

Illumination, Transcendence, and the Wisdom of Enlightenment: A Study of Suhrawardī's *the Temples of Light*

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Abstract

This study provides an in-depth exploration of Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī's *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* (*Philosophy of Illumination*) as articulated in his seminal work, *The Temples of Light*. Through a detailed analysis of primary texts and comparative frameworks, the research examines Suhrawardī's metaphysical vision of light and darkness as the foundational principles of existence, his hierarchical cosmology, and the role of spiritual enlightenment (*ishrāq*) in attaining divine knowledge. The study employs a multidisciplinary methodology, combining textual analysis, historical contextualization, and comparative philosophical inquiry to uncover Suhrawardī's synthesis of Greek, Persian, and Islamic intellectual traditions. The goal is to elucidate how Suhrawardī harmonized rational philosophy with mystical intuition, providing a cohesive framework for understanding the nature of being and the human journey toward the Divine. This research contributes to the broader discourse on Islamic philosophy and mysticism by emphasizing Suhrawardī's enduring influence on later thinkers such as Ibn 'Arabī and Mullā Ṣadrā, while also situating his work within the global intellectual heritage of metaphysical inquiry.

Key Words: Suhrawardī, Philosophy of Illumination, Divine Light, Islamic Mysticism, Comparative Philosophy

Introduction

Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (1154–1191 CE), famously known as “the Martyr,” is a towering figure in Islamic intellectual history whose *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* (*Philosophy of Illumination*) represents a groundbreaking synthesis of metaphysics, mysticism, and rational philosophy. By weaving together Aristotelian and Platonic principles with Islamic mysticism and Persian spiritual traditions, Suhrawardī created a unique philosophical system centered on light as the essence of existence, the ultimate source of truth, and the foundation of spiritual and cosmic order. His seminal work, *The Temples of Light* (*Ḥayākil al-Nūr*), provides a comprehensive framework for his illuminationist philosophy, addressing profound themes such as the metaphysical structure of reality, the interplay between light and darkness, and the spiritual journey of the soul toward divine truth.

This paper is organized into several sections to thoroughly explore Suhrawardī's philosophy and its broader significance. The first section provides a detailed overview of Suhrawardī's life, intellectual background, and the historical and cultural contexts that shaped his philosophy. The second section studies the metaphysical foundations of his illuminationist thought as articulated in *Ḥayākil al-Nūr*, focusing on the concepts of light, darkness, and the hierarchical nature of existence. The third section examines the integration of Greek and Persian philosophical traditions within Suhrawardī's work, highlighting his creative adaptation of Platonic idealism, Aristotelian logic, and Zoroastrian metaphysics. The fourth section explores the practical and mystical dimensions of Suhrawardī's philosophy, particularly the role of *ishrāq* (illumination) and *tajallī* (manifestation) in the seeker's spiritual ascent. Finally, the paper concludes with an analysis of Suhrawardī's enduring influence on Islamic thought, particularly his impact on later philosophers such as Ibn 'Arabī, Mullā Ṣadrā, and the broader tradition of Islamic mysticism.

The primary goal of this study is to provide a comprehensive understanding of Suhrawardī's *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, situating it within its historical and intellectual contexts while demonstrating its philosophical and mystical depth. By employing a multidisciplinary approach that combines textual analysis, historical contextualization, and comparative philosophy, this paper seeks to uncover the innovative ways in which Suhrawardī integrated diverse traditions to create a cohesive metaphysical framework.

This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on Islamic philosophy and mysticism by highlighting Suhrawardī's pivotal role in bridging reason and spirituality. It underscores his illuminationist philosophy as a unique synthesis of metaphysical inquiry and spiritual practice, offering a model of thought that continues to inspire scholars and mystics alike. Through its

exploration of *The Temples of Light*, this paper reaffirms Suhrawardī's enduring legacy as one of the most significant figures in the history of Islamic intellectual tradition.

A. The Life of Suhrawardī the Martyr

Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (1154–1191 CE), known as "the Martyr" (al-Maqtūl) due to his execution, was a Persian philosopher and mystic whose influence remains central to Islamic philosophical traditions. Born in Suhraward, a village situated between Zanjān and Bijār Garrūs in northwestern Iran, he is often referred to as Shaykh al-Isḥrāq, after his school of Illuminationism (Ḥikmat al-Isḥrāq), which sought to revive ancient Persian wisdom and integrate it into Islamic metaphysics (Craig 1998).

Suhrawardī received his early education in Marāghah, where he studied wisdom and jurisprudence under Majd al-Dīn Jīlī, the same teacher who instructed Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (Dabashi 2012, 115). His philosophical journey took him to Baghdad, Iraq, and Syria, where he immersed himself in Greek philosophy, Islamic sciences, and Persian metaphysical traditions. Deeply influenced by Plato and Aristotle, as well as Persian philosophical heritage, Suhrawardī developed a distinct synthesis that merged rational inquiry with mystical insight (Al-Hallaq 2013, 373–378).

By the age of thirty-two, in 1186, he completed his magnum opus, *The Philosophy of Illumination* (Ḥikmat al-Isḥrāq), solidifying his role as a philosophical innovator (Corbin 1977, 54). According to Henry Corbin, Suhrawardī was later called the "Master of Illumination" (Shaykh al-Isḥrāq) because of his effort to revive the philosophy of ancient Persia and integrate it into Islamic thought (Corbin 1998). His philosophy proposed light as the highest principle of existence, restructuring metaphysical inquiry around illumination, hierarchy, and mystical realization (Corbin 1977, 54; Corbin 1998).

Suhrawardī's radical ideas and philosophical stance, particularly his Batini (esoteric) interpretations, led to tensions with the religious authorities of his time. In 1191 CE, he was executed in Aleppo by order of al-Malik al-Zāhir, son of Saladin, after being accused of spreading heretical teachings (Dabashi 2012, 115). However, reports on his death vary: some accounts suggest that he starved himself, others claim he was suffocated, while some narratives describe him being thrown from a fortress wall and burned (Kamāl 2006, 13).

Despite his premature death, Suhrawardī's ideas continued to shape Islamic philosophy, particularly through the Illuminationist tradition, which influenced both Eastern Islamic and Western medieval thought. His attempt to bridge philosophy and mysticism remains a pivotal contribution to Islamic intellectual history.

B. Suhrawardī's Philosophy: Harmony between Rationality and Mysticism

Suhrawardī's philosophy represents an attempt to harmonize rational philosophy with spiritual mysticism. He sought to create a new paradigm that emphasizes the interplay between light and darkness, where light symbolizes the essence of truth and existence, and darkness represents corruption and evil. This framework reflects his understanding of divine perfection and beauty, central to his *Ḥikmat al-Isḥrāq* (Philosophy of Illumination) (see: Ḥanafī, n.d., pp. 280–281; Aminrazavi, 2007). Building upon this, Suhrawardī developed *Ḥikmat al-Isḥrāq* as a unique system of thought centered on the concept of light. He posited that God is the eternal source of light, radiating through all beings and the cosmos. For Suhrawardī, true knowledge is not attained solely through abstract reasoning but through the inner illumination of the soul. Spiritual enlightenment, or *isḥrāq*, emerges as an intuitive and divine form of knowledge beyond rational comprehension (see: Al-Ḥāj, 2000, pp. 41–42).

This perspective diverges from the Aristotelian and Avicennan traditions that prioritize rationality, positioning Suhrawardī closer to Platonic thought, where intuition and metaphysical contemplation are emphasized. Suhrawardī's *ḥikmah* bridges these traditions, introducing a mystical dimension to Islamic philosophy that resonates with Persian metaphysical ideas and the symbolic cosmology of Zoroastrianism (Aminrazavi, 2007).

Illumination (*Isḥrāq*) and Manifestation (*Tajallī*)

In Suhrawardī's mystical framework, *isḥrāq* and *tajallī* are central concepts representing spiritual experiences tied to divine truth. These ideas align with broader Sufi traditions but hold distinct nuances in Suhrawardī's philosophy.

Suhrawardī conceptualizes *isḥrāq* as the process through which the soul perceives divine truth—an internal enlightenment that transcends rational knowledge. Unlike Avicenna, who emphasized deductive reasoning, Suhrawardī asserts that true wisdom arises from direct spiritual experience, requiring inner purification and unwavering will (Zayyāda, 1986, vol. 1, p. 73; Sells, 1995; Reda, 1996). His philosophy frames light as the essence of existence and cognition, where the more luminous an entity, the closer it is to pure truth.

While deeply influenced by Platonism, Suhrawardī goes beyond Platonic abstraction, integrating Zoroastrian and Islamic metaphysical principles. He draws on the imagery of rising light (*ishrāq*) to illustrate gradual enlightenment, mirroring the rising sun as a metaphor for the ascent of the soul toward ultimate reality (Ziai, 2004). This hierarchical illumination establishes a cosmic order, where light permeates all levels of existence, from the *Nūr al-Anwār* (Light of Lights) at the highest realm to the dark, material world at the lowest (*Philosophy of Illumination*, 97.7–98.11).

The origins of Illuminationism (*ḥikmat al-ishrāq*), though rooted in Islamic philosophy, reflect a synthesis of Avicennan thought, Neoplatonism, and ancient Persian mystical traditions. Suhrawardī's *Kitāb Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* (The Book of the Wisdom of Illumination), completed in 1186, establishes illumination as a unique epistemological process, distinct from rational deduction (Ziai, 2004). His critique of Peripatetic Aristotelianism challenges the sufficiency of reason alone, advocating for a system in which knowledge is attained through spiritual unveiling rather than mere logical inference (Nasr, 1993).

Suhrawardī's integration of *ishrāq* into Islamic thought was also influenced by earlier Persian and Islamic philosophers, such as Abu'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, whose emphasis on self-reflection and light metaphors prefigured Suhrawardī's use of illumination as a philosophical method (Langermann, 1998). Likewise, Zayn al-Dīn 'Umar Savajī's innovations in mathematical logic and conceptual abstraction laid the groundwork for Suhrawardī's *Rules of Thought* (*al-Ḍawābiṭ al-Fikr*) (Ziai, 2004).

Despite Suhrawardī's execution in 1191, his concept of *ishrāq* endured, shaping post-Avicennan metaphysics and influencing later Sufī philosophers such as Mulla Ṣadrā, whose *al-Asfār al-Arba'ah* (The Four Journeys) extended Illuminationist ideas into mystical theology (Rizvi, 2019).

In Suhrawardī's mystical framework, *tajallī* (manifestation) is a fundamental concept that describes the appearance of the Divine in various forms within creation. It represents the gradual unveiling of divine reality, whereby God's presence permeates all phenomena, unfolding in degrees of intensity across the cosmos. This concept aligns with broader Sufī traditions, but Suhrawardī's articulation of *tajallī* distinguishes itself through its philosophical synthesis of Neoplatonism, Illuminationism, and Islamic mysticism (Izutsu 1984, 264).

The term *tajallī* translates to "manifestation," "revelation," or "divine disclosure", referring to the self-disclosure of God as Truth in Sufism (Izutsu 1984, 264). It signifies the way divine reality unveils itself in both the macrocosm (the universe) and the microcosm (the human heart), establishing a metaphysical link between God and creation (Dadbeh 1988, 587). In Islamic theology, the concept appears in the Qur'an, most notably in:

"And when Mūsā arrived at Our appointed time and his Lord spoke to him, he said, 'O my Lord, reveal Yourself to me that I may look at You.' Allah said, 'You cannot bear to see Me, but look at the mountain: if it remains in place, then you may be able to see Me.' But when his Lord manifested Himself (*tajallā*) to the mountain, He made it crumble into dust, and Mūsā fell unconscious. When he recovered, he said, 'Glory be to You! I repent to You, and I am the first of the believers.'" (*Sūrat al-A'raf*, 7:143)

This Qur'anic verse illustrates *tajallī* as an overwhelming, transformative event, in which Mūsā is unable to withstand direct divine manifestation. Islamic theologians interpret *tajallī* as a process through which God reveals Himself in a form accessible to human perception, leading to different doctrinal interpretations regarding whether divine reality can be truly "seen" (Dadbeh 1988, 588).

Suhrawardī expands upon this concept, incorporating it into his hierarchical cosmology of light. In his system, light descends through various realms, forming a structured order of divine manifestation. His interpretation of *tajallī* aligns with Neoplatonic thought, where being is progressively emanated from a higher source but retains a connection to the divine essence (*Philosophy of Illumination*, 97.7–98.11). This hierarchy of manifestation culminates in complete unveiling (*kashf*), which is reserved for those who reach the highest spiritual realization (Al-Qāshānī 1971, 17–18).

Suhrawardī's *tajallī* is not merely theological but also epistemological, serving as the foundation for acquiring true knowledge. He argues that rational deduction alone cannot lead to ultimate truth; rather, divine self-disclosure must be experienced directly through spiritual enlightenment (Izutsu 1984, 264). His system introduces a hierarchy of perception, where the heart acts as a mirror, reflecting divine light in accordance with its purity and receptivity.

Mystical traditions, including those influenced by Suhrawardī, recognize multiple levels of *tajallī*, each corresponding to a deeper stage of divine realization:

1. Muḥāḍarah – The level of self-effacement (mahv), where divine attributes begin to manifest.
2. Mukāshafah – The level of revealing divine attributes, where the seeker perceives God's signs.
3. Muḥaqqaqah – The stage of full divine unveiling (mahq), in which the mystic becomes completely absorbed in divine reality (Dadbeh 1988, 588).

Suhrawardī's illuminationist metaphysics integrates these mystical stages with a philosophical model, in which divine light descends and manifests at different ontological levels, guiding the soul's journey toward enlightenment.

Ontological and Epistemological Implications

From an ontological perspective, Suhrawardī's *tajallī* aligns with the idea of divine manifestation as the underlying reality of existence. He describes truth as a sun, shining upon the mirror of the heart and the cosmos (Ziai 2004). This principle asserts that all created beings are expressions of divine presence, appearing in multiple forms according to their level of spiritual receptivity (Philosophy of Illumination, 77.1–78.9).

Epistemologically, *tajallī* serves as the mechanism through which knowledge is acquired. By removing conceptual veils, the seeker perceives pure reality beyond material illusion. This illuminationist view of knowledge was later integrated into Sufi practices, particularly in the thought of Mulla Ṣadrā, who developed a doctrine of spiritual ascent through divine unveiling (Rizvi 2019).

The Role of Illumination and Manifestation in Mysticism

For Suhrawardī, *ishrāq* and *tajallī* are transformative processes that lead the seeker to ultimate knowledge and unity with the Divine. These experiences are not merely personal but have broader implications for understanding the nature of existence. By connecting divine light with creation, Suhrawardī bridges philosophical and mystical thought, influencing later thinkers such as Mullā Ṣadrā and shaping the development of Islamic metaphysics.

In sum, Suhrawardī's *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* presents a unique synthesis of philosophy and mysticism, where light serves as the central metaphor for divine truth, human enlightenment, and cosmic order. His concepts of *ishrāq* and *tajallī* remain pivotal in understanding the spiritual and metaphysical dimensions of Islamic thought.

C. The Concept of Light and Darkness in *Hayākil al-Nūr*

In *Hayākil al-Nūr (The Temples of Light)*, Suhrawardī articulates his profound philosophical vision of the interplay between light (*nūr*) and darkness (*ẓulmah*). For Suhrawardī, light represents the essence of existence, the source of reason, and the manifestation of divine reality. Darkness, conversely, embodies ignorance, chaos, and the absence of order. This duality is not merely a symbolic framework but a foundational principle of his *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* (Philosophy of Illumination), reflecting the metaphysical structure of reality as an emanation of divine light descending into varying degrees of luminosity and obscurity (Aybash, 1990, pp. 87–88).

Suhrawardī's concept of light is deeply rooted in both Islamic and pre-Islamic philosophical traditions. It echoes Platonic and Neoplatonic thought, where light symbolizes ultimate truth and goodness, while darkness signifies distance from the divine source. However, Suhrawardī distinguishes his philosophy by integrating this duality into an Islamic cosmological framework, aligning it with Qur'anic verses such as the Verse of Light (*Sūrat al-Nūr*, 24:35), which describes God as the "Light of the heavens and the earth." Suhrawardī's vision goes beyond symbolic representation, positing light as the very substance of existence and the vehicle of divine presence in the cosmos.

C.1. The Nature of Existence and Beings in *Hayākil al-Nūr*

Wujūd is an Arabic term commonly translated as existence, presence, being, or entity. However, in Islamic thought—particularly within Ṣūfism and Illuminationist (*Ishrāqī*) philosophy—*wujūd* transcends its ordinary meaning to signify a metaphysical reality deeply intertwined with divine perception. Within this framework, existence is not merely a state of being, but a condition that derives its reality from God's perception and presence (Schimmel 1975, 142, 267). For *Ṣūfī* mystics, *wujūd* is not simply the existence of God but rather the process of "being found" by God, which aligns with the final stage of *fanā'* (annihilation of the self in divine presence) (Kamal 2006, 21–32). This mystical interpretation of *wujūd* suggests that true existence belongs solely to God, while human and material existence is contingent, temporary, and in a state of continuous dependence on the divine source.

Suhrawardī's conceptualization of *wujūd* is distinct yet interwoven with *Ṣūfī* and Neoplatonic traditions. He envisions existence as a hierarchical continuum of light, emanating from *Nūr al-Anwār* (the Light of Lights), which represents the absolute divine presence. This gradation of light forms a cosmic ladder, where beings (*mawjūdāt*) occupy different levels of proximity to divine illumination. At the highest level is pure light—God Himself, while at the lowest level is material existence, characterized by darkness, obscurity, and distance from the divine source (ʿInān 1966, 20–45).

This hierarchical model resonates with Neoplatonic emanationism yet is profoundly Islamic in its orientation. Suhrawardī emphasizes the role of spiritual refinement and intellectual illumination in bridging the gap between the material and the divine. Unlike Avicenna, who emphasizes the intellect as the primary tool for metaphysical ascent, Suhrawardī integrates mystical intuition as a necessary complement to rationality, thereby establishing a unique epistemological framework.

C.2. *Hayākil al-Nūr*: An In-Depth Exploration of Suhrawardī's Illuminationist Philosophy

Hayākil al-Nūr stands as a cornerstone of Suhrawardī's illuminationist philosophy, encapsulating his metaphysical and spiritual insights into the nature of light, existence, and knowledge. The text is structured into several chapters, each delving into key aspects of his philosophy. Suhrawardī uses the term "temples" metaphorically, suggesting that light serves as the foundation of all existence, akin to a divine architecture (Al-Darūbī, 1978, pp. 2–9).

The key contributions of this volume can be forged into a few fundamental elements that shape Suhrawardī's Illuminationist philosophy, redefining both existence and knowledge in Islamic thought. At the heart of the book is the ontology of light, which Suhrawardī positions as the metaphysical essence of reality rather than a mere physical phenomenon. Unlike earlier Peripatetic traditions, which defined existence through substance and form, Suhrawardī envisions *wujūd* as a gradational hierarchy of illumination. In his system, being is not a binary state but a continuum of luminosity, where entities exist in proportion to the light they reflect or possess. This dissolution of the classical distinction between essence (*māhiyyah*) and existence (*wujūd*), particularly in contrast to Avicennan (Ibn Sīnā) thought, marks a significant philosophical shift, positioning light as both the foundation of being and the process of becoming.

Closely tied to this ontological framework is Suhrawardī's epistemology of illumination, which asserts that true knowledge is attained not through rational deduction alone, but through direct spiritual experience. In his view, intellectual reasoning is necessary but insufficient; it must be complemented by *ishrāq*, an intuitive enlightenment that transcends the limitations of discursive thought. This idea resonates with later mystical traditions, particularly those of Ibn ʿArabī and Mullā Ṣadrā, who similarly advocate for a synthesis of intellect and intuition. By emphasizing divine self-disclosure as the highest form of knowledge, Suhrawardī reorients Islamic epistemology away from pure Aristotelian logic toward a more experiential, illumination-based model.

Another essential contribution of *Hayākil al-Nūr* is its cosmological structure, which presents existence as a hierarchical order of light. At the pinnacle of this system is *Nūr al-Anwār* (the Light of Lights), the absolute divine presence, from which all other beings derive their existence. Below this supreme source, luminous intermediaries—including intellects and celestial spirits—serve as conduits of divine illumination, bridging the gap between pure light and material darkness. This structured vision of reality does not merely describe the metaphysical order; it also functions as a spiritual guide, outlining the soul's ascent from the obscurity of the material realm toward ultimate enlightenment.

Through this integration of ontology, epistemology, and cosmology, *Hayākil al-Nūr* establishes a philosophical paradigm where light governs both existence and knowledge. Suhrawardī's vision offers a comprehensive synthesis of mysticism, metaphysics, and Islamic thought, positioning illumination as the central principle through which all aspects of reality are understood and experienced.

C.3. Suhrawardī and Predecessors

Suhrawardī's philosophy marks a departure from classical Peripateticism by prioritizing intuition and spiritual experience over pure rationalism. His emphasis on light as the substance of reality draws heavily from Platonic and Zoroastrian thought, yet his synthesis of these traditions within an Islamic framework is uniquely his own. Unlike Avicenna, who viewed the material world as a necessary emanation from the divine, Suhrawardī emphasizes the symbolic and spiritual significance of light, making it both the source and the ultimate goal of existence.

In comparison to later mystics like Ibn ʿArabī, Suhrawardī's philosophy is less concerned with *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of existence) and more focused on the metaphysical and epistemological role of light. While Ibn ʿArabī emphasizes divine

presence in all things, Suhrawardī delineates a clearer hierarchy, maintaining the transcendence of the divine while allowing for graded levels of connection.

Suhrawardī's *Hayākil al-Nūr* is a profound contribution to Islamic philosophy, blending metaphysics, epistemology, and spirituality into a cohesive illuminationist framework. By redefining light as the essence of existence and a pathway to divine knowledge, Suhrawardī offers a visionary perspective that bridges classical philosophy with Islamic mysticism. His insights continue to resonate, providing a rich foundation for subsequent philosophical and mystical developments in the Islamic intellectual tradition.

C.4. The Concept of the Temple (*Haykal*) in *Hayākil al-Nūr*

In *Hayākil al-Nūr (The Temples of Light)*, Suhrawardī uses the temple (*haykal*) as a symbolic representation of existence and the cosmic order through the interaction of light with all things. He correlates the temple with the structure of the universe, asserting that every entity in creation has its own unique "temple" that reflects a specific degree of light. These "temples" represent the layered gradations of existence, where light radiates through varying levels of perfection, illustrating a metaphysical hierarchy that connects all beings to the divine source (Badawī, 2003, pp. 20–45; Maḥfūz, 1982, pp. 60–80).

Suhrawardī identifies divine light as the ultimate source of all existence. This light represents the absolute truth that illuminates minds and hearts, serving as the metaphysical essence that sustains all beings. According to Suhrawardī, every entity in the cosmos strives to reach this absolute light through repentance, contemplation, and spiritual practice. Divine light is not only the origin of existence but also its goal, guiding all beings toward transcendence and ultimate realization of the self in connection with the divine (Copleston, n.d., pp. 90–91).

As already discussed, this concept aligns with Neoplatonic and Zoroastrian traditions, where light represents the fundamental essence of divine presence and cosmic harmony. However, Suhrawardī differentiates his interpretation by embedding it within an Islamic framework, emphasizing *tawḥīd* (divine unity) and spiritual refinement. This integration transforms the notion of light from a purely metaphysical principle into a pathway for divine realization, setting his philosophy apart from its philosophical predecessors.

C.5. The Relationship Between Soul and Body

In *Hayākil al-Nūr*, Suhrawardī also portrays the soul as a luminous manifestation of the divine light, illuminating and elevating the physical body. The body, being material and inherently dark, can only achieve perfection through its connection to the spiritual light of the soul. This relationship underscores Suhrawardī's dualistic view of human existence, where the soul serves as the intermediary that links the individual to the higher celestial realm. He suggests that the body, devoid of this spiritual light, remains incomplete and bound to material limitations. The soul, on the other hand, represents the intrinsic yearning for divine truth and serves as the conduit for spiritual ascension. This idea aligns with Islamic Sufī traditions, while also echoing Platonic and Neoplatonic thought, which similarly emphasize the soul's transcendence over the body in its pursuit of the divine (Al-Ṭāhir, 1997, pp. 12–45).

Cultural and Philosophical Foundations of Suhrawardī's Illuminationism

Suhrawardī's *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* (Philosophy of Illumination) is deeply rooted in multiple intellectual traditions, drawing from Persian mystical thought, Greek philosophy, and Islamic metaphysics. His work represents a synthesis of these traditions, creating a unique philosophical system where light becomes the central principle of existence and knowledge. Understanding the cultural and philosophical foundations of his thought requires an exploration of the influences that shaped his illuminationist framework.

The first section examines Persian influences, particularly the Zoroastrian and Manichaean traditions, which emphasize the duality of light and darkness as metaphysical realities. Suhrawardī adopts and reinterprets these ideas within an Islamic paradigm, integrating them into his hierarchical cosmology of light.

The second section explores Greek philosophical influences, focusing on Plato's theory of forms and Aristotle's metaphysical principles. Suhrawardī engages in a dialogue with classical Greek thought, modifying Aristotelian logic and Neoplatonic cosmology to align with his own vision of illumination and mystical ascent.

The final section highlights how Suhrawardī synthesizes these Persian and Greek traditions within the framework of Islamic philosophy. His integration of Sufī mysticism, Qur'anic symbolism, and Islamic metaphysical principles distinguishes *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* from its predecessors, making it a groundbreaking contribution to Islamic intellectual history. This synthesis

not only challenges previous Peripatetic models but also influences later Islamic thinkers, such as Mullā Ṣadrā and Ibn ‘Arabī, ensuring the enduring impact of Suhrawardī’s illuminationist thought.

D.1. Persian Influences on Suhrawardī’s Thought

The profound influence of ancient Persian thought is evident in Suhrawardī’s philosophy, particularly in his development of the *Hikmat al-Ishrāq* (Philosophy of Illumination) and its emphasis on the interplay between light and darkness. Persian metaphysical traditions, which positioned light as a divine and cosmic force, deeply shaped Suhrawardī’s symbolic framework and understanding of spiritual and material existence.

The Legacy of Pre-Islamic Persian Philosophy

Before the advent of Islam in Persia, philosophical traditions in the region exhibited a strong metaphysical orientation and a deeply spiritual worldview. Among these views, one may consider Zoroastrianism, which centered on the duality of light and darkness, portraying light as the ultimate symbol of divine power and purity. The concept of divine fire and the association of light with ultimate truth heavily influenced later Islamic mysticism, including Suhrawardī’s illuminationist philosophy. Another significant tradition is Manichaeism, which emphasized the struggle between good (light) and evil (darkness), introducing a dualistic lens that later resonated with *Ṣūfī* interpretations of the spiritual journey toward divine unity. These pre-Islamic Persian philosophies left a lasting imprint on the metaphysical and symbolic frameworks of Islamic thought, particularly in the integration of light as a central metaphor for divine presence and spiritual realization (Chittick, 1983, 10–13).

The fusion of Persian philosophical heritage with Islamic thought during the medieval period significantly enriched Sufi practices and metaphysical principles, leaving a profound impact on the development of Suhrawardī’s Illuminationist philosophy. His *Hikmat al-Ishrāq* reflects this synthesis, particularly in its emphasis on light as the foundation of existence and knowledge. Persian metaphysical traditions, especially those found in Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism, deeply shaped Suhrawardī’s framework, providing him with a symbolic language and a structured cosmology that he later refined within an Islamic paradigm.

Suhrawardī’s hierarchical model of illumination proposes that divine light flows in cascading gradations, manifesting through both physical and spiritual realms. This cosmological vision aligns with Zoroastrian concepts, where light is seen as the ultimate force of order, purity, and divine essence permeating all existence. Similarly, his emphasis on the inner journey toward divine unity echoes Persian mystical traditions, particularly in the way he portrays spiritual illumination as the key to transcendent knowledge. Drawing from these influences, Suhrawardī articulates a vision of *tawḥīd ‘irfānī* (mystical unity) that integrates Persian esotericism with Islamic monotheism, illustrating the soul’s ascent toward divine realization through stages of increasing illumination.

In his philosophical synthesis, Suhrawardī adopts the ancient Persian notion of light as the first principle of existence, a concept rooted in Zoroastrian cosmology, where the universe is seen as a manifestation of divine radiance. In his system, light serves not only as a metaphysical reality but also as an epistemological guide, leading seekers toward absolute truth and divine wisdom. His emphasis on inner knowledge through spiritual illuminations (*ishrāqāt*) rather than mere rational deduction further reflects Persian mystical traditions, aligning his views with Zoroastrian and Manichaean doctrines that focus on inner enlightenment and the purification of the soul.

By merging Persian symbolic traditions with Islamic principles, Suhrawardī constructs a distinct philosophical framework centered on divine illumination. His ability to harmonize pre-Islamic Persian metaphysical constructs with Islamic mysticism not only revitalized ancient traditions but also laid the groundwork for subsequent developments in Islamic mystical thought. His synthesis created a unique model where light functions as both the foundation of existence and the ultimate means of spiritual ascent, shaping later Islamic philosophy and continuing to influence mystics and thinkers in the centuries that followed (W.H.T, 1962).

Suhrawardī’s use of light as a central metaphor extends beyond cosmology into mystical practice, where it serves as the medium through which divine knowledge is revealed to the seeker. This notion is deeply resonant with Zoroastrian thought, where light is both a purifying force and a path to divine truth. His illuminationist philosophy proposes a hierarchical structure of existence, in which divine light emanates through various levels of being, guiding the soul’s ascent toward ultimate realization. Furthermore, his emphasis on *bāṭinī* (esoteric) knowledge aligns with Persian traditions, which prioritize inner experience over outward appearances, linking the illumination of the heart to the realization of divine presence (Toshihiko, 1984, pp. 21–46).

Suhrawardī's incorporation of Persian influences enriched both the intellectual and spiritual dimensions of Islamic mysticism, offering a unique perspective on the relationship between humanity and the divine. His illuminationist approach redefined the role of light in understanding existence, providing a framework that integrated Neoplatonic cosmology, Persian metaphysics, and Islamic theological discourse. By doing so, he not only revitalized ancient traditions but also established a lasting foundation for later mystical developments in the Islamic world.

In essence, Suhrawardī's *Hikmat al-Ishrāq* stands as a testament to the power of cultural and intellectual exchange, illustrating how Persian and Islamic philosophical traditions merged to form a cohesive spiritual and metaphysical worldview.

D.2. Greek Philosophical Legacy in Suhrawardī's Illuminationism

Suhrawardī's *Hikmat al-Ishrāq* (Philosophy of Illumination) demonstrates a profound engagement with Greek philosophy, particularly the ideas of Plato and Aristotle. In *Hayākil al-Nūr* (The Temples of Light), Suhrawardī integrates Platonic ideals of forms and light as symbols of knowledge while incorporating Aristotelian concepts of matter and form. However, rather than merely adopting these influences, he transcends them, forging a unique synthesis that intertwines rational philosophy with Islamic mysticism, ultimately creating a distinct illuminationist system.

Greek thought played a central role in shaping Islamic intellectual traditions, particularly in metaphysics, logic, and spirituality. The translation of Greek philosophical works into Arabic during the medieval period brought figures such as Plato and Aristotle into the forefront of Islamic discourse. Plato's concept of the "world of forms" (*'ālam al-muthul*), which emphasizes eternal truths and the symbolic use of light, resonated deeply with Islamic mysticism. His association of light with ultimate knowledge laid a foundation for illuminationist interpretations, reinforcing the idea that spiritual realities transcend material existence. Aristotle, on the other hand, influenced Islamic philosophy through his metaphysical inquiries into substance, causality, and the Unmoved Mover, offering a hierarchical understanding of existence that would later be adapted by Suhrawardī.

Suhrawardī's engagement with Platonic and Aristotelian thought reflects a sophisticated philosophical dialogue, where he seamlessly blends Greek concepts with Islamic spirituality. Drawing from Plato's theory of forms, Suhrawardī conceptualizes divine truth as the ultimate light, arguing that both spiritual and material realities must be understood through this illuminated framework. For him, the material world is but a shadow or reflection of the true reality—the realm of divine light. He adopts Plato's allegory of the cave, illustrating that the soul must transcend material illusions to perceive the divine essence. In this sense, his notion of light as both a symbol and substance of divine knowledge aligns directly with his broader concept of *ishrāq* (illumination). Similarly, just as Plato's "form of the Good" represents the highest metaphysical reality, Suhrawardī elevates *Nūr al-Anwār* (the Light of Lights) as the ultimate source of existence and perfection.

While Plato provided a metaphysical foundation, Suhrawardī also incorporated key aspects of Aristotelian thought, particularly regarding the Unmoved Mover and causality. However, he reinterprets these ideas through his illuminationist lens, equating the Unmoved Mover with divine light, which animates and sustains the cosmos. Unlike Aristotle, who prioritizes the intellect as the highest faculty, Suhrawardī merges reason with mystical insight, suggesting that true knowledge is not attained through rational deduction alone but through spiritual illumination. In doing so, he modifies Aristotle's hierarchical cosmology, shifting the emphasis from motion and material causality to a model where divine light descends in successive gradations, illuminating the different levels of existence.

Through his synthesis, Suhrawardī bridges the gap between rational philosophy and mysticism, integrating Greek metaphysical principles into an Islamic framework. His *Hikmat al-Ishrāq* redefines light as both an ontological and epistemological principle, establishing a philosophical system that transcends Greek thought while enriching Islamic philosophy. By positioning illumination as the foundation of both existence and knowledge, he not only engages with classical Greek ideas but also revolutionizes Islamic metaphysics, leaving a lasting impact on later mystical and philosophical traditions. His engagement with Greek philosophy underscores his role as a pivotal figure in the development of Islamic intellectual thought. By synthesizing Platonic and Aristotelian ideas with Islamic mysticism, he forged a unique philosophical vision that continues to influence both metaphysical and spiritual discourses. *Hikmat al-Ishrāq* stands as a testament to the enduring dialogue between Greek and Islamic philosophies, providing a rich framework for understanding the interplay between reason, mysticism, and divine light.

E. The Influence of Suhrawardī on Islamic Philosophy

Although Suhrawardī did not gain significant support during his lifetime, his philosophical contributions profoundly impacted Islamic thought after his death. His *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* (Philosophy of Illumination) became a cornerstone of intellectual discourse, influencing mystics, theologians, and philosophers in the centuries that followed.

Suhrawardī's Illuminationist School

Suhrawardī's school of thought, rooted in the metaphysics of light and the spiritual path to enlightenment, left an enduring legacy in the Islamic philosophical tradition. His ideas resonated particularly with:

1. **Ibn 'Arabī:** As a leading figure in Islamic mysticism (*taṣawwuf*), Ibn 'Arabī's concept of *waḥdat al-wujūd* (unity of existence) echoes Suhrawardī's illuminationist vision. Both emphasize the divine presence as manifesting in all levels of existence, with light serving as a symbol of this unifying force.
2. **Al-Ghazālī:** While primarily a critic of rationalist philosophy, Al-Ghazālī's mystical works demonstrate a conceptual affinity with Suhrawardī's focus on intuitive knowledge and spiritual enlightenment. Suhrawardī's illuminationism complemented Al-Ghazālī's emphasis on esoteric understanding over purely rational inquiry.
3. **Iranian Philosophers:** Thinkers such as Mīr Dāmād and Ṣadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī (Mullā Ṣadrā) were deeply influenced by Suhrawardī's illuminationist philosophy. Mullā Ṣadrā's *ḥikmat al-muta'āliyah* (Transcendent Theosophy) reflects Suhrawardī's synthesis of rationality and mysticism, particularly in its metaphysical exploration of existence and light.

Lasting Legacy

Suhrawardī's impact on Islamic philosophy can be summarized in several key areas:

1. **Metaphysics of Light:** His emphasis on light as both the essence and structure of existence established a symbolic and metaphysical framework that influenced later Islamic thinkers.
2. **Integration of Reason and Mysticism:** Suhrawardī bridged the gap between Greek-inspired rationalism and Islamic spirituality, providing a model for integrating intellectual inquiry with spiritual practice.
3. **Revival of Persian Philosophy:** Suhrawardī's incorporation of pre-Islamic Persian metaphysical concepts revitalized this tradition within an Islamic context, influencing Iranian philosophy for centuries.

Broader Implications

Suhrawardī's contributions extended beyond philosophy, shaping theological and mystical discourses. His illuminationist principles served as a foundation for exploring divine reality, the nature of existence, and the human soul's journey toward enlightenment. Despite the challenges he faced during his life, Suhrawardī's intellectual legacy remains vibrant in Islamic thought (see: Nasr, 2019, pp. 81–85; El-Bizri, 2001).

In conclusion, Suhrawardī's influence on Islamic philosophy demonstrates the enduring power of his ideas. His ability to integrate diverse intellectual traditions into a cohesive philosophical system has ensured his place as one of the most significant figures in the history of Islamic thought.

Conclusion

Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī's *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* (Philosophy of Illumination) represents a monumental contribution to Islamic philosophy and mysticism. His synthesis of Persian, Greek, and Islamic intellectual traditions resulted in a unique framework that centers light as the metaphysical essence of existence and the pathway to divine truth. By merging rational inquiry with spiritual intuition, Suhrawardī bridged the gap between reason and mysticism, offering a comprehensive understanding of the cosmos, the human soul, and the relationship between creation and the Divine.

Suhrawardī's emphasis on illumination (*ishrāq*) and divine light (*nūr ilāhī*) as central metaphysical principles has profoundly influenced subsequent Islamic thought, from the mysticism of Ibn 'Arabī to the philosophical innovations of Mullā Ṣadrā. His work also reflects the enduring legacy of Persian metaphysics and Greek philosophy, adapted into an Islamic framework that prioritizes spiritual awakening and the pursuit of inner knowledge.

The legacy of Suhrawardī's illuminationist philosophy is far-reaching, shaping metaphysical and mystical discourses across centuries. It serves as a reminder of the dynamic interplay between diverse intellectual traditions, demonstrating how

integration and synthesis can produce groundbreaking philosophical insights. *Hayākil al-Nūr* stands as a testament to Suhrawardī's vision—a timeless exploration of light, existence, and the human quest for transcendence. His ideas continue to inspire scholars and seekers alike, solidifying his place as a pivotal figure in the history of Islamic thought.

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