

The Rule of the One in the Mystical Perspective of Ruhollah Khomeini

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Abstract

The rule “al-wāḥid lā yaṣḍur ‘anhu illā al-wāḥid” (the One does not emanate anything but the One) is one of the most fundamental rules of Islamic philosophy, according to which a single cause does not produce anything other than a single effect. This rule, rooted in Peripatetic philosophy, has always been a site of discussion and dispute among philosophers and mystics throughout the history of Islamic thought. Khomeini, as a mystic-philosopher, has a distinguished and unique approach to this rule. While accepting the principle of the rule, he examines it through two formulations: “al-wāḥid lā yaṣḍuru minhu illā al-wāḥid” and “al-wāḥid lā yaṣḍuru illā min al-wāḥid,” and with his mystical perspective, he offers a new reading of it. In this view, the rule of the One is not only not incompatible with the theory of the personal unity of existence, but by interpreting “unfolded existence” (wujūd munbasit) as the first emanation, the multiplicities of the world can be justified without violating the rule. Relying on the mystical foundations of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī and his followers, especially Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī, Khomeini introduces unfolded existence or the Muhammadan Reality (ḥaqīqat Muḥammadiyya) as the first determination and manifestation of the Supreme Truth, which is devoid of quiddity and limit and, as the intermediary of effusion, becomes the origin of the manifestation of multiplicities. This research, using a descriptive-analytical method and relying on Khomeini’s written works, especially his philosophical treatises and his commentaries on Miṣbāḥ al-Uns, explains his mystical approach to the rule of the One and shows how, by synthesizing the views of philosophers and mystics, he offers a horizon beyond both, in which the rule of the One can be presented in two different philosophical and mystical stations and ranks, and the confusion of these two stations has been the source of many errors in understanding the rule.

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Introduction

One of the most challenging issues in Islamic philosophy and mysticism is the manner of the relationship between unity and multiplicity and the explanation of the emanation of multiplicities from the single origin of existence. The rule “al-wāḥid lā yaṣḍur ‘anhu illā al-wāḥid” has been proposed as a philosophical answer to this problem: since a complete cause that is one cannot create multiple and divergent effects, from the One God nothing but a single being is emanated. This rule, which has a central role in the Peripatetic philosophical system, has faced serious challenges in the mystical system; because mystics, by accepting the theory of the personal unity of existence, believe that there is no real multiplicity in the world, and what is called multiplicity is the manifestations and appearances of that same single existence.

Ruhollah Khomeini, as a mystic-philosopher who was proficient in both philosophy and mysticism, has a special approach to this rule. The main question of this research is: How does Khomeini explain the rule of the One in his mystical system, and what difference is there between his philosophical and mystical views of this rule? Also, how does he reconcile accepting the rule of the One on the one hand and the theory of the personal unity of existence on the other?

Research Background

The rule of the One has a long history in the history of Islamic philosophy. Fārābī, Ibn Sīnā, Bahmanyār, Ibn Rushd, Shaykh al-Ishrāq, and Ṣadr al-Muta’alīhīn have each in some way formulated and proven this rule. Muslim theologians, unlike philosophers, have mostly moved in the direction of opposing the rule, because they considered it contrary to the universality of the power of the Supreme Truth and inconsistent with the foundations of theology.

Among mystics, Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn ‘Arabī has a complex encounter with this rule. On the one hand, he accepts the rule of the One, but on the other hand, he believes that a one that is one from every aspect and has no aspect of multiplicity and at the same time is the origin of something else has no instance. From Ibn ‘Arabī’s perspective, God is “the One-Many”—that is, He possesses multiplicity within unity, which is the same as the names and attributes.

Regarding the first emanation, there are also various views. Greek philosophers and, following them, Islamic philosophers consider the First Intellect to be the first emanation from the origin of effusion, while the people of gnosis, at a higher horizon, introduce the absolute will or sacred effusion as the origin of the emanation of multiplicities.

Regarding Khomeini’s view, numerous studies have been conducted. Zandiyya, in an article titled “The First Emanation from Khomeini’s Perspective,” has pursued his opinion in four axes: the rule of the One, the philosophers’ view on the first emanation, the mystics’ view on it, and the governance between the views of the two groups (Zandiyya, 1388, p. 115). Also, an article titled “The First Emanation from Imam Khomeini’s Perspective” has concluded that Khomeini, with his mystical approach, considers the instance of the first emanation to be unfolded existence, which is the same as the Muhammadan light reality (ṣ) (“The First Emanation from Imam Khomeini’s Perspective,” 1403, p. 4).

However, fewer studies have specifically explained the rule of the One in Khomeini's mystical view and examined the various dimensions of this view by directly relying on his works. The present research seeks to fill this gap.

1. The Rule of the One: Definition, Formulation, and Background

1-1. Definition of the Rule

The rule of "the One" is one of the important philosophical rules according to which a single cause does not produce anything other than a single effect: "al-wāḥid lā yaṣḍuru 'anhu illā al-wāḥid." In other words, a complete cause that is simple in terms of essence cannot have more than one effect; because if a single cause had two different effects, it would have to have two different aspects or characteristics so that each of the two effects would be issued from a particular aspect, and this entails composition in the cause.

1-2. Two Formulations of the Rule

Khomeini, in his philosophical treatises, states the rule of the One in two formulations: "al-wāḥid lā yaṣḍuru minhu illā al-wāḥid" and "al-wāḥid lā yaṣḍuru illā min al-wāḥid" (Imam Khomeini, 1381, vol. 1, pp. 250–255).

In explaining the first rule, he says that for every effect, the existence of a particular characteristic in the essence of the cause is necessary, and in reality, that characteristic causes the existence of the effect. For example, there must be a particular characteristic in the sun so that that characteristic causes burning or light. It is that same characteristic that, whenever it is found in something, the effect is its rays and shadow. The shadow of everything stands by that thing itself, and it is impossible for the shadow of something to come into existence from something else. Therefore, the shadow of a single thing must necessarily be single, and two multiple shadows do not exist from one thing.

Regarding the second rule, he also believes that a single thing whose effect is single is the shadow of one thing, and the realization of a single shadow from two things entails the realization of duality, and duality is contradictory to unity; therefore, a single thing is issued from the One, not from other than Him.

1-3. The Rule of the One in Peripatetic Philosophy

In Peripatetic philosophy, the rule of the One has a central role in explaining the system of existence. According to this rule, from God, who is the absolutely simple One, only one being—that is, the First Intellect—is emanated. From the First Intellect, because it intellects both its own essence and the essence of the origin, two beings (the Second Intellect and the soul of the sphere) are emanated, and in this way, the longitudinal chain of intellects and spheres is formed. This system, known as the "system of effusion," is a philosophical attempt to explain how multiplicities are emanated from unity without violating the rule of the One. The majority of philosophers and Ṣadr al-Muta'allihīn in early transcendent philosophy recognize the First Intellect as the most deserving of beings for the station of the first emanation (Zandiyya, 1388, p. 115).

2. The Mystical View of the Rule of the One

2-1. The Personal Unity of Existence and the Challenge of the Rule of the One

The mystical view of the rule of the One has fundamental differences from the philosophical view. In mystical ontology, instead of the theory of gradation of existence proposed in philosophy, the theory of the personal unity of existence is proposed. On this basis, the reality of existence is one, and no plurality or multiplicity has a way into it. In this view, instead of cause and effect, manifestation and appearance are discussed, and instead of philosophical possibles, the loci of manifestation of existence are discussed.

The fundamental challenge of mystics with the rule of the One arises from here: If the reality of existence is one and no multiplicity has a way into it, how can multiplicities be emanated from that One? And if multiplicities have no reality and are only appearances and manifestations of that single existence, will the rule of the One, which is based on homogeneity between cause and effect, still be valid?

2-2. Ibn ʿArabī and the Rule of the One

Ibn ʿArabī, as the greatest theorist of Islamic theoretical mysticism, has a complex encounter with the rule of the One. From an examination of his works, it appears that he does not have a uniform view of this rule and has encountered it in various ways (Khāliqīpūr and Saʿīdī, 1395, p. 22). On the one hand, he accepts the principle of the rule, but on the other hand, he believes that a one that is one from every aspect and has no aspect of multiplicity and at the same time is the origin of something else has no instance.

From Ibn ʿArabī's perspective, the reality of existence is one, and that is the existence of the Divine Essence, which, because it is infinite, has made space narrow for the presence of others (Ibn ʿArabī, 1946, p. 223). But this unity is a unity that contains all multiplicities. In other words, God is "the One-Many"—that is, He possesses multiplicity within unity, which is the same as the names and attributes. Therefore, the multiplicities of the world are nothing but appearances and manifestations of the divine names and attributes, and they have no independence. Thus, the rule of the One—which is based on homogeneity between cause and effect—is acceptable in Ibn ʿArabī's mystical system with a new interpretation: since God is one, His appearance is also one, but this single appearance becomes multiple in terms of the names and attributes.

2-3. The First Emanation in Theoretical Mysticism

In theoretical mysticism, instead of "the first emanation," which is a philosophical term, "the first appearance" or "the first determination" is discussed. Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī and, following him, Shams al-Dīn Fanārī believe that according to the rule of the One, unfolded existence or effused existence is the first emanation from the Supreme Truth. Unfolded existence, which in mystical terminology is also called "sacred effusion" or "the Muhammadan Reality," is the first determination of the existence of the Truth, which becomes the intermediary of effusion and the origin of the manifestation of multiplicities. This unfolded existence is

devoid of quiddity and limit, and for this reason, it has the capacity to be emanated from the Unlimited (Ḥusaynpūr, 1395, p. 176; Qūnawī, 1374, p. 45; Fanārī, 1374, p. 82).

To justify how multiplicities are emanated from unfolded existence, mystics appeal to the theory of “determinations.” Unfolded existence, although in the station of essence is one, becomes multiple in terms of the divine names and attributes that have appeared in it. This multiplicity is a conventional and shadow-like multiplicity, not a real and independent multiplicity.

3. The Rule of the One in the Mystical View of Ruhollah Khomeini

3-1. Acceptance of the Principle of the Rule

Khomeini (may God have mercy on him) is among the mystic-philosophers who believe that the rule of the One is a firm rule (Khomeini, 1381, vol. 2, p. 180). He accepts the rule in two formulations: “al-wāḥid lā yaṣḍuru minhu illā al-wāḥid” and “al-wāḥid lā yaṣḍuru illā min al-wāḥid.” However, he considers the scope of the rule limited to the Necessary Being; that is, what is meant by “the single cause” is a cause that is simple and one from every aspect.

Khomeini, in his philosophical treatises, explains the rule of the One using the concept of “shadow” (ẓill). He says that for every effect, the existence of a characteristic in the essence of the cause is necessary, and that characteristic causes the existence of the effect. Homogeneity between cause and effect is a condition, because the effect is from the effusions of the cause, and it is impossible for the “effused” to be from other than the genus of the “source of effusion.” Therefore, a suitable characteristic between cause and effect is necessary, and if two divergent things are produced from one source, it would entail that the source have two characteristics, so that each of the two things would be produced from one aspect and characteristic.

3-2. Critique of Confusing Generative and Conventional Matters

One of the important points in Khomeini’s view of the rule of the One is his emphasis on not confusing generative matters with conventional matters. He has repeatedly criticized the late Ākhūnd Khurāsānī’s use of the rule “al-wāḥid lā yaṣḍuru illā min al-wāḥid,” which relates to generative and real matters, in conventional usuli issues that have no connection to generation (Khomeini, 1378, vol. 1, pp. 120–125).

According to Khomeini, the rule of the One applies where both cause and effect are generative and real. But in conventional matters—such as issues of the principles of jurisprudence—this rule cannot be applied; because conventional matters have conventional unity and multiplicity and are not subject to generative rules.

This precise distinction between different domains of knowledge shows the depth of Khomeini’s philosophical-mystical view. With this approach, he both prevents the reduction of the rule of the One to conventional matters and avoids its improper extension into domains where it cannot be applied.

3-3. The Inner Dimensions of the Rule of the One

Khomeini, in his philosophical treatises, points to an important point that has remained hidden from the view of many researchers. He says: “Rather, for the

rule ‘al-wāḥid lā yaṣḍuru minhu illā al-wāḥid’ there is an inner dimension that, if they were attentive to it...” (Khomeini, 1381, vol. 2, p. 195). This expression shows that, from Khomeini’s perspective, the rule of the One has various layers and inner dimensions, each of which can be examined in its own place. The mystical inner dimension of the rule of the One is what he has addressed in his commentaries on *Miṣbāḥ al-Uns* and other mystical works. In this inner dimension, the rule of the One is not only not incompatible with the theory of the personal unity of existence, but itself confirms it. Since the existence of the Truth is truly one, His appearance and manifestation are also one. This single appearance is the same as unfolded existence or the Muhammadan Reality, which becomes the origin of all multiplicities of the world.

3-4. Unfolded Existence as the First Emanation

According to research conducted, Khomeini, with his mystical approach, considers the instance of the first emanation to be unfolded existence, which is the same as the Muhammadan light reality (ṣ) (“The First Emanation from Khomeini’s Perspective,” 1403, p. 4). This reality is devoid of limits and quiddity; because a thing that possesses quiddity does not have the capacity and worthiness to be emanated from the Unlimited.

Khomeini’s greatest focus for explaining the levels of the system of existence, in his “Commentaries on *Miṣbāḥ al-Uns*” of Fanārī—which is a commentary on Qūnawī’s “*Miftāḥ al-Ghayb*”—is directed toward the first emanation or, in his expression, the absolute or universal will (Ḥusaynpūr, 1395, p. 178). In these commentaries, he explains in detail how multiplicities are emanated from unfolded existence.

Khomeini in his philosophical treatises describes unfolded existence as follows: “Let it not remain hidden that unfolded existence and effused existence are not an essence for which unity is established; because it does not have quiddity, although it is possible. This means that unconditioned existence and unfolded existence are the shadow of the existence of the Truth and sheer relationality (ṣirf al-rabṭ); therefore, it has existential possibility, but it is not a composite duality” (Khomeini, 1381, vol. 3, p. 112).

This expression shows that, from Khomeini’s perspective, unfolded existence, although it is possible and has been emanated from the Supreme Truth, does not have quiddity, and for this reason, it is not “an essence for which unity is established.” Unfolded existence is the shadow of the existence of the Truth and sheer relationality—that is, its entire being depends on its connection to the Supreme Truth.

3-5. Synthesis of the Views of Philosophers and Mystics

One of the prominent features of Khomeini’s view of the rule of the One is his attempt to synthesize the views of philosophers and mystics. Zandiyya in her article shows that Khomeini in one case accepts the consensus of the views of philosophers and sages; but in another case, while not considering the views of the two groups opposed to each other, he states that the discussion of this issue in the two sciences has two different stations and ranks that should not be confused with each other (Zandiyya, 1388, p. 130).

In other words, from Khomeini's perspective, the rule of the One has two different applications:

1. In philosophy, the rule of the One is used as a rational principle to explain the system of cause and effect and the emanation of multiplicities from unity, and the instance of the first emanation is the First Intellect.
2. In mysticism, the rule of the One is used as an intuitive principle to explain the appearance and manifestation of the Supreme Truth, and the instance of the first appearance is unfolded existence or the Muhammadan Reality.

These two applications are not only not contradictory, but are complementary. Philosophy explains the system of existence with reason, and mysticism reaches its deeper layers with intuition. The confusion of these two stations has been the source of many errors in understanding the rule of the One.

3-6. The Rule of the One and the Refutation of Determinism

Khomeini also used the rule of the One to refute the doctrine of determinism (*jabr*). In his philosophical treatises, he introduces "the first proof for the refutation of the doctrine of determinism" as the rule "*al-wāḥid lā yaṣḍuru minhu illā al-wāḥid*" (Khomeini, 1381, vol. 2, p. 205).

His argument in this regard is that if human actions were emanated from God by compulsion, it would entail that multiple and divergent actions (such as actions of good and evil) would be emanated from the One God, and this is in contradiction with the rule of the One. Therefore, human actions cannot have been emanated from God in a deterministic manner, and man must have free will in his actions. This argument shows that, in Khomeini's view, the rule of the One is not merely an abstract philosophical rule, but also has practical applications in various domains of religious knowledge—including theology and ethics.

4. Analysis and Examination

4-1. Distinction Between Two Readings of the Rule of the One

An examination of Khomeini's works shows that he clearly distinguishes between two readings of the rule of the One: the philosophical reading and the mystical reading. In the philosophical reading, the rule of the One is an argumentative and rational principle according to which nothing but a single effect is emanated from a single simple cause. In the mystical reading, the rule of the One is an intuitive and experiential principle according to which nothing but a single appearance is emanated from the single unlimited existence, but this single appearance becomes multiple in terms of the names and attributes.

This distinction paves the way for solving many philosophical-mystical problems. Among the most important of these problems is the issue of how multiplicities are emanated from unity. In the philosophical reading, multiplicities are explained through the longitudinal hierarchy of intellects and spheres. In the mystical reading, multiplicities are explained through the determinations and manifestations of unfolded existence. These two explanations, although different, are not contradictory, and each is valid in its own place.

4-2. Khomeini's Innovation in Synthesis

Khomeini's main innovation is that he not only distinguishes the two philosophical and mystical readings from each other, but also offers a way to synthesize them. From his perspective, philosophers and mystics have each understood a part of the truth, and if their words are understood correctly, they are not only not contradictory, but are complementary.

This synthesizing approach is rooted in his own mystical foundations. From Khomeini's perspective, the reality of existence is one, and all schools of thought—whether philosophical or mystical—in fact point to aspects of this single reality. Their difference is in the instrument and method of knowledge, not in the object of knowledge itself. Philosophers know the truth with reason, and mystics with intuition, and both paths lead to the same single truth.

4-3. The Relation of the Rule of the One to the Personal Unity of Existence

One of the most important achievements of Khomeini's mystical view of the rule of the One is the explanation of the relation of this rule to the theory of the personal unity of existence. At first glance, it may seem that the rule of the One conflicts with the personal unity of existence; because the rule of the One is based on the homogeneity of cause and effect and the relative independence of the effect from the cause, while the personal unity of existence emphasizes the negation of any independence from other than the Supreme Truth.

But Khomeini, by interpreting unfolded existence as "the shadow of the existence of the Truth" and "sheer relationality," shows that these two theories are not only not contradictory, but are mutually necessary. From his perspective, unfolded existence, which is the first appearance of the Supreme Truth, has no independence from the Truth, and its entire being depends on its connection to Him. At the same time, this same unfolded existence, as the intermediary of effusion, becomes the origin of the appearance of all multiplicities of the world. In this way, the rule of the One in mysticism means the emanation of a single appearance from the Supreme Truth, and the multiplicities of the world are the determinations and individuations of that same single appearance.

4-4. Application of the Rule of the One in Khomeini's Various Works

Another noteworthy point is the extensive application of the rule of the One in Khomeini's various works. In his philosophical treatises, commentaries on *Miṣbāḥ al-Uns*, *Tanqīḥ al-Uṣūl*, and other works, he has addressed this rule in various ways. This extensiveness shows that the rule of the One was for him not merely an abstract philosophical issue, but a principle that has application in various domains of knowledge—from philosophy and mysticism to the principles of jurisprudence and theology.

However, he clearly distinguishes between the different applications of this rule and avoids confusing them with one another. This precision shows the depth and comprehensiveness of Khomeini's philosophical-mystical view.

Conclusion

The rule of the One has a special and distinguished place in Khomeini's mystical view. Relying on the mystical foundations of Muḥyī al-Dīn Ibn 'Arabī and his followers, especially Ṣadr al-Dīn Qūnawī and Shams al-Dīn Fanārī, he offers a new

reading of this rule in which the rule of the One is not only not incompatible with the theory of the personal unity of existence, but itself confirms and complements it.

The key points of this view are:

First, Khomeini accepts the principle of the rule of the One as a firm philosophical rule and examines it in two formulations: “al-wāḥid lā yaṣḍuru minhu illā al-wāḥid” and “al-wāḥid lā yaṣḍuru illā min al-wāḥid.”

Second, by distinguishing between the philosophical station and the mystical station of the rule, he prevents the confusion of these two stations and shows that each is valid in its own place.

Third, he introduces unfolded existence or the Muhammadan Reality as the first mystical emanation, which is devoid of quiddity and limit and, as the intermediary of effusion, becomes the origin of the appearance of multiplicities.

Fourth, by interpreting unfolded existence as “the shadow of the existence of the Truth” and “sheer relationality,” he explains well the relation of the rule of the One to the personal unity of existence and shows that these two theories are not only not contradictory, but are mutually necessary.

Fifth, he uses the rule of the One in various domains of knowledge—including theology and the principles of jurisprudence—and by distinguishing between generative and conventional matters, he prevents its improper application in unsuitable domains.

In sum, it can be said that Khomeini’s mystical view of the rule of the One is a prominent example of his ability to synthesize different philosophical and mystical views and offer a horizon beyond both. This view is not only theoretically important, but in practice can also open the way for many complex philosophical-mystical issues.

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