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Demystifying the Theory of the Unity of Knower and Known: A Comparative Study of the Views of Ṣadrā and Shoemaker Regarding Self-Knowledge

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Abstract

Mullā Ṣadrā explains self-knowledge through the notion of knowledge-by-presence, which refers to the immediate presence of the known before the knower. A puzzling component of this view is his idea that knower and known have a relationship of unity with one another. Reflection on Sydney Shoemaker's account of self-knowledge can help us uncover Ṣadrā's motivation for this puzzling idea. We show that Ṣadrā was motivated by his awareness of the concept of self-blindness, a notion introduced into contemporary philosophy by Shoemaker.

Résumé

Mullā Ṣadrā explique la connaissance de soi avec la notion de connaissance par la présence, qui fait référence à la présence immédiate du connu avant le connaissant. L'une des composantes énigmatiques de cette connaissance est que le connaissant et le connu sont l'un avec l'autre dans une relation d'unité. Nous pouvons découvrir la motivation de Ṣadrā à évoquer cette idée énigmatique en réfléchissant au point de vue de Sydney Shoemaker sur la connaissance de soi. Nous montrerons que la motivation de Ṣadrā était sa prise de conscience du concept important d'auto-cécité, une notion introduite dans la philosophie contemporaine par Shoemaker.

Keywords: Ṣadrā; knowledge-by-presence; unity of the knower and known; Sydney Shoemaker; self-knowledge; self-blindness

1. Introduction

The intuition that knowledge of propositions such as “I am in pain,” “I am happy,” etc. differ in some fundamental way from other knowledge has led to a proliferation of theories designed to capture that intuition, including the acquaintance theory (Russell, 1911), transparency theory (Burge & Peacocke, 1996; Moran, 2001), and the inner sense theory or perceptual model (Armstrong, 1968).

The philosopher Mullā Ṣadrā¹ sought to explain this type of knowledge with the knowledge-by-presence theory, which is well known in the context of philosophy

¹ Hereafter, we will use Ṣadrā instead of Mullā Ṣadrā.

of mind in the Islamic tradition. While the idea pre-dates Ṣadrā, having been raised by Porphyry, Plotinus, and Shahāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī, among other Muslim philosophers, it can fairly be said that the most comprehensive and precise explanation of knowledge-by-presence (*al-‘ilm al-ḥuḍūrī*) is Ṣadrā’s own, as found in important works such as *al-Ḥikmat al-muta‘āliya fī l-asfār al-‘aqliyyat al-arba‘a* (Ṣadrā, 1981), *al-Shawāhid al-rubūbiyya fī minhāj al-sulūkīyya* (Ṣadrā, 2003), and others.

Knowledge-by-presence, whose most important instance is self-knowledge, refers to the immediate presence of the known (*ma‘lūm*) to the knower (*‘ālim*). This theory has numerous components, which we will explain going forward, but at the outset we should note that it has often been considered mysterious due to a component known as the “unity of the knower and known” (*ittiḥād al-‘ālim wa-l-ma‘lūm*). This component entails that whenever our knowledge of a topic is of the presential knowledge type — for instance, our knowledge of ourselves and our states — the knower and known are one thing. The reader may well wonder why a philosopher should have posited such a strange characteristic for this type of knowledge, for it is otherwise universally considered that the knower and the object of knowledge are two things, each of which has an independent existence. Thus, the claim that these two things form a unity may seem strange and challenging. In this article, we try to resolve this strangeness by reference to the work of Sydney Shoemaker. We explain the idea of knowledge-by-presence, and especially its main component, the principle of unity, through a comparative approach, relying on Shoemaker’s important critique of the perceptual model in his discussion of self-knowledge. Reference to the literature of analytic philosophers will thus help us gain a better understanding of a classical theory.

Of course, there are fundamental differences between these two philosophers: notably, by discussing self-knowledge, Ṣadrā has theological and mystical goals in mind,² which cannot be said of Shoemaker. Nevertheless, the crucial point here is that Ṣadrā’s theology and mysticism are firmly grounded in his philosophical positions, especially in the theory of knowledge-by-presence, and this theory in turn rests on an important epistemological point that Shoemaker also broached in his discussion of self-knowledge. Grasping this epistemological point will greatly facilitate our understanding of Ṣadrā. We will show that, despite their differences, these two philosophers share a common epistemological intuition concerning the concept of *self-blindness*, and that comparative research can help us reread Ṣadrā’s idea of unity and discover his motivation for proposing this idea.

We will show that Shoemaker’s explanation — specifically his critique of perceptual models as regards the impossibility of self-blindness, and the necessity of presenting a model of self-knowledge that rejects the possibility of self-blindness — is compatible with Ṣadrā’s argument regarding the necessity of defining an inseparable relationship between knowledge and the object of knowledge. Shoemaker’s concept of “self-blindness” is therefore helpful in explaining the theory of unity and comprehending Ṣadrā’s motivation in raising it. In this article, we describe Ṣadrā’s

² Ṣadrā believes that self-knowledge is the gateway to knowledge of everything, the entire world, which in turn causes the self to know God since there is nothing without an equivalent within the human self (Ṣadrā, 1981, vol. 6 and 9; Faruq, 2018, p. 79).

intellectual context, and give a summary of his philosophical principles and his theory of knowledge in general. We then explain his account of acquired knowledge, and specifically the theory of knowledge-by-presence, whose most important instance is self-knowledge. Thereafter, we set out Shoemaker's critique of the perceptual model. Following that, we show that Ṣadrā's reason for raising the strange notion of the unity of the knower and the known is connected with his own understanding of the issue of the impossibility of the unawareness of some mental states — in Shoemaker's terminology, the impossibility of self-blindness. We will show that Ṣadrā was well aware of this key point in the debate on self-knowledge (although he explained it differently), and that this was his main motivation for raising the notion of unity. It should be noted that, in this article, we do not seek to evaluate Ṣadrā's or Shoemaker's views; our goal is merely to discover Ṣadrā's motivation in raising the notion of unity. Studying and evaluating Ṣadrā's notion and defending or refuting it is a subject for wider research about theories of knowledge-by-presence.

2. Ṣadrā's Intellectual Context

Ṣadr al-Muta'allihīn, known as Mullā Ṣadrā, was the founder of the well-known transcendental philosophy school of thought (*al-ḥikmat al-muta'āliya*). Transcendental philosophy is a philosophy with a synthetic approach in which the rational method, the intuitive method, and the narrative method are used together. In other words, Ṣadrā's philosophy is a combination of peripatetic philosophy³ — the tradition of rational thought which is indebted to Aristotle — and illumination philosophy⁴ — the tradition of the intuitive method — and theology.⁵ Ṣadrā believed that these three paths are jointly necessary to reach the truth and are not incompatible with one another.

Ṣadrā's approach is based on his view of philosophy more generally. Ṣadrā sees philosophy as more than mere intellectual inquiry. He considers philosophy to be a mode of being and a way of life whose goal is the realization of wisdom and the cultivation of a holy life in which the sage seeks a resemblance to the divine. This type of attitude is not unprecedented. The history of this style of thinking reaches back to the ancient Greek philosophers, including Plotinus and Porphyry, as well as to the Neoplatonic philosophers, and even Christian Gnosticism. In fact, as a revivalist of such thinking, Ṣadrā tried to establish an official philosophical system in which he used the heritage of peripatetic philosophy, the heritage of illumination philosophy, and the heritage of his religion in a way that ensured their mutual compatibility.

³ One of the three important schools in Islamic philosophy, founded by Avicenna.

⁴ The second largest school of Islamic philosophy, founded by al-Suhrawardī.

⁵ It is worth mentioning that Ṣadrā's religious thinking was different from many of his contemporaries. Ṣadrā faced severe opposition from both extreme Sufis (*ghulāt al-ṣūfiyya*) and exoteric scholars, who were hostile to philosophy in general. His philosophical project can be seen as a response to the aforementioned groups, whose views, according to him, distorted the true face of tradition. Therefore, his philosophical project was intended as a middle ground between Sufism, philosophy, and the Sharia, while not underestimating the significance of any of these (Faruqe, 2018, pp. 37–38; Ṣadrā, 2020).

Thus, we can see three faces of Ṣadrā in his works: Ṣadrā as a philosopher, Ṣadrā as a mystic, and Ṣadrā as a theologian. Although these three faces are blended and in harmony, they can be separated in analysis. That is, we can talk about Ṣadrā as a philosopher alone, although we should keep in mind the important point that Ṣadrā's philosophy is the basis of his theology and mysticism. In this article, our focus is only on the philosophical part of Ṣadrā's thinking, and we will not go to its theological and mystical dimensions. In other words, in this article, we are dealing with Ṣadrā only as a philosopher.

It should be noted that there is no specific account of self-knowledge within Ṣadrā's philosophical system; rather, the material relevant to the topic of the present paper is divided between his discussion of the self (*al-nafs*), and his discussion of knowledge in general, with an emphasis on the latter.

3. The Principles of Ṣadrā's Philosophy

In general, Ṣadrā proposes an existential philosophy. The first doctrine in his philosophy is the ontological primacy and authenticity of existence (*iṣālat al-wujūd*), in contrast to the subjectivity of quiddity (*māhiyya*). This doctrine is the core of Ṣadrā's philosophical system. According to it, existence is the one and only reality. Existence and reality are therefore identical, although multiplicity in this world needs to be explained. The second doctrine is the modulation and gradation of existence (*tashkīk al-wujūd*) that is at the same time a single entity: the different existences in this world are thus degrees, differing in intensity, of a single whole. And the third doctrine is "substantial motion" (*al-ḥarakat al-jawhariyya*), which contrasts with the Aristotelian theory of substance. Substance is not a fixed entity but is always moving (Rizvi, 2019). All of Ṣadrā's discussions, including the discussion of "self," "knowledge," and "self-knowledge," take place within the framework of these principles.

Ṣadrā's definition of the self and its states is existential. He considers the self to be an immaterial existence — which is "corporeal in its origination and spiritual [or incorporeal] in its survival" (*jismāniyyat al-ḥudūth wa-rūḥāniyyat al-baqā'*) (Ṣadrā, 1981, vol. 8, pp. 347–348; Ṣadrā, 2003, pp. 228–230). The human self, while being indivisible and singular, possesses faculties through the help of which it performs its intellectual and practical activities, and the self is united with them (Ubudiyat, 2013, p. 60). Ṣadrā addresses knowledge of the self and all its states under the category of knowledge-by-presence.⁶ Since this article is focused on discovering Ṣadrā's motivation for proposing the idea of unity — and so falls under the category of "knowledge" — there is no need to discuss his account of the self. So, we turn to his account of knowledge.

4. Ṣadrā's Theory of Knowledge

In Ṣadrā's existential philosophy, knowledge is also a type of existence, not quiddity. Thus, in contrast to philosophers before him, he does not consider knowledge to fall

⁶ Ṣadrā does not consider the human "self" to be fixed and unchanging during one's life. Every human being forms his "self" through his voluntary choices, beliefs, intentions, and motivations throughout his life. This view is a product of the principle of "substantial motion." See Khazaei, 2021.

under the category of qualities of the self, and does not see knowledge as a kind of accident, a state that merely affects an epistemic agent. Rather, he defines knowledge more generally as the existential presence of the immaterial (the known) before another immaterial thing (the knower) (*ḥuḍūr mujarrad li-mujarrad*). A human's knowledge regarding himself, his beliefs, and the states of his self are of this category. Despite this, Ṣadrā divides knowledge into two types: knowledge-by-presence and acquired knowledge (*al-ilm al-ḥuṣūlī*), although his belief in acquired knowledge is also ultimately rooted in knowledge-by-presence. Here the topic of our discussion is knowledge-by-presence; however, to understand it better, we will also very briefly discuss acquired knowledge.⁷

4.1 Acquired Knowledge

According to Ṣadrā's view of knowledge, we gain knowledge of something either through an intermediary or directly. Acquired knowledge is the knowledge that is gained through mental forms (*al-ṣuwar al-dhihniyya*) or mental existence (*al-wujūd al-dhihnī*).⁸ Mental existence shares the same qualities, features, and descriptions as extra-mental existence because it is merely another mode of existence (Rizvi, 2019). If we wish to find the closest concept to "mental form" among the concepts prevalent in analytic philosophy, we must indicate the concept of "representation," although of course in a broad and imprecise sense, and not exactly in the sense in which that term is used in contemporary philosophy. Therefore, we may say that acquired knowledge is knowledge that is gained through the representation of an external object (representing the external object itself in an individual form and not an abstract general concept from it); that is, in this type of knowledge, the knower gains knowledge of the object of knowledge indirectly and through a representation. Thus, it can be said that Ṣadrā's model of acquired knowledge is, generally speaking, a representational theory of knowledge.⁹ According to this definition, the components and properties of acquired knowledge are as follows:

Being mediated: This criterion is perhaps the most essential in the discussion of knowledge, and it is based on this that Ṣadrā divides knowledge into acquired and presential knowledge. In acquired knowledge, one's knowledge of an external object, such as a flower, is gained through the mental form (representation) of the flower.

⁷ This section, introducing Ṣadrā's theory of knowledge, has been derived from a previous article by the authors (Sarkarpour & Khazaei, 2021).

⁸ The question of what exactly is a mental form would require an extensive discussion that is beyond the scope of this article.

⁹ This is similar to Bertrand Russell's model, which distinguishes two types of knowledge — knowledge-by-description and knowledge-by-acquaintance — where ultimately he considers knowledge-by-description to lead to knowledge-by-acquaintance (Russell, 1911). It is worth mentioning that Russell and Ṣadrā are both foundationalists: Russell considers the foundation of knowledge to be knowledge-by-acquaintance and Ṣadrā considers it to be knowledge-by-presence.

Encountering two objects of knowledge: In acquired knowledge, we have two objects of knowledge, the direct object of knowledge and the intermediary or indirect object of knowledge. The directly known, which is the direct object of knowledge, is the mental form that is an intermediary to knowing the external object of knowledge. The indirectly known is the external object whose mental form is represented in the mind of the knower. It should be noted here that our knowledge of the mental form or the directly known is no longer of the type of acquired knowledge; rather, it is of the category of knowledge-by-presence.

Fallibility: The fallibility of acquired knowledge is also the product of the above-mentioned characteristics. When knowledge is actualized through an intermediary and, consequently, knowledge and its external object are distinct from one another, an error — meaning the non-conformity of knowledge with the indirectly known — may occur.

Being conceptual or representational: This component is another characteristic of its being mediated. As previously indicated, an intermediary can be defined as a concept or a kind of representation through which knowledge of the external object can be acquired.

The oneness or unity of knowledge and the directly known: In acquired knowledge, even though knowledge and its external object — which is referred to as the “intermediary known” — are distinct from one another and, in other words, are not one thing, knowledge and the directly known are nevertheless identical or one existence.

Now the question arises as to what relationship exists between the knower and the directly known. Ṣadrā introduces the relationship between the knower and the directly known as a “presential” relationship. His argument for this claim, in brief, is that if the relationship between the knower and directly known was also representational and of the same kind as acquired knowledge, there would be a problem of infinite regress, because once again this knowledge must occur through the mediation of a representation and this chain would continue for eternity.¹⁰

Presenting Ṣadrā’s argument is not pertinent to the main topic of this article, and we will pass over it. The important point is that Ṣadrā postulates a non-representational epistemic relationship called “knowledge-by-presence.”

4.2 *The Knowledge-by-Presence Theory*

According to Ṣadrā’s definition, knowledge-by-presence is the perception of the known such that the known itself — that is, the known in its existence and not through its form (or representation) — is present for the knower (Ṣadrā, 1981, vol. 6, p. 416). In the treatise *al-taṣawwur wa-l-taṣdīq* (concept and assertion), Ṣadrā gives a relatively complete definition of knowledge-by-presence:

¹⁰ For more information regarding the relationship between acquired knowledge and presential knowledge, see Taheri Khorramabadi, 2019; Sharokhi & Akbari Aqdam, 2022.

Sometimes knowing a real thing is exactly the very existence of that real thing, that is, the objective reality of the known thing is exactly the reality and mental existence of that very thing [or, in other words, is such that the existence of knowledge or the objective existence of the known (the known thing) is one and the same], such as the knowledge of immaterial beings of their essences [or natures] and knowledge of the self of its essence and, similarly, the awareness of the self of attributes that have been created within its entity and their knowledge of actions, wants, and their own mental conversations which is known as conversations of the self and other similar things. (Şadrā, 2001, p. 13)

In what follows we present each of the components of this account in detail:

Presence: The most important component upon which the definition of knowledge-by-presence is based is that of *presence*. Şadrā defines knowledge-by-presence as the “presence” of an immaterial thing before an immaterial thing, or, in other words, the “existence” of a thing for another thing. As he states in *al-Asfār*, “knowledge means the existence of a thing for a thing and its presence before that thing” (Şadrā, 1981, vol. 6, p. 416). We will address this in the discussion of the unity of the knower and known. Here, we simply mention that Şadrā’s meaning of the presence of a known before the knower is not like a presence such as the physical presence of material entities before one another.

Immateriality: In *al-Asfār*, Şadrā defines knowledge (knowledge-by-presence) as “the presence of an immaterial thing” (Şadrā, 1981, vol. 3, p. 286), and follows this by enumerating several characteristics for it:

Knowledge is not a nugatory thing — such as the abstraction from matter — and rather, it is not adjunctive either. It is existential and is not just any existence either; rather it is an actualized not potential existence and not any actualized existence but rather a pure existence and not mixed with non-existence (Şadrā, 1981, vol. 3, p. 297)

This statement explains the important characteristics of knowledge-by-presence and, in fact, is another expression of the characteristics of immateriality. These characteristics can be analytically explained as follows:

- (1) Knowledge is not a non-existential or nugatory thing; rather, it is existential (this characteristic arises from Şadrā’s specific view of the concept of non-existence; he also believes in a kind of existence for non-existence).
- (2) It is not in the category of relative concepts such as height.
- (3) Knowledge is an existential thing but is not every kind of existence; rather, it is a pure actualized existence that is not mixed with non-existence; that is, it is not potential existence. In general, Muslim philosophers consider immaterial existents to be actualized existents and material existents as always possessing a potential aspect. According to them, no material entity is purely actualized

existence and it is always mixed with non-existence such that every side is different from another side, and every part is separate from other parts; hence, material existence is not pure actuality. However, immaterial entities are existences in which there is no non-existence. Thus, knowledge is an immaterial existence because it is not mixed with non-existence. (Javadi Amoli, 2016, vol. 17, p. 172)

Immediacy: As previously mentioned, Ṣadrā divides knowledge into acquired and presential knowledge, based on the existence or non-existence of an intermediary in the actualization of knowledge. According to this, just as was indicated in the definition of knowledge-by-presence, it is knowledge where the very existence of the known (not its representation) is present before the knower without any intermediary. There are several other characteristics of knowledge-by-presence that depend on the characteristic of immediacy, and we address them below. (Ṣadrā, 1981, vol. 6, p. 162)

The unity of knowledge and the known: We explain this characteristic by reference to the three core concepts that arise in the discussion of knowledge, that is, knowledge, the knower, and the known. In knowledge-by-presence, in contrast to acquired knowledge, knowledge and the known are one thing. In his treatise *al-taṣawwur wa-l-taṣdīq*, Ṣadrā says the following in this regard:

Knowledge of something real is sometimes such that its mental existence is the same as its objective presence such as the knowledge of immaterial entities of themselves [knowledge-by-presence] and sometimes its mental existence is other than its objective existence such as our knowledge of things outside ourselves [acquired knowledge]. (Ṣadrā, 2001, p. 46)

Ṣadrā considers the otherness of knowledge and the known in knowledge-by-presence to be mentally posited, in the sense that they are essentially one and are only distinguished from one another through subjective consideration and mental analysis. We must note that this unity is a metaphysical relationship.

Non-propositional (non-representational): This characteristic, in reality, is another explanation of the characteristic of immediacy. In presential knowledge, there is no intermediary; that is, there is no mental form such as that which is present in acquired knowledge. In other words, there is no type of representation of the object of knowledge. (Ṣadrā, 1981, vol. 6, p. 157)

Infallibility: One of the most important epistemic properties of presential knowledge is its infallibility, understood in the sense that it makes no sense to evaluate such knowledge as either true and false. It has been said that there has been a consensus regarding this property reaching back from the present day to the time of the philosophers who innovated the teaching of knowledge-by-presence — such as al-Suhrawardī, Muhammad al-Fārābī, and

Avicenna.¹¹ Infallibility is, in fact, a rational conclusion of some of the previous characteristics, that is, the unity of knowledge and the known and immediacy. Mistakes and errors are only imaginable where there is an intermediary between the knower and known, since in such instances it is possible that the intermediary or narrative form or representation doesn't correspond to the known and doesn't transfer us precisely to the known. But such a source of error does not exist in presential knowledge. (Şadrâ, 1981, vol. 6, p. 257)

The unity of the knower and known: We have now come to the most challenging component of knowledge-by-presence, which is the subject matter of this article. According to Şadrâ, during the actualization of the presential relationship, not only is there unity between knowledge and the known, but there is also a specific ontological relationship between knowledge — which, as previously explained, is also the known — and the knower, which is known as unity, and this results in the establishment of a specific epistemological relationship. (Şadrâ, 1981, vol. 3, pp. 312–323)

Just as, according to our initial understanding, we today take the known to be separate and independent of the knower, philosophers before Şadrâ also denied the unity between the knower and known, and believed that knowledge must pertain to a reality other than the knower and that the relationship between them was of the type of substance and accident, where the accident is embodied in the substance (Ubudiyat, 2013, vol. 2, pp. 82–83).

Şadrâ opposes this view. According to him, the unity between the knower and known is like the relationship of unity between matter (*mâdda*) and form (*şūra*), in the sense that just as matter is objectively actualized through its union with form and changes from a potential to an actualized state, in presential knowledge also, the perceptual faculties of the soul — these faculties themselves being levels of the soul based on the law of the gradational unity of existence — can only be actualized through the union or, in other words, through a unified combination with the mental form (Şadrâ, 1981, vol. 3, pp. 318–321).

In the third volume of *al-Asfâr*, Şadrâ offers a detailed discussion in this regard, and shows that the manner of existence of perceptual forms for the knower is not like the existence or acquirement of wealth (for instance) for its owner that only indicates a type of attribution (ownership); rather, the existence of perceptual forms for the cognitive agent is like the acquirement of form for matter:

Perceptual acquirement is like matter acquiring a natural, physical form in which it becomes complete and the essence acquires another. Therefore, just as matter — except through forms — is nothing actualized and determined and the connection of forms to it (matter) is not one of an entity to another entity — due to the transfer of one of the sides to the other side; rather, it is through the transformation of matter from the level of deficiency — in itself — to the level of perfection. The state of the self in growing and becoming

¹¹ These philosophers' accounts of present knowledge are somewhat different from Şadrâ's.

actualized intellect — after it was potential intellect — is the same. (Şadrā, 1981, vol. 3, pp. 318–319)

Şadrā considers the history of this notion to go back to Plotinus' *Theologia*, a text which inspires his theory:

The First Teacher states in *Theologia*: It is worth knowing that the eye perceives things that are outside itself and it does not perceive them except such that it is them itself Similarly, when the eyes of the rational human being fall on rational objects, he does not perceive them except that he and them become one thing; the only difference is that the eyes see the apparent aspect of things while the intellect sees the inner aspect of things (Şadrā, 1981, vol. 3, p. 317)

Şadrā presents several reasons for raising this issue, and in this way gives an indication of the meaning of unity. One of his arguments is a criticism of those who consider the mere existence of a thing sufficient for the realization of knowledge-by-presence. In *Mafātiḥ al-ghayb*, he states:

The mere existence of a thing is not enough for it to be known, otherwise, it would be that everything that qualified as being a knower, would have knowledge of all entities; however, it is not so. Therefore, in acquiring knowledge there is no alternative except for one of these two things: either 1) unity or 2) an essential existential attachment. (Şadrā, 1984, p. 109)

In this statement, Şadrā defines the epistemic relationship between the knower and known, and acknowledges the important point that mere existence; in other words, the presence of a thing before another is not sufficient for the actualization of an epistemic relationship. It is one of the important distinctions of this theory that he does not refer to the mere presence of two things before one another as knowledge and strives to define an epistemic relation. He considers the existence of a relationship of the category of “unity” or, according to his terminology, “essential existential attachment,” which is, in fact, a kind of necessary relationship, as the condition for the actualization of knowledge-by-presence.

Determining Şadrā's exact intent in employing the term “unity” would require a lengthy discussion; but its conclusion, based on the views of his interpreters, is that, by “unity,” Şadrā means “identity” or “sameness.” For instance, Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi defines knowledge-by-presence as a relationship between a thing and itself, which is another explanation of the concept of unity, here to mean self-sameness and identicalness (Ha'iri Yazdi, 2015, p. 89).

There is no need in this article to detail the discussions that have taken place in interpreting the meaning of unity; it is enough to mention the conclusion of the discussion, for we will simply assume the validity of that conclusion going forward. Thus, we take unity to mean identity, and our main goal now is to discover Şadrā's motivation for raising the idea of unity in the theory of the identity of the knower and known in presential knowledge. In other words, the main question of this article is why Şadrā defines a type of knowledge in which the knower and

known are identical. We will now delve into Shoemaker's view to see how and from what part of his view regarding self-knowledge can we derive help for a more precise analysis of Şadrā's view.

5. Shoemaker Against the Perceptual Model

Shoemaker's work on the topic of self-knowledge is well known, and it is clear that his metaphysical and epistemological foundations are very different from Şadrā's. He is a physicalist and a functionalist, and naturally differs from Şadrā's existential definition of the nature of "self" and its states, "knowledge," and "self-knowledge." Regarding the "self," he rejects the immaterial Cartesian self (Shoemaker, 1963).¹² From Shoemaker's functionalist point of view, the self is not an independent entity; rather, he defines the self as a set of functions, and he defines self-knowledge in a functionalist manner, i.e., as a part of the functions of a mental state which, together with other functions related to an assumed mental state, constitute that state. In fact, Shoemaker's theory of self and self-knowledge is the theory of constitutivism (Shoemaker, 1994). In the comparative section, we will claim that, despite these differences, we can still get help from Shoemaker to better understand Şadrā's theory.

Shoemaker is opposed to the use of perceptual models to explain self-knowledge, and his arguments provide considerable help in understanding Şadrā's motivation in raising the notion of unity. We first explain the meaning of perceptual models.

5.1 A Definition of Perceptual Models

The history of perceptual models as a way of understanding self-knowledge goes back to John Locke. Locke believed in the existence of a faculty or "inner sense," that is, something similar to the five senses, through which knowledge of our inner or mental states was attained. Locke describes the inner sense as follows: "This Source of *Ideas*, every Man has wholly in himself: And though it be not Sense, as having nothing to do with external Objects; yet it is very like it, and might properly enough be call'd internal Sense" (Locke, 1975, p. 105).

Immanuel Kant also adopts a perceptual model, and believes that we have an "inner sense," through which we become aware of parts of our mind, similar in some aspects to the "external sense" through which we become aware of external objects (Schwitzgebel, 2019).

One of the most important contemporary philosophers who support the perceptual model is D. M. Armstrong. Armstrong believes that the process of self-knowledge is similar to sense perception.¹³

¹² Shoemaker accepts neo-Lockeanism regarding self-identity and personal identity. Although he accepts the existence of the body as a part of human identity, for him, the criterion of memory plays the main role (Shoemaker, 1996).

¹³ Introspection, in Armstrong's terms, has been used as a synonym for self-knowledge or self-awareness. However, sometimes, in Shoemaker's terms, this term has been treated as synonymous with perceptual self-knowledge.

In sense-perception, we become aware of current happenings in the physical world. A perception is therefore a mental event having as its (intentional) object situations in the physical world. In introspection, on the contrary, we become aware of current happenings in our own mind. (Armstrong, 1968, p. 323)

Armstrong is a defender of the inner sense theory and, in this way, he emphasizes the similarities of sense perception and introspection. Shoemaker rejects Armstrong's view and is critical of the perceptual model of self-knowledge. Before setting out Shoemaker's argument against the perceptual model, we will first explain his definition of the perceptual model, which may be summarized in two conditions:

- (1) The condition of independence: In perception, we have access to things that are independent of their being perceived.
- (2) Causal condition: In perception, there is a causal relationship between the object of perception and an individual's perception of it. (Shoemaker, 1994)

Shoemaker believes that reflection on these two main conditions will show us that, in perceptual models, there is always the possibility of *unawareness* regarding the object of perception; therefore, if we explain self-knowledge based on the perceptual model, there is the possibility of unawareness or, according to Shoemaker, self-blindness regarding our mental states. Yet Shoemaker tries to show that self-blindness, at least regarding some of our mental states — states such as beliefs, desires, pain, and will, which are according to him essentially self-expressive — is not possible and, thus, the perceptual model which allows the possibility of self-blindness is not a good model to explain self-knowledge. It is worth mentioning that the perceptual model is very similar to the model of acquired knowledge. In other words, acquired knowledge possesses the two conditions of the perceptual model.

Now we need to see what Shoemaker's argument against the perceptual model is. But before explaining his argument, we must first explain the concept of self-blindness.

5.2 The Concept of Self-Blindness

Shoemaker explains that self-blindness, or in other words unawareness of self, has an important precondition:

To be self-blind with respect to a certain kind of mental fact or phenomenon, a creature must have the ability to conceive of those facts and phenomena (just as the person who is literally blind will be able to conceive of those states of affairs she is unable to learn about visually. (Shoemaker, 1994, p. 273)

In the above statement, Shoemaker emphasizes that self-blindness is only attributed to an entity when it possesses the *concept* of the circumstances to which it is blind — that is, when it can conceptualize that of which it is unaware.

So lower animals who are precluded by their conceptual poverty from having first-person access do not count as self-blind. And it is only introspective access

to those phenomena that the creature is supposed to lack; it is not precluded that she should learn of them in the way others might learn of them, i.e., by observing her own behavior, or by discovering facts about her own neurophysiological states. (Shoemaker, 1994, p. 273)

Therefore, self-blindness is the inability of the agent to have first-person and direct access to a mental state, not a general inability to have knowledge of it through any method at all, that is, through methods other than the first-personal. So an individual who, for instance, is blind to her own anger, may be considered self-blind — according to Shoemaker's definition — if she can still perceive her being angry by observing her own aggressive behaviour, that is through means that are not first-personal. Nevertheless, she lacks the ability to perceive her anger through the first-personal and direct way. If an individual lacks the ability to understand her anger in any way at all, according to Shoemaker's definition, she is not considered self-blind (Shoemaker, 1994, p. 273).

Jeff Speaks summarizes Shoemaker's definition of self-blindness as follows:

Person "A" is self-blind to the mental state "B" if and only if:

- (1) Person A has the conceptual abilities to understand B, and
- (2) Person A lacks introspective access to B. (Speaks, 2004, p. 11)

Now we may answer the question of what the relationship is between the perceptual model and the phenomenon of self-blindness, for Shoemaker supposes that every perceptual model implies the possibility of self-blindness.

Remember that the two minimum conditions for the perceptual model are as follows: (1) the independence of perception and perceptual belief from its object (i.e., the referent of perception), and (2) the existence of a causal relationship between these two, that is, between perception and its object. According to the first condition, everyone who believes that self-knowledge is a process similar to perception must believe that the objects of self-knowledge — that is, mental states such as emotions, desires, and beliefs — at least from the conceptual aspect, are independent of an individual's knowledge of them, exactly like sense perception objects are usually independent of an individual's perception of their existence. Speaks states the following regarding the importance of this condition: "if a kind of knowledge does not satisfy this feature, then it is difficult to see what the grounds might be for taking it to be based on a kind of sense (whether inner or outer)" (Speaks, 2004, p. 10).

The second condition concerns the causal relationship between perception and its object. According to this condition, if the self-knowledge of something is like sense perception, then there must be a causal relationship between the object of self-knowledge (such as pain) and a person's awareness of it (awareness of her pain, as here, pain is the cause of knowledge). That is to say, self-knowledge of, for example, pain is attained when there is something like tissue damage that causes pain to manifest so that pain is created and data expressing "there is pain" flows towards a person who, as a result, becomes aware of that information and believes "I am in pain."

However, it is rational to assume that there is no guarantee that this causal process in an individual will *necessarily* take place (experimental science has shown that a person may have pain but not feel it); that is, the object of perception may be present before the perceiver but she may not perceive it. This is just as it is when we don't perceive some of the things that are actually present before us. Therefore, it seems that insofar as knowledge and its object are independent of one another and insofar as knowledge is supposed to be a *causal* relationship — as must necessarily be supposed in the perceptual model — unawareness of oneself, or self-blindness, is *possible* for a rational agent (Gertler, 2011, pp. 148–149). In other words, as long as there is no type of *necessary relationship* between mental states and knowledge of them, self-blindness is possible; and in the perceptual model, there is no such necessary relationship between perception and its object.

Brie Gertler expresses this matter succinctly. She states the following regarding Shoemaker's argument for the implication of the perceptual model on self-blindness:

The idea that self-blindness is possible, if the inner sense theory is correct, is a natural one. The inner sense theorist construes introspection as importantly similar to perception, and of course, *perceptual* blindness is not only possible but actual, as in the case of visual blindness. (Gertler, 2011, p. 148)

Gertler considers the comparison of self-knowledge to perception in the inner sense theory to be sufficient for the justification of the possibility of self-blindness, without any further analysis or specific explanation. Just as in visual perception, where blindness is not just possible but indeed actually happens, so in the perceptual model for knowledge of mental events it is also natural to consider that blindness is possible.

Based on the definition of self-blindness and its relationship with the perceptual model, we can see why, according to Shoemaker, self-blindness of mental states is impossible in rational entities — or at least some of them — and then we can explain why, again according to Shoemaker, the perceptual model is an unsuitable model to explain self-knowledge precisely due to the possibility of self-blindness.

Shoemaker offers several arguments to prove the impossibility of self-blindness for several instances of mental states, and we will explain one instance here.

5.3 Shoemaker's Argument to Prove the Impossibility of Self-Blindness to Beliefs

Shoemaker presents three arguments intended to prove the impossibility of self-blindness as regards beliefs, one of which we will address. His argument focuses on the human faculty of rationality and the ability to reflect.¹⁴ We human beings, as rational entities, can reflect on our beliefs. We can determine in response to present evidence whether or not we should reform our beliefs and change them. Shoemaker's words in this regard are as follows:

¹⁴ In her article "Self Knowledge and its Relationship with Rationality: Defending Richard Moran's Transparency Theory," Sarkarpour introduces and analyzes the rationalist approach regarding self-knowledge, albeit focusing on the rationalist views of Moran and Boyle. The article offers a general introduction to the rationalist approach. See Sarkarpour, 2020.

Briefly, the idea is that it is essential to being a rational being that one be sensitive to the contents of one's belief-desire system in such a way as to enable its contents to be revised and updated in the light of new experience, and enable inconsistencies and incoherencies in its content to be eliminated. (Shoemaker, 1994, p. 285)

Shoemaker argues that if our awareness of our beliefs is a perceptual process, then self-blindness or unawareness of our beliefs becomes possible. If we have no knowledge of our beliefs, how is it possible to consider evidence as to whether we should reform or change our beliefs? Evidently, such rational-based abilities in human beings require knowledge of beliefs, and this means the impossibility of self-blindness to beliefs and, consequently, the inaccuracy of the perceptual model.

Arguments of this form can be generalized. Wherever we can prove that self-blindness regarding a type of mental state is impossible, we are able to show that the perceptual model is unable to explain self-knowledge of that mental state, for in the perceptual model there is always the possibility of self-blindness. Shoemaker's argument is formulated in the following way:¹⁵

- (1) An entity that possesses rational faculties can determine if its beliefs should be reformed and changed based on new evidence.
- (2) An entity that can determine its beliefs, and reform and change them based on new evidence, must necessarily have knowledge of its beliefs.
- (3) An entity that possesses rational faculties must *necessarily* have knowledge of its beliefs.

This argument is based on the analysis of the concept of a rational entity. In fact, it is a conceptual reality that a rational existent can review and change its beliefs according to existing evidence. This is a very intuitive idea. Imagine an individual who believes that it is cloudy today. If he sees that it is sunny an hour later — that is, his evidence changes — and he still believes that it is cloudy and cannot reform his belief, intuitively we would not consider such a person to be rational. However, rationality does not mean that a person's intellect cannot go wrong and that his beliefs and thoughts are always consistent, coherent, and logical. Clearly, like all creatures possessing rationality, we can have deficiencies in our thinking. But the point is that it is sufficient simply to have the capacity of rational thought, to the extent that intuitively one can be referred to as rational: complete and perfect rationality is not required (Gertler, 2011, p. 152).

Apart from beliefs, pain is also an example of a mental state that Shoemaker utilizes to make arguments against the impossibility of self-blindness (Shoemaker, 1994). Studying all of these arguments is beyond the scope of this article; we merely need to know that all of Shoemaker's arguments are designed to prove that human beings possess a series of mental states and that being aware of them is part of the essence and quiddity of these states. In fact, these states are essentially self-expressive or self-demonstrative, and therefore it is impossible for them to exist and be

¹⁵ Shoemaker presents his arguments somewhat differently, not formulated in this way.

unknown, which is what it means for self-blindness to be impossible, at least regarding these mental states. Thus, self-blindness towards some mental states is impossible. Our knowledge of these mental states cannot be actualized through a process similar to that of sense perception. Since it is clear that we human beings possess such mental states (states that are necessarily conscious), a part of our self-knowledge must inevitably be actualized through a process apart from perceptual processes, that is, a process or model in which unawareness or self-blindness is impossible.

6. A Comparative Study of Ṣadrā's and Shoemaker's Views

As mentioned, it is clear that the metaphysical and epistemological foundations of Ṣadrā's and Shoemaker's thoughts are different. But despite these differences, we believe that both had a shared epistemic intuition. Both understood the importance of the impossibility of self-blindness. Hence, we can use this shared epistemological point to understand Ṣadrā's theory of unity. Without reference to self-blindness, it is very difficult to understand Ṣadrā's motivation for presenting the theory of unity.

It should be added that both philosophers draw metaphysical conclusions from this epistemological point. But their metaphysical results also differ, due to their different foundations. Ṣadrā comes to the theory of "unity" from the impossibility of self-blindness, whereas Shoemaker arrives at "constitutivism." But these different conclusions will not be an obstacle to using the mentioned epistemological point for a better understanding of Ṣadrā's motivation.

Now, in this section, we will reread and explain the principle of unity according to Shoemaker's concept of self-blindness. In this way, we will show that Ṣadrā's motivation for proposing the principle of unity was his understanding of the concept of self-blindness. We must remember Ṣadrā's definition of acquired knowledge. Acquired knowledge is the knowledge that is attained through a representation of the external object. Without going into a detailed discussion of the components of acquired knowledge according to Ṣadrā, we can now explain a point that has been previously indicated; in Ṣadrā's account of acquired knowledge, we can find the main two conditions of perceptual models: in acquired knowledge, like perceptual knowledge, knowledge is separate and independent of its object. Similarly, the acquired knowledge is, in fact, a representation of an object, and, in reality, the object of knowledge is the cause of the actualization of that representation in the mind of the knower. This means that the object is the cause for the formation of the representation of form in the mind of the knower. Thus, in acquired knowledge, like in the perceptual model, both the condition of the independence of perception from its object as well as the condition of a causal relationship between the object and perception is present.

Therefore, perhaps it can be said that acquired knowledge is very similar to the perceptual model, that is, a model based on representation and, according to Shoemaker's point, there is always the possibility of self-blindness in these models. Our claim in this article is that, in this discussion, Ṣadrā's attention was focused on that self-same important point, that is, the impossibility of self-blindness in self-knowledge or at least in a kind of self-knowledge. Accordingly, he does not consider the acquired knowledge model to be correct for self-knowledge, and instead introduces the knowledge-by-presence model in which the knower is united with the

known and there is absolutely no possibility of separation between them. Şadrā's argument for the unity of the knower and known will establish our point.

6.1 The Argument for the Unity of the Knower and the Known

Şadrā's argument for the unity of the knower and the known is as follows. Keep in mind that Şadrā utilizes the terms "intelligent being" and the "intelligible"; however, the intelligible, according to him, is something that is the object of perception (the known), including whether it is a general concept or an individual perceptual form:

If it is supposed that the actualized intelligible is something whose existence is other than the existence of the intelligent being such that they are two contrary existing essences and each has an identity that is contrary to the identity of the other ... in that case, it will be necessary that the possibility of mentally positing the existence of each of them — without the other — must exist because the minimum level of duality between two things is that each of them possesses an existence that is distinct in-itself from the other. Whereas it is not so regarding the actualized intelligible because the actualized intelligible does not possess an existence apart from the essence of the intelligible itself — not anything else — and one cannot imagine a thing to be intelligible except that a thing must perceive it. Therefore, if the intelligible is something separate from the intelligent being, it must be non-intelligible in itself — regardless of that intelligent being. In this case, its existence will no longer be this intelligible existence [known] that is the existence of the intelligible form. But the intelligible form is something free of matter ... and is forever an actualized intelligible, whether an intelligent being intellectualizes it in the external world or not. (Şadrā, 1981, vol. 3, p. 314)

Before we formulate the above statement in the form of an argument, we will first explain a point that will help to better understand the argument. Şadrā connects his argument to a discussion titled "mutual correlation" (*taḍāyuf*). Mutual correlation is a concept that addresses the relationship between two things that are equal in existence and in the way of existence. For instance, if one of them is actualized, the other is too; and if one is potential, the other is too (Şadrā, 1981, vol. 3, p. 315). Now we will formulate the argument. Şadrā's argument for the unity of the knower and known has three stages:

The First Stage:

- (1) Every perceptual form is an actualized known (earlier philosophers were also in agreement in this regard, according to Şadrā). (Ubudiyat, 2013, vol. 2, p. 87)
- (2) Every actualized known is a known without any intermediary.
- (3) If an entity possesses an attribute without any intermediary, that attribute is essential to that entity (i.e., the entity possesses this attribute without the intervention of any other thing, such as the attribute of evenness for the number four).

- (4) Every perceptual form is essentially actualized (or, in other words, to be known is essential for every perceptual form). (Ubudiyat, 2013, vol. 2, pp. 88–89)

The Second Stage:

- (1) The known and the knower are two mutually correlated things.
- (2) In two mutually correlated things, they are the same in existence and level of existence.
- (3) If there is a knower, there is also necessarily a known.

The Third Stage:

- (1) The relationship between the known and the knower is a mutually correlated relationship.
- (2) Mutual correlation requires a necessary existential relationship.
- (3) A necessary existential relationship must be identity or sameness.
- (4) The relationship between the known and the knower must be a relationship of identity or sameness.

The above argument proves our point well: Şadrâ, like Shoemaker, believes that our mental states (at least some of them) are necessarily conscious. Unawareness or self-blindness of them is impossible because being conscious is essential to them. In fact, when Şadrâ calls the intelligible form the “actualized known” (object of knowledge), he means that a person necessarily has knowledge of his intelligible form which, in other words, is that same mental state, and this is also the point Shoemaker indicated.

In another explanation, Şadrâ repeatedly emphasizes this point: certainly, the identity of those forms in themselves is essentially intelligibility (being known) (Şadrâ, 1981, vol. 3, p. 91). Thus, there is a necessary relationship between those states and our consciousness. This necessary relationship, according to Şadrâ, is a relationship of identity or sameness, which he calls “unity.” In fact, Şadrâ believes that the only unbreakable bond is the relationship of identity; therefore, if there is a mental state that is necessarily conscious and it is impossible to be unaware of it, according to Şadrâ, the only rational explanation that explains the relationship between an individual’s knowledge and that group of mental states is the relationship of identity or unity.

Therefore, Şadrâ was aware of the fact that the acquired knowledge model (which is very similar to the perceptual model) cannot explain knowledge of this group of topics — that is, knowledge of oneself and one’s mental states — because in the acquired knowledge model, due to the distinction of the object of knowledge and the knower, the separation between the object of knowledge (known) and the knowledge of it is possible and, as a result, the possibility of unawareness or self-blindness arises. Hence, he introduces knowledge-by-presence, in which the knower and known are identical and there is no possibility of separation between the two, and so no possibility of self-blindness or unawareness of the object of knowledge.

At this point, a question may be raised as to why Ṣadrā did not present a solution such as the transparency theory to resolve the problem of self-blindness in self-knowledge. And what is the difference between Ṣadrā's solution and the transparency theory?

The core of transparency theory, according to Gareth Evans, is as follows:

[I]n making a self-ascription of belief, one's eyes are, so to speak, or occasionally literally, directed outward — upon the world. If someone asks me “Do you think there is going to be a third world war?”, I must attend, in answering him, to precisely the same outward phenomena as I would attend to if I were answering the question “Will there be a third world war?”. (Evans, 1982, p. 225)

According to transparency theory, there is a kind of self-knowledge that cannot be attained through introspection and instead is attained through reflecting on the external evidence that forms that mental state. In other words, there are types of mental states — such as beliefs — that are self-expressive, and self-knowledge of them occurs simultaneous to their actualization. As Evans says, when a belief is formed, for instance, when we judge that a third world war will happen, simultaneously, “I believe that a third world war will happen” is actualized; every rational person will assert that it is irrational that one would say “a third world war will happen” and then say “I do not believe that a third world war will happen” (i.e., that one is unaware of one's own judgement). Therefore, according to Evans, it is as though the assertion “*a* is true” and the assertion “I believe that *a* is true” are equivalent (Evans, 1982, p. 225).

Thus, transparency theory requires that we assert that there is a range of mental states that are necessarily conscious and this is the very thing that will solve the challenge of self-blindness. In other words, transparency theory is a theory based on which self-blindness or unawareness of mental states is impossible: according to this theory, mental states and the self-awareness of them always accompany one another and are inseparable.

The difference between transparency theory and the theory of unity is significant for us. While it is clear that there is no talk of non-introspective self-knowledge — which is present in transparency — in the theory of knowledge-by-presence and the notion of unity, it must be said that, regarding the inseparable relationship between mental states and knowledge of them, Ṣadrā has taken a step beyond transparency theory and has presented the idea of unity as a means to analyze this necessary relationship. He believes that unity (or identity) is the only relationship that would negate any possibility of separation. This is in contrast to the transparency theory, which does not mention unity. In other words, in transparency, mental states and knowledge of them are two things; however, they always accompany one another. However, in the theory of unity, mental states and knowledge of them are self-same or identical. Thus, the notion of unity in this sense is different from transparency even though they are in accord regarding the assertion of the necessary consciousness of mental states and the impossibility of unawareness of mental states.

Here, we again remind readers that judging the strengths and weaknesses of Ṣadrā's solution — both generally as well as regarding the transparency theory — goes beyond the scope of this article. Our goal is to determine Ṣadrā's motivation

for proposing the idea of unity. We merely seek to show that the strange notion of the unity of the knower and known is rooted in a very important point in the discussion of self-knowledge, which Ṣadrā clearly understood. His concern is exactly the same as Shoemaker addressed in his criticism of the perceptual model. Whether the knowledge-by-presence model and the notion of unity are the only possible ways to present a suitable model for self-knowledge requires a separate discussion, which can be a path for continuing study.

7. Conclusion

In this article, while introducing Ṣadrā's theory of self-knowledge, we have tried to demystify one of its complex and strange components, that is, the "unity of the knower and known." For this purpose, we have utilized Shoemaker's view against the perceptual model and his important recognition of the impossibility of self-blindness to our mental states, so as to be able to arrive at Ṣadrā's motivation for postulating the knowledge-by-presence model with its strange component of the unity of the knower and known. Ṣadrā's arguments for the unity of the knower and known show that, like Shoemaker, he considers it impossible to be unaware of at least some mental states, and it seems that this very point was his motivation for raising the notion of the unity of the knower and known in explaining self-knowledge. Indeed, it is as though Ṣadrā intended to present a model for self-knowledge in which there is no possibility of unawareness of the object of knowledge — that is, our mental states. Naturally, acquired knowledge that has the possibility of unawareness of the object of knowledge cannot explain self-knowledge well. Thus, Ṣadrā developed a theory of self-knowledge in which self-blindness to our mental states is impossible. The knowledge-by-presence theory, with the characteristic of the unity of the knower and known, is Ṣadrā's proposal for resolving this issue.

Many questions remain regarding the idea of unity. Our aim in this article was merely to discover the motivation for Ṣadrā's raising such a mysterious notion. Therefore, as previously indicated, we have forgone the study of whether this idea is defensible and whether Ṣadrā's solution is the only possible solution to the issue of self-blindness. These are topics for more extensive research regarding the knowledge-by-presence theory.

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