

Philosophical Reason versus Mystical Intuition: Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī (d. 1191)

ROXANNE MARCOTTE

When they discovered the works of Aristotle, Muslims encountered a gold mine of philosophical queries. In his works, reason and intuition were, amongst so many of these queries, two notions that kept Islamic philosophers busy for centuries, up until the present days. This paper would like to propose a preliminary study of one particular aspect of Suhrawardī's discussion regarding knowledge¹. This study is more of an overview than a detailed account of his epistemology. Nonetheless, it is a modest attempt at seeing how reason and, more generally, the philosophical venture, are related to intuition and the mystical or gnostic experience, particularly in the philosophical works of Shihāb al-Dīn (Yaḥyā b. Ḥabash b. Amīrak) al-Suhrawardī (1153-1191), the *shaykh al-Ishrāq*, or the *shaykh al-Maqtūl*². The task at hand will be to investigate the role reason, central in the works of the philosophers or, as Suhrawardī calls them, the Peripatetics (i.e., more generally understood as being the Peripatetic philosophy of Avicenna), plays in the former's work, and how reason is conceived, defined, and interpreted in light of his newly formulated terminology and division of knowledge.

¹ This paper has greatly benefited from the judicious remarks made by Professors Herman Landolt, Todd Lawson and Parviz Morewedge. A shorter version of this paper was presented at the SSIPS (Society for the Study of Islamic Philosophy and Science) / SAGP (Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy) 15th Annual Conference 1996, at Binghamton University, SUNY (Oct. 25-7, 1996).

² He had befriended al-Malik al-Zāhir, son of Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Ayyūbī, governor of Aleppo. Opposition by the *'ulamā'*s and their accusation against what they alleged was his claim of prophecy, led to his death in Aleppo (d. 1191) ordered by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn himself, see Seyyed Hossein Naṣr, *Three Muslim Sages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), 52-82; cf. Henry Corbin, *En islam iranien; aspects spirituels et philosophiques*, vol. II, *Sohrawardī et les platoniciens de Perse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 9-19. Some have argued (i.e., Mehdī Ḥā'irī Yazdī, Sayyed Hussein Naṣr, Henry Corbin, Āshtiyānī) that Suhrawardī's texts are essentially mystical in nature, ranking philosophy and its method a good second while, for others (i.e., Hussein Ziai, John Walbridge, Mehdī Aminrazavī), his works combine both the mystical and the philosophical, as two complementary methods or "options" able to attain, or to "ultimately see" the same reality." More specifically, concerning these two methods, some have argued (e.g., Yazdī) that he has proposed a process which starts with philosophy as a stepping board that leads to a highest level, that of mystical experience, while others have argued (e.g., Naṣr) that through asceticism and philosophy one arrives at the mystical stage, while still others have proposed (e.g., Aminrazavī), that besides the use of philosophy, as a valid method to attain truths, "it was practising asceticism that resulted in illumination," see Mehdī Aminrazavī, "Suhrawardī's Theory of Knowledge" (Ph.D. Diss., Temple University, 1989), 142-4. It is quite obvious that interpretations regarding the Suhrawardīan method do not rally unanimity.

Philosophy versus Mystical Experience

Some have mentioned that the shift made by Suhrawardī from reason to mystical or direct intuition is not one of substance but rather of emphasis, i.e., what is really called for in his works is the predominance of a "philosophical intuition"³. The main difficulty which arises with such a claim is that the notion of intuition generally used by Suhrawardī appears to be slightly different in nature and in its function. In Aristotle's works, philosophical intuition is usually understood as a type of immediate knowledge or the faculty responsible for this type of intuitive knowledge⁴. This philosophical intuition has a role, i.e., at a first stage, in perceiving (intuiting) particulars of senses directly from the experienced world; and, in addition, at a second stage, in perceiving (intuiting) universals or generalizations and abstractions from the particulars (of senses). In Arabic, it is often considered to be the function of "*hads*", in the sense of "hitting correctly upon the mark" and related to the notion of "acumen"⁵. This Aristotelian notion was taken up by Avicenna, in whose works it plays a similar role in knowledge acquired through demonstrations⁶. However, in the works of Avicenna, intuition is integrated into a greater philosophical system considerably influenced by

³ A "*hads-i falsafah*" see Hussein Ziai, "Mushāhadah, Ravish-i Ishrāq, va Zabān-i Shir. Bahthī Pīrāmūn-i Nizām-i Falsafah-ye Ishrāq-i Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī [Mystical Contemplation, *Ishrāqī* Method and Poetic Language. A Study on the System of Suhrawardī's Philosophy of Illumination]", *Iran Nameh*, 8 (1990), 83-4.

⁴ Intuition is derived from the Latin and means "as contemplation" (*intuitio*), or "to gaze upon" (*intueri*), or "to look at" (*tuere*).

⁵ In the Posterior Analytics and the Nichomachean Ethics, see Dimitri Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition. Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 166-8, esp. 166; cf. Idem, "Avicenna V. Mysticism," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, (1989), vol. III, 79b-80b.

⁶ Gutas somehow arrives to the conclusion that "Avicenna... is not interested in the ethical but the epistemological function of the concept *hads* (*eustochia*, *not anchinoiā*)", see Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 169; cf. Idem, "Avicenna V. Mysticism", 80a.

religious considerations⁷. And finally, it becomes an essential element in his mystical philosophy⁸.

In Suhrawardī's works, the Aristotelian or, more precisely, the Peripatetic notion of intuition does, indeed, remain part of his Peripatetic outlook. For example, he often appeals to the judgements of intuition (*aḥkām al-ḥads* or *ḥukm al-ḥads* or *yaḥkum al-ḥads*)⁹. Again, in the *Physics* of his *al-Lamahāt* he mentions that, "the second [disposition] is its [the soul's] state when it acquires the first intelligibles (*ma'qūlāt*), and when it acquires the secondary (*thawānī*) [intelligibles], either by means of thought [or the cognitive process] (*bi-l-fīkr*) or by intuition (*bi-l-ḥads*); and it is called the habitual intellect (*'aql bi-l-malaka*)¹⁰". This passage occurs in a discussion which proposes essentially

⁷ For example, Avicenna also makes use of the term *fiṭra* (on the anthropological level) as a means of acquiring knowledge within the broader Islamic theological context, i.e., "the concept of natural intelligence providing innate, *a priori* knowledge, as expressed in the Qur'anic *fiṭra* [...] and *fiṭra* is precisely the term Avicenna uses to describe Intuition in theological terminology" to which corresponds such terms as "*waḥy* (revelation), *ilhām* (inspiration), and particularly *budītha* (self-evident, spontaneous, or *a priori* knowledge," see Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*, 170; cf. John Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights. Qutb al-Dīn Shirāzī and the Illuminationist Tradition in Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 34-5.

⁸ Gutas mentions, regarding the notion of intuition, that, "It [*ḥads*] is a mental act whereby the human intellect comes into contact (*etteṣāl*) with the active intellect (*'aql fa'āl*) and receives what Avicenna frequently describes as "divine effluences" (*ḥads*), i.e., knowledge of the intelligibles through the acquisition of the middle terms. *Ḥads* constitutes the *only* point of epistemological contact, in Avicenna's thought, between the sublunar and the supralunar realms, or between the mundane and the transcendental, and it refers to a strict and precise syllogistic process. Avicenna admits no other way to a knowledge of the intelligible world and ultimately of the Necessary Existent (*wājib al-wujūd*)," see Gutas, "Avicenna. v. Mysticism," 79b-80a.

⁹ Suhrawardī, *al-Talwīḥāt [The Intimations]* in *Opera metaphysica et mystica*, vol. I, ed. Henry Corbin, 2nd ed., (Istanbul, Maarif Matbassı, 1945; Tehran: Institut d'études et des recherches culturelles, 1993), 57; cf. Idem, *al-Mashāri' wa al-Mutārahāt [The Paths and Havens]* in *Opera*, I, 440; cf. *Hikmat al-Ishrāq [The Philosophy of Illumination]* in *Opera metaphysica et mystica*, vol. II, ed. Henry Corbin, 2nd ed., (Istanbul, 1952; Tehran: Institut d'études et des recherches culturelles, 1993), 109. The *Hikmat al-Ishrāq* has been translated in French by Corbin, see Suhrawardī, *Le livre de la sagesse orientale*, trans. Henry Corbin and ed. Christian Jambet, (Paris: Verdier, 1986). Suhrawardī goes on to mention in the *Physics* of his *al-Lamahāt* that, "thought (*fīkr*) is a movement (*ḥaraka*) belonging to the soul, by which it can acquire principles (*mabādī'*) [...] intuition (*ḥads*) is the excellence (*jūda*) of this movement which does not require any efforts (*talab*)," see Suhrawardī, *Kitāb al-Lamahāt [The Flashes of Light]*, ed., intro. and notes Émile Maalouf, 2nd ed., (1969; Beirut: Dār al-Nahār li-l-Nashr, 1991), 120.

¹⁰ *al-Lamahāt*, 119.13-5.

the same type of psychology that is found in Avicenna's works¹¹. Furthermore, in Suhrawardī's *Hikmat al-Ishrāq* [The Philosophy of Illumination], there is a whole discussion in the section on *Logic* which deals with "intuitive premises" (*hadsīyāt*)¹².

Nonetheless, the main thrust of Suhrawardī's philosophy of Illumination is the existence of a notion of intuition that might be better characterized, or better defined as a "mystical" intuition. The important element in Suhrawardī's thought is the contemplative aspect at the heart of his conception of "direct intuition," such that vision or mystical contemplation (*mushāhada*) becomes the basis for judgements that now acquire a status similar to that of demonstrations. In his *Introduction* to the *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, Suhrawardī alludes to this fact when he states that traditional logical demonstrations become, at the stage of mystical contemplation, superfluous¹³. Hence, it seems that conceptual knowledge with which philosophical intuition is usually associated is relegated to a secondary position. In this scheme, pre-eminence is attributed to the function of receptivity which is seen as transcending any type of human rational function. Although "direct intuition" has now been given a novel inferential character, it is essentially articulated to account for knowledge acquired through illumination (*ishrāq*) and, moreover, to ultimately account for revelation¹⁴. For Suhrawardī, "direct

¹¹ Cf. Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb al-Najāt fī al-Hikmah al-Manṭiqiyah wa al-ṭabī'īyah wa al-Ilāhiyah* [The Book of Deliverance Regarding Logical, Natural and Metaphysical Wisdom], ed. and intro. Majīd Fakhrī, (Beirut: Dār al-ʿAfaq al-Jadīd, 1405/1985), 204, 206. For an English trans., see Fazlur Rahman, *Avicenna's Psychology. An English Translation of Kitāb al-Najāt, Book II, Chapter VI with Historico-Philosophical Improvements on the Cairo Edition* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 34-6.

¹² *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 40-2 (no.30). The whole discussion is about demonstration (*burhān*) (it is also found in the *al-Talwihāt*) in which intuitive premises play a role in acquiring real knowledge. These are either empirical or traditional and are not obtained by induction; and proofs "based on intuition are shared by those with the same intuitive capabilities only," see Hossein Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination. A Study of Suhrawardī's Hikmat al-Ishrāq* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1990), 71-2.

¹³ Suhrawardī mentions that "the valid intuition (*al-hads al-ṣaḥīh*) judges without any appeal to a proof (*hujja*) [required in] a logical demonstration (*burhān*)," see *al-Talwihāt*, 57.

¹⁴ In one of Christian Jambet's notes to the French translation of the *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, it is written that "Q.D. [*Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī*] explique le rapport entre la *mokāshafa* et la *moshāhada*: celle-ci serait ici une «visualisation» plus qu'une «vision mentale». En effet, la *moshāhada* est plus particulière, plus spéciale que la *mokāshafa*. La différence entre les deux est celle du *général* et du *propre*. Cependant dans *Le Livre du Verbe du Soufisme* (chap.III: «De l'âme pensante comme Verbe»), Sohrawardī disait: «La *mokāshafa*, c'est l'actualisation d'une connaissance par l'âme, soit par une déduction, soit par inférence, soit par une intuition secrète se rattachant à une chose particulière échéant dans le passé ou dans l'avenir». [...] En bref, la *mokāshafa*, au sens le plus général, est révélation-intérieure, intuition, vision-mentale, inspiration imaginative. La *moshāhada* est visualisation, perception-visionnaire, organe des apparitions," see Suhrawardī, *Le livre de la sagesse orientale*, 86

intuition" is intrinsically linked to the mystical experience, and, accordingly, such terms as "*dhawq*" or mystical perception, "*kashf*" or mystical vision, and "*mukāshafāt*", or mystical revelations, all correspond to different aspects of a more general notion of mystical intuition. In Suhrawardī's works, this more general notion of mystical intuition is, perhaps, best defined by his own use of the expression "mystical contemplation" (*mushāhada*). It is also possible to resort to the expression "direct intuition" as an English equivalent for Suhrawardī's "mystical contemplation" (*mushāhada*). It is perhaps less with the term "mystical" that the problem resides than with the expression "contemplation" which can, at times, mean a sort of spiritual meditation, especially in Christian religious practice, e.g., concentration of the mind and of the soul upon the nature of God. The term contemplation can also mean the process of thoughtful, or long consideration, or observation of a particular thing. The latter would be able to indicate the more spiritual elements at the heart of Suhrawardī's philosophy, but "direct intuition" - perhaps philosophically more neutral - will be used in this study to correspond to Suhrawardī's "mystical contemplation" (*mushāhada*), the central notion in his conception of direct knowledge¹⁵.

Ontology of Light

The shift of emphasis from purely philosophical to more mystical aspects, and a new status attributed to direct intuition (*mushāhada*) must be understood within the general metaphysical system elaborated by Suhrawardī and, in particular, his distinct ontology of Light. With his philosophy of Light, he introduces a new realm of discourse, i.e., the language of the Theosophists (*al-ḥukamā' al-muta'alliḥa*) engrossed in the pursuit of God¹⁶. It might not be far-fetched to say that, with the introduction of his new terminology, he signals his departure from the purely philosophical discourse, and this paves the way for his more mystical and gnostic-oriented redefinition of metaphysics¹⁷. Most of his *Ishrāqī*, or "Illuminative" terminology makes use of symbols (*rumūz*) and metaphors, and this holds even more true for the most important of his symbols,

note d.

¹⁵ Suhrawardī, *Le livre de la sagesse orientale*, 198.

¹⁶ These "lights" are not merely the ones mentioned in the *Qur'ān (Sūrat al-Nūr)* but, they are also made to correspond to those existing in Iranian pre-Islamic traditions. His terminology should be compared with the existing ones developed by the philosophers, the theologians and the Sufis, cf. with the tripartite classification of Khwārizmī, *Mafātiḥ al-'Ulūm [The Keys to the Sciences]*, (Cairo, 1921). The "Theosophists" has, here, no modern and popular meaning; rather, it was coined by Corbin as a translation of *al-ḥukamā' al-muta'alliḥa*.

¹⁷ The philosophy of Suhrawardī incorporates numerous elements derived from theological and mystical milieus, as well as from the pre-Islamic Iranian traditions.

i.e., Light as the essence of everything¹⁸. On the whole, his symbolism of Light, especially in his Persian mystical treatises as well as in his *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, often overshadows the similarities that his philosophical stands share with Peripatetic philosophy¹⁹. The extent to which it departs from the latter owes much to the mystical and religious elements that are introduced from both his personal ascetic practices and, more crucial for the re-articulation of his philosophy, his own mystical experiences, in addition to elements coming from the Neoplatonic tradition, especially its ever so popular theory of emanation²⁰.

Suhrawardī with his philosophy of Light attempts to do away with concepts in general, such as existence, unity, matter, form, and so on, as the sources of our knowledge of reality²¹, inasmuch that his ontology of Light -a criticism of the Peripatetic epistemology- substitutes to most of these terms its own *Ishrāqī* terminology. He substitutes to these concepts a whole symbolism of Light which becomes simultaneously the new structure of reality and the object of knowledge²². However, owing to the very nature of symbols, it is not only the concept of Light, but his whole terminology, he asserts, which is deficient in expressing and describing the true nature of this reality. Light, as a concept, becomes more than the concept of existence, it becomes the *substratum* of reality²³.

¹⁸ These "secrets" or "symbols" (*al-rumūz*) are discussed in the *al-Talwihāt*; cf. Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination*, 23 n.3.

¹⁹ Cf. Majid Fakhri, "Al-Suhrawardī's Critique of the Muslim Peripatetics (*al-Mashshā'ūn*)" in *Philosophies of Existence. Ancient and Medieval*, ed. Parviz Morewedge, (New York: Fordham University Press, 1982), 279-84; cf. Idem, "al-Suhrawardī wa Maākhidhū 'alā al-Mashshā'īn al-'Arab", in ed. and intro. Ibrāhīm Madkūr, *al-Kitāb al-Tadhakārī Shaykh al-Ishrāq [Memorial. Shihab al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (Maître de l'Ishrāq)]* (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyah li-l-Kitāb, 1393/1974).

²⁰ Regarding the symbolism of his work, cf. Michael Byleby, "The Wisdom of Illumination: A Study of the Prose Stories of Suhrawardī" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Chicago, 1976); and Kāzēm Tehrānī, "Mystical Symbolism in Four Treatises of Suhrawardī" (Ph.D. Diss., Columbia University, 1974). On the "orality" of the philosophy of Suhrawardī, see Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination*, 19.

²¹ Suhrawardī notes that "if there is anything in existence that does not need to be made known, it is the manifest. Since there is nothing more manifest than light, then there is nothing less in need of being made known", *Hikmat*, 13; quoted in Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights*, 44.

²² Suhrawardī remarks that the immaterial light, as a symbol can only be analogous to physical light, see *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 110.

²³ Walbridge mentions that some have equated the Suhrawardīan concept of Light with the concept of existence, e.g. Nasr and Izutsu, see Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights*, 48-9; cf. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, 151-52 n. 27; and Toshihiko Izutsu, *Concept and Reality* (Tokyo: Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies, 1971), 144-5.

His ontology of Light incorporates a not so unfamiliar emanationist scheme. To begin with, there is a First Light, the Closest Light (*al-nūr al-aqrab*) which corresponds to the First Intelligence of the Peripatetics²⁴. It exists as a separate (*mujarrada*, i.e., from matter) Light²⁵ endowed with a two-fold impetus: on the one hand, it loves (*yuhibbu*) and contemplates (*yushāhidu*) the Light of Lights, i.e., God, the source of all Lights, situated above it; while, on the other hand, it controls (*yaqharu*) and illuminates (*ashraqa*) what lies below it²⁶. The only difference between the First Light and the Light of Lights lies in their relative degree of intensity (*shidda*) such that the perfection of the Light of Lights rests precisely in its utmost intensity of light.

By the same token, the ontological hierarchy of Lights is defined in similar terms of perfection, intensity, or abundance (*ghanī*); while, with regards to the Light of Lights and to all other superior Lights, it is defined in terms of impoverishment (*faqīr*). Similar to the classical Peripatetic scheme, a first Soul and a first Sphere come into existence from the First Intelligence, along with the ensuing emanation of the subsequent Intelligences, Souls and Spheres²⁷. For Suhrawardī, the First Light, motivated by love and sameness, contemplates the Light of Lights, and from the relation it maintains with it originates another light. Thereupon, a procession of Lights ensues. The multiplicity of these Lights results from both mystical contemplation of the superior levels of Light and illumination of the lower levels by the superior -directly as well as indirectly- through the intermediary of the First Light and all the other separate Lights²⁸. Each Light entertains the same type of ontological relation as regards to the Lights above and below it, a relation which is responsible for the origination of everything that lies below each individual Light. When the First Light sees its own impoverishment, its own matter and shape are obtained²⁹. As this process goes on, the Spheres and the elemental world all come into existence³⁰.

²⁴ *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 125, 126-9; cf. *Opera*, I, 61-2, 165-6. For Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī, Suhrawardī's commentator, the First Light corresponds to the first element ('*unsūr al-awwal*) and the universal soul ('*aqī al-kull*'), see Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights*, 60 n. 79.

²⁵ *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 126.

²⁶ *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 135-7, 140.

²⁷ *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 122, 177-83, 181; cf. *Risāla fī 'uqūd al-Ḥukamā'* [Epistle Regarding The Philosopher's Creed] in *Opera*, II, 264-5.

²⁸ *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 125, 126-7, 132-4, 142-3, 145-7.

²⁹ *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 132-4, 138-43; cf. Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination*, 165.

³⁰ *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 138.

It becomes clear from the above that Suhrawardī -like the Peripatetics- articulates his ontology of Light according to an emanationist scheme. The emanationist scheme of the latter is basically linear: from the First Intelligence emanates the Second, from the Second the Third and so on; whereas, Suhrawardī introduces a two-dimensionality into the process. It should, nonetheless, be noted that this traditional and linear procession of Intelligences is not wholly rejected, e.g., in his *I'tiqād al-Hukamā'* [*The Philosopher's Creed*], although, in the end, Suhrawardī does replace the scheme of the ten traditional Intelligences with an infinite multiplication of Lights³¹. He justifies this position by arguing that if the traditional Neoplatonic scheme were adapted, it would have for consequence the limitation of the number of the Intelligences. In contraposition, he redefines his ontology in terms of Light-participation with the essential characteristic of being devoid of any type of limitation³². Light is distributed almost in an exponential manner to the rest of reality, both horizontally and vertically³³. The expansion, even the explosion of the Neoplatonic emanationist scheme into an almost infinite series of relations has transformed the traditional ontology of emanation into a theory of participation of Light. Suhrawardī sets up a metaphysics in which Light is now the principle of the whole; whereas, previously, this principle had been the Intelligence (*nous*) of the Neoplatonists. The hierarchy of Intelligences gives way to his more encompassing re-articulation of ontology. For the Neoplatonists, the original source -the One- partakes in everything while losing nothing of itself.³⁴ Similarly, for Suhrawardī, there is the same type of unity of the whole, a kind of ontological monism rendered necessary by his philosophy of Light³⁵.

Light, while it is first and foremost used to designate God in the expression of the Light of Lights, it is also used to describe symbolically the nature of the soul. Moreover, and more relevant for the purpose of this paper, it describes symbolically the knowing "agent" in man. Suhrawardī's ontology of Light is responsible for the redefinition of the relationships reason has with the

³¹ *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 140, 156-7; cf. Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights*, 58, 61.

³² *Risāla fī I'tiqād al-Hukamā'*, 264-6.

³³ Toshihiko Izutsu, "*Ishrāqīya*", *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 16 vols., ed. Mircea Eliade, (New York: Macmillan Pub., 1987), vol. 7, 296b-301a, esp. 299a-300a. The horizontal level of Lights have been interpreted as the Platonic Ideas, see Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights*, 177-9.

³⁴ Plotinus, for example, conceived of the Intelligence as "giving of itself without losing itself," cf. chap. on Themistius in Octave Hamelin, *La théorie de l'intellect d'après Aristote et ses commentateurs*, ed. Edmond Barbotin, (Paris: J. Vrin, 1953).

³⁵ For an interpretation of a hint of "manichean dualism" in Suhrawardī's thought, see Hermann Landolt, "Mystique iranienne: Suhrawardī *Shaykh al-Ishrāq* (549 / 1155 - 587 / 1191) et 'Ayn al-Quzāt-i Hamadānī (492 / 1098 - 525 / 1131)" in *Iranian Civilization and Culture*, ed. Charles J. Adams, (Montreal: Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, 1972), 32, 37 n. 60.

source of its knowledge, the Light of Lights. In this respect and by extension, Light corresponds to the intellect³⁶. Light, being the essence of everything, it is therefore able to know everything directly and without any type of mediation, i.e., without mediation of concepts, except through the mediation of individual personal experience. Direct intuition, which presupposes the immediate grasping of a certain knowledge, i.e., of the manifestation of Light, must be considered the most perfect mode of cognition. These Lights, the product of illumination (*ishrāq*), are simultaneously the principle of both being and knowing. Light, as the principle of knowledge, ultimately finds itself at the core of revelation and becomes the principle of divine inspiration prophets and sages necessarily experience when they grasp the real truths³⁷.

Essence of Knowledge

Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Shahrazūrī (d. after 687/1288) summarizes the types of knowledge he found expressed in Suhrawardī's works. In the *Preface* he wrote to the *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, he makes a fundamental epistemological distinction for what he considers to be the nature of essential knowledge: on the one hand, there is a discursive or demonstrative (*baḥthīya*) as well as an intellectual (*naẓarīya*) knowledge and, on the other hand, there exists an "experiential" (*dhawqīya*) knowledge based on mystical perception (*dhawqīya*) -sometimes identified as mystico-theosophical perception (*ikma dhawqīya*)³⁸- as well as a mystical vision (*kashfīya*)³⁹. These two essential, although different, types of knowledge will naturally call upon different methods: for the former, a philosophical method will be necessitated while, for the latter, it will consist of a mystical or gnostic method. Both methods are quite distinct. First, there is the method of the philosophers which is essentially conceptual and Aristotelian as it resorts to an "observation of the sensibles" in order to produce knowledge, e.g., the method by which man produce the different sciences⁴⁰. It relies basically on the faculty of reason ('*aql*) and, in a broad sense, on demonstrative methods.

³⁶ See the *Appendix* in Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights*, 194-5; cf. Aminrezavi, "Suhrawardī's Theory of Knowledge," 157.

³⁷ *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 11-2.

³⁸ See the *Introduction* of Shahrazūrī, *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 5 and 79 n. a.

³⁹ *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 5-6.

⁴⁰ Suhrawardī's major criticism of Peripatetic principles takes the form of a criticism of their notion of definition which makes it impossible to know anything because knowledge is acquired by concepts. He substitutes to it, as a consequence of his own ontology, a theory of definition based on direct knowledge of divine matters. This, in turn, becomes the model for his epistemology and, in fact, for his whole cosmology, see Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights*, 101.

Essentially discursive in nature, the process of thought (*fikr*) relies on concepts and their representations which, in turn, necessitate both forms and mental concepts⁴¹. In the *Ishrāqī* terminology, it is known as an acquired knowledge ('*ilm ḥuṣūlī*). According to Suhrawardī, it is, although limited, a valid method which is useful for explaining what can be known through the other superior process, i.e., direct intuition⁴². Presumably, reason -or intellect- ranks quite high in the realm of discursive knowledge; however, the criterion for truth in the realm of intuitive knowledge -which gives access to the realm of the divine and of the experiential- cannot rest on reason, or intellect alone, if at all.

Besides the method of the Peripatetics, there is a spiritual means more adapted to the divine realm; these spiritual means are such *Ishrāqī* notions as vision (*ibṣār*), mystical vision (*kashf*), and mystical contemplation (*mushāhada*), and they are the sole guarantors of true knowledge. The spiritual method, sharing much with the method of the mystics and the Gnostics, rests on the "observation of some of the spiritual realities" from which true knowledge can be derived⁴³. A glimpse of what Suhrawardī alludes to is pointed out where he notes that what he has written in his book, notwithstanding his allegorical works, was not the result of "discursive thought" (*fikr*) but, rather, its obtainment was achieved by "another means" (*bi-amr ākhar*), corresponding to the fruits of his own experience⁴⁴. In fact, he mentions that he addresses those who, like him, are already "accomplished spiritual seekers (*mujtahid*) experienced in mysticism [...] or who aspire to it⁴⁵".

Therefore, mystical perception is a more "direct method," adapted for the divine realm. It is better organized and ruled than the method of the philosophers, and it requires less efforts in order to yield any results. Immediate knowledge is achieved through a process of mystical and direct intuition by which the unveiling presence of the known occurs to the knower, and not when occurs the imprinting of a form, as was the case with the Peripatetics' adoption of the principles of Aristotelian psychology. This type of mystical knowledge has come to be known as a presential knowledge ('*ilm ḥudūrī*). Moreover, the principle of this

⁴¹ It is conceptual (*taṣawwur*) and assertorical (*taṣdīq*), see *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 15.

⁴² *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 12. Some principles of *Ishrāqī* philosophy are sound Peripatetic principles, i.e., their methods and conclusions which he has not rejected and which he considers a major part to be generally valid, see Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights*, 33.

⁴³ Suhrawardī notes that, "we contemplate (*nushāhidu*) things from the spiritual realities (*ruḥānīyāt*); thereafter, we built upon these observations," see *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 13.

⁴⁴ *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 10.

⁴⁵ *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 12.

experiential method is essentially illumination (*ishrāq*) and an *Ishrāqī* relation (*al-idāfa al-ishrāqīya*)⁴⁶, capable of explaining the immediate and a-temporal character of this type of knowledge⁴⁷. Therefore, in grasping the essence of the object, this type of knowledge, which is essentially of a direct intuitive nature (as the term itself - *ḥudūrī* - implies) precludes the use of any logical or demonstrative method⁴⁸. There is no place for the mediation of concepts.

Direct intuition (i.e., mystical contemplation) lies at the cross-roads of mystical experience or contemplation (*mushāhada*) and illumination (*ishrāq*) in which it partakes. Although Suhrawardī establishes direct intuition alongside reason, he argues, nonetheless, that certainty only lies within the reach of the "experiential" (*dhawqīya*) method, i.e., of mystical perception⁴⁹. The personal experience of the true seeker (*mujtahid*) which is conceived as a direct intuition-like process is at the heart of his mystical contemplation. Accordingly, this personal experience possesses a distinctive and unique character that makes it impossible to be conceived as a mediating agent on par with such things as concepts. It would, therefore, seem impossible to simply equate direct intuition with any type of "philosophical intuition", or with the Aristotelian notion of "acumen", involved at the conceptual level of the thinking process, even at its most abstract level⁵⁰.

⁴⁶ It is the result of a "knowledge based on illumination and presence" (*'ilm al-ishrāqī al-ḥudūrī*) established by the existence of an "illuminationist relation" (*al-idāfa al-ishrāqīya*), see *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, 97-103; cf. Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination. A Study of Suhrawardī's Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* (Atlanta, Georgia: Scholars Press, 1990), 140-3.

⁴⁷ Both of these knowledge enjoy an ontological relation such that acquired knowledge (*'ilm ḥuṣūlī*) can be reduced to presential knowledge (*'ilm ḥudūrī*), see Sayyed Muhammad Reza Hejāzī, "Knowledge by Presence. A Comparative Study based on the Epistemology of Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191) and Mullā Sadrā Shīrāzī (d. 1050/1640)" (M.A. Thesis, Montreal: Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, 1994), 43-4; cf. Mehdī Ha'irī Yazdī, *The Principles of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy. Knowledge by Presence* (New York: SUNY, 1992).

⁴⁸ Knowledge by presence is restricted to immaterial existents and excludes any possibility of ascribing true-false judgments, hence it is free from falsity, see *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, 10.

⁴⁹ *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, 232; cf. Hejāzī, "Knowledge by Presence," 43-4. It is interesting to note that *ishrāqī* is associated with illumination, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, 121.

⁵⁰ As was briefly mentioned earlier, these mystical implications do not seem to find an echo in Avicenna's use of the notion of intuition; rather, he used it more in the sense of intellectual astuteness - even acumen. However, Ziai mentions that Ibn Sīnā's concept of intuition (*ḥads*), which is linked to the intellect in *habitu* (*'aql bi-l-malaka*) and which ultimately occurs as a result of the divine intellect (*'aql qudsī*) exerted an influence on Suhrawardī, for intuition in the latter's work is responsible for grasping the intelligibles without temporal extension and does not require the help of instruction at the hand of a teacher, see Ziai, "Mushāhadah, Ravish-i Ishrāq, va Zabān-i Shi'r," 83; cf. Idem, *Knowledge and Illumination*, 155.

It is important to notice that Suhrawardī introduces mystical knowledge, alongside a more discursive type of knowledge, essentially as a consequence of his own ontology of Light, Light being the essence of everything. Mystical contemplation and illumination become like two epistemological principles, at the heart of the "true" knowing process, and this as a corollary of his ontology. There is no doubt that for Suhrawardī it is the spiritual level which is the realm of pure existence. On this metaphysical horizon, the relations that are established between the different levels of Light are conceived either in terms of contemplation or of illumination. In other words, a contemplation of the superior Lights is complementary to an illumination of the lower Lights by the higher ones. Knowledge at this level combines the Light's self-consciousness of its divine essence, i.e., the nature of its Light, and the realization of being, itself, an illumination of the first principle, the Light of Lights. The same type of relationship that prevails between the Lights at the metaphysical level also prevails at the physical level⁵¹. Lights, which manifest themselves to others are also manifest by themselves and to themselves. It is interesting to note that these Lights conceived as self-conscious are able to know in quite similar ways as Neoplatonic Intelligences. Having defined the essence of existence as Light, Suhrawardī can then proceed to make this type of mystical knowledge an immediate knowledge rooted in the spiritual experience of the Lights (i.e., those that become apparent, or manifested)⁵². On the whole, the ontological underpinning of the spiritual experience is the *Ishrāqī* ontology of Light.

Turning to Suhrawardī's psychology, it is noteworthy that it shares some similarities with the one of Avicenna. In such works as *al-Lamahāt* (the section on *Physics*), the division of the internal senses of the soul is a quite familiar scheme: the *sensus communis*, the faculty of representation, the imaginative faculty, the estimative faculty, and the recollective faculty⁵³. However, the essential Peripatetic distinctions established between each of these different faculties of the soul are rejected by Suhrawardī, so that the essentially Peripatetic configuration of his psychology may make way for his ontology of Lights. Suhrawardī's psychology lumps together all the preceding faculties into one (by drawing an analogy with the classical *sensus communis*)⁵⁴. As for the classification of the different functions of the rational soul, it does not greatly

⁵¹ Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights*, 109; cf. *Hikmat*, 110-3.

⁵² *al-Mashāri' wa l-Mu'ārahāt*, in *Opera*, I, 194-5.

⁵³ *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 209 f., 220-4.

⁵⁴ Wheeler M. Thackston, *The Mystical and Visionary Treatises of Shihabuddin Yahya Suhrawardī* (London: Octagon Press, 1982), 18 n. 19; cf. with the very critical review of Hermann Landolt, "Suhrawardī's "Tales of Initiation." Review Article". *Journal of American Oriental Society*, 107 (1987), 475-86, esp. 480; cf. *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 207ff.

depart from the classical distinctions made between the different intellects: the hylic intellect, the intellect *in habitu*, the intellect *in actu*, and the acquired intellect⁵⁵. But then again, the distinctiveness of each of these functions of the rational soul gives way to the soul's ability at receiving Light. Peripatetic psychology is thus one of the building blocks at the heart of Suhrawardī's own epistemology to which he can then substitute his own Light terminology. His ontology of Lights introduces the notion of the commanding Light (*nūr isfahbad*) to correspond to the managing rational soul; it introduces the notion of the triumphal Light (*nūr al-qāhir*) to correspond to the intellect⁵⁶. It is, it seems, the new emphasis on the process of a direct intuition as a means of acquiring knowledge that serves to bridge the gap that exists between two types of perception - both physical and spiritual.

In the works of Suhrawardī, direct intuition is not really a faculty but, rather, a function operating not so differently than the function of vision on which Suhrawardī dwells on at length and from which he derives many analogies. Direct intuition, as vision of the abstract Lights or as mystical contemplation (*mushāhada*), acquires a novel and important epistemological function. Vision of the abstract Lights through contemplation becomes the mediator between the knowledge of the physical world (i.e., the perception of the manifestations of the physical lights) and the knowledge of the spiritual world (i.e., the perception of the pure and abstract Lights). Only the second type of knowledge corresponds, for Suhrawardī, to the real goal sought by all genuine seekers of truth.

Where there had been a rational foundation to certainty (as in the Aristotelian and Peripatetic philosophical tradition), Suhrawardī now adds to it an experiential and essentially mystical foundation: certainty consists of divine knowledge obtained by divine inspiration befalling man. Mystical perceptions such as direct intuition, a combination of inspiration and revelation, acquires a new necessity. Light reveals itself at the individual level and, consequently, direct intuition, or immediate perception, of Light now becomes the ultimate source of truth. It is interesting to see that one of Suhrawardī's commentators, Muḥammad Sharīf b. al-Harawī (fl. 11th c.), commenting on the former's philosophy, notes that what is acquired by prophets, and those who might be labelled Theosophists (*ḥukamā-i ilāhī*), are mystical revelation (*mukāshafa*), presential experience or mystical contemplation (*mushāhada*), revelation (*waḥī*) as well as inspiration

⁵⁵ *Kitāb al-Lamaḥāt*, 113-21 and, in the same work, see the Preface, xii-xiv; another edition of the text exist, but it only comprises the metaphysics, see Suhrawardī, *Siḥ Risālah az Shaykh Ishrāq al-Alwāh al-'Imādiya, Kalimat al-Tasawwuf, al-Lamaḥāt*, ed. Najaf-Gholi Ḥabībī, (Tehran: Anjuman-i Shāhanshāhī-yi Falsafah-yi Irān, 1397/1977); cf. with the Introduction of Thackston, *The Mystical and Visionary Treatises*, 11-3.

⁵⁶ *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, 147 and 154 respectively; cf. Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights*, 194-5. Walbridge identifies the immaterial light with the intellect and the accidental Light with intellection, see *Ibid.*, 60.

(*ilhām*)⁵⁷. These four states would seem to constitute varying degrees of divine manifestation and experiential perceptions. The religious implication of Suhrawardī's position for the traditional Islamic theory of revelation cannot be minimized; as a matter of fact, it should not be forgotten that Suhrawardī was put to death on alleged charges of claiming the possibility of the advent of another Prophet⁵⁸. Furthermore, this divine knowledge, in a way ineffable, can only find its expression through symbols which, Suhrawardī mentions, are such that they are non-refutable by means of logical demonstrations and thus, quite obviously, they contain their own intrinsic truth criteria.

Suhrawardī, by appealing to both reason and direct intuition, seems to want to integrate both the demonstrable and the "experiential" aspects of two different experiences: the intellectual and the mystical. However, the fact that he establishes with his philosophico-mystical explanation the pre-eminence of the experience of direct intuition (i.e., mystical contemplation) should not be underestimated. It becomes clear that knowledge acquired through philosophy and the one acquired through mystical experience are not identical. Moreover, the shift from reason to direct intuition is indicative of the new mystical orientation of *Ishrāqī* philosophy and its ascetic aspect mentioned by Qutb al-Dīn Shīrāzī (d. 1311) who writes that the *Ishrāqī* method rests primarily on "mystical perception, internal revelations, due to continuous practice of spiritual exercises"⁵⁹. In any case, Suhrawardī himself states that knowledge corresponds, first and foremost, to the actual mystical perception or personal experiencing of the truth; it is to be followed subsequently by philosophical proofs⁶⁰.

⁵⁷ Quoted by Ziai, "Mushāhadah, Ravish-i Ishrāq, va Zabān-i Shi'r", 94 n. 15; cf. Muḥammad Sharīf Nizām al-Dīn Aḥmad b. al-Harawī, *Anwāriyya*. 11th c. A.H. *Persian Translation and Commentary on Suhrawardī's HIKMAT AL-ISHRĀQ [Philosophy of Illumination]*, ed. Hossein Ziai, 2nd ed., (1357/1978; Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, 1363/1984).

⁵⁸ Beside his claims to an absolute omnipotence of God, Suhrawardī, nonetheless, opened the door to the possibility of prophetic claims on this very "experiential" basis. It is interesting to note that Ibn Arabī's concept of "*waḥdat al-wujūd*", with all its religious and theological implications, was also vehemently opposed and attacked by the 'ulamā'.

⁵⁹ For Qutb al-Dīn Shīrāzī's commentary on the *Hikmat al-Ishrāq* translated by Corbin, see Suhrawardī, *Le livre de la sagesse orientale*, 241 n. 23; cf. *Ibid.*, 241 n. 24 on certainty.

⁶⁰ Walbridge mentions that "Suhrawardī states that the truths of the Science of Lights are derived in the first instance from mystical intuition," see Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights*, 42; cf. *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 162-5. Walbridge also adds that "*The Philosophy of Illumination* is philosophy, not mysticism; Suhrawardī constructs rational proofs of his intuitions both for the sake of his own continued certainty and correct interpretation of those intuitions and for the guidance of those without the experience," see Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights*, 42.

Knowledge of the Sage

In the Introduction of his *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, Suhrawardī dwells on the relation reason and direct intuition must enjoy. Reason, the principle at the heart of the philosophical tradition, cannot be done away with since some Peripatetics principles, attainable only through a discursive process, remain valid and essential. Consequently, reason must be incorporated into *Ishrāqī* philosophy. The hierarchy of the different stages attained by sages which he establishes is indicative of the relation reason and direct intuition enjoy in his philosophy. For instance, the most perfect sage (*hakīm*) is the one who has achieved the utmost level of perfection in philosophical knowledge, in addition to the utmost level of perfection in mystical experience. It is upon such a sage that befalls the responsibility of the supreme authority (*ri'āsa*) over the community and of the vice-regency of God (*khilāfat Allāh*)⁶¹. Both reason and direct intuition (i.e., mystical contemplation) would appear to be on par and to have the same heuristic value. However, Suhrawardī goes on to say that in the absence of such a perfect individual able to develop these two faculties to their utmost perfection, the individual that will deserve the responsibility of the supreme authority and the vice-regency of God over the community will be the one who will possess the greatest amount of mystical experience, whether he lacks great philosophical knowledge or possesses none whatsoever⁶². Discursive knowledge alone is, therefore, insufficient for the true seeker; moreover, it is insufficient for anyone who would aspire to become the leader of the community, a matter much more crucial for the Islamic community as a whole.

In addition, the office of God's vice-regency requires the existence of a "direct appointment"⁶³. In the same way, mystical knowledge, resulting from illumination as well as mystical contemplation, is in need of a living proof (*quṭb*), e.g., those who are able to witness and who have already witnessed these divine truths⁶⁴. Likewise, the followers of Suhrawardī's philosophy, in order to be able to penetrate the secrets of the philosophy of Light, must have already received some sort of divine inspiration (*barq ilāhī*); while others, he notes, will not be able to benefit at all from what his book, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, has to

⁶¹ Hussayn Ziai, "The Source and Nature of Authority: A Study of al-Suhrawardī's Illuminationist Political Doctrine," in ed. Charles E. Butterworth, *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy. Essays in Honor of Muhsin S. Mahdi* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 324-34.

⁶² *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 12.

⁶³ *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 12.

⁶⁴ Suhrawardī mentions that these proofs (*quṭb*) are essential, whether they are living, or in occultation; and what is alluded to here is the whole doctrine of prophets and prophethood, see *Ibid.*, 11, 12; cf. Corbin, *En islam iranien*, II, 69-72.

offer, in which case, they will have to depend on someone else for its interpretation⁶⁵. For Suhrawardī, direct intuitive knowledge is of the utmost importance. It is only those who have received it, or perceived it, who are able to guide others⁶⁶.

Conclusion

In summary, Suhrawardī considers knowledge to be acquired through two distinctive, although interrelated, operations: rational demonstration and mystical contemplation (*mushāhada*). On the whole, the latter has logical and epistemological priority over the former. The pre-eminence of a direct intuition over philosophical reasoning is, to a great extent, ontological in nature. Suhrawardī's ontology, with its hierarchy of Lights, makes Light the essence of everything and the principle at the heart of the knowing process. In addition, Light is the fundamental principle responsible, on the one hand, for the dissemination and distribution of divine illumination and, on the other hand, of its correlate, i.e., mystical contemplation. Reason, although excellent and invaluable in the realm of the sensible is limited in its efforts at grasping these divine truths, while direct intuition, responsible for a more immediate and instantaneous access to these Lights, embraces the whole spectrum of the divine effusion. Reason is deficient since it is hampered in its efforts at grasping truths; whereas, direct intuition as a receptacle for the divine is most capable of direct knowledge guaranteeing it immediate and unhampered access to certainty and divine truths.

Suhrawardī's classification of learned men according to their respective merits in philosophy and mystical experience is revealing since it is direct intuition or mystical contemplation that is ascribed the predominant place, as opposed to reason. A case in point is Suhrawardī's statement that only mystics, such as Sahl al-Tustarī (d. 896), Abū Yazīd al-Bisṭāmī (d. 874) and al-Ḥallāj (d. 912, a disciple of al-Tustarī and Junayd)⁶⁷, have "achieved union (*ittiṣāl*) with the Active Intellect... they have surpassed discursive philosophy through their personal experience"⁶⁸. Another reason for the pre-eminence of this direct

⁶⁵ *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 12-3. Suhrawardī also alludes to the existence of a "qā'im al-Kitāb", or a maintainer of the Book" who will guide the seeker unable to "truly" understand the esoteric meaning of his work, especially the *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*.

⁶⁶ The importance of the master-disciple relationship is prevalent in Suhrawardī's works.

⁶⁷ For a good introduction to the historical background of the early Sufi tradition, see Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 42-77.

⁶⁸ *al-Talwīhāt* in *Opera*, I, 73-4; quoted in Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination*, 21, 21 n. 3; cf. *ibid.*, 21-2, 21 n.2; cf. Henry Corbin, *Les motifs zoroastriens dans la philosophie de Sohrawardī, shaykh-ol-Ishrāq (ob. 587/1191)*, preface M. Pouré-Davoud, (Tehran: Édition du Courrier, 1325/1946), 28-9.

intuitive function appears to be essentially religious in nature and linked to Suhrawardī's prophetology, inasmuch as it is only the most perfect sage which can witness these truths that deserves to hold God's vice-regency, whether he is embodied in a living proof (*qutb*) or is in occultation.

Whereas previous philosophers such as al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā had extolled primarily intellectual faculties, Suhrawardī has brought direct intuition, in the sense of mystical contemplation (*mushāhada*), to the forefront as an alternative -albeit more reliable- foundation to certainty. Moreover, he has attempted to formulate the basis of what might be said to be an "esoteric philosophy"⁶⁹. His attitude towards the methods, of both the philosophical and the mystical traditions, paved the way for his own personal expression of mystical speculations embedded in philosophical terminology and a posteriori demonstrations. Inescapably, his "essentially" mystical thought is unable to avoid emphasising intuitive knowledge as the ultimate source and criterion of true knowledge⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Toshihiko Izutsu, "*Ishrāqīya*", 296b.

⁷⁰ Landolt, "Mystique iranienne," 25.