

**DOI: 10.7596/taksad.v5i4.638**

## **Suhrawardi: A Philosopher Who Must Be Re-Known!**

**Abdollah Niksirat<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

In this article it has been dealt with the importance and place of Suhrawardi's philosophical and illuminationist thoughts. His thought is the focal point in which the Zoroasterian, Platonic and peripatetic metaphysics and Islamic mysticism as well as the revelation and religious tradition have met together and have found new combination in one coherent system by his own innovations.

The souvenir of Iranian ancient metaphysics is searched in the Iranian Sufism and mysticism; since the illuminationist philosophy is heavily influenced by the Iranian Sufism and mysticism, consequently one of the first-class sources is to know Eastern and Iranian mysticism.

Through philosophical and mystical meditations Suhrawardi sought to close the truth of positive religion to the philosophical truth and in a word lump together the positive religion, mystical path and truth. His important preoccupation is to explain how the expatriate can return home; because the illuminationist philosopher is basically who does not separate the philosophical enquiry from the spiritual perfection.

**Keywords:** Illuminationist philosophy, Sheikh Ishragh (Suhrawardi), Philosophy, Modern age, Metaphysics, Mysticism.

---

<sup>1</sup> Assistant Professor of Philosophy, Faculty of Theology, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Iran.  
(a.niksirat@scu.ac.ir)

## ***Introduction***

In this article, we try to briefly investigate the importance and position of Suhrawardi's illuminationist philosophy in the new age and contemporary world. Also, this point also has been noted that the current age, more than any other time, requires to pay attention to the ideas and thoughts of true philosophers and in particular the true spiritual philosophers, such as Sheikh Ishragh. Because neglecting the spiritual and true self is one of the actual losses, including one of the spiritual and real disasters of modern man. Sheikh's oriental philosophy is one of the most prominent and the most important spiritual philosophies of the past and present; it can compensate some spiritual and psychical shortcomings and deficiencies in the modern man.

It is worth noting that since our intention here is to represent the position and the importance of Suhrawardi's philosophy, we make an outline of the historical and mythological origins of illuminationist philosophy from Suhrawardi's lips - as founder of this philosophy – and other commentators of his works and thoughts. Also we have examined and explained as possible the impact of the Sheikh's transcendent thoughts and ideas on the future schools. Finally, we have paid attention to the necessity and importance of Suhrawardi's ideas in the contemporary world and to the reasons that justify the discussion of the illuminationist philosophy in our age.

### **What is philosophy? Who is philosopher?**

The philosophy can be used in two senses: philosophy in general sense that is "everyone's personal worldview"; the worldview is an insight that everyone can have on the world around. This insight is based on everyone's artistic and scientific knowledge and also on his/her social and environmental factors. So all the people are philosophers and the philosophy is not a special estate of an individual and not a special of certain time and place; philosophy and human being have been happening at the same time. But the philosophy in the specific sense is a deep insight and justifiable reflection on the fundamental problems, i.e. God, man and the universe; it has of course two fundamental characteristics: it is reasonable and freely (Dadbeh 1997: 12-13).

Now the important question is that if the philosophy in its true meaning is to think deeply, reasonably and freely, so why the contemporary man whose thinking has apparently greater

depth and more freedom and rationality in his/her feeling, escapes from it? What is the secret of human escape from philosophy and especially spiritual theosophy? Why humans do not philosophize spiritually or perhaps do not want to do this type of philosophy?!

It can be said that the man in contemporary world is like a man, insane and suffering loss, who escapes of thinking about his past and future things and refusals the thinking of himself real self.

### **Origins of illuminationist philosophy**

Suhrawardi has pointed out many times the historical and mythological origins of illuminationist philosophy. He knows four groups of the mythological characters and philosophers sharing in the breeding and spread of illuminationist philosophy: 1. The Greek sources that result in Pythagoras and Empedocles and especially Plato as summit. 2. The source which originates from Hermes. 3. Fahlavi philosophers the origin of which is Kayoumarth and Feridoun and Kikhosrow followed him in Iran. 4. Indian sources originated by a group of Brahmans. (Ziaei Torbati 1993: 27). Of course, with a slight difference it is said that the sources are briefly as follows: 1. Ancient Iranian metaphysics; 2. the Greek metaphysics, especially Plato's philosophy; 3. Peripatetic philosophy; 4. Islamic mysticism; 5. Qur'an Majid and Islamic traditions (Jahangiri 1990: 187-191).

So, according to statements of Sheikh and his first class commentators of his works such as Shahrazouri it can be claimed that the understanding of his philosophy is one of the important sources of better understanding of platonic and Neo-Platonic philosophy. In other words, the analysis and interpretation of the Platonic Ideas that is based on the correct understanding of universe of Ideas and masters of species, is founded on the correct understanding and identification of illuminationist philosophy. It is interesting to know that Sheikh himself knows relevant two ancient metaphysical streams, namely Greek and Iranian schools in the history and evolution of illuminationist philosophy (Suhrawardi 1993: 32-35) and (Sajjadi 1996: 129).

For this reason, some researchers try to find the ancient Iranian Khosravani wisdom souvenir in the Iranian mysticism (Motahari 1997: 168-170). Now, considering that the illuminationist philosophy is highly influenced by Iranian mysticism and Sufism, we can conclude that the philosophy follows Khosravani and Pahlavi metaphysics of ancient Persia and consequently one of the first class sources is knowledge of Eastern and Iranian mysticism.

Suhrawardi considered himself as reviver of "eternal wisdom" and called it "Divine Wisdom" or "antique wisdom"; one that has existed always among Indians, Persians, Egyptians and Babilonians and ancient Greeks up to the time of Plato (Nasr 1983: 1/532).

The opinions of Suhrawardi have been indebted in some extent to the Islamic philosophers, especially Avicenna and the great Mystics and theologians such as Hallaj and Ghazali. For example, Ghazali's "*niche of lights*" has a great influence in developing the theory of light and replacing it by the concept of "existence" that in the philosophies before him especially peripatetic philosophy; so the light has been the basis of ontology of "Sheikh Eshragh". Suhrawardi also has been influenced by the teachings of Zoroaster, especially about the Angelology and the symbolic aspect of light and darkness.

Suhrawardi has been influenced not only by the ancients, but also his thoughts are impacting and penetrating in the works of future thinkers after him. For example, Suhrawardi's influence on Shirazi and Toussi is not something that can be easily passed from it (Ebrahimi 1997: 66).

Henry Corbin, the well-known orientalist and expert of Suhrawardi, also believes that Suhrawardi's thought has influenced the people such as Nasir Aldin Toussi, Ibn Arabi, Mohammad Ibn Abi Jomhour, Jalal al-Din Davani, Gh. Mansour Shirazi, Mirdamad and Mulla Sadra (Corbin 1985: 308). It has been said that Mulla Sadra and following him Haj Mulla Hadi Sabzevari are influenced intensely by him; in a way that Mulla Sadra in almost all discussions of his *journeys* proposes the view of Sheikh Eshragh and considers it conforming to his philosophical goals and system. Haji Mulla Hadi Sabzevari has been also influenced by the philosophy of Suhrawardi, especially in the discussion of "gradation of light" (Javarashkian and Elyasi 1994: 27-31).

One important aspect of Suhrawardi's work and his position in philosophy is referred to recognize Suhrawardi's motives, causes and reasons for his attention to the illuminationist philosophy; because if those causes and motives exist today as well, it will be natural to speak of illuminationist philosophy. Some oppositions with that philosophy are based on these motives.

### **Signification and mission of illuminationist philosophy in the contemporary world**

However, on the meaning of the "*eshragh*" it is said that this term has been derived from "*shargh*" and is related with the sun whose rise is from the East, and gives light everything. The

land of light (East) is related and united with the land of illumination (East). In the works of Suhrawardi, the "Maghreb" (West) is in where the Sun goes down and the darkness dominates on everywhere and everything. The land of matter is ignorance or arguments that are caught in the trap of their logical building, but in contrast, the land of the "East" is the universe of light and existence and the land of knowledge that has been combined of the purity and the holiness and emancipate the man of himself and the world (Abourian 1993: 69). In other words, the term "illumination", as in the sensible world refers it on the morning light and the moment when the daybreak appears with the first Sun ray, in the intelligible sky of spirit also it suggests a moment where the immaterial light of knowledge tends to appear (Omid 2005: 51). It is interesting to know Suhrawardi does not see the East and West of the world as the geographic climates, but for him the "West" is the material world, a prison in which falls the human soul and it must get rid of it; the "East" is the East of lights and the world of angels that is beyond the visible world and the origin of the human soul (Nasr 1983: 1/537). So, what about the West and the East Suhrawardi has said, is very similar to Plato's views about the natural world and the world of Ideas; this indicates the influence that Suhrawardi has taken from Platonic schools.

In terms of philosophers also, the illuminationist philosophy briefly consists in: "the emergence of lights of intellect and their emission on the souls, when their detachment of the materials and sensory barriers" (Jahangiri 1990: 184). Henry Corbin on the illuminationist philosophy says: "the major thought that dominates in Suhrawardi's works is to revive the Iranian ancient philosophy and metaphysics" (Halabi 1994: 368). He believes that the concept of "illumination" has three meanings: 1. philosophy or the moment of appearance of knowledge; 2. the philosophy based on the esoteric intuition and mystical experience; 3. the philosophy of orient and ancient Iranian philosophers that has been based on the intuition and observation. In his view one of the consequences of this philosophy is to create a link between the philosophy and Sufism, so that they became thereafter inseparable (Corbin 1994: 5-293). On the steps of the illuminationist philosophy it has the following steps:

1. Purification phase and preparation for the revelation;
2. Observing the divine lights and achieving the accidental lights;
3. Making the correct science and the method of making the science on the basis of mental, esoteric and illuminative experiences that result in the achievement of certain knowledge;

4. Developing the results of steps 1 to 3. At this stage two types of language applied: the normal philosophical language that is based on the formal science and the language of allegory (Ziaei Torbati 1993).

Sheikh Eshragh considered the discursive philosophy incomplete and inadequate and believed that such knowledge does not lead to our desired; in this reason he reproached to the peripatetic philosophy and like Rumi knew wooden the foot of those who made the arguments. It is worth noting that although Suhrawardi had opposed peripatetics and criticized them hardly, but his opposition with the peripatetic philosophers is not meant his opposition with demonstration and argument. In fact, it is to defend the philosophy and the resurgence of true philosophy; Sheikh decides to show that the philosophy is not synonymous with the conventional peripatetic philosophy of time and the origin of philosophical thoughts is not merely Aristotelian, but it has other origin that is coordinated with the religious and spiritual backgrounds (Movahed 1995: 20). Sheikh Eshragh believes that

Knowledge of philosophy does not pertain to a special group, so that the doors of radiation of spiritual lights are not closed and the way of increasing the knowledge is not stopped for anybody and receiving philosophical truths is not prohibited; the true knowledge belongs for all and the way of its increase is open just as before and the God's giving the knowledge of the unseen world is not parsimonious (Sajjadi 1984: 35).

In other words, the illuminationist philosophy has been a kind of intellectual movement that has become into existence in the Islamic community against the peripatetic discursive philosophy that considered the instrument of achieving knowledge to be argument; he has emphasized that although the argument is necessary but not sufficient and for achieving knowledge, especially the knowledge of supernatural secrets and Divine truths there exists the other way: it is the way of spiritual tasting, intuition and illumination; because for discovering truths this method is stronger, more disciplined, and has lower-cost (Suhrawardi 1993: 2/13 and Jahangiri 1990: 184-186).

Self-forgetfulness and God-forgetfulness, for Sheikh Eshragh, are necessarily interdependent; as in the Quran and traditions, it has been also emphasized. He says by a non-verbal language: know that you forgot yourself and you do not know what you are; the reason is that you have forgotten God, so inevitably you have forgotten yourself! He believes that the self-knowledge

brings the man close to the theology; so everyone knows himself, as he/she can, he/she will enjoy knowledge of God and if he/she impose on himself an asceticism and close to perfection, his/her knowledge increases (Suhrawardi 1993: 3/?).

About the mystical disposition Suhrawardi says that most of my theories have not originated from thinking, but they have born from mystical tasting and ascetic practices. So since they have not achieved by the way of the demonstration but through the intuition, they are not destroyed by any doubt. My way is one that all seekers of the right way and Plato went and by help of the taste can solve many problems (Alshirazi, n.d.: 16).

Suhrawardi believes that achieving the illuminationist philosophy is not possible without seeking and effort and without a spiritual guide. So those who he calls them the carriers of the nature of wisdom, should deal with the illuminative disclosure and intuition rather than with argumentation and demonstration; they must be oriented to the esoteric and the secret of the heart. In this way, we can say: the philosophy for Suhrawardi is different with what many philosophers have said in this regard (Ebrahimi 1997: 16-19).

Suhrawardi knew the first degree of philosophy as passing the world and its intermediary degree observing divine lights and its end an infinite journey (Shahrazuri 1986: 466). The important thing that is the interest of "illuminationist" mystic is how the strange can return to his home. Because in fact, the illuminationist philosopher is who does not separate the philosophical research from the spiritual perfection (Corbin 1994: 295-296).

It is worth noting that Suhrawardi considers the religious law as the whip of God and believes this whip is used for educating the people and leads them to Him. He has known necessary the adherence to holy script and Prophet's tradition for the seeker and considered possible the arrival to the transcendent truth by this way. Also he believes that in the light of Mohammad we can achieve the truth of the past religions and the past wisdom.

## **Conclusion**

Now, the basic question: what is the importance of dealing with Suhrawardi's thoughts in our age? In other words, what necessity requires to analyze in the contemporary world Suhrawardi's thoughts and opinions and his importance? Is a good thing to speak of the mysticism and illumination in present time? The author believes that in the current era, more than any other

time, we need to discuss and propose the thoughts that lead the human to the super-sensible world super-propel and emancipate him from the cesspool of worldly concerns and make aware him of self-knowledge and self-confidence and look into his Ahuraean, spiritual and sacred dimension.

Of course, it is not surprising if say that the human today needs to "self-knowledge" and "self-understanding". Because today more than any other period the human escapes from himself and this is one of the huge difficulties of today's human that causes irreparable vacuum; he neglects and forgets the true self which is the same as the spiritual and otherworldly aspect.

Perhaps one of the factors and causes of negligence is that the man is a multi-dimensional and even self-contradictory existence. Therefore, attention to mere one dimension and neglecting other aspects causes a cancerous and non-harmonious growth of human being.

Hence, in the modern world that the secular man sinks in the various and colorful manifestations of modernity and is drunk with the technological and industrial developments, in such a way that it can be felt a kind of despair and self-depreciation and spiritual vacuum in modern man, discussion of Suhrawardi's mystical ideas and thoughts is a ray of hope that makes the human aware of his sacred, spiritual and mystic aspect, the real truth.

## References

- Aburian, M. A. (1983). *Foundations of Illuminationist Philosophy by Suhrawardi*, Trans. by M.A., Sheikh. Tehran: Beheshti University Press.
- Alshirazi, Gh. (n.d.). A Commentary of Hekmat Eshragh.
- Corbin, Henry (1994). *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Trans. by J., Tabatabaei. Tehran: Desert Publications.
- Dadbeh, A. (1997). *General Philosophy*, University of Payam Noor, eleventh edition, Tehran.
- Dehkhoda, A., Dictionary of Persian Language, word Suhrawardi
- Ebrahimi, Dinani (1997). *Ray of Thought and Intuition in Suhrawardi's Philosophy*. Fourth Edition. Tehran: Hekmat Publications.
- Halabi, A. A. (1994). *The History of Philosophy in Iran and the Islamic world*. First Edition. Tehran: Asaatir Publications.



- Izutsu, Toshi Haikou (2000). *Foundation of Sabzevari's Philosophy*. Trans. by S.J., Mojtabavi, Intro. by M. Mohaghegh. Tehran: Tehran University Press.
- Janagiri, M. (1990). *Illuminationist Philosophy, Philosophy in Iran (Proceedings of Philosophy), Professors of Philosophy Department of Literature and Humanities*, Tehran University, Sixth Edition. Tehran: Hekmat Publication.
- Motahari, M. (1997). *Familiarity with Islamic Sciences*. Twentieth Edition. Tehran: Sadra Publishing.
- Nasr, S. H. (1983). *Shahaboddin Suhrawardi the Victim, the History of Philosophy in Islam, Under the Observation of Mohammad Sharif*, trans. by R. Nazemi. Tehran: Academic Publishing.
- Popkin, Richard and Sterol, A. (1995). *Philosophy in a New Key*, Trans. by S. J., Sixth Edition. Tehran: Mojtabavi, Hekmat Publications.
- Russell, Bertrand (1994). *The History of West Philosophy*. Trans. by N., Daryabandari, Sixth Edition. Tehran: Parvaz Publications.
- Sajjadi, S. J. (1996). *Dictionary of Philosophy and Theology*. Tehran: Amir Kabir Publications.
- Sajjadi, S. J. (1984). *Philosophy in the Islamic World*. (Shahaboddin Suhrawardi). Tehran: Falsafeh Publications.
- Shahrazuri, Sham Addin Mohammad Ibn Mahmud, Nezhat Arvah Va Rozat Afraah (1986). *History of Philosophers*, Trans. by M.A. Tabrizi, by efforts of M.T., Danesh Pajouh and M., Sarvar Molaei. Tehran: Scientific and Cultural Publications.
- Suhrawardi, Hekmal Eshragh (1993). *Collected Works*, vol. 2. Tehran: Institute for Cultural Research and Studies.
- Suhrawardi, Sh. (1983). *A Commentary of Hekmatal Eshragh, Sh. M., Shahrazuri*. Tehran: Institute for Studies and Research.
- Suhrawardi, Y. Shahaboddin (1998). *Philosophy of Illumination*, Trans. and comment. by S. J., Sajjadi, Sixth Edition. Tehran: Tehran University Press.
- Ziyaei Torbati, H. (1993). *Hekmal Eshraq A Commentary*. Tehran: Institute for Cultural Research.