times to be called “mystical” [Mystiche], especially with regard to the religious consciousness and its content.  

A third theme of Hegel’s discussions of dialectic is moral conflict. This theme occurs in Hegel’s early discussions of tragedy, which he explains as a conflict of contradictory principles. The stage of dialectic occurs when attempts are made to annul or dominate one principle in favor of an opposing principle. In speculation, the two opposing principles are considered to be aspects of a totality. These themes of dialectic, negativity, and contradiction persist through the course of Hegel’s career.

The above remarks fall short of a summary of Hegel’s view of contradiction; but they may serve as an introduction to his position that gives particular emphasis to the religious dimension of the issue. Hegel’s views of contradiction have three major sources: the tragic, the Kantian, and the Christian traditions, especially Christian mysticism. From Greek tragedy, Hegel finds an asymmetric conflict between principles that can only be reconciled when prioritized in a more comprehensive scheme. From Kant and Fichte, Hegel introduces the dialectic as a path along which we are driven by contradictions as we attempt to overcome them. From the mystics, Hegel offers speculative thought as a way to overcome the contradictions inherent in the finite.

Shahid Mutahhari’s View of Contradiction

Shahid Mutahhari’s essay begins with an introduction, followed by a section on Hegel’s philosophy, and an account of contradiction from the perspective of the tradition of Islamic philosophy.

Mutahhari begins by pointing out the importance of the topic of conflict and opposition, the appreciation of which is deepened by scientific and philosophical study. He observes that ancient forms of dualism were a reaction to conflict that sought to assign separate sources for good and evil. According to the monotheistic faiths, however, all things have a common origin regardless of whether they are considered good or bad; and as parts of a divinely ordered whole, even ugly things contribute to the beauty of the whole.

According to the Qur’an, conflict, opposition and diversity are signs of God and of divine wisdom. Mutahhari cites several ayāt of the Qur’an to demonstrate this; and he quotes some beautiful Persian poetry that reflects these divine teachings.

After these remarks, Shahid Mutahhari turns to modern Western philosophy. He claims that some modern philosophers take the extreme position that all motion and evolution is brought about by contradiction. Indeed, in his Science of Logic, Hegel does claim that motion arises from contradictions:

> But ordinary experience itself testifies that there do exist at least a great many contradictory things, contradictory dispositions etc., of which the contradiction is present not in any external reflection but right in them. Nor is contradiction to be taken as an abnormality which happens only here and there, but it is
rather the negative in its essential determination, the principle of all self-movement which consists in nothing else than in the display of contradiction. External, sensuous motion is itself contradiction’s immediate existence. Something moves, not because now it is here and there at another now, but because in one and the same now it is here and not here; because in this here it is and is not at the same time. One must concede to the dialecticians of old the contradictions which they pointed to in motion; but what follows from them is not that motion is not but that it is rather contradiction as existent.  

In his article, Mutahhari goes to some lengths of mathematical explanation to show how an analysis of motion will not result in a moment at which a thing is both here and not here. If this were not bad enough, Hegel also makes claims about the Law of Non-contradiction that seem quite absurd. In the Science of Logic, Hegel openly rejects the Laws of Identity, Non-contradiction, and Excluded Middle; and the Law of Non-contradiction is openly rejected in an early essay on skepticism. In this essay, written when Hegel was thirty–two years old, there is a discussion about how the divine essence can imply existence, given that, by definition, the essence is that which is abstracted from existence. Although the discussion in the essay is about Spinoza, it is a discussion with a long history.

In Islamic philosophy, the problem was solved by Avicenna without any disruption in the principles of formal logic, and in Christian philosophy, we find a similar solution inspired by Avicenna in Aquinas, namely, that if “essence” is defined as excluding existence, God will be said to have no essence, and if essence is defined in such a way that existence is not necessarily excluded, it will be proved that with contingent beings, but not with regard to God, essence excludes existence. Hegel, however, seems to think that the solution to the problem requires a rejection of the Law of Non-contradiction! After citing several other such contradictions, he claims that all the discussions of divinity permit the framing of contradictory propositions, and that this is the principle of skepticism, namely, that for any thesis, one can equally well defend its opposite. He concludes:

The so called “principle of contradiction” is thus so far from possessing even formal truth for Reason, that on the contrary every proposition of Reason must in respect of concepts contain a violation of it.

So, Hegel’s strategy is to go along with the skeptics and admit that for various philosophical problems, especially those pertaining to theological issues, one can argue cogently for either side of the proposition. But instead of taking this as warrant for the skeptic’s suspension of belief, he advises rejecting the Law of Non-contradiction.

Mutahhari writes that some of the modern philosophers have gone so far as to deny the Law of Non-contradiction which some of the ancients considered to be the most basic principle of thought, the “mother of all theorems” (um al-qaḍāyā). Despite his explicit statements of rejection of the Law of Non-contradiction, Hegel’s interpreters are not convinced that he was really denying the ancient principle of formal logic. Regardless of whether these interpretations are correct or not, the reasons that Hegel gives in the review about skepticism, the contradictions that arise in the course of theological discussion, seem
pathetic if meant to demonstrate the invalidity of a principle of formal logic. They are dubious because it is so easy to come up with resolutions to the problems Hegel mentions. These sorts of difficulties are not of a magnitude that should lead one to abandon the laws of logic! This leads one to suspect that there is more to Hegel’s rejection of the laws of logic than meets the eye; either that or Hegel was mad.

The latter alternative is the explanation that was favored by Sir Karl Popper, who wrote of Hegel: “the reason why he wishes to admit contradictions is that he wants to stop rational argument, and with it scientific and intellectual progress.”  

17 Popper goes on to claim that the “Prussian method” in Hegel’s “madness” is at the service of absolute monarchy. Popper’s view of Hegel is notorious; and a number of Hegel interpreters have taken the trouble of pointing out Popper’s misunderstandings and misleading quotations taken out of context.  

18 Yet when Popper’s book was first published in 1946, it was generally well received by British intellectuals, and Gilbert Ryle wrote a review of the book in which he expressed the idea that Popper was only stating the obvious by revealing Hegel’s motives and fallacies.  

19 In the same year that Popper’s book counted Hegel among the enemies of an open society, A. J. Ayer wrote: “Few men, indeed, can ever have reasoned worse than Hegel, the arch pontiff of the nineteenth century....”  

20 Russell finishes his chapter on Hegel in his History of Western Philosophy with the wry observation that Hegel’s philosophy “illustrates an important truth, namely, that the worse your logic, the more interesting the consequences to which it gives rise.”  

21 The reaction to Hegel, that he was a mad proto-fascist, can only be understood in terms of a tendency to imagine a philosophical source of error for the politics of Hitler’s third Reich during the war years.

Shahid Mutahhari is not caught up in the fever of war; unlike Popper, Mutahhari’s reception of Hegel is logically acute and fair-minded. His main purpose is to compare Hegel’s views with those found in Islamic literature and philosophy, but for this to be effective, he would have to display a credible familiarity with Hegelian and Marxist thought, for the struggle that occupied the intellectuals in Iran of his generation was with Marxism. Marxists based their views on an interpretation of dialectical method, a method Marx described as “standing on its head” in the philosophy of Hegel. Marx claimed to set the dialectic right-side-up on the basis of his discovery of “the rational kernel within the mystical shell” of the dialectic.  

22 Ideas of dialectical social transformations were popular among Iranian intellectuals, and not only among Marxists. Dr. Shari’ati espoused a dialectic of tawārid and shirk (monotheism and idolatry) that he used in a popular interpretation of the story of Cain and Abel (although Shari’ati’s “dialectic” had very little to do with the Hegelian dialectic).  

23 So, when Mutahhari was invited to teach in Qom in the 1970’s, he gave lectures on the philosophy of history in which he compared Islamic views with those of Hegel, and he lectured on movement and time.  

24 The sources of information about Hegel available in Persian during the 1970’s were limited.  

25 There was nothing translated into Persian of Hegel until Hamid Enayat’s translation of the master/slave section of the Phänomenologie appeared in 1352/1973, and his translation of the preface to the lectures on the
philosophy of history, *Reason and History*, which was published the following year. A few years later, he translated Walter Stace’s *Hegel*, although Stace’s interpretation of Hegel is hardly sympathetic. In another work, Stace writes:

*Hegel, having received this idea [the identity of opposites] from the past, proceeded to make a terrible mess of it. He supposed that what he had found was a logical principle and tried to make it the basis of a new superlogic. This was absurd because the identity of opposites is not a logical but a definitely antilogical idea. It is the expression of a nonrational element in the human mind. In trying to make a logic of it, Hegel did actually fall into a species of chicanery. For every one of his supposed logical deductions was performed by the systematic misuse of language, by palpable fallacies, and sometimes, as Russell has pointed out, by simply punning on words. It was this chicanery, which was quickly exposed, and which was the chief, though not the only, cause of the downfall of the Hegelian philosophy.*

An example of the impact of Marxism and the lack of access to Hegel’s own writings can be found in Mutahhari’s attribution of historical determinism to Hegel, which he supports by reference to a quotation from Engels (this taken out of context from the translation of a popular book on Marxism), while current scholarship identifies Hegel as a kind of compatibilist.

If the world is understood as undergoing changes through its history, whether these changes are understood as directed by the laws of a Marxist historical determinism or through divinely appointed laws and destiny, the philosophical problem arises of how freedom of the will and responsibility are possible given the causal structure of the world. Shahid Mutahhari refers to a popular book translated into Persian to attribute an inadequate form of historical determinism to Hegel and Marx:

*Hegel, and Marx following him, accept historical determinism. According to Hegel and Marx, freedom is nothing but consciousness of historical necessity. In the book Marx and Marxism, the following passage of Engels is quoted from his work Anti‑Dühring:*  

*Hegel was the first to state correctly the relation between freedom and necessity. To him freedom is the appreciation of necessity. Necessity is blind only in so far as it is not understood. Freedom does not consist in the dream of independence from natural laws, but in the knowledge of these laws and in the possibility, this gives of systematically making them work towards definite ends. This holds good in relation both to the laws of external nature and those which govern the bodily and mental existence of men themselves.*

If the world is understood as undergoing changes through its history, whether these changes are understood as directed by the laws of a Marxist historical determinism or through divinely appointed laws and destiny, the philosophical problem arises of how freedom of the will and responsibility are possible given the causal structure of the world. Both Hegel and Mulla Sadra propose answers to this problem that attempt to reconcile determinism with human freedom and responsibility by tracing the source of human action through the agent’s own choice, regardless of whatever external causes might determine
In “The Principle of Contradiction,” Mutahhari does not directly refer to the works of Hegel or Stace, nor to the Iranian Marxists to whom he refers in earlier works. Instead he cites the Persian translations of several books of Paul Foulquié (1893–1983) who was a Jesuit existentialist whose philosophy was aligned with that of Louis Lavelle (1883–1951) and to the Persian translation of Will Durant’s *The Story of Philosophy*. Following Foulquié, Mutahhari claims that Hegel formulated the triad of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, and he quotes Foulquié to the effect that, contrary to a widespread misperception, Hegel did not *invent* this triad, for it had been used by Fichte and Schelling, but Hegel considered it to be “the ultimate explanation of reality.”

In 1958, Gustav Mueller wrote a frequently cited article that explains exactly where the triad of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis originates: “The Hegel Legend of ‘Thesis–Antithesis–Synthesis’”. Mueller’s article shows that Foulquié is wrong about the triad, as are countless other popular descriptions of Hegel’s dialectic: not only is Hegel not the inventor of this triad, the words “thesis, antithesis, synthesis” never appear together in any of Hegel’s writings! As an example of misunderstanding Hegel’s dialectic, Mueller cites Walter Stace, who claims that Hegel’s dialectic is the method of thesis—antithesis—synthesis, and then faults Hegel for not consistently using his own method! Mueller can find only one place in Hegel’s own writings where an allusion is made to this “triplicity”: in the preface to the *Phänomenologie*; although Beiser claims that even here, Hegel is not alluding to thesis—antithesis—synthesis; rather his target is the triadic form of Kant’s table of categories, which, after praising for engendering a scientific approach to philosophy, Hegel condemns as a formulaic method: “but there is almost no use in holding that the triadic form has any scientific rigor when we see it reduced to a lifeless schema, to a mere façade, and when scientific organization itself has been reduced to a tabular chart.” Mueller refers to the triad of thesis—antithesis—synthesis as being “Fichtean,” but Beiser observes:

*Although Kant’s antinomies were the inspiration for Hegel’s dialectic, Hegel never used Kant’s method of exposition of thesis and antithesis. It has been said that this method was used by Fichte and Schelling, and then by extension wrongly attributed to Hegel; but it corresponds to nothing in Fichte or Schelling, let alone Hegel.*

Now that there are searchable collections of the works of Hegel and other major philosophers, it is fairly easy for anyone to confirm that Hegel never endorsed the triad falsely attributed to him, and that it is not to be found in Fichte. Mueller points out that in the 1817 student notes edited and published as Hegel’s *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Hegel does mention the triad of thesis—antithesis—synthesis to describe the arrangement of Kant’s table of categories and the progression of the three *Critiques* but even here, there is no endorsement, but rather an expression of dissatisfaction with the rigidity of the triadic framework.

Mueller claims to have “finally discovered” the source of the error of attributing the
thesis—antithesis—synthesis method to Hegel:

In the winter of 1835–36, a group of Kantians in Dresden called on Heinrich Moritz Chalybäus, professor of philosophy at the University of Kiel, to lecture to them on the new philosophical movement after Kant. They were older, professional men who in their youth had been Kantians, and now wanted an orientation in a development which they distrusted; but they also wanted a confirmation of their own Kantianism. Professor Chalybäus did just those two things. His lectures appeared in 1837 under the title Historische Entwicklung der speculativen Philosophie von Kant bis Hegel, Zu näherer Verständigung des wissenschaftlichen Publikums mit der neuesten Schule. The book was very popular and appeared in three editions. In my copy of the third edition of 1843, Professor Chalybäus says (p. 354): “This is the first trilogy: the unity of Being, Nothing and Becoming … we have in this first methodical thesis, antithesis, and synthesis … an example or schema for all that follows.” This was for Chalybäus a brilliant hunch which he had not used previously and did not pursue afterwards in any way at all. But Karl Marx was at that time a student at the University of Berlin and a member of the Hegel Club where the famous book was discussed. He took the hunch and spread it into a deadly, abstract machinery. Other left–Hegelians, such as Arnold Ruge, Ludwig Feuerbach, Max Stirner use “thesis, antithesis, synthesis” just as little as Hegel.

Although most commentators now cite Mueller’s article in refutation of “the legend” that Hegel’s method is one of thesis—antithesis—synthesis, the legend continues to find defenders. Even if Hegel does not use these terms, and even if his dialectic is not a method with preset rules that can be mechanically applied, one may find elements in Hegel’s dialectic that fit the pattern. The countless writers who have described Hegel’s dialectic in this way were not merely repeating Marx but confirming what they understood from their own readings of Hegel. So, the fact that Foulquié describes Hegel’s dialectic as one of thesis—antithesis—synthesis does not mean that his interpretation of Hegel should be thrown into the dustbin of history, even if we agree with the recent interpreters, like Beiser and Pinkard, who convincingly argue that Hegel’s dialectic cannot be reduced and was not intended to be reducible to any fixed pattern or method.

Regarding Hegel’s rejection of the Law of Non-contradiction, Shahid Mutahhari is insightful despite the limitations of his sources. Although he introduces Hegel as the “champion of the philosophy of contradiction” (qahramān-e falsafeh-ye taḍād), he discerns:

_Hegel himself, at the same time, understood this truth: what he named “the reconciliation of contradictories” is other than that which all rational people know to be impossible._

Accordingly, we should expect that when Hegel denies the Law of Non-contradiction, he means by this something other than what is found in the treatises on logic. Why, then, did Hegel describe what he was doing in a way that could so easily lead to misunderstanding? In this regard, Mutahhari makes a remark that may be more insightful than intended: “This sort of claim is more similar to a joke than to a serious [assertion]...” This point is verified in a recent study by Karin de Boer, who writes: “In my view, Hegel...
here [where he denies the Law of Non-contradiction] ironically couches his conception of contradiction in the metaphysical language he is intending to overcome."\footnote{46} It is Hegel’s use of irony that may be at the root of the comment that his claims seem more like a joke than a serious assertion. Of course, jokes can be told for serious purposes, as is often the case with irony. According to the observation of Mutahhari, there are two principles:

(1) the Law of Non-contradiction of classical logic (LNC), which is formulated in symbolic logic as \( \neg(\neg A \land A) \), but in Aristotle’s more metaphysical formulation is: “It is impossible for the same attribute at once to belong and not to belong to the same thing in the same relation.” (Metaphysics \( \Gamma \), 1005b); and

(2) what de Boer calls the principle of self-contradiction and describes as an asymmetrical conflict between a concept and its historical manifestation.\footnote{47}

The fact that concepts develop in an organic way through the history of philosophy due to disharmonies and tensions that arise in the way these concepts are understood is no license to disregard (LNC). Likewise, we may distinguish two kinds of negation: (1) the kind of negation that is discussed in classical logic texts, which applies to a true proposition to yield a false one and to a false proposition to yield a true one; and (2) the kind of negation that occurs in Hegel’s Logik, which is a relationship of conceptual difference, tension, or dissonance. Hence, in formal logic, the negation of a negation brings one back to the original unnegated proposition; while in Hegel’s system, the negation of the negation of a concept will generally be different from the original concept.\footnote{48} The logic of Hegel’s negation, thus, demonstrates that what he calls “negation” is a form of opposition other than that found in the principles of formal logic; and that the law of non-contradiction that he denies is only the admission of conflicts and oppositions rather than contradictions in the sense denied by LNC.

Much of the blame for the confusion that is widespread about Hegel’s view of contradictions must rest with Hegel’s own manner of writing. He presupposes a familiarity with Kant’s discussion of the concepts of reflection in the first Critique, in which Kant takes aim at Leibniz and Locke for their excessively rationalistic and empiricist views of concepts, respectively, and suggests that opposition can occur not only by formal contradiction, but “wherever one reality combined with another in one subject annuls the other’s effect.”\footnote{49} For Hegel, “contradictions” arise when both general concepts and their particular instantiations are considered, as, for example, in his treatment of the concept of religion in his Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion, and in his consideration of the development of pure concepts in science and philosophy in the Logik.

Both Kant\footnote{50} and Hegel\footnote{51} appeal to the image of different factors in mechanics to explain how the opposition takes place that Hegel calls a “contradiction.”

Mutahhari’s third insight about the Hegelian notion of contradiction is that it is related to the paradoxes of the mystics. When Mutahhari surveys discussions in the Islamic tradition that might possibly be thought to contain affirmations of contradictions, he finds examples in mystical poetry, such as a couplet about
rays of sunlight that are both separate and not separate from the sun (chon nur ke az mehr joda hast va joda nist).\textsuperscript{52} Hegel also uses the metaphor of light in his \textit{Logik}:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Just as the light of nature is not a something, nor is it a thing, but its being is rather only its shining, so manifestation is self-identical absolute actuality.}\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

Shahid Mutahhari even finds a poem that could serve as an epigraph for Hegel’s \textit{Logik}:

\begin{quote}
عاقل زهست گویدو عارف زنیستی مین در میان آب و کیل هستم و نیستم
\end{quote}

\textit{The man of reason speaks of being, the mystic of nothingness; I, between water and mud, both am and am not.}\textsuperscript{54}

\textbf{Reconciling Contradictory Views of Contradiction}

The points mentioned above indicate several lines along which the dialogue initiated by Shahid Mutahhari between Hegel and Mulla Sadra could be extended to a broader discussion of Hegel’s philosophy and Islamic philosophy in the tradition of Mulla Sadra.\textsuperscript{55} Both Hegel and Sadra take steps in their philosophies to incorporate the views of the mystics of their own traditions. Both develop philosophical systems that serve theological purposes. Likewise, both the Christian mystical tradition on which Hegel draws and the theoretical mysticism or \textit{'irfān}, that inspires Mulla Sadra were accused by their opponents of pantheism. In both traditions, claims are made that superficially seem to deny LNC, although neither rejects formal logic in practice. Both consider that, as Shahid Mutahhari puts it, being and nothingness embrace one another in becoming. Nevertheless, Shahid Mutahhari expresses the opinion that despite such apparent similarities, “the foundations and roots of these two modes of thought are completely different, and they have emerged from completely different origins.”\textsuperscript{56} If we consider the foundations and roots to be in their immediate histories, this is undeniable. If we consider more remote foundations and roots, however, we will find that both draw upon Aristotle, religion, and mysticism. These common foundations were obscured from Shahid Mutahhari’s view by the limitations of the sources on which he relied for his understanding of Hegel. Mutahhari sums up the foundational difference as follows:

\begin{quote}
In the opinion of the Islamic philosophers, especially Mulla Sadra, what possesses reality is pure being, and the determined and manifested beings derive their reality from pure being. In the opinion of these thinkers, when being reaches its weakest point in the order of its descent, it takes on a fluid quality, mixes with non-being, and takes the form of becoming. This is precisely the opposite of Hegel’s notion of being.\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}
Mutahhari takes the relatively low level of being in becoming, according to Mulla Sadra, to be opposed to Hegel’s principle of thesis—antithesis—synthesis as being the ultimate explanation of reality, according to Foulquié. The impression given by Mutahhari’s sources (especially Iranian Marxist writers who saw Hegel’s dialectic primarily as a precursor to Marx’s) is that in Hegel’s philosophy we have a metaphysics in which becoming is superior to being and nothingness; and that becoming overcomes being and nothingness through the dialectic. In Islamic philosophy, by contrast, we have a metaphysics in which pure being is the source of all things, the world of becoming is a low level of sensible reality, and nothingness is a concept that does not correspond to anything in the external world at all.

One could facetiously describe the view that Hegel and Mulla Sadra agree because they reach similar conclusions about becoming as the thesis opposed by Mutahhari’s antithesis that they are opposed in “roots and foundations” because of their different metaphysical hierarchies. The way to overcome both thesis and antithesis is to move beyond the apparent similarities and differences, not by denying them, but by extending the conversation between Mulla Sadra and Hegel begun by Shahid Mutahhari in such a manner to enable us to understand these similarities and difference and find others.

A first step in the direction of this kind of synthesis would require us to examine the treatments of being as Sein and wujūd in Hegel and Mulla Sadra, respectively. On the basis of the very different meanings these philosophers give to being and to other key terms, one might begin with a relativist strategy for synthesis. We should not assume that what Hegel means by Sein is the same as what Sadra means by wujūd. We might formulate this in either of the following ways:

Being (Sadra) ≠ being (Hegel)

wujūd ≠ Sein

Each of these terms, in Arabic and German, is notoriously ambiguous and has been used to indicate such diverse things as: reality itself, the act of existing, a universal concept that applies to everything that is. If this is right, then when Sadra and Hegel say opposite things about being, it is not because they contradict each other, but because they are not affirming and denying the same propositions.

When Mulla Sadra speaks of the primacy of existence over essence, he is not talking about the universal concept, but about something immediately present, neither universal nor particular, that is sometimes described by the admittedly flawed metaphor of something that flows into essences as water might flow into various molds. In the beginning of Hegel’s Logik, on the other hand, Hegel is discussing the concept of being, a universal. When Hegel identifies being with nothingness, he is not making the absurd statement that there is no difference between whether a particular house is or is not.

He is only pointing out that the level of abstraction of the two concepts is such that there is no determinate content to them. We could put this in Sadrean terms by observing that the concepts of being and nothingness are secondary philosophical intelligibles and not primary intelligibles of quiddity. The concepts of being and nothingness are what the Aristotelian tradition called transcendental because
they apply to things across categories, to both substances and accidents. According to Mulla Sadra, secondary intelligibles have no whatish (māhuwī) content, that is, no content reference to which would serve as even a partial answer to the Aristotelian question: “What is it?” The concepts of being and nothingness differ because of the relations they have to other concepts and because of the disjoint sets of essences that are said to be and not to be. Hegel also admits that being and nothingness differ when their relations are taken into account, but that is to pass beyond the pure indeterminate concept of being. For Hegel, the path to overcome the emptiness of the concept of being is to repeatedly negate inadequacies in successive attempts to arrive at a more adequate idea, a path that leads through ever more determinate conceptions but finally returns to being in what Hegel calls the absolute idea, which is no longer a mere abstract concept, but a concrete reality:

So the logic also has returned in the absolute idea to this simple unity which is its beginning; the pure immediacy of being, in which all determination appears at first as extinguished or removed by abstraction, is the idea that through mediation, that is, the sublation of mediation, has come to the likeness corresponding to it. The method is the pure concept that only relates to itself; it is, therefore, the simple self-reference which is being. But it now is also the fulfilled concept, the concept that comprehends itself conceptually, being as the concrete and just as absolutely intensive totality.

Hegel calls the path by which the inadequate conceptions are overcome “dialectic”. Dialectic takes somewhat different forms in Hegel’s various works. The dialectic of the Phänomenologie is centered on epistemological problems, while the Logik is developed through a dialectic of pure concepts overcome through the synthesis of their contrary and unequal determinations to constitute specific ‘definitions’ of the absolute principle of reality, or God.

Reliance on the dialectic gives Hegel’s works a narrative form composed of episodes that constitute the stages of a philosophical journey, which invokes the trope of the wayfaring of the mystic with which Hegel was thoroughly familiar through his lifelong reading of the Christian mystics, especially Eckhart (c. 1260–c. 1328) and Boehme (1575–1624).

The symbol of the mystics’ journey is common to Christian mysticism and the Ḳirān and taṣawwuf of Islam, as well as the philosophical tradition following Plato’s allegory of the cave. So, it is not surprising that writers in the Christian and Islamic worlds who were profoundly engaged with the writings of their mystical traditions should make use of the image of the journey in the presentation of their own philosophical ideas. Mulla Sadra’s magnum opus, The Four Journeys, is only the most outstanding example on the philosophical appropriation of the mystic’s journey.

In his recent study of Mulla Sadra’s philosophy, Sajjad Rizvi makes several important observations about the notion of the journey. The central point is that Mulla Sadra’s journeys are understood as paths along which existence itself is intensified. The idea that existence comes in degrees of intensity is called tashkīk. The name of Sadra’s doctrine of tashkīk al-wujūd is sometimes translated as the “gradation of being”, but Rizvi makes a good case for using “modulation of being.” Being, as Aristotle taught, is said to
be in many ways. For Sadra, these ways may be divided into concrete existence, mental existence, verbal existence, and written existence. Within each of these, being ranges over various levels of intensity. The word *tashkīk* is derived from *shakka* (he doubted), and *shakk* was used in the Arabic translations of Aristotle to translate *aporia* (ἀπορία) (literally, a lack of passage). The *aporia* are conundrums that are not readily solved, and, so, impede progress. Following Aristotle, Sadra structures his philosophy as a series of discussions of *aporias*. Rizvi explains further:

*The second level of the aporetic method concerns the problem of contradictions, paradoxes and antinomies…. a key to understanding a rich multivocal philosophical discourse through a metaphilosophical appreciation of the aims of the philosophical system…. I argue that *tashkīk* is a central guiding principle in Sadra’s metaphilosophy and permeates all branches of his philosophical system…. However, the question remains: how does *aporia* differ from a contradictory statement? Does contradiction entail the disavowal of knowledge of the subject–matter in question? How is this different from paradox and antinomy? A paradox sounds absurd yet has an argument to sustain it. An antinomy is a self–contradictory compound proposition arrived at through accepted ways of reasoning. The aporetic method does not attempt to circumvent these problems. The aporetic method is also an acknowledgement, and indeed manifestation, of the significance of the Corbinian concept of ‘coincidentia oppositorum’, a Romantic dissolution of the Law of Non–Contradiction in which One is both/and many.

*Tashkīk* is an essentially aporetic idea because it entails concepts of affirmation and scalar gradation, modulation and negation…. Affirmation as well as essential privation is asserted of every level of ontic hierarchy. The negotiation between these poles is graded and ambiguous as well, and in itself a *mushakkak* concept.

*Third, I assume that Sadrian philosophy is processual, … characterized by the primacy of process over things or substances; it regards processes as the principal category of ontological description and focuses on ‘acts of being’…. Sadrian ontology envisages things as structures of events, ‘acts of being’, and processes. Being possesses processual extension through becoming, and thus, for Sadra, the distinction is blurred since being is becoming, insofar as an essential property of being is to become, to unfold and to overflow.*

Rizvi does not compare Sadra to Hegel, but the idea that *tashkīk* provides the method for overcoming *aporias* brings it close to Hegel’s dialectic. In Hegel, dialectic provides the means of accepting what is true in previous inadequate conceptions while modifying them to take into account what is found in various instantiations of the concept. In Mulla Sadra, *tashkīk* is introduced in such a way that the higher intensities of being should include the lower levels. Oppositions at lower levels are conjoined in different aspects of the higher level of existence.

Another recent study of Sadra’s philosophy explicitly compares it with the Hegelian system. Muhammad Kemal takes the intensification of being in Sadra to be "a movement similar to the dialectic movement of
Both Hegel and Mulla Sadra reject being as an abstract concept. Mulla Sadra’s critique of Sohravardi is precisely focused on what he sees as the mistaken identification of being with the empty abstract idea. Sadra writes:

... the abstracted mental meaning is not the reality of existence (haqiqat al-wujud). Indeed, that is a mental meaning of the secondary intelligibles such as thingness, contingency, substantiality, accidentality, humanity, blackness, and other abstracted substantives by which are provided accounts of things whether real or not real. Our discourse is not of this, but of what is so designated, and this is a single simple reality... 67

Hegel often refers to God as “the absolute,” so, one way to attempt to reconcile Hegel with Mulla Sadra would be to identify Sadra’s haqiqat al-wujud (the truth or reality of existence) with Hegel’s absolute instead of with Sein (being). Hegel would agree with Mutahhari that God as the absolute is above becoming:

In the absolute itself there is no becoming, since the absolute is not being; nor does the absolute determine itself reflectively, for it is not the essence which determines itself only inwardly; and it also does not externalize itself, for it is the identity of inner and outer. 68

However, the issue is more complicated than this. Sadra and Hegel are not merely using different concepts for God; they are using historically related concepts with different interpretations. Hegel admits that being has been traditionally used as a definition for God:

When being is expressed as a predicate of the absolute, this provides the first definition of the latter: the absolute is being. This is (in the thought) the absolutely first, most abstract, and most impoverished definition. It is the definition of the Eleatics, but at the same time also the familiar one that God is the sum total [Inbegriff] of all realities. The point is that one is supposed to abstract from the limitedness inherent in every reality, so that God is nothing but the real in all reality, the supremely real. Insofar as reality already contains a reflection, this idea is expressed more immediately in what Jacobi says about the God of Spinoza, namely that he is the principium of being in all existence. 69

Thus, any attempt to reconcile Hegel with Mulla Sadra by substituting Hegel’s true infinity, or the absolute, or the idea for Sadra’s being will fail by erasing from view the opposition that Hegel explicitly sought to maintain against Spinozism. One could dismiss this by pointing out that Sadra also would reject being as fundamental if it were to be understood as a mere secondary intelligible, but Spinoza’s view of being is more than this. Of course, Spinoza’s view of being is also much different than Sadra’s; and there were other views of being, such as the Akbarian view of the personal unity of being (waadat al-wujud al-shakhsh) that both influenced Sadra and prompted him to differentiate his own position in a manner that may be compared with Hegel’s view of the inadequacy of Spinozism while acknowledging his indebtedness. Sadra and Hegel draw on Ibn ‘Arabi and Spinoza, respectively, although both are
careful to reject the pantheistic views attributed to their predecessors.

One of the major objections that reappears in criticisms of both pantheistic and neo-Platonic theologies is that these views are inconsistent with the religious teaching that God is the creator of the world. In “The Principle of Contradiction in Islamic Philosophy” Shahid Mutahhari directs a version of this criticism against Hegel. He begins, however, with the view of the Marxists that all motion has its source in conflict.

Then he asks where they might find the ultimate source of this conflict. The Marxists refer to the theory of dialectic in Hegel. At this point, Shaid Mutahhari asks:

*What would Hegel say? As long as what he says is unclear, what his followers say cannot elucidate it, and they cannot make clear what are its strong and weak points.*

The sources in Hegel’s writings that would be needed to answer this sort of question were not available to Mutahhari or to the Iranian Marxists who referred to Hegel’s dialectical method. Mutahhari alludes to this problem in the above quotation, but the exigency of offering a critique of Marxist ideology on the basis of Islamic philosophy required him to push ahead on the basis of the portrait of Hegelian philosophy that he was able to paint with the materials in the secondary sources at his disposal.

Mutahhari attributes to Hegel a conception of philosophy as explaining the world: “Hegel ... asked: What is philosophy? And he gave the answer: Philosophy is the explanation of the world of being.” In his Vorle\ungen über die Philo\ophie der Religion, Hegel gives a different answer. At the end of the lectures, he describes philosophy as arising from thinking, which leads to doubts, and continues until a reconciliation of the opposing thoughts is found.

*This reconciliation is philosophy. Philosophy is to this extent theology. It presents the reconciliation of God with himself and with nature, showing that nature, otherness, is implicitly divine, and that the raising of itself to reconciliation is on the one hand what finite spirit implicitly is, while on the other hand it arrives and this reconciliation, or brings it forth, in world history.*

Mutahhari’s strategy in “The Principle of Contradiction in Islamic Philosophy” is to present the principle of causality as developed in Mulla Sadra’s *ḥikmat al-muta’āliyah* as one that provides a more satisfactory account of the world than the Hegelian dialectic.

Hegel rejects causal proofs for the existence of a first cause, according to Mutahhari, because his view of causation is limited to the relations governed by the laws discovered in the natural sciences. Since this kind of causation is useless for providing an ultimate explanation of the world, Hegel turns to dialectic. Mutahhari then argues that some explanation is needed for why there are dialectical progressions in the world, and explanation that the Hegelians cannot provide because they have no more ultimate explanation than the dialectic. The principle of ontological causation in Islamic philosophy, can provide the needed explanation, and the principle of causation itself can be understood as being grounded in the first cause. However, Hegel does not reject the principle of causation for the reasons...
that Mutahhari attributes to him. For example, although Hegel limits the notion of causality to relations among inanimate objects and events, he does not base causal relations on laws of nature.

For Mutahhari, Hegel’s view of motion is limited to the results of causal relations among quiddities, and as such, can never provide an ultimate explanation of the world. In ḥikmat al-muta’āliyah, on the other hand, we have the principle of the fundamentality of existence (iṣālat al-wujūd), according to which essence (or quiddity, whatness, māhiyat) is dependent on existence. It is true that Hegel’s notion of causation is rather limited; but he does acknowledge a dependence of essence on being: “Essence issues from being; hence it is not immediately in and for itself but is a result of that movement.”

Mutahhari observes that in Hegel, mind and objective reality are ultimately one. He then surmises that since the dialectic may describe conceptual development, Hegel’s doctrine of the unity of mind and world must be behind his view that the world is to be explained through the dialectic. Mutahhari then attacks the view that mind and world are one. If the world and mind were one, then the way we think of things would be the way things are. But we make mistakes. Thinking something is so does not make it so. Hence, Hegel is wrong. The mind and world are not one. Anyone familiar with Hegel’s works will immediately protest that the identity of world and spirit is only the result of a long journey of the spirit and is never asserted by Hegel as a simple identity between what is thought to be and what is. Mutahhari also offers the standard refutation of subjectivist idealism, that the real would remain even if all creatures with minds were to perish. Of course, Hegel would agree, and, like Mutahhari, he rejects subjective idealism. Further comparable positions relevant to this topic could be found through an examination of Mulla Sadra’s position on the identity of the intellect and the intelligible. Sadra’s arguments in this regard are hardly a plea for subjective idealism!

Indeed, Hegel, like Mulla Sadra, can be read as elaborating Aristotelian theories of the soul; and both are keen to support Aristotle’s identity of intellect and intelligible with the intellect’s self-knowledge as it thinks forms (De an.III 4). Hegel introduces the apparent duality of subject and object within thinking as an explication of “the identity of intellect and intelligible that Aristotle affirms, and that for Hegel is a perfect example of BeInichelbsNein, thought’s being at home with itself.” In the Logik, Hegel asserts that the positive element (the negation of the negation) in the dialectic is the discovery of unity in diversity, and that truth consists precisely in this, the overcoming of the difference between thought and its object: “the sublation of the opposition between concept and reality, and the unity which is truth.”

In his book on Mulla Sadra, Muhammad Kemal finds various points of agreement between Mulla Sadra and Hegel. Nevertheless, he appears to agree with Shahid Mutahhari when he refers to “fundamental ontological differences between Hegel and Mulla Sadra’s thought.” Kemal supports his allegation that “Hegel lapses into the ‘darkness of illusion’ or ‘nihilism’ in the Heideggerian sense” by citing Hegel’s analogy of metaphysics to a diamond net:

For Hegel, reality is a range of universal thought determinations or categories: ‘Metaphysics is nothing but the range of universal thought determinations and is as it were diamond-net into which we bring
Contrary to Kemal, Hegel is certainly not here “considering reality as ‘the range of universal thought determinations’”, for his diamond net is metaphysics and not reality itself! The context of the quotation is a discussion of the differences between the methods of the science of physics and the philosophy of nature, the latter of which employs a metaphysical procedure.

Kemal’s allegation depends on an interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy according to which Hegel takes ultimate reality to consist in ideas. So, despite the points of similarity that could be taken to support the thesis that Hegelian and Islamic philosophy are in agreement, Kamal supports the antithesis that Hegel’s philosophy is fundamentally opposed to Hegel’s because the latter sees reality as constituted by ideas while Sadra’s philosophy is realist. The criticism of Hegel’s philosophy as reducing reality to thoughts has its origins in Karl Marx:

*My dialectic method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which, under the name of “the Idea,” he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurges of the real world, and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of “the Idea.” With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.*

Needless to say, neither Hegel nor anyone else has been so foolish as to think that any process of the brain could be the cause of the material world! The misunderstanding of Marx, and subsequently of Kemal, is due in part to Hegel’s unusual use of the term idea (Idee), and Hegel’s disgraceful failure to define his terms. By *idea*, Hegel does not mean a Platonic Form or a thought in someone’s mind; rather, he is indicating the aim or completion of the process of the dialectic through which the inadequacies of concepts are overcome. Both Kant and Hegel rejected mentalistic versions of idealism, such as that associated with Berkeley. Kant’s transcendental idealism held that the categories are determined by what is required in order to make true judgments about phenomena rather than by things as they are independent of observation. Hegel rejects the Kantian distinction between phenomena and things in themselves. Our concepts about the subjects of our judgments as well as the concepts we use to express judgments about these things are open to criticism. This criticism is not based on the discovery of a lack of correspondence between concept and object, but in the inadequacies that spur the dialectic in which concepts evolve or are replaced. The end toward which this process of the reformation of concepts aims is designated by Hegel as the absolute idea: “the absolute idea alone is being, imperishable life, self-knowing truth, and is all truth.”

Marx thinks that Hegel sees the relation between the real world and the idea as that of shell and kernel, a relation that he, Marx, inverts with the declaration that ideas are mere reflections of the real world. Hegel, to the contrary, rejects the dualism of world and absolute idea, and quotes some poetry from Goethe to make the point:
'Into nature's inwardness'
Oh! you philistine! – 'No created spirits steal.'
I ask you never to remind Me and mine
Of sayings of this kind.
We think: and here and there We find the centre everywhere. 'The sweet of mortal blessedness Is to taste the outer peel!'
For sixty years they've told it me, I've learnt to curse them silently; But tell me till the shadows fall: All riches from its bounty pour, Nature has neither rind
Nor core,
But everything is found in all Look to yourself, and only find Whether you are core or rind.

Hegel’s absolute idealism is neither a Berkeleyan subjective idealism nor is it a Kantian transcendental idealism; it is neither an immaterialist mentalism nor a dualism that separates phenomena from the thing-in-itself, or separates the finite from the infinite.

In fact, Hegel insists that any philosophy worthy of the name must be a form of idealism. Thales theory that everything is water is, according to Hegel, a form of idealism because it holds that there is a principle, water, in terms of which all things are related, and concepts of things that ignore the principle of water are inadequate, or do not live up to the idea. So, for Hegel, Marx's materialism would also be viewed as a kind of idealism, one that substitutes economic forces for the water in the philosophy of Thales. Hegel would view the idealisms of Thales and Marx as failures because the principles on which they are based have deficiencies that require them to be overcome through further dialectical development. Idealism, in this sense, as Hegel explicitly insists, is not contrary to realism.

Kamal discerns another fundamental difference between Mulla Sadra and Hegel in that: “Mulla Sadra does not advocate the idea of the dialectical movement of the world.” Hegel does advocate a dialectical movement of the world through the dialectical processes in spirit, history, and concepts; but likewise, Mulla Sadra allows that there are grades of existence; and he explains motion, and change generally, in terms of variations in the intensity of being of what changes. Mulla Sadra also affirms the
correspondence between the microcosm and the macrocosm, whose form he likens to “a steep pathway between the disquieting of satan and the inspiration of the angel.” All souls are destined to return to God, as the cosmos also will return to its Creator. Mulla Sadra explains that the generation of divine activity in the world and human activity of the soul require a link between opposing material and spiritual factors.

... if, in the macrocosm, the outward Kingdom of heaven were not linked to the inward Sovereignty of God’s majestic Throne, and the outward bodiment of the earth were not linked to the inward Sovereignty of His Gardens, the words of God that do not run out [31:27] or cease could not be generated on the face of the earth through the ink of hyle, which is like the saliva that aids in configuring speech and the ink for writing figures.

The notion of the dialectical movement of the world without any divine teleology, however, is in the works of Engles, who attributes the notion to Hegel:

*This new German philosophy culminated in the Hegelian system. In this system – and herein is its great merit – for the first time the whole world, natural, historical, intellectual, is represented as a process, i.e., as in constant motion, change transformation, development; and the attempt is made to trace out the internal connection that makes a continuous whole of all this movement and development.*

If what Engles means by the constant motion of the whole world is only that dialectical processes are to be found in nature and history, Hegel would agree. Mulla Sadra, correspondingly, would affirm that the natural changes found in substances occur because of changes in the intensity of their existence. He would also explain the working out of the divine plan in history through the missions of the prophets as one that occurs as people take up the journey toward God, which he further elaborates as perfection of the spirit, which is an intensification of being. It is just this idea of the explanation of the changes of history with reference to the divine plan and the missions of the prophets that is the organizing theme of Shahid Mutahhari’s *Man and Universe.*

**Synthesis and Incommensurability**

The historical juncture at which ‘Allāmah Ṭabāṭabā’ī and Shahīd Mutahhari took up the project of mustering Islamic philosophy in the struggle against Soviet backed Iranian communism required them to work with the information about Marx and Hegel that was available, often through Marxist writings. The concern was not for historical exegesis of the views of Hegel with attention to the intellectual context in which Hegel worked. This might lead us to conclude that the target of Mutahhari’s discussions of Hegel is not Hegel at all, but Hegel (Iranian Marxists), Hegel as understood by Iranian Marxists. This, however, would also be an oversimplification. Mutahhari made use of the best information that was available to him, including such diverse sources as Iranian Marxist writings, Will Durant, Walter Stace, and Paul Foulquié. Given these sources, a reasonable conclusion to be drawn from extensive study was that
despite some similarities, Hegelian and Islamic philosophy were based on fundamentally opposing visions of God, being, essence, change, history, and logic.

By taking into account Hegel’s own texts and the enormous secondary literature that continuously multiplies about Hegel, it is not difficult to discover that many of the contradictions that seem to arise when comparing Hegel’s views and those of Mulla Sadra can be sublated. It would be ludicrous to conclude from this that Hegel and Mulla Sadra are in complete agreement on the most fundamental issues in philosophy. The quest for a synthesis to resolve every apparent conflict may be counted among the flaws of the Hegelian tradition. So, we need not seek some synthesis between the thesis that Hegel’s philosophy and Mulla Sadras are in agreement, or the antithesis that they are fundamentally opposed. A study of both may yield the result that there are both important similarities and differences between them. Our understanding of the practice of philosophical and religious reasoning is deepened as we gain familiarity with these similarities and differences and are able to incorporate various elements in our own reasoning, which can take the form of synthesizing, but can also take the form of a recognition of incommensurability.

The forms of opposition that may spur philosophical growth include not only contradictions and polar oppositions, but tragic conflicts, dilemmas, incommensurabilities, and other tensions. The incommensurabilities make synthesis impossible beyond a certain depth, because synthesis requires the identification of propositions upon which the thinkers agree and disagree. Even the attempt at such a synthesis gives the misleading impression that the proponents of Islamic philosophy can proceed by accepting those parts of the Hegelian system that translate into points of agreement, refuting the points of disagreement, and leaving the rest for further refinement. This is misleading because students of Mulla Sadra and Hegel may well learn most from one another as we struggle to resonate with insights that we do not accept and to address the concerns articulated through elaborate forms of conceptual apparatus that we are unable to fully understand.

Shahid Mutahhari’s work invites the study of the configurations of ideas that give rise to the polar opposition between Hegelian and Islamic currents of philosophical thinking in Iran, including the harsh denunciations of philosophy, especially Islamic philosophy, that were often to be heard in the Islamic seminaries, and which, even today, are repeated by some. Understanding all of this requires the study of Hegel and Mulla Sadra, each in their own context, as well as their receptions in Iran in the decades prior to and following the victory of the Islamic Revolution, to which Shahid Mutahhari contributed so much, and because of which he was martyred.

One of the most noble ways in which to honor the work of Shahid Mutahhari, is to continue the work of comparative philosophy that he began. Because of the conversation that Mutahhari opened between Hegel and Sadra, their philosophies have become entangled. This entanglement creates an obligation, a demand for further understanding, for mutual recognition of both resonances and dissonances.
References


—. The Phenomenology of Spirit. Translated by Terry Pinkard. Terry Pinkard, 2013.


1. This work is greatly facilitated by the compilation of the relevant materials from Mutahhari’s works by Ali Dezhakam in (M. Mutahhari, Tafakkor falsafi–ye gharb az manzar ostad shahid Mutahhari 1386/2007), 247–308.

2. (M. Mutahhari, The Problem of Contradiction in Islamic Philosophy 1983), which is the translation of the first half of (M. Mutahhari, Asl–e tazad dar falsafeh–ye Islami 1374/1995), first published in the Spring of 1349/1970 by the University of Tehran, Faculty of Theology, Publications of the Research Group. Despite the quality of the translation, we might be forgiven for quibbling that aṣl should be rendered as “principle” instead of “problem” and “contradiction” would be a better translation for tanaquḍ, while taḍād is more precisely “contrariety”. The translation as “contradiction”, however, is justified by the fact that Mutahhari uses taḍād where Hegel uses Widerpruch, which is translated as “contradiction”. The quotations given in this paper will differ to some extent from those of the published translation.


4. This is an allusion to Lessing’s “broad ugly ditch” (gar/tiger breiter Graben). See (Lessing 2005), 87.

5. (G. W. Hegel, On Christianity: Early Theological Writings 1961), 140–141.

6. (G. W. Hegel, On Christianity: Early Theological Writings 1961), 256.

7. (G. W. Hegel, On Christianity: Early Theological Writings 1961), 312.

8. The possibility of a Darwinian explanation that could obviate the need for teleology was unimaginable for Kant, who wrote: “For it is quite certain that in terms of merely mechanical principles of nature we cannot even adequately become familiar with, much less explain, organized beings and how they are internally possible. So certain is this that we may boldly state that it is absurd for human beings even to attempt it, or to hope that perhaps some day another Newton might arise who would explain to us, in terms of natural laws unordered by any intention, how even a mere blade of grass is produced. Rather, we must absolutely deny that human beings have such insight.” (Kant, Critique of Judgment 1987), §75. Hegel was likewise unable to imagine anything like modern evolutionary theory (see (Wood 2004), 206). For a discussion of the impression that Kant’s treatment of natural teleology had on Hegel’s dialectic, see (Wood 2004), 200.

9. The first edition of this work was published in Heidelberg (1817).


11. See (de Boer 2010), ch. 1. De Boer notes that Hegel sometimes uses the term “dialectic” to refer to both the stage of opposition, dialectic proper, and the overcoming of the opposition, speculation. (de Boer 2010), 212, n. 3. Many writers use “dialectic” primarily in this more inclusive sense.


13. This essay, “On the Relationship of the Philosophy of Nature to Philosophy in General” was published by Schelling and Hegel in the Kristishes Journal der Philosophie in 1802. See (Giovanni 1985) for discussion and translation of the article.

14. See the discussion in (Legenhausen 2007).

15. See (Burrell, Aquinas and Islamic and Jewish thinkers 1993) and (Burrell, Aquinas and Mulla Sadra on the Primacy of Existing 2013).
16. (Giovanni 1985), 325.
17. (Popper 1966), 40.
19. Cf. (Akehurst 2010), 27, citing (Ryle 1947): "Nor is it news to philosophers that Nazi, Fascist and Communist doctrines are descendants of the Hegelian gospel. They may therefore wonder whether Dr. Popper is not flogging a dead horse in exposing once again the motives and fallacies of Hegel. But Dr Popper is clearly right in saying that even if philosophers are at long last immunized, historians, sociologists, political propagandists and voters are still unconscious victims of this virus ..."
21. (Russell 1945), 746.
22. (Marx 1999), 1873 Afterward to the Second German Edition. In this same work, Marx calls Hegel a “mighty thinker” and that he had avowed himself to be Hegel’s pupil. Of course, Marx is speaking figuratively. Hegel died when Marx was thirteen years old. Just five years later, Marx enrolled at the University of Berlin, engaged in the discussions of Hegelian philosophy with members of the “Doktorklub” and then with the Young Hegelians, and took courses on jurisprudence with the foremost Hegelian at the university, Eduard Gans. (Breckman 1999), 165.
23. (Shariati 1979), 98.
24. (Davari 2005), 73.
25. For a revealing account of Hegel’s reception in Iran, see (Moslehi 1392/2013), 596–631. In addition, prior to the Revolution, Shahid Beheshti was also lecturing on Hegel in the seminars of Qom.
26. (W. Stace 1961), 213; this book has also been translated into Persian by Bahā’ al-Dīn Khoramshāhī as ‘Irfān va Falsafeh (Tehran: Entesharat Sorush, 1358/1979), but too late for it to have been read by Shahid Mutahhari. For a book length critique of Stace’s Mysticism and Philosophy in Persian, see (Fanaei Eshkevari 2014).
27. (M. Mutahhari, Society and History 1985). For Hegel’s compatibilism see, for example, (Pippin 1999); although, as Wallace points out, Hegel’s compatibilism is not to be confused with the variety defended in the British Empiricist tradition. See (Wallace 2005), 82–83.
29. (Engels 1947), 69.
31. For a bibliography of Foulquie’s works, see: http://www.idref.fr/026870649#070 [9].
32. Lavelle was professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne from 1932 to 1934 and at the Collège de France from 1941 until his death. Lavelle’s philosophical system combined elements of the French philosophie de l’esprit and existentialism.
35. (Beiser 2005), 161
37. (Beiser 2005), 161
38. Dies ist vollendete Vernunftphilosophie, die auf Vernunft Verzicht tut; \( \forall \) hat \( \forall \) viele Freunde erworben wegen des Negativen, auf einmal von die\( \forall \) her alten Metaphysi\( \forall \) befreit zu \( \forall \) ein. – Es ist \( \forall \) chon die ganz roh empirische und barbarische Gemeine Art des Vorstellens und diegänzliche Unwiss\( \forall \)haftigkeit der Form bemerkt worden. – Aber außer der allgemeinen Idee von \( \forall \) synthetischen Urteilen a priori, Allgemeinem, das an \( \forall \) den Unterchied hat, hat der Instinkt Kants in derganzen Anordnung, in die ihm allen gelahmenen The\( \forall \) ans der Triplizität ausgeführt, a) theoretische, \( \forall \) praktische Vernunft, \( \forall \) Einheit beider, Urteilskraft, \( \forall \) in den meisten weiteren Abteilungen bei den Kategorien, bei den Vernunftideen: den Rhythmus der Erkenntnis, der wissenschaftlichen Bewegung, als ein allgemeines Schema vorgezeichnet und allen gelahnlenen The\( \forall \) sus, Antithese\( \forall \) und Synthese\( \forall \) aufgeteilt, die We\( \forall \) en des Ge\( \forall \) tes, durch die er Ge\( \forall \) t \( \forall \) ist, als \( \forall \) bewußter, daß er \( \forall \) in der \( \forall \) untercheidet. Das erste \( \forall \) das We\( \forall \) en, aber fürs Bewußtsein Anders\( \forall \) en; was nur We\( \forall \) en \( \forall \) die Gegen\( \forall \) tand. Das zweite \( \forall \) das Für\( \forall \) ch\( \forall \) en, die eigene Wirklichkeit; das Negative gegen das An\( \forall \) ich \( \forall \) ihm das We\( \forall \) en, das Selbstbewußtsein \( \forall \) \( \forall \) das We\( \forall \) en, – das umgekehrte Verhältnis. Das dritte ist die
Einheit von beiden; die für 'ich' eienende, 'elbtbewußte Wirklichkeit ist alle wahre Wirklichkeit, in die zurückgenommen wohlt

My translation: “This is the completed philosophy of the understanding, that which abstains from reason; it has won so
many friends because of the negative, for once to be freed of this old metaphysics. — It is just the very raw empirical and
barbaric sort of conception, the entirely unscientific form of which has been mentioned. — However, aside from the general
idea of synthetic a priori judgments, general, but that differentiates itself, Kant’s instinct in the entire arrangement in which
he divides the whole is carried out according to a spiritless schema of triplicity: (α) theoretical, (β) practical reason, (γ) the
unity of both, the power of judgment, so that in most of the further subdivisions of the categories, of the ideas of reason
there is a preconceived rhythm of knowing, a scientific movement as a general schema and set up as an omnipresent
thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, the manner of the spirit, through which it is spirit, is to be so divided as to be known. The
first is the essence, but for consciousness as other; what is only essence is an object.

The second is being—for—itself, its own actuality; the negative opposed to the in—itself is to it the essence; the self–
consciousness is itself the essence — the reversed relationship. The third is the unity of both, the being for itself, self–
conscious actuality is the all true actuality, in its being taken back as well as its objectivity as being for itself.” In this
passage, for all its difficulties, it is clear that Hegel is by no means endorsing the triplicity that he attributes to Kant because
he finds it lifeless and rigid as opposed to the organic development of the dialectic that he will later elaborate.

39. Translated as (Chalybäus 1854).
40. (Mueller 1958), 413–414.
41. For example, (Wheat 2012).
42. (Beiser 2005), 159–160.
43. (Pinkard 2012), 7. Pinkard admits: “Hegel’s view was that there is a logic to the kinds of antinomies that philosophy in
its history has put on display, but this logic itself can be demonstrated only after the fact...”
46. (de Boer 2010), 364.
47. (de Boer 2010), 372.
48. See (Wallace 2005), 64; (de Boer 2010), ch. 3.
55. Mosleh also sees Mutahhari as bringing Hegel and Islamic philosophy into dialogue (Mosleh 1392/2013), 610–613.
60. See the division of concepts in (Misbah Yazdi 1999), 119–123.
61. The Arabic māhuwā is from the translation of Aristotle’s Greek, “Ti esti?” (τι ἐστι) as “Mā huwa?” (What is it?). See
Aristotle’s Metaphysics, 1028a 11–12.
63. See (G. W. Hegel, The Encyclopaedia Logic 1991), § 85; (de Boer 2010), 46.
64. [(Magee 2008), 256.
65. (Rizvi 2009), 27–29.
66. (Kamal 2006), 8.


69. (G. W. Hegel, The Encyclopaedia Logic 1991), §86, 137.


71. (G. W. Hegel, Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: One-Volume Edition, the Lectures of 1827 1988), 269/489. In the introduction to his lectures on the history of philosophy, Hegel elaborates his view that philosophy and religion have the same ultimate content or the same end, but that their forms and methods differ. See (Lauer 1974), 106–116.

72. For a discussion of Mutahhari’s views of Hegel and Kant, see (Fana’i Eshkavari 2012), 76–82.

73. (G. W. Hegel, The Science of Logic 2010), 11:244.

74. See (Kalin 2010) for a discussion of this an translation of Mulla Sadra’s “Treatise on the Unification of the Intellector and the Intelligible” (Risalah fi ittihad al-‘aqil wa-l-ma’qul).

75. (Ferrarin 2004), 122. Ferrarin points out another factor that contributes to the similarities to be found in the philosophies of Hegel and Mulla Sadra. It is well known that Islamic philosophy reads Aristotle with a Neoplatonic interpretation. Ferrarin comments: “Hegel reads Aristotle once again through the eyes of a certain Neoplatonism: dialectic, the relation between being and negation, the relation between the One and the many, is read into a complex theory of nous.” (Ferrarin 2004), 196. In the introduction to his lectures on the history of philosophy, Hegel defends the Neoplatonists for finding rational elements in myths. (Lauer 1974), 118.

76. (G. W. Hegel, The Science of Logic 2010), 12:246.

77. (Kamal 2006), 8

78. (Kamal 2006), 8; citing (Petry 1970), 202.

79. (Marx 1999), 1873 Afterward to the Second German Edition.

80. Of course, Marx is not saying that Hegel thought that a process in the brain brings about the material world. What Marx contends is that the idea, no matter what Hegel imagined, is only a process in the brain, and as such cannot play the role of motor of history to which Marx assigns “material”, that is, economic forces. Marx fails to realize that Hegel would object that even the economic laws to which he appeals are ideas insofar as they are truly laws, and as such, rational.


83. There is an often quoted remark in Hegel’s Logik in which he explains this: “The claim that the finite is an idealization defines idealism. The idealism of philosophy consists in nothing else than in the recognition that the finite is not truly an existent. Every philosophy is essentially idealism or at least has idealism for its principle, and the question then is only how far this principle is carried out. This applies to philosophy just as much as to religion, for religion also, no less than philosophy, will not admit finitude as a true being, an ultimate, an absolute, or as something non-posited, uncreated, eternal. The opposition between idealistic and realistic philosophy is therefore without meaning. A philosophy that attributes to finite existence, as such, true, ultimate, absolute being, does not deserve the name of philosophy. The principles of ancient as well as more recent philosophies – whether “water,” “matter,” or “atoms” – are universals, idealizations, not things as given immediately, that is, in sensuous singularity. Not even the “water” of Thales is that, for, although also empirical water, it is besides that the in–itself or essence of all other things, and these things do not stand on their own, self–grounded, but are posited on the basis of an other, of “water,” that is, they are idealized. In thus calling the principle or the universal an idealization as we have just done (and the concept, the idea, spirit, deserve the name even more), and in saying then that the singular things of the senses are idealizations in principle, or in their concept, and even more so when sublated in the spirit, we must note, in passing, the same double–sidedness that transpired in the infinite, namely that an idealization is on the one hand something concrete, a true existent, but, on the other hand, that its moments are no less idealizations, sublated in it; in fact, however, there is only one concrete whole from which the moments are inseparable.” (G. W. Hegel, The Science of Logic 2010), 21:142–143. For a discussion of this passage and a solid interpretation of Hegel’s idealism, see (Stern 2009), 45–76.
85. (Kamal 2006), 65.
86. (Sadra, The Elixir of the Gnostics 2003), Part Three, paragraph 44.
87. (Sadra, The Elixir of the Gnostics 2003), Part Two, paragraph 58.
88. (Engels 1947), 14 (page numbers refer to the pdf version).
89. (M. Mutahhari 1997).
90. See the perceptive discussion of this point in (de Boer 2010): 28, 206.

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