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FATİH SULTAN MEHMET VAKIF ÜNİVERSİTESİ
MEDENİYETLER İTTİFAKI ENSTİTÜSÜ

YÜKSES LİSANS TEZİ

FALSAFAH AND *TAṢAWWUF* IN THE ISLAMICATE CIVILIZATION: GHAZALI AND SUHRAWARDI ON THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL VALUE OF MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE

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YRD. DOÇ. DR. NAGİHAN HALILOĞLU

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BEYAN

Bu tezin yazımında bilimsel ahlâk kurallarının gözetildiğini, başkalarının eserlerinden yararlanırken bilimsel normlara uygun olarak kaynak gösteriminin yapıldığını, kullanılan veriler üzerinde herhangi bir değişiklik yapılmadığını, tezin herhangi bir kısmının bu üniversite veya başka bir üniversitedeki başka bir tez çalışmasına ait olarak sunulmadığını beyan ederim.

SİMONE DARIO NARDELLA

ABSTRACT

This thesis analyzes Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (1058-1111) and Abū al-Futūḥ Yaḥyā b. Ḥabash b. Amīrāk al-Suhrawardī's (1154-1191) ideas about the acquisition of knowledge through mystical practice and experience. Their practice of *taṣawwuf* and their intellectual approach to it will be compared to their relation to philosophy, in the sense of the *falsafah* tradition of the Islamicate world, and how their being related to both traditions (*falsafah* and *taṣawwuf*) informed their mysticism. Particular attention will be given to their ontology and epistemology. The main works that will be taken in consideration are Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, *Kitāb Sharḥ ʿAjā'ib al-Qalb* and *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* and Suhrawardī's *Kitāb Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, *Kalimat al-Taṣawwuf* and *al-Alwāḥ al-ʿImādiyyah*. Finally, their mystical experiences and epistemology will be compared to three approaches to the study of mysticism (Traditionalism, the Unity Thesis and Constructionism) to see whether these approaches are suitable to the study of these authors. I argue that both Ghazālī and Suhrawardī consider the way of mysticism as superior to the way of reason in seeking the truth, even though they both value reason and do not reject it. Rather, the best way of seeking the truth is by joining mysticism and reason. I also argue that none of the three approaches to the study of mysticism mentioned (Traditionalism, Unity Thesis and Constructionism) suits our authors, so new approaches are needed.

Keywords: Ghazālī, Suhrawardī, mysticism, philosophy, epistemology

FOREWORD

This thesis explores the relation between the *falsafah* tradition and the *taṣawwuf* tradition in classical Islamic thought and how mystical experience was considered a way to certain knowledge.

This will be done by looking at some of the works of two of the most influential thinkers of the Islamic world between the second half of the 11th century and the end of the 12th century: Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (1058-1111) and Shahāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Suhrawardī (1154-1191). The works I will be focusing on are Ghazali's *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Qalb* (Book of the Marvels of the Heart) from his *Ihyā' 'Ulum al-Din* (Revival of Religious Sciences), *Mishkāt al-Anwār* (The Niche of Lights) and t *Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* (Deliverance from Error) and Suhrawardi's *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* (The Wisdom of Illumination), *Alwāḥ 'Imādī* (The Imadian Tablets) and *Kalimat al-Taṣawwuf* (The Word of *Taṣawwuf*).

Praise for the completion of this project is due to God, from beginning to end, who said "If you thank Me, I shall increase you." May God bless and give peace to His Prophet Muḥammad, who said "Whoever has not thanked people, has not thanked God" and to his family and companions. May God be pleased with and reward on my behalf my means to Him and to His Prophet, Shaykh Abu al-ʿAbbās Aḥmad al-Tijānī, Shaykh al-Ḥājj Abū Isḥāq Ibrahim Niasse al-Tijānī, Shaykh ibn al-Khayrī, Shaykh Ḥabīb Sall, Sayyidī Tevin Muṣtafā Okon-Briggs, Imām Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Finch and all the Tijānī brothers and sisters who have supported me in this project through their prayers and encouragement. Without their spiritual aid and knowledge, approaching this thesis would have been impossible for me, as they are my guides in understanding the Ṣūfī path.

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I wish to dedicate this thesis to my beloved cousin Ruggero, whose miraculous recovery from what would have normally been a fatal accident has made us praise God much. I pray that he becomes among the foremost knowers of God, for that is the greatest happiness. May God reward all those who have assisted me in this thesis, both those I have mentioned and those I have not, ten and more times than they deserve.

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0. INTRODUCTION

This thesis explores the relation between the *falsafah* tradition and the *taṣawwuf* tradition in classical Islamic thought and how mystical experience was considered a way to certain knowledge.

This will be done by looking at some of the works of two of the most influential thinkers of the Islamic world between the second half of the 11th century and the end of the 12th century: Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (1058-1111) and Shahāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā al-Suhrawardī (1154-1191). The works I will be focusing on are Ghazali's *Kitāb 'Ajā'ib al-Qalb* (Book of the Marvels of the Heart) from his *Ihyā' 'Ulum al-Din* (Revival of Religious Sciences), *Mishkāt al-Anwār* (The Niche of Lights) and t *Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* (Deliverance from Error) and Suhrawardi's *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* (The Wisdom of Illumination), *Alwāḥ 'Imādī* (The Imadian Tablets) and *Kalimat al-Taṣawwuf* (The Word of *Taṣawwuf*).

My working assumption in analyzing the ideas of our authors is that they 1) sincerely believed in the validity of what they expressed; and 2) had personal experience of it . I compare their words and ideas with each other and put them in the context of earlier Islamic thought. However, it is not within the scope of this research to identify possible social or historical causes that brought the authors to hold the opinions they held, aside from some factors commonly emphasized within the secondary literature. Examples of this are the tendency to disclose one's real beliefs only partly and to a select audience to avoid possible accusations of blasphemy from those who may not understand them or who may disagree with them, or the variation of writing styles and terminology in the works of a single author to suit different audiences and topics. My interest is mainly to present the authors' beliefs about mystical experiences as expressed in their works to uncover epistemological and ontological assumptions that may be of use in the study of mysticism in general as well as in the study of Islamicate civilization. I refer to Hodgson's concept of Islamic*ate* civilization to emphasise that, while both our authors professed Islam, they were immersed in a world where Islamic revelation was not the only source for their worldview. They had to engage considerably with Greek pre-Islamic thought,

with the surviving traditions of Pythagoreanism, Hermeticism, Aristotelism, Neo-Platonism and remnants of Zoroastrianism and this constitutes an important aspect of their thought.[1]

This thesis aims at uncovering different or similar understandings of the relation between mystical experience and knowledge – or knowledge traditions - in the eyes of classical Islamicate thinkers. This will tell us something about the Islamicate civilization on the one side and mysticism on the other. With the rise of globalization and of post-secularism, world mysticism, both inside and outside the perspective of organized religions, has become part of the cultural panorama of the contemporary world, whether on an academic level (through academics who are insiders to the very mystical traditions they study) or on a popular level (the increased interest throughout the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first for different and at times purportedly new forms of spirituality, regardless of their historical place of origin). At the same time, the continued study of mysticism in academic circles has revealed both similarities and striking differences between the world's mystical traditions, which has brought the academic community to diverge in their analyses, some preferring to look at mysticism as a single phenomenon assuming different outward features in each culture, and others seeing this as a historically biased and inaccurate portrayal of reality, so that they give more importance to the cultural and ideological differences between mystics. In such circumstances, while seeing benefits and limits in both approaches, I believe it is important to return to the study of the actual texts where individual understandings of mysticism within a given tradition have been recorded, to ensure that our perception of this part of intellectual history across civilizations is not obfuscated by generalization and interpretations that are too broad in scope.

From the point of view of civilization studies, mysticism is an important element of most civilizations, so understanding how they conceived of it is necessary to understand how they thought of themselves. Indeed, whether we are talking about Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, Christians, Shamanists, Animists, Muslims or the civilizations of Ancient Egypt or the Graeco-Roman world, revelation through prophets, saints, oracles, initiates, ascetics, shamans or even common people was a

[1] Marshall G.S. Hodgson, **The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization. Vol. 1: The Classical Age of Islam**, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 57–60.

key (even if not necessarily frequent) occurrence that often defined many elements of that civilization. If, instead of understanding how all these people understood mystical revelation, we substitute their understanding with modern scientific theories or by assuming that behind every mystical claim there was in reality some political, economic, social or medical cause, we may fail to ever deeply appreciate these civilizations.

This research has several limits that need to be accounted for. First, it does not cover the whole of the authors' works, not even those on mysticism, but focus on the six that have been mentioned above. When necessary, I will refer to their other works, especially as they are discussed in the secondary literature, but it should be understood that the conclusions I reach rely primarily on the views expressed in *Kitāb ʿAjā'ib al-Qalb, Mishkāt al-Anwār, Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl, Hikmat al-Ishraq, al-Alwāḥ al-ʿImādiyyah* and *Kalimat al-Taṣawwuf*. The second limit is that this research is mainly concerned with ideas and not so much with the historical, political or economic factors that may be behind these ideas. I have left out considerations on the possible influence of such factors on the authors' thought, except when said influence seemed to me glaringly obvious.

0.1. Defining terms: the meaning of *taṣawwuf*, mysticism, *falsafah* and philosophy

The term mysticism and its derivatives like mystical experience and mystical philosophy, as well as the terms *tasawwuf*, Sufism and their derivatives are all hard to define and their meaning differ from author to author. Some intellectuals have tried to provide strict and precise definitions or distinctions (see for example René Guénon's critique of the use of the term mysticism for what he called initiation)[2], while others have acknowledged that the different meanings ascribed to these words constitute a problem too compound to be solved in a satisfactory manner. As Geels and Belzen said: "The concept of mysticism… seems to be just as general as the word 'religion' and equally impossible to define".[3] These authors tend to simply give their own working definition and rely on their readers' ability to understand their

[2] see his **Perspectives on Initiation**, ed. Samuel D Fohr, trans. Henry D Fohr (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 1946).
[3] Belzen JA & Geels A (eds), 2003. **Mysticism, A Variety of Psychological Perspectives**. Rodopi B.V. (The Netherlands: 2003), p. 9.

usage of said terms and to distinguish between the way they and other intellectuals use them.

The term *taṣawwuf*, with its derivatives, is specific to the Muslim world and less problematic than mysticism. This is because the Ṣūfī tradition is recognizable as a single tradition within the same civilization, even though it includes a wide range of different paths, ideas and practices. The term mysticism on the other side, if applied to contexts beyond that of Western civilization, implies an acknowledgement of a common nature between the varying traditions one refers to by using this term.

For the purposes of this thesis, the term mysticism will be used loosely to indicate the belief that there is some kind of hidden knowledge to be acquired through some form of personal revelation, inspiration or experience, facilitated by the adoption of a set of practices and closeness to a teacher who is seen as able to pass on this knowledge, or the knowledge of the means to it. This is meant to be a broad definition and, since this thesis only analyses the works of Muslim thinkers, "mysticism" and "*tasawwuf*", with their derivatives, will be used interchangeably. Nonetheless, as we will see, our authors faced the same dilemma that we encounter, having to decide whether to consider the ancient Greek philosophers as Ṣūfīs or as something else. Such problems, then, are not new.

Tasawwuf is the name of that science within the Islamic world that studies the states of the heart and the soul from the perspective of their role in one's journey to God, discussing the effects of religious rituals, everyday actions and sins on one's consciousness and interpreting those unusual experiences that individuals who are trying to come closer to God may encounter. At the highest levels, it purports to provide access to a personal and undoubtable knowledge of God and, through God, knowledge of anything else, from hidden aspects of prophecy and sainthood to the reality of this world and the next life, including also occasional inspirations that would benefit an individual or his community, such as the ability to discern the real intentions of others or to be alerted through dreams about the best course of action to undertake. The range of practices adopted by those who study this science and ascribe themselves to it (the *Ṣūfiyyah* or *mutaṣawwifah*, with some disputes concerning the appropriateness and precise meaning of each of these terms) is indeed vast: the most common are different degrees of asceticism and devotion through a number of forms of worship and contemplation, many of which have their root in the

Quran and the hadith of the Prophet – peace and blessings be upon him -, while the origin and even acceptability of others on the basis of Islamic teachings is subject to dispute. The ideas presented by Sufis regarding God and His relation to creation and to human beings also vary, sometimes are written in deliberately obscure language (based on the assumption that to grasp high spiritual truth one must be spiritually ready or else their exposition will harm the faith of the one who hears or reads about them) and have been subject to dispute. Opponents to the Sufis typically portray the beliefs found in Sufi texts as blasphemy, while the supporters of Sufism from among the religious scholars defend the same ideas by arguing that their detractors have misunderstood them and that only someone who walks the Sufi path under the instruction of a qualified Shaykh – spiritual master – is able to understand those texts correctly and criticize them if needed.

Although I am going to use the terms mysticism and *tasawwuf* (along with spirituality) interchangeably, emphasising in this way the common aspects between Islamic *tasawwuf* and other non-Islamic spiritual traditions that reach hidden knowledge and wisdom as well as certainty-giving experiences through self-purification, one must bear in mind that such use is disputed and that the two terms do not overlap in all regards. "Mysticism" has connotations that the term "*tasawwuf*" does not share. It is, for example, in some contexts, semantically close to magic, while *taṣawwuf* usually is not, despite the presence of practices that sometimes are confused with magic.

As for *falsafah* and philosophy, their relation is similar to that of *taṣawwuf* and mysticism. *Falsafah* is in principle the philosophical tradition that developed in the Islamicate world from the encounter between Islamic thought and Greek philosophy and some of its leading figures are Ibn Sinā and al-Fārābī. Philosophy is a broader and loaded term. Its application for example to Islamic doctrines that developed in the Ṣūfī tradition or in the *kalām* tradition is contested, as well as its application to the thought of other civilization, like the Hindu and the Chinese. In this thesis, both terms will be used interchangeably and only to mean the tradition inspired by Greek philosophy in the Islamicate civilization and led by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sinā. Ghazālī's thought for example will never be called philosophy or *falsafah* because, even though he borrowed many concepts from this tradition, he never professed allegiance to it *as a tradition of knowledge, acknowledging its authorities*. Suhrawardī, on the

other side, is both a Ṣūfī and a philosopher, or *faylasūf*, because he explicitly acknowledges his adherence to these two traditions. Even though he takes a particular stance toward Peripatetic thought and thus Ibn Sinā, he still affirms a connection to the Greek philosophers as authorities.

0.2. Brief summary of academic approaches to the issue of mystical experience

Academic approaches toward the study of mysticism are countless. I will not attempt to present all of them, but only some that may be relevant here. Each scholar's approach towards mysticism usually depends first and foremost from the point of view of his discipline: philosophers, psychologists, biologists, neurologists, theologians, historians, all tend to explain mysticism in different ways. To review each discipline's approaches here would be a futile exercise. There are however three approaches that do need to be mentioned here. One of them is relevant to the study of Suhrawardi in particular, while the other two are useful in understanding the issue explored above regarding the appropriateness of the term "mysticism" when describing non-Christian forms of spirituality, such as Sufism. The first one is the Traditionalist approach. The other two are the Unity Thesis developed by William James[4] and further supported by Stace[5] and the Constructionist approach represented by Katz[6] and Proudfoot.[7]

As for Traditionalism, also known as Perennialism, it is not simply an approach to the study mysticism but a broader narrative connecting different civilizations, philosophy, religion and mysticism. Its father is generally considered to be René Guénon (1886-1951), who laid down the key ideas and themes of the Traditionalist school in his numerous works. Other authors whose thought is connected to the school are Ananda Coomaraswami, Julius Evola, Frithjof Schuon and Seyyed

[4] William James**, The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature - Centenary Edition** (USA and Canada: Routledge, 1902).
[5] **Mysticism and Philosophy** (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1960).
[6] **Mysticism and Language** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); **Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); **Mysticism and Religious Traditions** (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).
[7] **Religious Experience** (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985).

Hossein Nasr.[8] Antoine Faivre has summarized the chore features of the Traditionalist school in three postulates, thus summarized by Hanegraaff:

> (1) There exists a primordial Tradition of non-human origin – humanity has not invented but received it – which has progressively gotten lost, and of which the various historical traditions and metaphysics are the membra disjecta. The source of this Tradition cannot be identified by means of scholarly historiography. (2) Modern Western culture, science and civilization is inherently incompatible with Tradition; never before has humanity been alienated from the latter as seriously as today. (3) The Tradition may be recovered, partially at least, by focusing on the common denominators of the various religious and metaphysical traditions. Such research cannot be neutral but requires the seeker to embrace the fundamental Traditional values and perspectives, and preferably to have undergone "initiation". The Tradition can only be understood from the perspective of Tradition itself; the very idea of neutral, "disinterested" historical research in which the evidence of surviving sources is the ultimate yardstick reflects a modernist and historicist perspective incompatible with Tradition.[9]

In the language of the Traditionalist school, the terms metaphysics, esotericism and initiation are usually related to what is more commonly referred to as mysticism and mystical knowledge. Guénon, for example, calls *tasawwuf* "Islamic esotericism"[10] and the knowledge explored by the Vedanta and for which one prepares or realizes through Yoga as "metaphysics"[11], while it is common in other literature to refer to Sufism, Yoga and Vedanta as mystical traditions, especially in so far as they seem to lead to experiences of unitary consciousness or to express a unitary view of existence. It should be noticed that, as mentioned earlier, Guénon himself was critical of such uses of the term "mysticism", hence his choice of different terms.[12] Regardless of the choice of terms and of the fact that

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[8] Wouter J Hanegraaff, "Tradition," ed. Wouter J Hanegraaff, **Dicitonary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism** (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2006), 1132.

[9] Antoine Faivre, "Histoire de la notion moderne de tradition dans ses rapports avec les courants ésotériques (XVe-XXe siècles)", in: Symboles et Mythes dans les mouvements initiatiques et ésotériques (XVIIe-XXe siècles): Filiations et emprunts (ARIES special issue), Milan/Paris: Archè/La Table d'Émeraude, 1999, p.33, summarized in Wouter J Hanegraaf, "Tradition," ed. Wouter J Hanegraaf, **Dicitonary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism** (Leiden, The Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2006), p.1132.

[10] René Guénon, **Scritti Sull'esoterismo Islamico E Il Taoismo,** trans. Lorenzo Pellizzi, 5th ed., Piccola Biblioteca Adelphi 320 (Adelphi, 1993).

[11] René Guénon, **Introduction to the Study of the Hindu Doctrines**, trans. Marco Pallis (Bristol: Luzac & Co., 1945), pp.261-7, 276-84.

[12] Guénon, **Perspectives on Initiation**, pp.7-16.

Traditionalism is not limited to the study of mysticism, it does provide a narrative in which mystical traditions within major world religions participate in and manifest the single primordial Tradition. This framework affects the way in which Traditionalists understand mysticism across different traditions.

The reason for this approach's relevance to this study is that it shares some common elements with Suhrawardi's view of the history of *Ishraqi* philosophy, as he proclaims to follow the same path of Plato and the philosophers before him, as well as some monotheists among the Persians before Islam, in joining discoursive (*baḥth*) and intuitive, or divine, philosophy (*ta'alluh*),[13] syllogistic reasoning with *mushāhadah*, or "direct intuition",[14] and giving precedence to the latter. I believe that Suhrawardī's narrative and method has much more in common with the notion of *prisca theologia*[15]than it does with contemporary Perennialism, but the latter's influence on scholars like Corbin (not a Perennialist in the full sense, but someone at least influenced by some Perennialist ideas),[1617] Nasr and Amin Razavi, who have contributed significantly to the academic literature on Suhrawardi,[18] makes it important to account for it in any study of Suhrawardī. The notion of *prisca theologia* will be discussed in the chapter on Suhrawardi's views.

The second approach that I will consider here is the unity thesis developed by William James in 1902[19] and later re-introduced by Stace in 1960.[20] Hood summarizes the view as follows:

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[13] Shahab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination**, trans. John Walbridge and Hossein Ziai (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1999), 2–3.

[14] This is how Roxanne Marcotte translates the term in her "Reason ('aql) and Direct Intuition (Mushahadah) in the Works of Shahab Al-Din Al-Suhrawardi (d.587/1191)," in **Reason and Inspiration in Islam: Theology, Philosophy and Mysticism in Muslim Thought**, ed. Todd Lawson (London/New York: I.B. Tauris Publishers/The Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2006), 221–34. I also considered "mystical vision" and "mystical witnessing" as possible translations, but I ultimately incline to Marcotte's translation more. The term, and the reasons for my choice to use Marcotte's translation, will be discussed more in depth in the chapter on Suhrawardi's views.

[15]See Hanegraaff, "Tradition."

[16] Ibid., p.1134

[17] See for example his **Suhrawardī D' Alep Fondateur de La Doctrine Illuminative (Paris: Maisonneuve, 1939); En Islam Iranien: Aspects Spirituels et Philosophiques. Vol. 2, Sohrawardi et Les Platoniciens de Perse** (Paris: Gallimard, 1971); **The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism**, trans. Nancy Pearson (Omega Publications, 1994); **L'homme de Lumière Dans Le Soufisme Iranien** (Paris: Éditions Présence, 2003).

[18] See for example Nasr's **Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna - Suhrawardi - Ibn 'Arabi** (Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1964) and; Aminrazavi's **Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination**, Curzon Sufi Series (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2013).

[19] James, **The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature - Centenary Edition.**

[20] Stace, **Mysticism and Philosophy.**

> The unity thesis is essentially the Jamesian view that there is little diversity among mysticisms if one focuses on experience rather than its interpretation. … The "eternal unanimity" of James was forcefully re-introduced by Stace (1960) in his seminal work *Mysticism and Philosophy*. The unity thesis became quickly identified with a common core that mystical experiences were argued to share based on several explicit assumptions. These included that (a) one can separate experience from the interpretation of experience; (b) experiences of union are central to all mysticisms; (c) union can be experienced as either extrovertive (unity in diversity) or introvertive (contentless consciousness); (d) mystical experiences share a family resemblance in terms of secondary criteria such as noetic quality, sacredness, positive affect, and alleged ineffability; (e) introvertive and extrovertive mysticism are themselves aspects of a single mysticism insofar as the ontological status of the "one" is identical in both; (g) and finally, the empirical relationship of these two forms of mystical experience is an open question.[21]

This approach is contrasted by the constructionist one introduced by Katz[22] and Proudfoot[23] that critiques the assumption that experience and interpretation can be distinguished from each other given the claim of the non-existence of unmediated experiences. Mystical experiences, as all experiences, are also seen as heavily shaped by their context and by individual and social factors, making them be extremely varied from one tradition to another. Can then the label of "mysticism" be applied to all? Lastly, language is also seen as playing a role in constituting the experience rather than merely interpreting it.[24]

This thesis does not commit itself, in principle, to either of the latter two approaches (nor to the traditionalist one). I rather try to deduce from the words of Ghazālī and Suhrawardī how they described mystical experience in their own terms. I will then attempt to compare their views with the three approaches presented here.

Other views of mysticism that it may be worth mentioning are the psychoanalytic one, which sees mystical experiences (particularly experiences of oneness) as regressions to the infantile state and the psycho-biological one, that tends to reduce these experiences to the product of biological or neurological phenomena,

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[21] Ralph Wilbur Hood Jr., "Conceptual and Empirical Consequences of the Unity Thesis," in **Mysticism - A Variety of Psychological Perspectives**, ed. Jacob A Balzen and Antoon Geels (The Netherlands: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2003), 17.
[22] Katz, **Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis**; Katz, **Mysticism and Religious Traditions**; Katz, **Mysticism and Language.**
[23] Proudfoot, **Religious Experience**.
[24] Hood Jr., "Conceptual and Empirical Consequences of the Unity Thesis," 18–19.

rather than to some supernatural intervention or to the effective access to another dimension of consciousness and existence.[25]

0.3. Reasons for the choice of Ghazālī and Suhrawardī

The reasons for choosing Ghazālī and Suhrawardī for this analysis are the following: both have a relation to the *falsafah* tradition and speak about, even if their stances differ; both explored the issue of mystical experience within their writings; both are known to have been practicing Ṣūfīs; they were both influenced by Ibn Sinā, so their thought shares some features that facilitate comparison; they lived around the same period and in the same lands (between Syria and Persia), subject to similar cultural influences, even if they reacted differently; they are two key figures in the intellectual history of Islam, particularly for its philosophical and spiritual traditions; academics have devoted considerable attention to them, but there are still many unanswered questions and debated issues in the secondary literature about them.

This thesis is structured in three chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter, "The Lives of the Wise", introduces Ghazālī and Suhrawardī's life and works. The second chapter, "The Paths of the Wise", speaks of their relation to *falsafah* and *taṣawwuf* and what they thought of these two traditions. The third chapter, "The Hearts of the Wise", speaks of their answer to the problem of acquiring certainty in knowledge and of some elements of their epistemology and ontology.

The next chapter will explore the lives and works of these authors and the role philosophy and *taṣawwuf* played in their lives.

[25] Jacob A Balzen and Antoon Geels, eds., **Mysticism - A Variety of Psychological Perspectives** (The Netherlands: Editions Rodopi B.V., 2003), 7–8.

1. THE LIVES OF THE WISE

When researching the lives of thinkers as famous and influential as Ghazālī and Suhrawardī, it is not surprising to find that biographers both in the Muslim world and in modern academia have devoted considerable attention to ascertain the details of their lives, often hoping to find in it information regarding the people, experiences and circumstances that shaped their thought and allowed them to be read and known by the later generations. As for al-Ghazālī, a most important (auto)biographical source is *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* (Deliverance from Error), an intellectual autobiography focused on his study of different types of seekers of the truth, to eventually embrace the method of the Ṣūfīs. Other sources include the witnesses of his students ʿAbd al-Ghāfir al-Fārisī and Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī, plus the works of several Muslim historians, past and recent.[26] As for Suhrawardī, we find some autobiographical material within his *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq.* Another important source is Shahrazūrī's biographies of the philosophers, known as *Nuzhat al-Arwāḥ*, as well as other works on the lives of the philosophers.[27]

1.1. Al-Ghazālī's life

Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazālī was one of the foremost intellectuals of his time. He is known for his contributions to Islamic law (*fiqh*), particularly its principles (*uṣūl al-fiqh*), theology (*kalām*) and spirituality (*taṣawwuf*). For a long time he has been seen by academics as the main figure responsible for bridging the gap between Sunnī legalism and Ṣūfīs. Nonetheless, as we get to know more about the Muslim intellectual tradition prior to his time, it appears evident that, while being undoubtedly an outstanding contributor to Islamic thought, the gap between Sufism and Sunnī Orthodoxy (the latter being a rather obscure term in itself when applied to Muslim thought)[28] seems to have been much

[26] "Biography: Primary Source Material," **Ghazali.org,** September 12, 2015, http://www.ghazali.org/2015/09/psm-bio/.
[27] Hossein Ziai, "Al-Suhrawardī," ed. P. Bearman et al., **Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition**, 2012, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_1107.
[28] That is because the term "orthodoxy" etymologically means "correct opinion". It is evident that every group and intellectual or religious school considers itself to be correct, and that at the same time any judgment on which religious group is correct stands on a subjective judgment. The Orthodox

less pronounced by Ghazālī's time than academics imagined at first, due to the work of other earlier Ṣūfīs.[29] Many of the authors of early treatises on *taṣawwuf* were in fact scholars of Islamic law, theology and Prophetic traditions or Quranic exegesis in their own right, and Ghazālī acknowledges to having studied their works and their influence is recognizable in his works (most noticeably the influence of Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī's *Qūt al-Qulūb* on Ghazālī's magnus opus in *taṣawwuf,* the *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn*).

Another aspect of Ghazālī's works is how he drew on the Muslim philosophical tradition (particularly, but not only, Ibn Sinā's) for arguments and metaphors. It has been suggested that some elements of Ghazālī's cosmology and epistemology are in fact heavily inspired by Ibn Sinā's philosophy, but represented in religious, rather than philosophical terminology.[30] This should not make us think that Ghazālī was somehow simply plagiarizing controversial authors by recasting their ideas in a more acceptable light: as he argued when defending himself during the controversy of Nishāpūr, where he was accused of having been influenced by the philosophers, he might well have seen his actions as a way to study what was seen as a dangerous subject, suitable only for those well-grounded in faith and knowledge, discern in it the beneficial from the harmful and propose to the Muslim community only what was beneficial.[31]

In connection with this, the apparent inconsistency between some of Ghazālī's views as they are expressed in his different works is worth mentioning. As argued by Richard M. Frank,[32] it is quite possible that some of the inconsistencies were due to Ghazālī's official commitment to the Ashʿarī school, while at the same time his own thoughts and personal beliefs, informed not only by his official Ashʿarī and Shāfiʿī training, but also by his study of *falsafah* and his practice of *taṣawwuf,* may have been different from those of the majority. Had he expressed his views fully, some

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Church can be identified as such simply because historically they have been called Orthodox even by those who did not see them as the correct interpretation of Christianity, but the same cannot be said nor applied to any Muslim group. It is more profitable to identify groups by the names they use for themselves, thus speaking, for example, of Sunni Islam, rather than Orthodox Islam.

[29] Toby Mayer, "Theology and Sufism," in **The Cambridge Companion to Classical Islamic Theology**, ed. Tim Winter, Cambridge Companions to Religion (University Press, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 258–87.

[30] Alexander Treiger, **Inspired Knowledge in Islamic Thought : Al-Ghazali's Theory of Mystical Cognition and Its Avicennian Foundation**, ed. Ian Richard Netton (London: Routledge, 2012).

[31] Ibid., 96–102.

[32] Richard M. Frank, **Al-Ghazali and the Ash'arite School** (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), 91–101.

readers would have been unable to understand them, while others would have reacted with hostility, endangering Ghazālī's life, livelihood and even ability to benefit others through teaching. This, however, while supported by some of the textual evidences analysed by Frank,[33] does not enlighten us on Ghazālī's exact views and how much they differed from the other schools and what is expressed, often in vague terms, in his writings. In particular, Frank has argued that Ghazālī abandoned Ashʿarī cosmology for an Avicennan model, but Marmura has disagreed with him. Frank Griffel has attempted to provide a synthesis of the thought of both scholars, concluding that eventually Ghazālī walked a middle path, though with a heavy Avicennan influence.[34]

Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī was born between 441/1050 and 451/1060 in Ṭūs, Khorasan, near Meshhed.[35] He and his brother Ahmad were left orphans quite young. They began their education there in Ṭūs. Ahmad al-Ghazālī eventually grew up to become a famous preacher and Ṣūfī. As for Abū Ḥāmid, he continued his studies with several scholars in Jurjān, then back in Ṭūs, then in Nishāpūr. There, he was a brilliant student at the feet of al-Juwainī (1028-85), known as 'Imām al-Ḥaramayn', the Imam of the two sanctuaries (Mecca and Madina). It was likely from him that Ghazālī derived his attention to philosophy and to its possible benefits for the religious sciences.[36]

In 484/1091, Ghazālī started working under Niẓām al-Mulk, teaching in the prestigious Niẓāmiyyah school of Baghdad. While there, scholars from all over the Islamic world came to learn at his feet and his prestige and popularity flourished. Only four years later, however, in 488/1095, he left the school. There are several speculations as to the possible political reasons behind this, with some suggesting that Ghazālī, following the assassination of Niẓām al-Mulk by Ismāʿīlī assassins, might have been afraid of Ismāʿīlī retaliations against his polemical treatises against

[33] Frank, **Al-Ghazali and the Ash'arite School.**
[34] Frank Griffel, **Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology** (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 10–12.
[35] Frank Griffel, "Al-Ghazali," in **The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy**, ed. Edward N. Zalta, Summer 2016, 2016, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/al-ghazali/; Griffel, **Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology**, 23–25; Watt W. Montgomery, "Al-Ghazali," ed. P. Bearman et al., **Encyclopedia of Islam, Second Edition**, 2012, http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0233.
[36] Griffel, **Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology,** 30.

them, leading him to leave Baghdad in incognito.[37] Ghazālī's own account is that he became worried about the state of his soul, seen as he had been pursuing knowledge for the sake of this world rather than the hereafter. He therefore decided to repent and leave Baghdad, to distance himself from those who knew him and to try to live in the way of the Sufis, worshipping God and abstaining from luxury. He travelled to Damascus, Jerusalem, Hebron, Mecca and Medina and then spent ten years in Syria – although the exact length of his permanence there is disputed -. Some suggest he may have visited Egypt as well in his travels.[38] He then returned to Nishapur in 499/1106, where he resumed teaching**,** but this time with a spiritual perspective that gave new life and meaning to the precepts and beliefs of Islam. Later, he returned to his birthplace, Ṭūs, where he established (or had already established before his return to Nishapur) a *khanqāh*, a place where Sufi teachers and students live and worship together. There, he had several students until his death in 505/1111.[39]

1.2. Suhrawardī's life

Shihāb (or Shahāb) al-Dīn Abū al-Futūḥ Yaḥyā ibn Ḥabash ibn Amīrak al-Suhrawardī, also referred to as *Shaykh al-Ishrāq* (the master of Illumination), *al-Shaykh al-Maqtūl* (the executed master) and *al-Shaykh al-Shahīd* (the martyred master),[40] was born near Zanjān, Iran.[41] For his birth, Shahrazūrī - Suhrawardī's main biographer, though not a direct one - gives the year 545 or 550 AH, while Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Ziai give 549.[42] Amin Razavi identifies these in Gregorian years as 1166, 1171 and 1170 respectively,[43] but Ziai[44] and Nasr[45] identify 549 AH as 1154 and 1153 CE. At an early age, Suhrawardī is said to have travelled to Marāgheh and studied *ḥikmah* there with Majd al-Dīn al-Jīlī.[46] Then he travelled to Isfahan where he studied philosophy with Ẓāhir al-Dīn al-Qārī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Mardīnī (d.

[37] Montgomery, "Al-Ghazali."
[38] Ibid.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Henry Corbin, **Nell'Islam Iranico: aspetti spirituali e filosofici. Vol.2: Sohrawardi e i platonici di Persia**., ed. Roberto Revello, Abraxas 18 (Milano - Udine: Mimesis Edizioni, 2015), 30.
[41] Amin Razavi, **Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination,** 1–3.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, eds., **History of Islamic Philosophy**, History of World Philosophies 1 (New York: Routledge, 1996), 777.
[45] Nasr, **Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna - Suhrawardi - Ibn 'Arabi**, 56.
[46] Amin Razavi, **Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination**, 1–3.

594/1198).[47] There he was also introduced to the *Baṣā'ir* of ʿUmar b. Sahlān al-Sawājī, a work which introduced him to non-Aristotelian logic.[48]

After completing his formal studies, Suhrawardī took to travel, first in Persia, and then also in Anatolia and Syria.[49] Modern biographers report different aims for these travels: according to Amin Razavi,[50] Nasr[51] and Tosun Bayrak,[52] Suhrawardī was looking for Ṣūfī masters in his journeys and became strongly attached to some of them. According to Ziai[53]and Walbridge,[54] however, he was looking for princes who would become both his patrons and pupils, so that Suhrawardī may transform them in philosopher-kings and apply an ideal Illuminationist political doctrine.

This disagreement among scholars mirrors perhaps the two main academic interpretations of Suhrawardī. The first, sired by Henry Corbin[55] and continued by Nasr[56] and Amin Razavi,[57] tries to emphasise the mystical aspects of Suhrawardī's thought, and sometimes the universalist or even Perennialist tendencies of his philosophy, as well as his relation to Zoroastrian thought.[58] Scholars of this group prefer to use the term 'theosopher' when referring to Suhrawardī, rather than the more limiting 'philosopher' or 'mystic', thus emphasising Suhrawardī's connection to the Neoplatonic and Hermetic pre-Islamic traditions.[59]

The other interpretation, supported by Ziai and Walbridge[60] emphasises the philosophical aspect of Suhrawardī's works. Amin Razavi also sees a third interpretation, prominent among Iranian scholars of Islamic philosophy, which sees

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[47] Nasr and Leaman, **History of Islamic Philosophy**, 778.
[48]Amin Razavi, **Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination**, 1–3.
[49]Nasr, **Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna - Suhrawardi - Ibn 'Arabi**, 56–58.
[50]Amin Razavi, **Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination,** 1–3.
[51]Nasr, **Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna - Suhrawardi - Ibn 'Arabi,** 56–58.
[52]Shahab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, **The Shape of Light - Hayakal Al-Nur**, trans. Tosun Bayrak al-Jerrahi al-Halveti (United States of America: Fons Vitae, 1998), 26–29.
[53]Hossein Ziai, "Source and Nature of Authority: A Study of Suhrawardi's Illuminationist Political Doctrine," in **The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy**, ed. Charles E. Butterworth (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 304–44.
[54]Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination**, xv–xvii.
[55] see, for example, Corbin, **Nell'Islam Iranico: aspetti spirituali e filosofici. Vol.2: Sohrawardi e i platonici di Persia**.
[56] see Nasr, **Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna - Suhrawardi - Ibn 'Arabi,** 52–82.
[57] Amin Razavi, **Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination**.
[58]See for example: Nasr, **Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna - Suhrawardi - Ibn 'Arabi,** 61; and Amin Razavi, **Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination**, 51.
[59] ***Corbin, Nell'Islam Iranico: aspetti spirituali e filosofici. Vol.2: Sohrawardi e i platonici di Persia***., 55–98.
[60]See: Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination**, xix.

Suhrawardī as a Neo-Avicennan philosopher,[61] but I tend to see this interpretation as somehow in line with those of Ziai and Walbridge. The idea that Suhrawardī was looking for Sufi masters in his travels supports the importance of mysticism in Suhrawardī's system, while his relations with rulers support the idea of a political aspect and doctrine within Illuminationism.

The source for the idea that Suhrawardī went seeking Sufi masters seems to be Shahrazūrī's collection of biographies of the philosophers titled *Nuzhat al-Arwāḥ*.[62] The source for the idea that he was looking for rulers who would become his pupils, on the other side, is a history work on the history of the Seljuks, referenced by Ziai in his article *The Source and Nature of Authority*, where he presented his thesis of a political program within Suhrawardī's philosophy of Illumination.[63]

As a matter of fact, one claim hardly negates the other. On the one side, Suhrawardī's own practice of *taṣawwuf* makes one think he would have had teachers in that field too, even though it seems that he did not commit himself to a particular master, failing to find one who matched his spiritual insight.[64] However, this does not exclude that, having realized that he could not find teachers worthy of him, he may have seen fit that he himself should take pupils. His educational background and interest in using the study of Peripatetic philosophy as propaedeutic to the study of Illuminationism made it probably easier for him to teach well educated rulers than common people, given that the latter would have been able to practice mysticism and receive spiritual insights even without knowing philosophy, like some Ṣūfīs and their pupils, but they would have struggled to follow Suhrawardī's Peripatetic side, which required a certain degree of education and intellectual refinement. Therefore, I see it likely that both claims be true at the same time: Suhrawardī sought Ṣūfī masters first and suitable, princely students later in his travels, eventually finding Malik Ẓāhir in Aleppo.

Suhrawardī met Malik Ẓāhir on a journey from Damascus to Aleppo.[65] According to Yāqūt b. ʿAbd Allah al-Ḥamawī, this was in 579/1200 (Walbridge and

[61]Amin Razavi, **Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination**, xvii–xviii.
[62]see ibid., 1 note 5.
[63]see Ziai, "Source and Nature of Authority: A Study of Suhrawardi's Illuminationist Political Doctrine", 322, note 48.
[64]Amin Razavi, **Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination**, 1.
[65]Ibid.

Ziai give 1183 CE as the Gregorian equivalent for the Hijri year of 579).[66] In Aleppo, Suhrawardī would be listened to by the local scholars and he would debate defending the positions of the philosophers, demonstrating the strength of their arguments.[67]

It is not known for sure whether Suhrawardī trained students in Aleppo, aside from Malik Ẓāhir, but he definitely had companions and friends in his life who requested that he compose some of his works for them and that he sometimes makes reference to as "brothers" in his works, including *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*.[68] Nonetheless, none of them left us a biography of the Master of Illumination, perhaps due to the political climate following Suhrawardī's execution. Shahrazūrī is the only one to write about *al-Shaykhal-Maqtūl* in a manner that suggests personal knowledge, but there is no other evidence that would indicate that the two ever met. Amin Razavi suggests that Shahrazūrī might have met someone who knew Suhrawardī personally.[69] On the other side, the author of *al-Nujūm al-Ẓāhirah fī Mulūk Miṣr wal-Qāhirah*, Yūsūf b. Taqhribirdī, reports there to have met Suhrawardī, but to have found him to be a man with vast knowledge and a small mind.[70] This remark perhaps is not intended to mean that Suhrawardī was somehow lacking in his understanding of philosophical and scholarly issues - something that would contrast what we know from Suhrawardī's own works and from what others have written about him. Rather, it could mean that he had little intelligence in not concealing his views that would have attracted opposition and accusations of blasphemy, something that is evident from his life and had already been observed by his teacher in Isfahan and intimate friend, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Mardīnī, at whose place in Diyār Bakr he resided for some time before his journey to Syria.[71] Al-Mardīnī is reported to have once praised Suhrawardī for his ardour in the pursuit of knowledge, but that he was afraid his zeal and lack of prudence would eventually bring about his ruin.[72]

Suhrawardī was not only known for his mastery of both philosophy and mysticism, but also for his ability to produce extraordinary results, seen either as miracles, alchemy or magic, depending on the source. It is said, for example, that in

[66]Ibid., 1; Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination,** xv.
[67]Amin Razavi, **Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination**, 1.
[68]Ibid., 2.
[69]Ibid.
[70]Ibid.
[71] Corbin, **Nell'Islam Iranico: aspetti spirituali e filosofici. Vol.2: Sohrawardi e i platonici di Persia**., 26.
[72] Ibid.

Aleppo he produced a precious stone out of nothing, through which Suhrawardī was admitted to court, becoming increasingly close to Salahuddin's son.[73]

Another episode that demonstrate Suhrawardī's powers is related by Shaykh Tosun Bayrak al- Jerrahi al-Halveti:

> There is a tradition according to which Malik Zahir asked Suhrawardi one day to show him an example of his knowledge of alchemy. Although Suhrawardi at first refused, claiming that such practice was not for the eyes and comprehension of the governor, he conceded upon his patron's insistence.
>
> After certain preparations and recitations, he asked the governor to come to the balcony of the palace and look at the walls of the city. The whole city was surrounded by Mongol armies attacking the walls of the city! Soon the walls were swarming with them, and they were killing and destroying everything in front of them. They were coming toward the palace from all directions. Finally, when they reached the gates of the palace, Malik Zahir, in terror, wanting to take refuge, rushed to the harem. Opening the door of the harem, he came face to face with a seven-headed dragon. He fell down and fainted.
>
> Suhrawardi brought him back, took him to the balcony, and showed him the city of Aleppo, peaceful and beautiful, shining under the sun. It is said that this incident brought the change of heart to Suhrawardi's patron.[74]

The question of the origin of Suhrawardī's supernatural abilities is a significant one for research. It has been mentioned that some considered Suhrawardī's powers to be miracles and therefore a sign of his high spiritual standing. Others, however, saw them as alchemy or magic. In the Islamic tradition, miracles and magic occupy almost opposite religious categories: miracles (called *mu'jizāt* in the case of Prophets and *karāmāt* in the case of saints) are a sign of divine favour, that prove the veracity of a Prophet's message by incapacitating his opponents to produce anything similar (the word *mu'jizah*, pl. *mu'jizāt*, indicates precisely something that incapacitates) or the high status of a saint with God (the word *karāmah*, pl. *karāmāt*, meaning 'honour'); magic (referred most commonly to as *siḥr*), on the other side, is forbidden by Islamic sacred law and its practice amounts to blasphemy and unbelief. To complicate things, Muslim cultures (not unlike Western cultures) have known many

[73] John Walbridge, **The Leaven of the Ancients : Suhrawardi and the Heritage of the Greeks,** ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Albany: State University of New York, 2000), 14.
[74]Suhrawardi, **The Shape of Light - Hayakal Al-Nur**, 28.

forms of miracles and magic, called by different names and the religious status of which is often disputed. There is a lack of research about these different practices and sciences as they were present in the Muslim world, which brings modern researchers to misunderstand certain social and cultural dynamics in those areas. It is necessary to throw more lights on the debates that over the centuries have surrounded these sciences, that have so much in common also with Hermeticism and Western esotericism, to reach a more accurate and nuanced understanding of Islamic cultures as well as of the history of the interactions between the latter, previous civilizations and Western esoteric thought. John Walbridge's otherwise remarkable work[75] on Suhrawardī, for example, would benefit from a greater precision of terms when dealing with these sciences (usually referred to as magic or occult).[76] I do not, however, blame him for this: in the absence of more detailed research, the choice of terms at the disposal of academics is inevitably limited.

Eventually, Suhrawardī's abilities and ideas, along perhaps with his increasing influence over Malik Ẓāhir, led the religious scholars of Aleppo to see him as a dangerous heretic and to request his execution from al-Malik al-Ẓāhir. The latter refused. The scholars then appealed to al-Malik al-Ẓāhir's father, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīnal-Ayyūbī himself, who heeded their concern and ordered his son to execute the theosopher, under the threat of depriving him of the rule of Aleppo. Malik Ẓāhir obeyed and had Suhrawardī executed in 587/1208.[77] Taqhribirdī reports that *al-Shaykh al-Maqtūl* died on a Friday in the month of Dhu al-Ḥijjah.[78]

There are different accounts of the exact motivation behind and modality of Suhrawardī's execution. Ziai[79] postulates that Suhrawardī was executed because his political doctrine of a philosopher-king worried Salahuddin, who was already busy fighting the Crusaders and the Ismāʿīlīs, and who did not have a great opinion of philosopher-kings, given his experience with the Fatimids and Hasan-i-Sabah. He could surely not afford having his own son follow some doubtful ideas that so much

[75]see John Walbridge, **The Leaven of the Ancients :Suhrawardi and the Heritage of the Greeks,** ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Albany: State University of New York, 2000); **The Wisdom of the Mystic East: Suhrawardi and Platonic Orientalism** (Albany: State University of New York, 2001); and especially "The Devotional and Occult Works of Suhrawardi the Illuminationist," **Ishraq**, no. 2 (2011): 80–97.
[76] Walbridge, "The Devotional and Occult Works of Suhrawardi the Illuminationist."
[77]Amin Razavi, **Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination**, 2.
[78]Ibid.
[79] Ziai, "Source and Nature of Authority: A Study of Suhrawardi's Illuminationist Political Doctrine."

resembled those of his adversaries. If one is to lend credit to Corbin's Shīʿīte reading of Suhrawardī's work, which even establishes connections with the Ismāʿīlī tradition,[80] this hypothesis becomes even more plausible.

Corbin discusses one of the accusations made against Suhrawardī by the scholars of Aleppo, namely that the latter believed in the possibility for God to send a prophet after Muhammad. In itself, the incident in which some scholars question Suhrawardī, asking whether he believes in the above and Suhrawardī replies that he does since Allah has power over all things, seems paltry and an example of mediocre scholarship on behalf of the scholars who questioned him. If Suhrawardī really said, as Corbin reports, when the scholars said God could not send another prophet, "Is it an absolute impossibility or not?", I believe what Suhrawardī was referring to is the fact that God, in absolute, has always the power to send new prophets, even if He has decreed that He will send no more after the prophet Muhammad, as implied by the Quran 33:40, "And he is the seal of the prophets". This would fit the Ibn Sinian and Ashʿarī categories of what is intellectually necessary, possible and impossible for God: sending prophets is always intellectually possible for God, even if He has announced that He is not going to do it anymore, so that the believers know He will not send more prophets.

It is also possible that Suhrawardi manifested Shīʿī tendencies, as shown by Corbin, which perhaps alarmed the scholars of Aleppo and Salahuddin. This, however, does not seem to have been argued specifically by those who charged him with blasphemy. Ultimately, Corbin ascribes Salahuddin's decision to demand Suhrawardi's execution to his need for the support of the scholars.[81] Nasr appears to follow Corbin's view.[82]

Amin Razavi[83] analyzes three views concerning the reason for Suhrawardī's execution:

1) that Suhrawardī was an advocate of Persian nationalism, in reaction to the Arabs' domination over Persia. This view is supported by his use of Zoroastrian elements, but, as argued by Amin Razavi, had this really been Suhrawardī's

[80] Corbin, **Nell'Islam Iranico: aspetti spirituali e filosofici. Vol.2: Sohrawardi e i platonici di Persia**., 35.
[81] Ibid., 27–29.
[82] Nasr, **Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna - Suhrawardi - Ibn 'Arabi,** 57.
[83] Amin Razavi, **Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination**, 4.

intention, Aleppo would not have been the best place to carry out such a project, something which Suhrawardī would have known.

2) Ziai's theory of the "philosopher-king", discussed earlier, which is plausible.

3) that Suhrawardī was called by some of his followers '*abū l-futūḥ rasūl Allāh*' (father of victory, messenger of God), and that therefore he could have claimed the rank of prophecy. While Amin Razavi sees this as a strong argument, especially seen that Suhrawardī saw the prophet Idrīs-Enoch-Hermes as the originator of wisdom and that he claimed for himself a rank similar to Hermes. As for the fact that the scholars may have believed that Suhrawardī claimed prophecy for himself, that is plausible, especially seen that they accused him of believing that God could send a prophet after Muhammad, not to mention Suhrawardī's connection (though complex) to Ibn Sinā. However, I do not think that Suhrawardī himself believed to be a prophet: at most he may have claimed implicitly to be the *khalīfah* of Allāh of the time, since he says that the *khalīfah* is the one who combines both rational and illuminative wisdom – which are the two types of wisdom he teaches in his books and evidently he was trying to prepare pupils who would unite both. In Ṣūfī doctrines, however, the *khalīfah* of Allah in a given time is not necessarily a prophet, but can well be a saint (*walī*), or the *Quṭb* of the time. I do not see therefore enough evidence to say that Suhrawardī himself claimed implicitly to be a prophet, even though it is possible that the scholars of Aleppo thought he did.

Suhrawardī is a wonderful example of the variety of the intellectual influences circulating in the Nile-to-Oxus region in the 12th century CE. He joins the Ṣūfī heritage with the Peripatetic philosophy inherited from the Greek, through the Byzantines. He also carries on the Pythagoraean, Neoplatonic and Hermetic traditions traced back not only to ancient Greece, but also to Zoroastrian Persia. Here and there he makes reference to Buddhism and Hinduism, which, though not as relevant to his thought as the aforementioned traditions, demonstrate how eclectic Islamicate civilization was at the time.

As there are bright sides, however, there are also less positive ones: for one, Suhrawardi's execution proves that the intellectual climate of his time, even though rich and varied, was tense and that thinkers who expressed their original views too openly challenging some of the most largely accepted or politically supported doctrines where they lived did so at the risk of their life. This cultural pluralism may

well be seen as connected to the parallel political threat to independent thought: the different intellectual influences were often linked to rival political claims, as in the case of the conflict between Salahuddin and the Ismāʿīlīs. This means that imposing a certain degree of control on the spread of certain suspicious ideas was seen as necessary to preserve a certain societal and political order.

Walbridge's research on the sources of Suhrawardī's knowledge of ancient Greek and Persian thought shows two seemingly opposing facts. The first is that from an historical perspective thinkers who promoted the connection between philosophy and mysticism believed in a narrative of the history of philosophy contradicted by some of what is known today about ancient thought, basing some of their knowledge of the thought of past authorities on what was later revealed to be spurious, fabricated or wrongly attributed text, such as the *Theology of Aristotle*, which we know today to have been written by Plotinus, or the works of Zoroastrian wisdom popular among ancient Neoplatonists, that may have actually been authored by other Neoplatonists. The second is that, despite its weakness from a historical point of view, that particular approach to knowledge that sees wisdom as something to acquire not only through the study of books, but also through spiritual practices that lead the seeker to mystical experiences has recurred in history with a surprising consistency of doctrines and practices, without denying the differences of opinion and interpretations that occurred between its proponents in different times and civilizations.

The works of Ghazālī and Suhrawardī occupy an important position in the history of Islamic philosophy and *taṣawwuf*. Ghazālī's contribution to the fields of *kalām, uṣūl al-fiqh* and *taṣawwuf* is widely recognized in the Sunnī world and in academia. As for Suhrawardī, the importance of his works is felt especially in the Shīʿī philosophical and mystical tradition, not to mention the literary value of his prose for Persian literature: his writings are considered among the greatest examples of Persian prose.[84]

1.3. Ghazālī's works

[84] For more on Suhrawardi's later influence, see ibid., 12–45.

Ghazālī is the author of several works in the fields of *kalām*, *falsafah*, logic, *uṣūl al-fiqh*, *ʿilm al-muʿamalah* (the science of dealings) and *ʿilm al-mukāshafah* (the science of unveilings). The latter two are, as a matter of fact, two aspects of the science of *taṣawwuf*: the first concerns its practical aspects, such as the purification of one's deeds, heart and soul; the second represent its theoretical (in its etymological sense of vision that bestows knowledge) fruits, namely the acquisition of mystical knowledge of divine realities through the removal of what veils the heart from their direct perception. *ʿIlm al-muʿāmalah*, in the sense explained here, should not be confused with the branch of *fiqh* that carries sometimes the same name, and deals with the outward rules and conditions of transactions and contracts. The authenticity of some of Ghazālī's works has been disputed, but I will discuss authenticity only with regards to those books closest to the present research.

Ghazālī's major works in *fiqh* and *uṣūl al-fiqh* are almost a dozen, all in Arabic. While their importance for the *fiqh* tradition cannot be neglected, they are of relatively little import for the purposes of this thesis, and I will limit myself to list their titles here: *al-Taʿlīqah* (The Comment); *al-Mankhūl min Taʿlīqat al-Uṣūl*(What is Sifted from the Comment on the Principles); *al-Basīṭ* (The Plain); *al-Wasīṭ fī al-Madhhab* (The Medium in the School); *al-Wajīz fī Fiqh al-Imām al-Shāfiʿī* (The Compendium of Imam Shāfiʿī's *Fiqh*); *Khulāṣat al-Mukhtaṣar wa Naqāwat al-Muʿtaṣar* (The Summa of the Abridgement and the Selection from the Extract); *Kitāb Tahdhīb al-Uṣūl* (The Refinement of the Principles); *Ghāyat al-Ghawr fī Dirāyat al-Dawr* (The Utmost Depth in Understanding the Change); *al-Mustaṣfā min ʿIlm al-Uṣūl* (The Chosen from the Science of Principles), one of Ghazālī's most important works on *Uṣūl*; *Asās al-Qiyās* (The Foundation of Analogy); *Fatāwī al-Ghazālī* (Ghazālī's Fatwās).[85]

Ghazālī's major works on *taṣawwuf* are also about a dozen, mostly in Arabic, but including some Persian work, listed here: *Mīzān al-ʿAmal* (The Scale of Action)*; Iḥyāʾ ʿUlūm al-Dīn* (The Revival of Religious Sciences), which is the most important work for our research and will therefore receive more attention soon*; al-Imālāʾ ʿalā Ishkālāt al-Iḥyāʾ* (The Questions on the Problematic Parts of the *Iḥyāʾ*)*; Bidāyat al-Hidāyah* (The Beginning of Guidance)*; al-Arbaʿīn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn* (The Forty Principles of Religion)*; Kīmīyā-ye Saʿādah* (The Alchemy of Happiness), in

[85] "Oeuvre," **Ghazali.org**, September 12, 2015, http://www.ghazali.org/2015/09/oeuvre/.

Persian*; Ayah al-Wald al-Muḥib* (O Loving Son), in Persian*; Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk* (Advice to the Kings), in Persian*; Zād Akhart* (The Provision for the Hereafter), in Persian*; al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl* (The Deliverer from Misguidance), which divides the seekers of truth and certainty in four groups, namely, scholastic theologians (*mutakallim*), philosophers, Ismāʿīlīs and Ṣūfīs. Ghazālī presents there autobiographically his experience with these groups and how he ultimately chose *taṣawwuf* as the only path that can provide certainty*; Sirr al-ʿAlamayn wa Kashf mā fī al-Dārayn* (The Secret of the Two Worlds and the Unveiling of What Lies in the Two Abodes)*;* and *Minhāj al-ʿĀbidīn* (The Way of the Worshiper).[86] Of the works that have been ascribed to al-Ghazālī but which have been considered more likely spurious, most deal actually with *taṣawwuf* or, in some cases, more problematic sciences such as forms of magic, talismans and incantations. Given that their attribution to Ghazālī is already dubious, however, we will not treat them in this thesis, with the exception of *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, the authenticity of which will be discussed shortly.[87]

Ghazālī's major works of *kalām* are also about a dozen, all in Arabic: *al-Mustaẓhir* (The Exposer) or *Faḍā'iḥ al-Bāṭiniyyah wa Faḍā'il al-Mustaẓhiriyyah* (The Obscenities of the Bāṭinīs and the Virtues of the Exposers)*; Ḥujjat al-Ḥaqq* (The Truth's Proof)*; al-Iqtiṣād fī al-Iʿtiqād* (Moderation in Belief)*; al-Risālah al-Qudsiyyah* (The Jerusalem Letter)*; Mufāṣil al-Khilāf* (The Distinguisher of Disagreement)*; Qawāṣim al-Bāṭiniyyah aw Jawāb al-Masāʾil al-Arbaʿ allatī Saʾalahā al-Bāṭiniyyah bi-Hamadhān* (The Mortal Blows to the Bāṭinīs or the Answer to the Four Questions Asked by the Bāṭinīs in Hamadhān)*; al-Maqṣad al-Asnā fī Sharḥ Asmāʾ Allāh al-Ḥusnā* (The Loftiest Goal in Explaining the Allah's Beautiful Names)*; Jawāhir al-Qurʾān wa Duraruh* (The Quran's Jewels and Pearls)*; Fayṣal al-Tafriqah bayn al-Islam wa al-Zandaqah* (The Criterion to Distinguish between Islam and Heresy)*; Mishkāt al-Anwār* (The Niche of Lights)*; Iljām al-ʿAwāmm ʿan ʿIlm al-Kalām* (Restraining the Commoners from the Science of *Kalām*)*; Al-Ḥikmah fī Makhlūqāt Allāh* (The Wisdom in Allah's Creations)*; Qānūn al-Ta'wīl* (The Rule of Interpretation).[88] Of these, only few, such as *Mishkāt al-*

[86] Ibid.
[87] for more on this and a list of the spurious works, see "Corpus: Pseudo Works," **Ghazali.org,** September 12, 2015, http://www.ghazali.org/2015/09/pseudo/.
[88] "Oeuvre."

Anwār, are directly relevant to the present research on Ghazālī's use of mysticism in epistemology, although many *(al-Iqtiṣād fī al-Iʿtiqād, Fayṣal al-Tafriqah, Iljām al-ʿAwāmm ʿan ʿIlm al-Kalām, Faḍā'iḥ al-Bāṭiniyyah, Qānūn al-Ta'wīl*) bear an indirect, yet close, relevance by helping us understand how Ghazālī saw the relation between mystics with their inspirations, normative hermeneutics of Islamic texts and other groups with related, but crucially different, claims to superior knowledge compared to the Sūfīs (for example, the doctrines of the Ismāʿīlīs).

Of Ghazālī's books, the ones that this thesis will focus on are the *Kitāb fī Sharḥ ʿAjā'ib al-Qalb* (The Book on the Exposition of the Marvels of the Heart), which is the twenty-first book of the *Iḥyā' ʿUlūm al-Dīn*, where he introduces the human heart's capacity for inspired knowledge. The *Iḥyā'* is considered Ghazālī's masterpiece in *taṣawwuf* and is directly connected to his ten years retreat in which he sought to live the way of the Ṣūfīs and bring life to his religiosity. As the title of the work suggests, through the *Iḥyā'*, Ghazālī intends to bring spiritual life to the religious sciences: if such sciences are pursued for the sake of this temporary worldly life and are not animated by sincerity before God and personal illumination, they are of little benefit, because the heart of the individual accumulating them will result dead and hard.

The *Iḥyā'* is divided in four volumes, each comprising ten books. The first volume deals with knowledge, belief and individual forms of worship, such as the daily prayers, the zakāh, fasting and performing the pilgrimage, as well as night vigils and similar supererogatory practices. The second deals with social responsibilities, such as brotherhood and marriage, and it culminates with a description of the Prophet's character, the model to be emulated by all Muslims in their dealings with God and the creation. The third presents those diseases of the heart, or vices, which lead to the destruction of one's soul, such as pride, anger and arrogance. This volume begins with a book about the human heart (*qalb*), what is meant thereby vis-à-vis other terms like soul (*nafs*), spirit (*rūḥ*) and intellect (*ʿaql*), the nature of the Devil's insinuations to our heart and the possibility of receiving inspiration from the angels or God by means of passing thoughts, dreams and visions. This is the book called *ʿAjā'ib al-Qalb*, which we made reference to before. The fourth volume of the Iḥyā' deals with those virtues by means of which the

human soul is saved, such as love for God and the Prophet, trust in divine care, belief in the oneness of God, fear of the divine, thankfulness and patience.

Another book of special importance to our research is Ghazālī's intellectual autobiography, *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*, where he speaks of four groups of seekers of the truth and certainty (the philosophers, the Ismāʿīlī, the mutakallimūn and the Ṣūfīs), explaining why he ultimately chose *taṣawwuf* as the path to certainty. It should be observed that, while Ghazālī makes reference to four groups that existed in his own time, the division he makes probably tries to cover four broad categories of seekers of religious and philosophical certainty that stem directly from his human ontology. Therefore, as long as such an ontology is kept in mind, similar categories of truth-seekers may be found in all places and ages. We will present Ghazālī's exact views on the philosophers and the Ṣūfīs.

Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, which may have been written toward the end or right after his return from his spiritual retreat,[89] is another work relevant to this research. Therein, Ghazālī provides an explanation of the famous *āyat al-nūr*, the verse of light, found in surah 24, verse 35, of the Quran. This explanation is connected to Ibn Sinā's epistemology and human ontology, but presented in more religious, rather than philosophical, language. After explaining this verse, Ghazālī explains a ḥadīth that says that between man and God there lie 70.000 veils of darkness and light. For Ghazālī, these veils represent those material and intellectual attachment and barriers that bring human beings to entertain false notions of God. The veils of darkness are usually related to matter, while those of light tend to be connected to angels or misunderstood divine attributes. There are also mixed veils of light and darkness. Human beliefs and ideas about the divine of which Ghazālī was aware are distributed in this triple scheme of veils (veils of darkness, veils of both darkness and light, and veils of light), with even the theological and philosophical schools of Islam up to Ghazālī's time being declared veiled to some degree, depending on the belief about God that they champion. The utmost knowers of God, who have been freed from all these veils, seem ultimately to be the most complete of the Ṣūfīs, although their exact belief about Allah is not made entirely clear, on the assumption that the readers might not be ready for it.

[89] F. Rahman, review of **Essai de chronologie des œuvres de al-Ghazālī (Algazel)**, by Maurice Bouyges and Michel Allard, **Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London** 24, no. 3 (1961): 585–87.

The authenticity of this work has been questioned by Hava Lazarus-Yafeh[90] because of its use of a specifically philosophical terminology that had not been used by him or other Sunnī theologians before him. Montgomery Watt[91] questioned the authenticity of the last chapter of the work. Griffel finds the arguments of both unpersuasive.[92] In this thesis we will assume the *Mishkāt*'s authenticity, following Griffel's judgment.

1.4. Suhrawardī's works

Despite the brevity of his life, Suhrawardī has produced more than fifty works. These are divided more conveniently according to their style than the topics they deal with. This is because they all deal with Peripatetic and Ishrāqī philosophy, as the author saw the former as propaedeutic to the latter. While some works may be more devoted to the exploration of one type of philosophy than the other, they all feature references to both.

His works can be divided in four categories, as done by Corbin[93] and Amin Razavi:[94]

1) discursive instructional manuals in Arabic that expose both Peripatetic and Ishrāqī methods and doctrines. These are four and Suhrawardī makes reference to each one in some of the others, explaining the order in which they should be studied. They are *al-Talwīḥāt* (The Intimations), *al-Muqāwamāt* (The Opposites), *al-Mashāri' wal-Muṭārahāt* (The Paths and Conversations) and *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* (The Wisdom of Illumination).

2) symbolic tales in Persian that are meant to lead the initiate through his spiritual journey. They also happen to be among the highest expressions of Persian prose. They include: *Aql-i Surkh* (Red Intellect), *Āwāz-i Par-i Jibrā'il* (The Chant of Gabriel's Wing), *Qiṣṣat al-Ghurbah al-Gharbiyyah* (The Story of the Occidental Exile), *Lughat-i Mūrān* (The Language of the Termites), *Risālah fī Ḥālat al-Ṭufūliyyah* (Treatise on the State of Childhood), *Rūzī bā Jamā'at-i Ṣufiyān* (A Day Among the

[90] Hava Lazarus-Yafeh, **Studies in Al-Ghazzali** (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975).
[91] William Montgomery Watt, "A Forgery in Al-Ghazali's Mishkat?," **JRAS**, 1949, 5–22.
[92] Griffel, **Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology,** 9–10.
[93] Corbin, **Nell'Islam Iranico: aspetti spirituali e filosofici. Vol.2: Sohrawardi e i platonici di Persia**., 31.
[94] Amin Razavi, **Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination**, 8–9.

Sufis), *Ṣafīr-i Simūrgh* (The Sound of the Griffin), *Risālah fī al-Miʿrāj* (Treatise on the Nocturnal Ascent), *Partaw-nāmah* (Treatise on Illumination).

3) Minor treatises in Arabic and Persian dealing with particular issues and concepts, often connecting, as usual in Suhrawardī, the Peripatetic method with the Ishrāqī one. They are: *Hayākil al-Nūr* (The Forms of Light), *Alwāḥ ʿImādī* (The Imadian Tablets), *Partaw nāmah* (Treatise on Illumination), *Fī Iʿtiqād al-Ḥukamāʾ* (On the Belief of the Philosophers), *al-Lamaḥāt* (The Flashes of Light), *Yazdān ShināKht* (Knowledge of the Divine) and *Bustān al-Qulūb* (The Garden of Hearts).

   Along with these, one should consider Suhrawardī's commentaries on Ibn Sinā and Fārābī's works, which comprise his translation of Ibn Sinā's *Risālat al-Ṭayr* (The Treatise of the Birds), a commentary upon his *al-Ishārāt wal-Tanbīhāt* (The Indications and Admonitions), a treatise, called *Risālah fī Ḥaqīqat al-ʿIshq* (Treatise on the Reality of Love), which is based on Ibn Sinā's *Risālah fī al-ʿIshq* (Treatise on Love), and a lost commentary on Fārābī's *Fuṣūṣ*.

4) Devotional texts that present different invocations for the seekers, including some addressed to the planets, or the luminaries that govern them, like *Hurakhsh*, the Great Sun, or to the "Complete Nature" (*al-Ṭībāʿ al-Tāmm*). These texts are of particular interest because they draw on concepts and terms less common in Sufi works, including those of esoteric invocations, and more on what would seem to be the Persian, Neoplatonic and Hermetic traditions. While Suhrawardī's connection to these traditions is well-known, the fact that pre-Islamic terms and concepts should enter with such openness in these devotions is fascinating and raises questions on our understanding of Muslim devotional and esoteric practices in that time and how they differed among the various intellectual groups.

   It should also be observed that devotional works like these often serve an instructional purpose too, as reflecting on the names and attributes of the invoked entities entails realizing the metaphysical and cosmological assumptions that underlie their characterization. Shahrazurī calls these

prayers of Suhrawardī *al-Wāridāt wal-Taqdīsāt* (Inspirations and Sanctifications).

While most, if not all, of Suhrawardī's works deal with the issue of knowledge, and particularly mystical knowledge, in one form or the other, the most important for the subject matter of this thesis are the following: *al-Talwīḥāt, al-Mashāri' wal-Muṭāraḥāt, Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq, Hayākil al-Nūr, al-Alwāḥ al-'Imādiyyah* and *Kalimat al-Taṣawwuf*.

Suhrawardī wrote the *Talwīḥāt* after finding difficulty writing his *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*,[95] probably because he needed to expose first his particular ideas about the Peripatetic method as well as preparing the student to learn about *Ishrāq* after having acquainted himself with the philosophical principles of the *mashshā'ī* philosophers. Therein, he reduces the categories of Aristotelian logic from ten to four, introduces the new category of motion and reduces quantity to quality, for example by arguing that something short is weaker than something long.[96] He also supports the principality of essence over the Ibn Sinian view of the principality of existence,[97] something which we will discuss in more detail later.

It is in this work that Suhrawardī relates his vision of Aristotle of the *Theologia*, who would in reality be Plotinus, occurred between wake and sleep.[98] This vision, which will be analyzed later, will lead Suhrawardī to develop the notion of *'ilm ḥuḍūrī*, knowledge by presence, starting from the fact that the way to certainty in knowledge is to ponder on how we know our own self, not through representation, but through direct and immediate self-consciousness. It is also here that he speaks of his spiritual lineage going from Hermes-Idrīs-Enoch to the Greeks, the Egyptians and the Persians and then to the Ṣūfīs, through different channels that would converge in Suhrawardī.

Al-Mashāri' wal-Muṭāraḥāt is a text meant to be studied after the *Talwīḥāt*, but before *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*.[99] It mixes Peripatetic and Illuminationist arguments. In the introduction, Suhrawardī states clearly that understanding of discursive philosophy is a prerequisite for *ishrāq*:

[95] Ibid., 9.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid., 10.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid., 12.

> When the person who desires discursive philosophy has properly understood this section and established his knowledge in this regard, then it is permissible for him to set foot in ascetic practices and enter *ishraq* so he can see certain principles of illumination. The three forms of illuminationist wisdom are as follows, and knowledge of them comes only after illumination. The beginning of illumination is detachment from the world; the middle way is the observation of divine light; and the end is limitless.[100]

This book is also where he discusses the language of illumination (*lisān al-ishrāq*) and his own mystical experiences,[101] so we will return to it in our analysis of Suhrawardī's ideas about mystical knowledge.

Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq is Suhrawardī's *magnum opus* and the place where he most extensively presents the principles of illuminative wisdom. It is Suhrawardī's fourth doctrinal work and was composed over a few months in 582/1186. Its content is said to have been revealed to Suhrawardī by the Spirit in a few days. The author makes it clear that the intended recipients of the book are those who wish to join between discursive wisdom and divine wisdom, or at least seek divine wisdom. Those interested only in Peripatetic philosophy have no place in it. It has two main sections, one on logic and issues related to the Peripatetics, and one on the soul's journey to *ishrāq* through purification.[102]

Hayākil al-Nūr, originally written in Persian, is Suhrawardī's most important treatise. In it he defines what an object is, discusses the relation between the "I" and the body and the nature of "personal identity", necessary and contingent Being, eternity, creation and God's relation to time, celestial bodies' movement and their qualities, the immortality of the soul and its fate after departure from the body.[103] His treatment of the nature of "I" and "personal identity" is of particular importance to our research.

Alwāḥ-i ʿImādī, also known as *al-Alwāḥ al-ʿImadiyyah*, is an exposition of some of the crucial concepts of Ishrāqī philosophy written for Malik ʿImād al-Dīn Urtuq, the Seljuk ruler of Kharpūt and Suhrawardī's patron.[104] In it, Suhrawardī explains some of the technical terminology of *falsafah* and *manṭiq*, the nature of the rational

[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Ibid., 12–13.
[103] Ibid., 15.
[104] Ziai, "Source and Nature of Authority: A Study of Suhrawardi's Illuminationist Political Doctrine," 322, note 48.

soul (*nafs nāṭiqah*), identified with the quranic *rūḥ*, the other types of souls (*nafs*) and spirits (*rūḥ*) present within minerals, plants, animals and human beings (the souls, or *animae*, of Aristotelism) and the possibility of ridding oneself of the distraction caused by the external faculties (the five senses) to attain knowledge of the intellectual world (the one the *nafs nāṭiqah* properly belongs to) by direct witnessing of its lights and of the Light of lights, God, and other issues such as the rule of the best possible contingency (*imkān al-ashraf*) and the accidental nature of evil.

Kalimat al-Taṣawwuf is an important work for us because, while its first part simply reiterates and explains philosophical and *ishrāqī* concepts as the other works mentioned so far, its second part (and the introduction of the text) establishes an explicit relation between Suhrawardī and the way of the Ṣūfīs, by making extensive reference to their sayings, by describing this way as fully bound by adherence to the Quran and the Sunnah and by explaining many of the technical terms of *taṣawwuf.* On the one side, this shows that Suhrawardī was part of the Ṣūfī tradition of his time and was glad to train his students in it. On the other side, it also appears that Suhrawardī's use of philosophy, and the philosophical language of his Ishrāqī wisdom, make him more than a Ṣūfī, as he is effectively bringing the two traditions of *falsafah* and *taṣawwuf* together and giving them a new name and shape in the form of his illuminative wisdom (that draws also on ancient Persian wisdom).

2. THE PATHS OF THE WISE

This chapter will present Ghazālī and Suhrawardī's understanding and attitude toward the two knowledge traditions of *falsafah* and *taṣawwuf*. Both have expressed criticism for the first in different ways and praised the second as a path to knowledge and certainty. They did not however wholly reject the first for the second. Ghazālī made use of many concepts from *falsafah* in his works of *kalām* and *taṣawwuf* while Suhrawardī openly belonged to the *falsafah* tradition (which he would refer to as *ḥikmah* or wisdom).

The issues of Ghazālī's relation to *falsafah* and of Suhrawardī's relation to ancient Persian or Zoroastrian wisdom have been thoroughly discussed in academia. It is not within the scope of this thesis to repeat those discussions, so only what is necessary will be mentioned.[105]

2.1. Ghazālī and *falsafah*

For a long period, Ghazālī has been held responsible by Western academics for the supposed demise of philosophy and its sciences in the Sunni world three generations after him. Frank Griffel has shown however that, rather than making *falsafah* disappear, Ghazālī made it possible for it to be absorbed within the *kalām* discourse (and, I would add, the Ṣūfī discourse), so that it continued to be pursued in this form.[106]

Ghazālī's criticism of *falsafah* is not a critique of its method – except in the science of metaphysics as we will see later – but of some of the social and intellectual aspects that had become part of it. These were mainly two: the mistakes found in their metaphysical sciences which were blindly followed by the students or justified by misapplied logic by the philosophers themselves and which led them to disbelief; and the fact that many philosophers had no real belief, from Ghazālī's perspective in prophethood and the sacred law and were remiss in its practice,

[105] For these debates see Richard M. Frank, **Al-Ghazali and the Ash'arite School** (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994); Frank Griffel, **Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology** (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Henry Corbin, **En Islam Iranien: Aspects Spirituels et Philosophiques. Vol. 2, Sohrawardi et Les Platoniciens de Perse** (Paris: Gallimard, 1971); Henry Corbin, **The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism**, trans. Nancy Pearson (Omega Publications, 1994).
[106] Griffel, **Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology**, 3–10.

counting this distance from religion as a sign of intelligence and independent judgment.

In his *Munqidh*, Ghazālī describes the philosophers as those "who maintain that they are the men of logic and apodeictic demonstration".[107] In speaking of philosophy, he further says:

> Know that the philosophers, notwithstanding the multiplicity of their groups and the diversity of their doctrines, can be divided into three main divisions: Materialists, Naturalists, and Theists.
>
> The first category, the Materialists, were a group of the most ancient philosophers who denied the existence of the omniscient and omnipotent Creator-Ruler. They alleged that the world has existed from eternity as it is, of itself and not by reason of a Maker. Animals have unceasingly come from seed, and seed from animals: thus it was, and thus it ever will be. These are the godless in the full sense of the term.
>
> The second category, the Naturalists, were men who devoted much study to the world of nature and the marvels found in animals and plants; they also were much taken up with the dissection of animal organs. In these they saw such marvels of God Most High's making and such wonders of His wisdom that they were compelled, with that in mind, to acknowledge the existence of a wise Creator cognizant of the aims and purposes of all things. Indeed, no one can study the science of anatomy and the marvelous uses of the organs without acquiring this compelling knowledge of the perfect governance of Him Who shaped the structure of animals, and especially that of man.
>
> However, it appeared to these philosophers, because they had studied nature so much, that the equilibrium of the mixture of humors had a great effect on the resulting constitution of the animal's powers. Hence they thought that man's rational power was also dependent on the mixture of his humors and that its corruption would follow the corruption of the mixture of his humors, and so that power would cease to exist. Once it ceased to exist, they alleged that bringing back the nonexistent would be unintelligible. So they adopted the view that the soul dies, never to return. Consequently they denied the afterlife and rejected the Garden and the Fire, the Assembly and the Recall, and the Resurrection and the Reckoning. So in their view there would be no future reward for obedience, and no punishment for disobedience. Therefore they lost all restraint and abandoned themselves to their passions like beasts. These were also godless men, because basic faith is belief in

[107] Abu Hamid Ghazali, **Al-Ghazali's Path to Sufism: His Deliverance from Error**, **Al-Munqidh Min Al-Dalal**, trans. McCarthy R.J. (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2000), 24.

God and the Last Day — and these men denied the Last Day, even though they believed in God and His Attributes.

The third category, the Theists, were the later philosophers, such as Socrates, the master of Plato, and Plato, the master of Aristotle. It was Aristotle who systematized logic for the philosophers and refined the philosophical sciences, accurately formulating previously imprecise statements and bringing to maturity the crudities of their sciences. Taken altogether, these refuted the first two categories of the Materialists and the Naturalists. Indeed, by the arguments they advanced to lay bare the enormities of the latter, they relieved others of that task: "And God spared the believers from fighting (the unbelievers)" (33.25) by reason of the unbelievers' own infighting.

Then Aristotle refuted Plato and Socrates and the Theists who had preceded him in such thorough fashion that he disassociated himself from them all. Yet he, too, retained remnants of their vicious unbelief and innovation which he was unsuccessful in avoiding. So they all must be taxed with unbelief, as must their partisans among the Muslim philosophers, such as Ibn Sinā, al-Fārābī and their likes. None, however, of the Muslim philosophers engaged so much in transmitting Aristotle's lore as did the two men just mentioned. What others transmitted is not free from disorder and confusion and in studying it one's mind becomes so muddled that he fails to understand it — and how can the incomprehensible be rejected or accepted?

The sum of what we regard as the authentic philosophy of Aristotle, as transmitted by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sinā, can be reduced to three parts: a part which must be branded as unbelief; a part which must be stigmatized as innovation; and a part which need not be repudiated at all.[108]

From the above, it appears that Ghazālī was not particularly impressed with Greek philosophy, as far as religious guidance was concerned. He did not see Greek philosophers as mystics or prophets, but rather, after scrutinizing their beliefs as they had been transmitted to him, he concluded that, in different measures, they all were unbelievers because they did not profess the unity of God, the createdness of the world or the Last Day.

Ghazālī then proceeds to discuss the sciences of philosophy, namely: mathematics, logic, physics, metaphysics, politics and ethics. About mathematical sciences (comprising arithmetics, geometry and astronomy), Ghazālī says:

[108] Ibid., 29–31.

> Nothing in them entails denial or affirmation of religious matters. On the contrary, they concern rigorously demonstrated facts which can in no wise be denied once they are known and understood. From them, however, two evils have been engendered.[109]

The first of these two evils is that its students may become enticed and marvel at mathematics' precision and clarity and assume that philosophers must be equally accurate in every science, including metaphysics. Hearing then about their rejection of religion and disregard for it and for sacred law, the students may stop revering religion and its norms out of sheer imitation. This would be a grave mistake, in Ghazālī's opinion, since one may be proficient in one science and incompetent in another. The philosophers' accuracy in mathematical issues does not entail that their judgment of religion must be equally accurate.[110]

The second evil is that an ignorant man partisan for Islam may erroneously think that, since the philosophers are denigrated by the religious scholars, all of their sciences must be refuted, he calls them ignorance and claims that they go against what God revealed. Those who know these sciences and know them to be true through apodeictic demonstration, will see this man as a fool. They will not doubt their sciences and knowledge, nor their proofs, but will rather doubt the man's sciences and religion, thus growing in conviction in their support of philosophy and rejection of religion. All this, while the mathematical sciences never dealt with religious matters nor did religious sciences deal with mathematics, so there is no conflict between the two, since their spheres of interest differ. Moreover, should a revealed text appear to contradict apodeictic demonstration (Ghazālī here makes an example about a hadith dealing with eclipses), the revealed text would in this case have to be interpreted metaphorically. The apodeictic demonstration would therefore be accepted as true, while the literal meaning of the text would be left for an appropriate metaphorical meaning.[111]

What Ghazālī says here about these sciences is a fine example of the value of his *Munqidh* for the modern reader. In only a few pages, Ghazālī was able to frame the controversy between faith in revealed texts and scientific discovery that was going to

[109] Ibid., 31.
[110] Ibid., 31–32.
[111] Ibid., 32–33.

torment Europe a few centuries later, leading to enormous intellectual changes, the weakening of religious authority and the rise of science, atheism and agnosticism.

About the logical sciences, Ghazālī says:

> Nothing in the logical sciences has anything to do with religion by way of negation and affirmation. On the contrary, they are the study of the methods of proofs, of syllogisms, of the conditions governing the premises of apodeictic demonstration, of how these premises are to be combined, of the requisites for a sound definition, and of how the latter is to be drawn up. Knowledge is either a concept, and the way to know it is the definition, or it is an assent, and the way to know it is the apodeictic demonstration. There is nothing in this which must be rejected.[112]

He further adds that logic is the same science used by the *mutakallimūn*, but that philosophers and theologians have developed different terms and jargons for it. Similarly to the mathematical sciences, the study of logic carries two risks. The first is that its student, hearing the theologians critique of the philosophers, may assume that this includes the science of logic. Knowing logic to be clear, accurate and true, he will doubt the theologian's intelligence and then his religion, becoming closer to philosophy and further away from religion. The second is that the student, by knowing that some of the philosophers' views in metaphysics are classified as unbelief by the theologians, may assume these views to be based on a proper application of logic's conditions and methods and thus rush to uphold these same views before even beginning the study of metaphysics. This second point is connected to Ghazālī's major criticism of the philosophers, namely that they have abused logic by stipulating conditions that, if observed, must necessarily produce true conclusions in reasoning. However, when it comes to the study of metaphysics, they apply loosely the conditions they set forth and fool themselves into thinking that the conclusions they reach – which at times amount to innovation (*bid'ah*) and at times to unbelief (*kufr*) – are logically necessary and, as such, irrefutable. As mentioned before, it was precisely to dismantle this assumption that Ghazālī wrote the *Tahāfut*, to prove that the reasoning of the philosophers on metaphysical matters and their conclusions could be refuted through logic itself. This means that, since

[112] Ibid., 33–34.

logic cannot provide certainty in metaphysical issues, another tool is required: revelation.[113]

About the physical sciences, Ghazālī says:

> The physical sciences are a study of the world of the heavens and their stars and of the sublunar world's simple bodies, such as water, air, earth, and fire, and composite bodies, such as animals, plants, and minerals. They also study the causes of their changing and being transformed and being mixed. That is like medicine's study of the human body and its principal and subsidiary organs and the causes of the alteration of the mixtures of its humors. And just as religion does not require the repudiation of the science of medicine, so also it does not require the repudiation of the science of physics, except for certain specific questions which we have mentioned in our book *The Incoherence of the Philosophers*. Apart from these, it will be clear upon reflection that any other points on which the physicists must be opposed are subsumed in those we have alluded to. The basic point regarding all of them is for you to know that nature is totally subject to God Most High: it does not act of itself but is used as an instrument by its Creator. The sun, moon, stars, and the elements are subject to God's command: none of them effects any act by and of itself.[114]

Ghazālī in this case does not mention any evil attached to the study of these sciences. As he explains at the end of the quotation, however, the main issue related to these sciences from the point of view of theology – particularly the Ashʿarī school – is the idea that things produce their effects by themselves, independently of God. Ghazālī affirms the Ashʿarī view that all creation is subject to God's command and produce no effect in themselves. Rather, it is God's intervention in every moment that connects each cause – such as the presence of fire – to its effect – such as something burning -.

> It is in the metaphysical sciences that most of the philosophers' errors are found. Owing to the fact that they could not carry out apodeictic demonstration according to the conditions they had postulated in logic, they differed a great deal about metaphysical questions. Aristotle's doctrine on these matters, as transmitted by al-Fārābī and Ibn Sīnā, approximates the teachings of the Islamic philosophers. But the sum of their errors comes down to twenty heads, in three of which they must

[113] Ibid., 33–35.
[114] Ibid., 35.

> be taxed with unbelief, and in seventeen with innovation. It was to refute their doctrine on these twenty questions that we composed our book The Incoherence.
>
> In the three questions first mentioned they were opposed to (the belief of) all Muslims, viz. in their affirming
>
> (1) that men's bodies will not be assembled on the Last Day, but only disembodied spirits will be rewarded and punished, and the rewards and punishments will be spiritual, not corporal. They were indeed right in affirming the spiritual rewards and punishments, for these also are certain; but they falsely denied the corporal rewards and punishments and blasphemed the revealed Law in their stated views.
>
> (2) The second question is their declaration: "God Most High knows universals, but not particulars." This also is out-and-out unbelief. On the contrary, the truth is that "there does not escape Him the weight of an atom in the heavens or in the earth." (34.3; cf. 10.62/61).
>
> (3) The third question is their maintaining the eternity of the world, past and future. No Muslim has ever professed any of their views on these questions.
>
> On other matters — such as the denial of the divine attributes, and their assertion that God is knowing by His essence, not by a knowledge superadded to His essence, and similar views of theirs — their doctrine is close to that of the Mu'tazilites. But there is no need to tax the Mu'tazilites with unbelief because of such views.[115]

It is clear from this passage that, while Ghazālī approves of the mathematical, logical and physical sciences of the philosophers in terms of validity and merely warns against collateral risks of studying them, he believes that the philosophers made grave mistakes in metaphysics that led them to unbelief. These mistakes are either due to the imitation of Aristotle's thought or to the difficulty of applying logic to the study of metaphysical issues.

About the political sciences, Ghazālī simply says the philosophers took them from the ancient scriptures, the prophets and their predecessors.[116] About the moral sciences, he says:

> All they have to say about the moral sciences comes down to listing the qualities and habits of the soul, and recording their generic and specific kinds, and the way to cultivate the good ones and combat the bad. This they simply took over

[115] Ibid., 35–36.
[116] Ibid., 36.

> from the sayings of the Sufis. These were godly men who applied themselves assiduously to invoking God, resisting passion, and following the way leading to God Most High by shunning worldly pleasures. In the course of their spiritual combat the good habits of the soul and its shortcomings had been disclosed to them and also the defects that vitiate its actions. All this they set forth plainly. Then the philosophers took over these ideas and mixed them with their own doctrines, using the lustre afforded by them to promote the circulation of their own false teaching. There was indeed in their age, nay but there is in every age, a group of godly men of whom God Most High never leaves the world destitute. For they are the pillars of the earth, and by their blessings the divine mercy descends upon earth dwellers as is declared in the tradition from Muhammad — God's blessing and peace be upon him! — in which he says: "Because of them you receive rain, and thanks to them you receive sustenance, and among them were the Companions of the Cave." Such godly men existed in ancient times as the Qur'ān declares (cf. Sura 18).[117]

Ghazālī says that the philosophers' moral sciences were derived from the Ṣūfīs of old. His explanation of this is important: God never leaves the world totally deprived of pious men who turn away from the world and persistently remember God. This is similar to what Suhrawardī says in *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* (see below), that the earth is never deprived of an intuitive philosopher. The difference between Ghazālī's statement here and Suhrawardī's position, as will be seen later, is that Ghazālī believes the philosophers have copied the Ṣūfīs and mixed their views with their, while for Suhrawardī the ancient philosophers were themselves the Ṣūfīs.

Two dangers originate from the philosophers' moral sciences. The first is that, knowing the philosophers to have been generally condemned by the theologians, an ignorant man may deny from their moral doctrine those true aspects that have come from prophets and Ṣūfīs, thus bringing ignorance to himself, denying the truth and possibly even committing unbelief, if the thing denied is part of what the Prophet taught. The second is that, by accepting their teachings in full, deceived by their references to the Quran and the sayings of prophets and Ṣūfīs, one might end up accepting also what is false in their doctrines, thus being misled.[118]

Ghazālī's last critique of the *falāsifah* is his aversion to the excuses they adduced for their negligence in the practice of Sharīʿah or their insincerity in it. This most likely was not the case with every single philosopher or student of philosophy, but it

[117] Ibid., 36–37.
[118] Ibid., 37–42.

was a social reality sizeable enough to draw Ghazālī's attention in the *Munqidh*, as well as a blemish attached to the most famous of the *falāsifah*, Ibn Sinā. The latter's example was obviously a likely influence (negative for Ghazālī) on all those who attached themselves to the *falsafah* tradition, so it was necessary for him to criticize him to contrast the negative effects of his example.

Ghazālī says that the excuse adduced by these philosophers for their laxity in observing the sacred law is their rejection of imitation (*taqlīd*), understanding the real meaning of prophecy and that it is only meant to lead to what is wise and beneficial, to control the common people, prevent conflicts between them and excessive indulgence in their desires. While some of them may practice the rites of Islam such as the recitation of the Quran, the Friday prayer and the daily prayers at the mosque, one may see them drinking wine or violating the Sharīʿah in other ways. If questioned about this, they would claim they believe in prophecy, that the rituals are prescribed as a form of physical discipline and to protect fortune and family, while wine is prohibited due to its causing enmity. By his intellect, the philosopher can save himself from that and drink only with the intention to stimulate the mind. Ghazālī says that Ibn Sinā even wrote in a testament that he made a pact with God to do some things, honour the precepts of the Sharīʿah, be diligent about acts of worship and not drink wine for pleasure, while drinking wine, however, with the intention to improve his health. Ghazālī scoffs at such an attitude toward the sacred law, where one respects it in order to be allowed an exception for the sake of improving one's health[119] (when this is not a need, such as one's health being poor, since there are some exceptions made in Sharīʿah for such cases). In short, Ghazālī saw the philosophers either perceiving themselves above the law because of their intellect or upholding fanciful interpretations of it that *de facto* allowed them to act more or less as they pleased.

I believe it is evident from what has been presented here that Ghazālī's criticism of *falsafah* was not aimed at saying that their methods were all wrong: he acknowledges the precision, clarity and usefulness of the mathematical sciences, logic, the physical sciences and some aspects of their politics and ethics. However, he believes they erred in metaphysics by not applying logic thoroughly to their reasoning in this field – given the difficulty of doing so – and following instead

[119] Ibid., 66–69.

blindly what the ancients had said or giving their own new views, all the while claiming it was all known by necessity of reason and logic, disregarding whether it agreed with the texts of the Sharīʿah or not. In addition to this, many became negligent in the practice of the sacred law and considered themselves somehow above it, or above the interpretation of it transmitted by the *fuqahā'*. His critic, more than to a way to knowledge, is therefore directed to the social reality of the *falsafah* tradition and what taking the ancients as authorities in metaphysics implied for a Muslim.

2.2. Suhrawardī and *falsafah*

Suhrawardī speaks of philosophy in many of his works, since his entire *ouvre* revolves around *falsafah* or *ḥikmah baḥthiyyah* (discursive wisdom) or the Peripatetic (*mashshā'ī*) school, the type of *taṣawwuf* he calls *ishrāq* (illumination) or *ḥikmah ilāhiyyah* (divine wisdom) and the way to join both. His conception of philosophy is quite different from Ghazālī's.

First, he usually refers to philosophy as *ḥikmah* (wisdom), a word with positive connotation, as opposed to the more neutral *falsafah* used by Ghazālī. This word, and its derivative *ḥakīm,* was applied to the philosophers to themselves, but it was also used for physicians (called *ḥakīm,* pl. *ḥukamā'*), surely because medicine was part of the philosophical sciences at the time, and even to some Ṣūfīs, such as *al-Ḥakīm* al-Tirmidhī, a known religious scholar, *faqīh, muḥaddith* and Ṣūfī of the third century.

Second, Suhrawardī distinguishes between two types of *ḥikmah* in his works: *ḥikmah mashshā'iyyah* (Peripatetic) or *baḥthiyyah* (discursive, speculative) and *ḥikmah ishrāqiyyah* (illuminative) or *ilāhiyyah* (divine).[120] The first refers to knowledge attained through the syllogistic method of the Peripatetics, along with the conventional philosophical sciences (mathematics, logic, physics, metaphysics, politics and ethics). The second refers to the knowledge attained through spiritual purification that leads to inspirations (*ilhām*), spiritual tasting (*dhawq*) and witnessing (*mushāhadah*). This is considered the same type of knowledge attained by prophets and Ṣūfīs, as well as the Greek philosophers before Aristotle (including Plato), a group of ancient Persians, the ancient Egyptians who had inherited their

[120] Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination**, 3.

knowledge from the prophet Hermes-Idrīs-Enoch, the father of philosophers (*wālid al-ḥukamā'*), and a group of the Brahmins.[121]

As for discursive or Peripatetic philosophy, Suhrawardī seems to see it as a propaedeutic study to prepare the students for illuminative wisdom, as he says in *al-Mashāri' wal-Muṭāraḥāt.*[122] When it comes to provide a narrative for the history of philosophy, in the way that Ghazālī did in the *Munqidh*, however, Suhrawardī is clearly more concerned with the history of the divine, or *Ishrāqī*, philosophers, than with the discursive philosophers. In many of his works he deals with the issues of Peripatetic philosophy (what Ghazālī would have referred to as *falsafah*) pertaining to logic, physics or metaphysics, sometimes introducing some original contributions, such as reducing the Aristotelian categories from ten to four, adding motion to them and reducing quantity to quality.[123] It is evident from his works however that Suhrawardī considers the *ḥikmah baḥthiyyah* and the method of the Peripatetics as inferior to divine wisdom.[124]

In *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, he devotes the first part to a summary and simplification of logic through which he starts introducing his views that are more closely inspired by his spiritual experiences. Here he criticizes some of the ideas and methods of the Peripatetics (especially Ibn Sinā, seen as their master).[125] One of the ideas he criticizes is that of essential definitions (*al-ḥadd al-dhātī*). In Walbridge's words:

> Such definitions were supposed to reveal the essence of natural universals by listing the proximate genus and the differentia. He argues that such definitions are not actually possible. If the definition is successful, it presumes that the hearer already knows the genus and differentia; if so, the hearer must already have known the essence of the thing. If he does not know the genus and differentia, the definition will only be empty words. In other words, he who knows the thing does not need the definition; if he does not know the thing, the definition will not teach him what it is. Moreover, he can never be certain that all the essential differentia have actually been included. Suhrawardī argues that things must be known through direct experience, and definitions can do no more than point out what is being talked about. The

[121] Ziai, "Source and Nature of Authority: A Study of Suhrawardi's Illuminationist Political Doctrine," 326.
[122] Shahab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, **Opera Metaphysica et Mystica I,** ed. Henry Corbin (Istanbul, Turkey: Maarif Matbaasi, 1945), 194.
[123] Amin Razavi, **Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination**, 9.
[124] see Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination**, 3.
[125] Amin Razavi, **Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination**, 31.

> rejection of essential definition thus wounds the heart of the Peripatetic notion of science.[126][127]

Another change introduced by Suhrawardī to Peripatetic thought is to consider universals (*al-kulliyāt*) as only existent in the mind, while acknowledging the external existence of particulars (*al-juz'iyyāt*). Among the *kulliyāt* he counted existence (*wujūd*), which he saw not as something possessing a reality outside of the mind, but only something we predicate in our minds about existent things. These things are what really exists, existence not being super-added to them. Suhrawardī's position on this is what is commonly referred to as *aṣālat al-māhiyyah* (primacy of essence[128]) and is put against Ibn Sinā and Mullā Ṣadrā's view of *aṣālat al-wujūd* (primacy of existence).[129] This discussion is crucial to the history of Islamic philosophical thought but it goes beyond the scope of this thesis and cannot be analyzed further here.

In connection to both the critique of essential definitions and the affirmation of the primacy of essence, it is necessary to mention one of Suhrawardī's other major contributions to Islamic philosophy, the concept of knowledge by presence. This concept will however be explored in detail later on, so we will not elaborate upon it here and will resume the discussion on Ghazālī to speak of his understanding of *taṣawwuf*, followed by Suhrawardī's.

2.3. Ghazālī and *taṣawwuf*

Ghazālī is known for his support of *taṣawwuf* as the way to acquire certain knowledge beyond doubt. He clearly argues for this in the *Munqidh* and his post-seclusion works tend to discuss the Ṣūfī way and the knowledge that it brings. He has been often seen as the one who bridged the gap between orthodox Islam and the Ṣūfīs but studies[130] have shown that such a gap was less pronounced before Ghazālī than supposed at first in Islamic Studies. Ghazālī did however play a great role in favouring the diffusion of *taṣawwuf* in the Muslim world, both because of his own

[126] Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination**, xxiv.
[127] Suhrawardī's rejection of essential definitions would need to be compared to Wittgenstein's concept of "familial relations".
[128] Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination**, xxiv.
[129] Ibid., 33.
[130] see for example Mayer, "Theology and Sufism."

testimony of life (which carried considerable weight, seen his standing as a scholar even before his seclusion) and of the political and social support of the Seljuq establishment, which included – most importantly – the *madrasah* system that the Seljuqs were sponsoring.[131] Moreover, like Griffel has argued that Ghazālī did not cause the disappearance of *falsafah* but its absorption in *kalām,*[132] I suggest that Ghazālī's call to *taṣawwuf* and to seek experiential knowledge of metaphysics, rather than the knowledge of it provided by rational argumentation or the imitation of Greek philosophers, allowed for those who may have otherwise cultivated and studied *falsafah* to engage instead with *taṣawwuf.*[133]

In the *Munqidh*, Ghazālī describes the Ṣūfīs as those "who claim to be the familiars of the Divine Presence and the men of mystic vision and illumination".[134] He also says:

> Their particular Way is consummated [realized] only by knowledge and by activity [by the union of theory and practice]. The aim of their knowledge is to lop off the obstacles present in the soul and to rid oneself of its reprehensible habits and vicious qualities in order to attain thereby a heart empty of all save God and adorned with the constant remembrance of God. … their most distinctive characteristic is something that can be attained, not by study, but rather by fruitional experience and the state of ecstasy and "the exchange of qualities." How great a difference there is between your knowing the definitions and causes and conditions of health and satiety and your being healthy and sated! … Similarly, too, there is a difference between your knowing the true nature and conditions and causes of asceticism and your actually practicing asceticism and personally shunning the things of this world.
>
> I knew with certainty that the Sufis were masters of states, not purveyors of words …
>
> My only occupation was seclusion and solitude and spiritual exercise and combat with a view to devoting myself to the purification of my soul and the cultivation of virtues and cleansing my heart for the remembrance of God Most High, in the way I had learned from the writings of the Sufis. …
>
> Then certain concerns and the appeals of my children drew me to my native land; so I came back to it after being the person most unlikely to return to it. There I

[131] Ibid.
[132] Griffel, **Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology**.
[133] I argued this point in an unpublished paper on Ghazālī submitted in 2013 to the School of Oriental and African Studies (London, UK) in pursue of the BA Arabic and Islamic Studies degree.
[134] Ghazali, **Al-Ghazali's Path to Sufism: His Deliverance from Error, Al-Munqidh Min Al-Dalal**, 24.

also chose seclusion out of a desire for solitude and the purification of my heart for the remembrance of God. But current events and important family matters and gaining the necessities for daily living had an effect on the way to realize my desire and troubled the serenity of my solitude, and the pure state of ecstasy occurred only intermittently. But nonetheless I did not cease to aspire to it. Obstacles would keep me away from it, but I would return to it.

In the course of those periods of solitude things impossible to enumerate or detail in depth were disclosed to me. This much I shall mention, that profit may be derived from it: I knew with certainty that the Sufis are those who uniquely follow the way to God Most High, their mode of life is the best of all, their way the most direct of ways, and their ethic the purest. Indeed, were one to combine the insight of the intellectuals, the wisdom of the wise, and the lore of scholars versed in the mysteries of revelation in order to change a single item of Sufi conduct and ethic and to replace it with something better, no way to do so would be found! For all their motions and quiescences, exterior and interior, are learned from the light of the niche of prophecy. And beyond the light of prophecy there is no light on earth from which illumination can be obtained.

In general, how can men describe such a way as this? Its purity — the first of its requirements — is the total purification of the heart from everything other than God Most High. Its key, which is analogous to the beginning of the Prayer, is the utter absorption of the heart in the remembrance of God. Its end is being completely lost in God. But the latter is its end with reference to its initial stages which just barely fall under the power of choice and personal acquisition. But these are really the beginning of the Way, and everything prior to it is like an antechamber for him who follows the path to it.

From the very start of the Way revelations and visions begin, so that, even when awake, the Sufis see the angels and the spirits of the prophets and hear voices coming from them and learn useful things from them. Then their “state” ascends from the vision of forms and likenesses to stages beyond the narrow range of words: so if anyone tries to express them, his words contain evident error against which he cannot guard himself. But speaking in general, the matter comes ultimately to a closeness to God which one group almost conceives of as “indwelling,” and another as “union,” and another as “reaching”: but all that is wrong. We have already shown why it is wrong in our book *The Noblest Aim*. But really one intimately possessed by that state ought not to go beyond saying:

There was what was of what I do not mention:

So think well of it, and ask for no account!

Generally speaking, anyone who is granted nothing of that through fruitional experience grasps, of the reality of prophecy, only the name. The charisma of the “saints” are in reality the first stages passed through by the prophets. Such was the

> initial state of the Apostle of God — God's blessing and peace be upon him! — when he went to Mount Hirā', where he would be alone with his Lord and perform acts of worship, so that the Arabs of the desert said: "Muhammad indeed passionately loves his Lord!"
>
> This is a state which one following the way leading to it will verify by fruitional experience. But one to whom such experience is not granted can acquire certain knowledge of that state through experience of others and hearsay, if he frequents the company of the Sufis so as to have a sure understanding of that from observing the circumstances accompanying their ecstatic states. Whoever associates with them will derive this faith from them, for they are the men whose associate is never wretched. But whoever is not favored with their company must learn the certain possibility of such mystical states through the evidence of apodeictic demonstration in the way we have mentioned in "*The Book of the Marvels of the Heart,*" one of the books of *The Revivification of the Religious Sciences*.[135]

From the above account, it can be seen that for Ghazālī the characteristics of the Ṣūfī path are the following: the union of knowledge and action, or theory and practice; the knowledge to be sought is not just any knowledge, but that which teaches how to purify one's heart; to purify the soul from negative traits and from concerns other than God; to adorn the soul with virtues and with the constant remembrance of God; a certain degree of seclusion; their way is the best and most direct to the Presence of God, because it is wholly based on the lights received from the niche of prophecy; its followers experience dreams, visions, revelations, inspirations, special states that defy description and for which existent words are inaccurate; closeness to God; and fruitional experiences, that impart knowledge different from that acquired from reasoning or by hearing and believing others.

2.4. Suhrawardī and *taṣawwuf*

Ghazālī's description of the Ṣūfī way has much in common with Suhrawardī's characterization of the way of the *Ishrāqiyyūn* and of the adepts of divine wisdom (*ḥikmah ilāhiyyah*). In the introduction to *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, Suhrawardī describes their (and his own) efforts and attainments thus:

[135] Ibid., 51–58.

… Begging me to write you a book in which I would tell what I have obtained through my intuition {*dhawq*}[136] during my retreats {*khalwāt*} and visions {*munāzalāt*}. In every seeking soul there is a portion, be it small or great, of the light of God. Everyone who strives has intuition {*dhawq*}, be it perfect or imperfect. Knowledge did not end with one people, so that the doors of heaven are shut behind them and the rest of the world is denied the possibility of obtaining more. Rather, the Giver of knowledge {*wāhib al-ʿilm*}, who stands at the "clear horizon, is not stingy with the unseen" [Quran 81:23-24]. The most evil age is the one in which the carpet of striving has been rolled up, in which the movement of thought is interrupted, the door of revelations {*mukāshafāt*} bolted, the path of visions {*mushāhadāt*} blocked.

Before I wrote this book and during the times when interruptions prevented me from working on it, I wrote other books in which I have summarized for you the principles of the Peripatetics according to their methods. … But the present book has a shorter method and provides a shorter path to knowledge than their method does. It is more orderly and precise, less painful to study. I did not first arrive at it through cogitation {*fikr*}; rather, it was acquired through something else. Subsequently I sought proof for it, so that, should I cease contemplating the proof, nothing would make me fall into doubt.

In all that I have said about the science of lights and that which is and is not based upon it, I have been assisted by those who have travelled the path of God. This science is the very intuition of the inspired and illumined Plato, the guide and master of philosophy {*ḥikmah*}, and of those who came before him from the time of Hermes, "the father of the philosophers {*ḥukamāʾ*}", up to Plato's time, including such mighty pillars of philosophy as Empedocles, Pythagoras, and others. The words of the Ancients are symbolic {*marmūzah*} and not open to refutation. The criticisms made of the literal sense of their words fail to address their real intentions, for a symbol cannot be refuted. This is also the basis of the Eastern doctrine {*qāʿidat al-sharq*} of light and darkness, which was the teaching of Persian philosophers such as Jamasp, Frashostar, Bozorgmehr, and others before them. It is not the doctrine of the infidel Magi, nor the heresy of Mani, nor that which leads to associating others with God – be he exalted above any such anthropomorphism {*sic*} {*taʿālā watanazzah*}!

Do not imagine that philosophy has existed only in these recent times. The world has never been without philosophy or without a person possessing proofs and clear evidences to champion it. He is God's vicegerent {*khalīfah*} on His earth. Thus shall it be so long as the heavens and the earth endure. The ancient and modern

[136] The additions in {curly} brackets are mine, while those in (round) and [square] brackets are of the original translator.

philosophers differ only in their use of language and their divergent habits of openness and allusiveness. All speak of three worlds, agreeing on the unity of God. There is no dispute among them on fundamental questions. Even though the First Teacher [Aristotle] was very great, profound and insightful, one ought not exaggerate about him so as to disparage his master. Among them are the messengers and lawgivers such as Agathadaemon, Hermes, Asclepius and others.

The ranks of the philosophers are many, and they fall into these classes: a divine philosopher {*ḥakīm ilāhī*} proficient in intuitive philosophy[137] {*ta'alluh*} but lacking in discursive philosophy {*baḥth*}; a discursive philosopher {*ḥakīm baḥḥāth*} lacking intuitive philosophy; a divine philosopher proficient in both intuitive philosophy and discursive philosophy; a divine philosopher proficient in intuitive philosophy but of middle ability or weak in discursive philosophy; a philosopher proficient in discursive philosophy but of middle ability or weak in intuitive philosophy; a student of both intuitive philosophy and discursive philosophy; a student of only intuitive philosophy; and a student of only discursive philosophy. Should it happen that in some period there be a philosopher proficient in both intuitive philosophy and discursive philosophy, he will be the ruler by right and the vicegerent of God. Should it happen that this not be the case, then rulership will belong to a philosopher proficient in intuitive philosophy but of middle ability in discursive philosophy. Should these qualities not coincide, rulership belongs to a philosopher who is proficient in intuitive philosophy but who lacks discursive philosophy. The world will never be without a philosopher proficient in intuitive philosophy. Authority on God's earth will never belong to the proficient discursive philosopher who has not become proficient in intuitive philosophy, for the world will never be without one proficient in intuitive philosophy – one more worthy than he who is only a discursive philosopher – for the vicegerency requires direct knowledge {*al-talaqqī*}. By this authority I do not mean political power. The leader with intuitive philosophy may indeed rule openly, or he may be hidden – the one whom the multitude call "the Pole." {*al-quṭb*} He will have authority even if he is in the deepest obscurity. When the government is in his hands, the age will be enlightened; but if the age is without divine rule, darkness will be triumphant. The best student is the student of both intuitive philosophy and discursive philosophy.

[137] Walbridge and Zia'i chose to translate the term *ta'alluh* as intuitive philosophy, i.e.: the wisdom based on intuition, term that they have also used to translate *dhawq* (see note 9, above). I agree that this kind of wisdom is what Suhrawardī is referring to here, and there is no reason to doubt it. However the term *ta'alluh* deserves some special attention: etymologically, it would indicate the meaning of "becoming or making oneself divine", if one follows its root and Arabic grammar, a meaning that would clearly contrast with Islamic belief. It is most likely, however, that the term was introduced into Arabic through the translation of Greek philosophical works, being a predictable translation for the Greek **to be finished**

> Next is the student of intuitive philosophy, and then the student of discursive philosophy.
>
> … The reader of this book must have reached at least the stage in which the divine light has descended upon him – not just once, but regularly. No one else will find any profit in it. So, whoever wishes to learn only discursive philosophy, let him follow the method of the Peripateticsm which is fine and sound for discursive philosophy by itself. … Indeed, the system of the Illuminationists cannot be constructed without recourse to luminous inspirations, for some of their principles are based upon such lights. Should Illuminationists fall into doubt about these principles, they will overcome it by climbing the ladder of the soul {*al-sullam al-mukhalli'ah* or *al-mukhalla'ah*}. Just as by beholding sensible things we attain certain knowledge about some of their states and are thereby able to construct valid sciences like astronomy, likewise we observe certain spiritual things and subsequently base divine sciences upon them. He who does not follow this way knows nothing of philosophy and will be a plaything in the hands of doubt.[138]

This long quote presents several characteristics of what Suhrawardī calls the "wisdom (or philosophy) of Illumination". These are: it is based on spiritual tasting (*dhawq*), or intuition, obtained through the practice of seclusion and by means of visions; there is a portion of the light of God in everyone who seeks this knowledge and strives for it, and everyone who does so will attain some degree of spiritual tasting, whether perfect or imperfect; this knowledge is not usually attained through mere cogitation, even though, like in the case of the very book *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, it is sometimes possible to find rational proof for the contents of this knowledge, so that it becomes unassailable by doubt, being true both by insight and by reason; the father of all philosophers was Hermes, Empedocles and Pythagoras are among the Greek masters of intuitive philosophy, Plato is the master of its people; this wisdom is not exclusively Greek, since it is also the basis of the Eastern wisdom based on light and darkness taught by the Persian sages Jamasp and Bozorghmehr, but it is not to be confused with the doctrines of the Magi or Mani; philosophy, or wisdom, is wither discursive or intuitive; intuitive philosophy is superior to discursive philosophy, but perfection lies in mastering both; the vicegerent of Allah on earth, the Pole, is by necessity proficient in intuitive philosophy and sometimes also in discursive philosophy; the earth is never void of a vicegerent of Allah and therefore it is never

[138] Suhrawardi, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, 1–4.

void of an intuitive philosopher; a discursive philosopher who does not know intuitive philosophy cannot be the vicegerent of God; the vicegerent of God may be a ruler outwardly, like a great and just king, or he may stay hidden and rule the world spiritually, like the one commonly called "the Pole"; at some point in the intuitive philosopher's journey, divine lights will descend upon him, first intermittently, then continuously or more often; if an intuitive philosopher experiences doubts about the content of his knowledge, he solves it by "climbing the ladder of the soul", i.e.: by leaving his body and ascending to the presence of the spiritual lights, contemplating them and removing his doubts like an astronomer or physician would do observing the physical objects he is studying.

The mention of the Pole and of the vicegerent of Allah seems to indicate a relation, or even identity, between this intuitive wisdom and *taṣawwuf*. A further corroborating indicator of this relation or identity seems to be the means and achievements mentioned by Suhrawardī: seclusion (*khalwah*), visions (*mushāhadāt*), intuition or spiritual tasting (*dhawq*). However, the statement that philosophy originated with Hermes and that Plato is the master of intuitive philosopher, while Pythagoras, Empedocles and the Persian Jamasp and Bozorgmehr are among the representatives of this tradition, does not fit much with an understanding of *taṣawwuf* as a specifically Muslim practice, nor with Ghazālī's stated views on Plato and the Greek philosophers in the *Munqidh*, reported above, and in the *Tahāfut*[139] - in the *Munqidh*, Ghazālī even says that Pythagoras' doctrine is the weakest of Greek philosophy.[140]

Other statements from Suhrawardī's other works and from Ghazālī himself, however, can help bridge this gap to establish that, at least in Suhrawardī's view, the Ṣūfīs and the ancient intuitive philosophers belonged to the same tradition of wisdom, all being within divine guidance, even if their methods may have differed. As for Ghazālī, his views on Plato, Pythagoras and Greek philosophy in general are clear in the *Munqidh*: he does not consider them within divine guidance, rather they are unbelievers. However, even Ghazālī believes that there were Ṣūfīs and prophets in the ancient world, identified as individuals who broke their attachment to the

[139] Abu Hamid Ghazali, **The Incoherence of the Philosophers**, trans. Michael E. Marmura (Provo, Utah: Brigham University Press, 2000), 1–5.
[140] Ghazali, **Al-Ghazali's Path to Sufism: His Deliverance from Error, Al-Munqidh Min Al-Dalal**, 50.

world, turned to God and received visions and inspirations guiding them to the truth. Moreover, he believes that it is from these anonymous individuals that the philosophers have drawn their sciences of politics and ethics.[141]

As for Suhrawardī, the evidence that his divine philosophers are Ṣūfīs can be easily drawn from two sources: the first is his account of the dream in which he saw the author of the *Theologia of Aristotle*, whom we today identify with Plotinus, although Suhrawardī thought of him as being Aristotle; the second is his work entitled *Kalimat al-Taṣawwuf*, where he speaks about the Ṣūfī path and defines some Ṣūfī terms. As for the first, in the *Talwīḥāt*, recounting the dream, Suhrawardī says:

> Then he began to praise his teacher, the divine Plato, so lavishly that I was bewildered and said, "Have any of the philosophers of Islam reached his station?"
>
> "No, nor to a part of thousandth part of his rank."
>
> Then I began to list a number of those with whom I was familiar. He showed no interest in any of them, but when I reached Abū Yazīd al-Biṣṭāmī, Abū Muḥammad Sahl b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Tustarī, and others like them, he seemed to be delighted and said, "These are in truth the philosophers and sages. They did not stop with formal knowledge but went on to the knowledge that comes from presence, contact and witnessing. They are not distracted by the connections of matter. They have "the nearness and the good end." They move as we move and speak according to what we say."
>
> Then he departed from me and left me weeping at his departure. How grievous was that state![142]

It is evident, therefore, that for Suhrawardī, based on his acceptance of this dream, the Ṣūfīs such as al-Biṣṭāmī, al-Tustarī "and other like them", were in accordance with Aristotle and belong to the real wise who sought knowledge by intuition and unveiling, while Ibn Sinā and al-Fārābī are kept in little consideration. The fact that Plato is seen, however, as superior over Muslim philosophers *and* Ṣūfīs is, however, problematic in light of Muslims' widespread belief of theirs being the best of religious communities and their prophet being the Seal of Prophecy and the leader of prophets (*imām al-mursalīn*). More attention will be given to this point later on.

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[141] Ibid., 36–37.
[142] Walbridge, *The Leaven of the Ancients : Suhrawardi and the Heritage of the Greeks*, 228–29.

In *Kalimat al-Taṣawwuf*, Suhrawardī mentions that the receiver of the book has requested from him an explanation of the way of the Ṣūfīs and their terminology. He then advises him to hold onto piety (*taqwā*) at all time and to continuously abide by the Quran and the Sunnah, for the way of *taṣawwuf*, as well as all guidance, depends on that.[143] This is important as it distinguishes Suhrawardī from those philosophers that Ghazālī had criticized for holding themselves superior to the Sharīʿah and for not respecting it.[144] Suhrawardī then proceeds to explain a series of philosophical concepts and issues such as the *kullī* and the *juzʾī*, the emergence (*ṣudūr*) of the intellects from the Light of lights and the nature of the human soul, or *nafs nāṭiqah* (or *rūḥ*), the problem of evil, the faculties and powers in animals, plants and minerals and, significantly, the way in which knowledge of hidden things is acquired through dreaming or absence from the senses. He refuses some notions such as the eternity (*qidam*) of the world,[145] the Christian trinity and dualism, then mentions that among the ancient Persians there were some, distinct from the Magi, who were just and guided by God and whose wisdom of light was revived by Suhrawardī in his *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. He then lists the conditions necessary for the occurrence of spiritual raptures (*khalasāt*)[146] and begins explaining many Ṣūfī terms such as *basṭ*, *qabḍ*, *riḍāʾ*, *maʿrifah*, *maḥabbah* and others, sometimes giving their meaning in the language of the philosophers.[147] Regarding the conditions for the occurrence of spiritual raptures, he says:

> Whoever persists in pondering over the soul's realm (*malakūt*), remembers God out of humility, reflects with subtlety (*tafakkara fikran laṭīfan*) on the world of

[143] Shahab al-Din Yahya Suhrawardi, **Al-Mu'allafat Al-Falsafiyyah Wal-Sufiyyah: Al-Alwah Al-'Imadiyyah, Kalimat Al-Tasawwuf, Al-Lamahat**, ed. Najafqali Habibi (Beirut - Baghdad: Manshurat al-Jamal, 2014), 112–16.
[144] Ghazali, **Al-Ghazali's Path to Sufism: His Deliverance from Error, Al-Munqidh Min Al-Dalal**, 68–69.
[145] The discussion of Suhrawardī's thoughts regarding the eternity or temporality of the world is beyond the scope of the thesis, even though it would be worth exploring in a wider comparison between Ghazālī and Suhrawardī. It is useful to mention here that in *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, Suhrawardī defends the eternity of the world, calling it *qadīm*, while specifying that this does not make God and the world equal, since the latter still depends and emanates from the former. *Kalimat al-Taṣawwuf* was written after *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, as evidenced by references made to the latter in the former. The different expressions are possibly due to the different recipients for the texts and a desire to protect oneself from charges of unbelief, since Ghazālī had deemed belief in the eternity of the world as *kufr* in the *Tahāfut*.
[146] Suhrawardi, **Al-Mu'allafat Al-Falsafiyyah Wal-Sufiyyah: Al-Alwah Al-'Imadiyyah, Kalimat Al-Tasawwuf, Al-Lamahat**, 155.
[147] Ibid., 160–72.

> sanctity (*al-'ālam al-qudsī*), reduces his food and appetites and keeps awake at night praising and displaying humility toward His Lord will soon be taken by pleasant raptures, similar to the lightning which shines and disappears, which will then begin to stay in his soul, making it expand and fold.[148]

This sort of general description, if considered along with the explanation of Ṣūfī terms that follows it, shows that, even though Suhrawardī generally prefers to use Peripatetic or specifically *Ishrāqī* terminology in most of his works, rather than the terminology of *taṣawwuf*, he considered *taṣawwuf* and the divine wisdom he speaks about as a single way to the truth, found both among the ancient Greeks and the Persians.

Therefore, it can be said that both Ghazālī and Suhrawardī believed that there had been Ṣūfīs, i.e.: divine philosophers, in the ancient world and before Islam and that they had influenced the tradition of *falsafah* or *ḥikmah*, but they disagree on whether the famous Greek philosophers, such as Pythagoras and Plato, were themselves intuitive philosophers or not. Either way, they seem to concur that Muslim philosophers, like al-Fārābī and Ibn Sinā, were discursive philosophers and not intuitive philosophers, except that maybe Ibn Sinā alluded to intuitive philosophy in his *Manṭiq al-Mashriqiyyīn* and spoke explicitly about it in *al-Ishārāt wal-Tanbīhāt.* Had Suhrawardī commentary on the latter reached us, we would be able to know more precisely what his thoughts about Ibn Sinā were.

It can also be observed that Ghazālī's approach to pre-Islamic philosophy is much more critical than Suhrawardī: he has no qualms about classifying the beliefs of ancient philosophers as unbelief and even calling Pythagoras' philosophy the "feeblest of all philosophical doctrines."[149] Suhrawardī, on the other side, magnifies the doctrines of the ancients and sees them as symbolic (*marmūzah*) and thus not open to refutation.[150] He also asserts that they agreed on the major issues, all recognizing the unity of God and the existence of three worlds.[151] The idea that the teachings of the ancients were symbolic and thus irrefutable reminds one of the polemics over the *shaṭaḥāt*, or ecstatic utterances, of the Ṣūfīs and the disputes over

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[148] Ibid., 155.
[149] Ghazali, **Al-Ghazali's Path to Sufism: His Deliverance from Error, Al-Munqidh Min Al-Dalal**, 50.
[150] Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination,** 2.
[151] Ibid.

certain aspects of their language. To those who condemn the Ṣūfīs for unbelief based on some of the statements found in their works, the latter often reply that, before issuing any such charge, the accuser must study the terminology of the Ṣūfīs and travel their path. This is another evidence of how, for Suhrawardī, the ancient philosophers and the Muslim Ṣūfīs belonged more or less to the same path to the truth. It must be said that Suhrawardī's picture of these ancient philosophers, based on what was available about them in his time, was different from our modern picture of them. Plotinus, for example, was confused with Plato and Aristotle, and today's teaching of the history of philosophy in schools tends to downplay the mystical, mysteric and magical practices Empedocles and others were associated with and focus on rational philosophy only.[152]

Ghazālī's knowledge of ancient philosophy was, as far as he states in the *Munqidh*, the fruit of two years of difficult study without a teacher[153] and he had no commitment to the philosophical tradition. While he could adopt from it any element that he found useful in it, he had no compelling reason to treat their works as symbolic or even inspired and to practice with them the same care he would practice with difficult Ṣūfī works. That is why he could easily dismiss Pythagoras' views – despite the latter's being generally known as a kind of mystic, so that his philosophy should be interpreted with care, aware of the possibility of misunderstanding symbols for actual literal assertions – as feeble. Suhrawardī, however, had studied the works of the ancient and Muslim philosophers at length. He was himself a philosopher and was more versed in and committed to this tradition than the tradition of *kalām* or the religious sciences – although he clearly knew enough for his personal practice as well as to relate his understandings and inspirations back to the Quran and the Hadith, as he does often in his works. His dreaming of Aristotle is only another proof of the attachment and respect he had for the Greek philosophers. Such intellectual closeness to the ancients means that he could look at their works with the same compassionate and reverent eyes that Ghazālī would use for the words of controversial Ṣūfīs.

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[152] An excellent study on Suhrawardi's knowledge of ancient philosophers is: John Walbridge, **The Leaven of the Ancients : Suhrawardi and the Heritage of the Greeks**, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Albany: State University of New York, 2000).

[153] Ghazali, **Al-Ghazali's Path to Sufism: His Deliverance from Error, Al-Munqidh Min Al-Dalal**, 27–28.

Having presented Ghazālī and Suhrawardī's relation to the traditions of *falsafah* and *taṣawwuf*, in the next chapter we will see how they made use of the latter, or of the joining of both, to acquire certainty.

3. THE HEARTS OF THE WISE

This chapter presents Ghazālī and Suhrawardī's ways to find certain knowledge and some related aspects of their epistemology and ontology. We will begin by recounting Ghazālī's personal journey to certainty, followed by the use both make of the metaphor of light, their ideas about the human soul, the angels, the relation between the human faculties of knowledge and the worlds, the ascent or journey of the soul, the two ways to knowledge they speak about and Suhrawardī's explanation of how to attain certain knowledge and dispel doubt. We will argue that they both see *taṣawwuf* as a way able to provide better and surer knowledge, but that they do not intend to call their students away from learning through study. Perfection lies in joining both and they give particular value to the study of logic.

3.1. Ghazālī's certainty

In *al-Munqidh min al-Ḍalāl*, Ghazālī describes to us the beginning of his journey through the groups of those who seek the truth. He tells us that since childhood God had endowed him with a questioning nature, not pleased with mere imitation of authorities and determined to investigate in depth the different schools of thought and religions he encountered to discern what was true in their beliefs and what was not.[154]

He began by asking himself what the true meaning of knowledge was. The answer he gave to himself was:

> … sure and certain knowledge is that in which the thing known is made so manifest that no doubt clings to it, nor is it accompanied by the possibility of error and deception, nor can the mind even suppose such a possibility. Furthermore, safety from error must accompany the certainty to such a degree that, if someone proposed to show it to be false — for example, a man who would turn a stone into gold and a stick into a snake — his feat would not induce any doubt or denial.
>
> I realized, then, that whatever I did not know in this way and was not certain of with this kind of certainty was unreliable and unsure knowledge, and that every

[154] Ibid., 17–20.

> knowledge unaccompanied by safety from error is not sure and certain knowledge.[155]

He continues by saying that he started doubting all the knowledge he possessed except sense-data and self-evident truths. He decided to inquire in these two means to knowledge, beginning with sense-data. Through reflection he realised that it was possible to doubt sense-data as well as the senses are easily deceived, for example, by time and distance: shadows seem still while in reality they are constantly but imperceptibly moving due to the movement of the Sun, while distant stars, which are proved through the mathematical sciences to be bigger than the Earth look small to the eye.[156]

Not being able to trust sense-data anymore, he puts to test the rational data belonging to the class of primary truths, such as the fact that ten is more than three and that a thing cannot be something and its opposite at the same time and in all respects. However, he realized that reason had enabled him to judge the sense-data false and unreliable, despite his previous confidence in them. What if there existed, beyond reason, another faculty that could belie the judgements of reason just as reason had belied sense-data? The fact that such a faculty was not manifest did not prove that it was non-existent.[157]

He then began pondering about the dream state and how we believe all perceptions and intellections that we find while dreaming, without doubting them, even though we dismiss them as fancies when we wake up. What if there was a state beyond our normal state of wakefulness in which we would dismiss as fancies what we experience in our normal state of wakefulness? Perhaps this state is the one spoken about by the Ṣūfīs, the result of their inward concentration and absence from the sense, in which the perceive things that are not according to reason. Or maybe this state is what comes after death, given the Prophet's saying that men are asleep and awake when they die.[158]

Ghazālī then tried to refute such arguments but an objection could only be construed through a rational proof. In this case, rational proofs were inadmissible,

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[155] Ibid., 20.
[156] Ibid., 21.
[157] Ghazali, **The Incoherence of the Philosophers**, 22.
[158] Ghazali, **Al-Ghazali's Path to Sufism: His Deliverance from Error, Al-Munqidh Min Al-Dalal**, 22–23.

since it was the very primary laws of thought that Ghazālī was putting on trial. For two months he became a skeptic inside, even while still professing belief in reason outwardly. The cure to this malady, he says, came eventually, so that he returned to accept the self-evident data of reason and to rely on them with tranquillity.[159] This cure however did not come through reason, but through "a light which God Most High cast into my breast. And that light is the key to most knowledge."[160] He therefore said:

> Therefore, whoever thinks that the unveiling of truth depends on precisely formulated proofs has indeed straitened the broad mercy of God. When the Apostle of God — God's blessing and peace be upon him! — was asked about "the dilation" in the Most High's utterance: "So he whom God wishes to guide aright, He dilates his breast for submission to Himself (i.e., to embrace Islam)" (6.125), he said: "It is a light which God casts into the heart." Then someone said: "And what is the sign of it?" He replied: "Withdrawal from the mansion of delusion and turning to the mansion of immortality." And it is this of which the Apostle — God's blessing and peace be upon him! — said: "God Most High created men in darkness, then sprinkled on them some of His light." From that light, then, the unveiling of truth must be sought. Moreover, that light gushes forth from the divine liberality at certain times, and one must be on the watch for it according to the saying of the Apostle — Peace be upon him! — "Your Lord, in the days of your lifetime, sends forth gusts of grace: do you then put yourselves in the way of them!"[161]

Ghazālī tells us therefore that even certainty in the validity of the use of reason in the quest for the truth is known by a divine light that makes the chest expand and be at peace and confident with the primary laws of thought. It is therefore necessary to seek the truth from this light, which is sent forth by God at certain times, in which we must try be in its way.

I believe this is an allusion from Ghazālī to walking the Ṣūfī path, which is the path of knowledge and practice. Revelation and the Prophet's teachings have informed us about these times through the prescription of prayers at set times and the observance of the teachings of the Prophet and of the Ṣūfī masters allow us to receive this light and the unveilings more and more to increase our knowledge and certainty.

[159] Ibid., 23.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid.

Ghazālī tells us how it is that the Ṣūfī way provides such certainty, after speaking about his ten years of seclusion and spiritual practice:

> For ten years I remained in that condition. In the course of those periods of solitude things impossible to enumerate or detail in depth were disclosed to me. This much I shall mention, that profit may be derived from it: I knew with certainty that the Sufis are those who uniquely follow the way to God Most High, their mode of life is the best of all, their way the most direct of ways, and their ethic the purest. Indeed, were one to combine the insight of the intellectuals, the wisdom of the wise, and the lore of scholars versed in the mysteries of revelation in order to change a single item of Sufi conduct and ethic and to replace it with something better, no way to do so would be found! For all their motions and quiescences, exterior and interior, are learned from the light of the niche of prophecy. And beyond the light of prophecy there is no light on earth from which illumination can be obtained.[162]

It is necessary for us to pause here and present some questions. The first is whether Ghazālī in the *Munqidh* is claiming that the Ṣūfī experiences are self-evident as true beyond doubt or whether he builds an argument to prove their reliability. The second is whether he calls people to rely on spiritual experiences only or whether his intention is more elaborate, calling to a union of reason, sense-data, reports and spiritual experience, along with revelation and prophecy as the way to have sure knowledge. I argue that Ghazālī is calling to a union of these ways to knowledge. Spiritual experience is for him linked to prophecy and we will soon see how he establishes that. This experience in turn had given him already confidence in the use of reason and reason's primary data, as mentioned earlier, so that the joining of reason and spiritual experience seems to be what he calls to, rather than encouraging the use of spiritual experience alone.

The first point that I see necessary to establish is that spiritual taste (*dhawq*), translated by McCarthy as "fruitional experience", is a part of the prophetic faculty that is tasted not only by prophets, but also by the saints who follow in their footsteps. This is proved by the last passage that we have quoted, where Ghazālī says that all the movements of the Ṣūfīs are derived "from the light of the niche of prophecy".[163] Ghazālī also says:

[162] Ibid., 56.
[163] Ibid.

> Generally speaking, anyone who is granted nothing of that through fruitional experience {*dhawq*} grasps, of the reality of prophecy, only the name. The charisma {*karāmāt*} of the "saints" are in reality the first stages passed through by the prophets. Such was the initial state of the Apostle of God — God's blessing and peace be upon him! — when he went to Mount Ḥirā', where he would be alone with his Lord and perform acts of worship, so that the Arabs of the desert said: "Muhammad indeed passionately loves his Lord!"[164]

The second point is that for Ghazālī there is a faculty of knowledge similar to the senses and reason, deputed to the apprehension of the invisible, metaphysical and future matters just as the senses are responsible to apprehend the physical world and the intellect is responsible for intellectual judgments such as determining what is intellectually necessary, possible and impossible. This faculty, *dhawq* or spiritual tasting, is a part of prophecy but it is not restricted to prophets and can be experienced by those who walk the Ṣūfī path or witnessed by those who accompany them.[165]

The third point is that Ghazālī accepts the use of reason to prove the validity of *dhawq* and support its existence and use. Further than that, he acknowledges reason and reliable report as ways to acquire sure knowledge along with *dhawq*, especially when these three come together. On the other side, he denies that supernatural proofs adduced to a claim have independent authority if alone, such as that of men producing magical – and seemingly miraculous - effects like turning sticks into snakes, as they could be cases of magic, deception and misguidance. Rather, certainty lies in joining reason with reliable or mass-transmitted reports (*tawātur*), the direct experience of *dhawq* and one's repeated experiences of the truth of prophetic promises, such as one who sees in his life thousands of times that God increases the knowledge of those who practice what they know and takes care of the affairs of those who wake up only intending to please Him in that day, as the Prophet had promised.[166] We shall see that this practice of joining reason and spiritual insight and letting them confirm each other is part of the philosophical project of Suhrawardī as well. It is even possible that Suhrawardī was inspired in this by an acquaintance

[164] Ibid., 57–58.
[165] Ibid., 59–64.
[166] Ibid., 60–64.

with Ghazālī, even though until now there is no evidence that Suhrawardī took from Ghazālī's works. It is likely though that he was aware at least of some of them.

The last point to be made here on Ghazālī's call to *taṣawwuf* as a way to sure knowledge is the fact that in his view this path did not only provide experiences to support the conclusions of reason. Rather, as we have said, *dhawq* is needed to apprehend metaphysical matters in which the application of logic is inherently unreliable, as Ghazālī had already proved in the *Tahāfut*. Part of its usefulness, therefore, must be to provide original knowledge of metaphysical issues and to solve intellectual debates on them.

That Ghazālī does this is clear from at least one passage of the *Arbaʿīn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*, a work similar to the *Iḥyā'* but shorter and with a slightly different structure. It is divided in four parts, each of ten sections, like the *Iḥyā'*, but its first and second parts are devoted to issues of belief and outward ritual worship respectively. The *Iḥyā"*s first and second volume, on the other side, are devoted to outward individual worship (with the first book dealing with knowledge and belief) and social obligations and relations respectively.

In the discussion on the divine will (*irādah*)[167] Ghazālī states that the solution to the dilemma of the relation between the divine decree and human free will can only be resolved by gaining understanding of this issue through God's light by purifying one's soul.[168] The theological positions advanced otherwise by the different Muslim groups (Ghazālī discusses the positions of the Qadariyyah, the Jabriyyah, the Muʿtazilah and the intermediate position of Abū Ḥanīfah and the Ahl al-Sunnah wal-Jamāʿah) are either wrong and lead to unbelief or mere approximations (like the view ascribed to Abū Ḥanīfah).[169]

To explain Suhrawardī's views about certainty we must first present a summary of his epistemology. We will do this along with Ghazālī's to facilitate a comparison between them.

3.2. The metaphor of light

[167] Abu Hamid Ghazali, **Kitab Al-Arba'in Fi Usul Al-Din Fil-'Aqaid Wa Asrar Al-'Ibadat Wal-Akhlaq**, ed. Abd Allah Abd al-Hamid 'Urwani and Muhammad Bashir Al-Thaqfah (Damascus, Syria: Dar al-Qalam, 2003), 22–30.
[168] Ibid., 23–24.
[169] Ibid., 24–30.

Ghazālī's *Mishkāt al-Anwār* and Suhrawardī's *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* are both based on the symbolism of light (*nūr*). Ghazālī defines light as "that which is itself visible and makes other things visible" (*mā yubṣaru bi nafsihi wa yubṣaru bihi ghayruhu*).[170] Suhrawardī does not provide a definition, saying that "anything in existence that requires no definition is evident. Since there is nothing more evident than light, there is nothing less in need of definition".[171] Elsewhere however he defines light by saying: "If you wish to have a rule regarding light, let it be that light is that which is evident in its own reality and by essence makes another evident".[172]

In pondering Suhrawardī's first statement, we must know that Suhrawardī criticized the Peripatetic reliance on essential definition (*ḥadd dhātī*), which consists in identifying the defined thing's proximate genus and differentia. In his works he provides arguments for his criticism and conditions under which definition can be used to acquire knowledge.[173] Entering those arguments and conditions would go beyond the scope of the thesis, but in short he says that "we have definition only be means of things that have been encountered by both the one who produces the definition and the one who is trying to understand what he does not know through it".[174][175]

Ghazālī distinguishes four ranks of lights:

1) That by which things are revealed (i.e.: perceived and or known);
2) That by and for which things are revealed;
3) That by, for and from which things are revealed;

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[170] Abu Hamid Ghazali, **Mishkat Al-Anwar ("The Niche for Lights") by Al-Ghazzali**, trans. William Henry Temple Gairdner, vol. XIX (London, United Kingdom: Royal Asiatic Society, 1924), 81; Abu Hamid Ghazali, **Mishkat Al-Anwar Fi Tawhid Al-Jabbar**, ed. Samih Damigh (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr al-Lubnani, 1994), 44.
[171] Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination**, 76.
[172] Ibid., 81.
[173] Amin Razavi, **Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination**, 93.
[174] Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination**, 10.
[175] This translation is mine. Walbridge and Ziai's translation is "we have definitions only by means of things that specify by conjunction (*bi umūr takhuṣṣu bil-ijtimā'*)". I find their translation obscure and, based on my understanding of Suhrawardī's critique, believe that the word *ijtimā'* here means to actually encounter or be with someone or something, which is one of the word's meanings, though not a technical one. Part of the issues raised by Suhrawardī is that it is impossible to define something to someone through a differentia that the other person has never encountered elsewhere, which is likely to be the case if one has never encountered the thing being defined, otherwise he would know it already and would not require a definition to know it. Therefore, it is necessary that both the definer and the one who wants to know what he has never encountered through definition have encountered the differentia used in the definition.

4) That by, for and from which things are revealed without there being any other light from which to derive light.[176]

Ghazālī does not proceed systematically to distribute the different lights according to this division of ranks but he does speak immediately after about the various lights and divides them between those that relate to the sensible world and those that relate to the intelligible world.[177] I am going to divide the lights he speaks about there and in the rest of the *Mishkāt* according to these four ranks, based on my understanding.

To the first rank for Ghazālī belong the planets, the sun and the moon and their likes in the heavens, and the rays that illumine all that is on the earth in the physical world.[178] My understanding of Ghazālī's definition of these lights would also include: the five physical senses (sight, hearing, touch, smell, taste) and the five internal senses (common sense – *ḥiss mushtarak* -, estimative faculty – *wahm* -, retentive imagination – *khayāl* -, memory – *ḥāfiẓah* -, compositive imagination – *mutakhayyilah* - and cogitative faculty – *mutafakkirah* -, these two being often considered together)[179] as means of perception (sensible and intelligible), because they are lights by which things are known, while they do not know *themselves* since the recipient of their knowledge is the heart, not themselves; every knowledge, science and piece of information, for the same reason mentioned for the five internal and external senses; visions, unveilings, inspirations and spiritual tastes also fall in this category for the same reason as the senses and sciences.

To the second rank belong all knowing entities, called by Ghazālī spiritual intellectual lights (*anwār ʿaqliyyah maʿnawiyyah*)[180] like the souls of animals and human beings and the angels, described by Ghazālī as "high, noble substances of light" (*jawāhir nūrāniyyah sharīfah ʿāliyah*).[181]

To the third rank belong the entities that, in addition to being able to know, provide knowledge to others. These are again the human souls, which are entrusted to manage the physical world by being God's vicegerents on earth, and the angels

[176] Ghazali, **Mishkat Al-Anwar Fi Tawhid Al-Jabbar**, 61.
[177] Ibid., 61–62.
[178] Ibid., 61.
[179] Ghazali arranges these internal senses in different ways through his works. For more details on this see Abu Hamid Ghazali, **Al-Ghazali's Kitab Sharh 'Ajaib Al-Qalb - The Marvels of the Heart,** trans. Walter James Skellie (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2010), xxiii–xxvii.
[180] Ghazali, **Mishkat Al-Anwar Fi Tawhid Al-Jabbar**, 62.
[181] Ibid., 72.

from which lights (in the sense of knowledge) descend to human souls.[182] He says about the angels that they are

> high, noble substances of light from whom lights emanate to the human spirits and due to these lights they may be called 'lords', so that God is 'the Lord of lords', and they have different degrees in their luminosity.[183]

To the fourth rank belongs God alone, who is the real light. Anything else to which the name 'light' is applied derives its light and very existence from God and hence can only be called 'light' in a metaphorical sense.[184]

Existence (*wujūd*) itself is identified with light because its opposite, non-existence (*ʿadam*), is the utmost darkness, as it is never going to be illumined or revealed.[185] Otherwise, matter is identified with darkness because it possesses no light of its own and requires to be illumined by something else. Luminous physical bodies, such as the Sun or fire, are light with respect to other physical bodies that do not emanate light, but they are dark with respect to the spiritual beings, such as the human souls or the angels, because the latter possess the light of knowledge and self-awareness, while the former do not.[186] Light and darkness are therefore relative attributes as a thing may be counted as light with respect to one thing but as darkness with respect to another.[187] Everything is darkness if compared to God's light and yet His light can illumine all things. In other words, everything is non-existent with respect to God's existence, but God can give existence to everything. Everything is ignorant, unconscious and powerless with respect to God's knowledge (including self-awareness), will and power, and yet He can bestow self-awareness, knowledge, will and power on whatever He wishes.[188]

Suhrawardī's classification of different types of lights is more complex than Ghazālī. I believe this is not due to an actual disagreement between them on, for example, the fact that lights can be divided in the four ranks described by Ghazālī,

[182] Ibid., 62.
[183] Ibid., 72.
[184] Ibid., 56.
[185] Ibid., 57.
[186] Ibid., 52–54.
[187] Ibid., 43.
[188] Ibid., 57–59.

but because Suhrawardī is trying to provide a more detailed description of what lies in the spiritual world.

Suhrawardī agrees with Ghazālī that God is the Light of lights (*nūr al-anwār*) and that all lights emanate from Him. He however supports the Ibn Sinian view of emanation, that time has no beginning and no end and that world is pre-eternal and post-eternal. God is the cause and the world is the effect. Cause and effect are simultaneous, so the world must be pre-eternal and post-eternal like God.[189]

Ghazālī had judged this view of the *falāsifah* in the *Tahāfut* as disbelief. It is worth noting that Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Ibn Rushd did not agree on this judgement. Ghazālī's argument in the *Tahāfut* against the pre-eternality of the world is entirely rational argumentation, without reference to Quranic verses. Al-Rāzī and those who agreed with him on this did not find Ghazālī's argument compelling and they regarded the verses on creation in the Quran as adequate to support both the view of *creation ex-nihilo* (argued for by Ghazālī) and that of the world's pre-eternity (argued for by Ibn Sinā and Suhrawardī).[190] Another view in which Suhrawardī agrees with Ibn Sinā and which Ghazālī classes as disbelief is the fact that the pleasures and pains of the next life are imaginal so that the physical bodies are not resurrected.[191]

Suhrawardī follows an emanationist scheme closely reminiscent of Ibn Sinā's. Ibn Sinā sees God as the most intense existence (*wujūd*) and the degree of intensity of existence decreases the further one goes from God, until bodies are generated rather than intellects. Suhrawardī speaks of light instead of existence but this light is less intense and pure in each degree of emanation away from the Light of lights until dusky substances (*jawhar ghāsiq*, pl. *jawāhir ghāsiqah* or *ghawāsiq*), dark states (*hay'ah*, pl. *hay'āt ẓulmāniyyah*) and barriers (*barzakh*, pl. *barāzikh*), which are the bodies, are generated.[192] The absence or non-existence (*ʿadam*) of light is therefore identified with the world of matter and – lower than that – non-existence, in a way similar to what we have seen for Ghazālī.[193]

Suhrawardī divides the light in incorporeal or pure, (*nūr mujarrad* or *maḥḍ*) and accidental (*ʿaraḍī* or *nūr ʿāriḍ*). He also divides darkness (*ẓulmah*) in that which does

[189] Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination**, 115–17.
[190] Griffel, **Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology**, 118–20.
[191] Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination**, 148–49.
[192] Amin Razavi, **Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination**, 78–79.
[193] Ibid., 87–88.

not need a locus, which is the dusky substance (*jawhar ghāsiq*) and that which is an accident or state of something else, which is the dark state (*hay'ah ẓulmāniyyah*). So we have light and dakness, independence and dependence. On the side of independence we have the incorporeal light and the dusky substance, while on the side of dependence we have the accidental light and the dark state.[194]

Suhrawardī calls the body (*jism*) a barrier (*barzakh*) and it is that which can be pointed to. Every barrier is a dusky substance. It is illumined if light shines upon it and is dark when no light shines upon it. The light that accompanies bodies such as the sun is an accidental light, while the sun itself is a barrier, hence it is a dusky substance because every barrier is a dusky substance.[195]

Bodies depend for their existence on incorporeal lights because they cannot necessitate that which is superior to them. Accidental light can be pointed to, since its locus is a body. Incorporeal light cannot be pointed to. Everything that is light in itself and not by virtue of something else is an incorporeal light.[196]

3.3. The soul

For Suhrawardī everything that is self-aware must be an incorporeal light and be thus self-subsistent too. This incorporeal light apprehends itself not through a representation of its ego (*anāniyyah*) in its ego, because that would make the representation an "it" in relation to the ego. Moreover, if in order to know itself the ego has to rely on a representation of itself, he would have to know itself before the representation in order to recognise it as itself, so he would have to know itself before that through which it knows itself, which is absurd. Therefore we, as self-aware beings, are incorporeal lights, constantly self-aware. That awareness is our essence and not an attribute added to it. We are not our body because if that were the case we would never lose awareness of our body, while we do not feel for example except a little of what happens inside our bodies, so much so that we need to dissect them to discover our internal organs. The ego is nothing but being evident and being light.[197]

[194] Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination**, 77.
[195] Ibid.
[196] Ibid., 78–79.
[197] Ibid., 80–81.

This ego is called by Suhrawardī *nūr isfahbādhī* (lordly light), *nūr mudabbirah* (managing light), *nafs nāṭiqah* (rational soul), *qalb* (heart) and *rūḥ* (spirit). For Suhrawardī, the angels and the human being possess this same essence. The main difference between them is that human beings are related to earthly bodies and are therefore lower than angels in the hierarchy of lights.

Ghazālī also uses different terms for the human soul. It defines it as that thing in man that knows and perceives. He describes it as a subtle lordly spiritual substance (*laṭīfah rabbāniyyah rūḥāniyyah*)[198] or as a spiritual (or conceptual) intellectual light (*nūr ʿaqlī maʿnawī*) and in the same way he describes the angelic souls.[199] He calls it heart (*qalb*), spirit (*rūḥ*), intellect (*ʿaql*) or soul (*nafs*), explaining that all these terms bear different meanings, but all share this one meaning of that subtle spiritual substance within man that knows and perceives, which is man really and is his essence.[200] For Ghazālī, it is "an entity (*wujūd*) which is a self-existing principle (*aṣl qā'im bi-nafsihi*), and knowledge is a quality (*ṣifah*) residing in it, and the quality is other than the thing qualified."[201] Ghazālī also uses the term *ʿaql* (intellect) to denote this quality of knowledge which is other than the heart,[202] for example throughout the *Mishkāt al-Anwār*, where he speaks of the intellect as the eye of the heart toward the spiritual world.[203] He also says that this 'eye' is sometimes referred to as *rūḥ* (spirit) and as *nafs insaniyyah* (human soul).[204]

Here we can see one of the main differences between Suhrawardī and Ghazālī. For Ghazālī, the soul (or heart) knows through an attribute that is other than it, which he calls intellect, spirit or human soul (while these terms could also be used for the heart itself). In particular, it is through this attribute that the heart perceives the intelligible or spiritual world. Suhrawardī, on the other side, denies that the soul knows through an attribute and argues that the soul is in its own essence awareness[205] and acquires knowledge by simply beholding the sensible or spiritual things.[206]

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[198] Ghazali, **Al-Ghazali's Kitab Sharh 'Ajaib Al-Qalb - The Marvels of the Heart,** 6.
[199] Ghazali, **Mishkat Al-Anwar Fi Tawhid Al-Jabbar**, 62.
[200] Ghazali, **Al-Ghazali's Kitab Sharh 'Ajaib Al-Qalb - The Marvels of the Heart**, 6–10.
[201] Ibid., 9.
[202] Ibid., 10.
[203] Ghazali, **Mishkat Al-Anwar Fi Tawhid Al-Jabbar**, 45–46.
[204] Ibid., 45.
[205] Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination**, 81.
[206] Ibid., 4.

Suhrawardī introduces the concept of knowledge by presence (*ʿilm ḥuḍūrī*),[207] which is one of his most important contributions to Islamic thought. For him, the soul is pure light and awareness. When attached to the body, it perceives the outer world in a simple manner: making the example of the sense of sight, the soul perceives what is in front of the eyes simply because it is present in front of them illumined by external light (accidental) and without veils in between. This is in contrast to the previous theories about sight that imagined that a light was either irradiated from the eye to the seen thing or from the thing to the eye. As for the perception of the spiritual world, it also does not require additional means. When the soul succeeds at not being distracted by the senses, it naturally perceives the world of lights, the spiritual world, by itself. The more intense the light is, the further will its vision reach. The higher it is in the hierarchy of lights, the more it will know as it will perceive everything below it. At the same time, the more it knows and the higher it will be in the hierarchy of lights and close to the Light of lights.[208]

3.4. Angelology

The higher lights' relation to the lower ones is one of dominance (*qahr*), while the lower lights have love (*maḥabbah*) for the higher lights. This is important because, when the human being begins to become detached from bodily concerns out of longing for the Light of lights and the higher lights, it is his longing for them that elevates him until he is no more attached to the body and becomes attached to the highest lights, in the presence of the Light of lights. This is similar in a sense to what Ghazālī says throughout the *Mishkāt* about the human being becoming connected to the spiritual world as he begins his ascent towards God with the help of the angels and the souls of prophets and saints until he reaches God's presence from where he has access to all knowledge.[209]

Suhrawardī divides the angels in categories. The first distinction is between the dominant lights (*qawāhir*) and the managing lights (*anwār mudabbirah*), which we have already discussed. The dominant lights are divided in two orders emanating

[207] for a detailed analysis of this concept, also in the light of later Islamic philosophy, see Mehdi Hairi Yazdi, **The Principles of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy** (Albany: State University of New York, 1992).
[208] Amin Razavi, **Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination**, 81–92, 102–20.
[209] Ghazali, **Mishkat Al-Anwar Fi Tawhid Al-Jabbar**, 45–67.

from the Light of lights. One order is vertical or longitudinal (*ṭūlī*) and the other horizontal or latitudinal (*ʿaraḍī*). The vertical order corresponds to the archangels. Suhrawardī tends to give Zoroastrian names to the angels. This vertical order of angels is the first emanation and is called *Bahman* or *nūr aqrab* (nearest light). The latitudinal order emanates from the masculine aspects of the longitudinal order and corresponds to the Platonic archetypes. The angels of this order are called *arbāb al-anwāʿ*, 'lords of the species'. They are also called *ṭilismāt* (talismans) or *ṣanam* (idols or icons).[210] "Each one has its celestial domain over which it rules and exercises its particular influence in the created order."[211] From the feminine aspects of the longitudinal order the heavenly bodies such as the fixed stars and the planets are generated, due to the solidification of the angelic order.[212]

In comparison with Ghazālī's division of lights in four ranks, we can see that Suhrawardī's incorporeal lights, both the dominant lights and the managing lights (which include the human souls) belong to the second rank in so far as they are lights by and for which things appear, and to the third rank in so far as they are lights by, for and from which things appear. The heavenly bodies, which for Suhrawardī are the solidification of the angelic order, belong to the first rank, that by which things appear. These have no self-conscience in so far as they are physical barriers and their light is accidental, although Suhrawardī ascribes to them managing lights. The managing lights of the heavenly bodies obviously belong to the second and third rank of Ghazālī. The fourth rank is reserved to the Light of lights in both. Ghazālī's angels in the *Mishkāt* are "high noble substances of light from which lights[213] are poured on the human spirits. For this reason they may be called 'lords', while God is the 'Lord of lords'. They have different ranks with regards to their luminosity and their metaphor in the visible world are the Sun, the Moon and the heavenly bodies."[214]

3.5. The worlds and the faculties of knowledge

Ghazālī distinguishes between two worlds (*ʿālam*), the sensible (*ḥissī*) and the intelligible (*ʿaqlī*), and calls them by various names. The intelligible is also called

[210] Amin Razavi, **Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination**, 82.
[211] Ibid.
[212] Ibid.
[213] In the sense of Ghazālī's first rank of lights, i.e.: knowledge, sciences, blessings and what causes spiritual experiences.
[214] Ghazali, **Mishkat Al-Anwar Fi Tawhid Al-Jabbar**, 72.

invisible (*ghayb*) because it is invisible to the five external senses and to most human beings. It is called angelic court (*malakūt*) because it hosts the angels and the real causes of all the effects witnessed in the sensible world, as this is a reflection and a metaphor for the intelligible world. It is called high (*ʿulwī*) because it is symbolically more noble, and therefore higher, than the sensible world. It is called spiritual (*rūḥānī*) because it hosts the spirits (*rūḥ*, pl. *arwāḥ*) of animals, humans beings and angels. It is called luminous (*nūrānī*) because it hosts the metaphysical lights that are the souls of animals, human and angels as well as God, the Light of lights (*nūr al-anwār*). The sensible is therefore called by the opposite of all these: vision (*shahādah*), kingdom (*mulk*), low (*suflī*), bodily (*jusmānī*) and dark (*ẓulmānī*).[215]

He identifies these two worlds in relation to the two faculties of knowledge (the physical eye and the eye of the heart, i.e. the intellect) which he treats in the *Mishkāt*. In other works and in other parts of the *Mishkāt* however we can read him talking about other worlds and faculties. In general, he says:

> Know that man's essence, in his original condition, is created in blank simplicity without any information about the "worlds" of God Most High. These "worlds" are so many that only God Most High can number them, as He has said: "No one knows the hosts of your Lord but He" (74.34/31). Man gets his information about the "worlds" by means of perception. Each one of his kinds of perception is created in order that man may get to know thereby a "world" of the existents — and by "worlds" we mean the categories of existing things.[216]

It is clear then that the worlds referred to by Ghazālī in his works vary according to his different treatment of the faculties of knowledge. It is not our purpose here to present a detailed account of how his classification of these faculties varies throughout his works.[217] We can however draw a general picture by referring to six faculties and four worlds.

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[215] Ibid., 51, 70.
[216] Ghazali, **Al-Ghazali's Path to Sufism: His Deliverance from Error, Al-Munqidh Min Al-Dalal**, 59.
[217] for such an account see Ghazali, **Al-Ghazali's Kitab Sharh 'Ajaib Al-Qalb - The Marvels of the Heart**, xxiii–xxvii.

As for the six faculties, these are the five internal senses of Aristotelian thought plus the *rūḥ qudsī* (saintly spirit)[218], also called *dhawq* (taste), in reference to the tasting of the spiritual realities,[219] or *nubuwwah* (prophecy).[220] Of the five internal senses, two are responsible for perceiving, two for conserving and one for dealing with what has been perceived and conserved. The two responsible for perception are the common sense (*sensus communis*, *ḥiss mushtarak*), which perceives and gather the forms received through sense impression, and the estimative faculty (*wahm, wahmiyyah*), which perceives meanings and concepts (*maʿānī*). The two responsible for conserving are retentive imagination (*khayāl*), which preserves the sensible forms apprehended by the common sense, and recollection (*dhākirah*), which preserves the concepts apprehended through the estimative faculty. Both are sometimes called memory (*ḥāfiẓah*). The one responsible for dealing with the apprehensions stored in the memory is in fact two faculties, but they are often categorized together as one. These are the compositive imagination (*mutakhayyilah*), which combines the sensible apprehensions stored in the retentive imagination into new sensible forms (like a winged horse or a rose smelling of coffee), and cogitation (*mufakkirah*), which combines concepts to produce further concepts, judgments and knowledge. From these two derive all the sciences and arts.[221]

The sixth faculty is *dhawq* (taste) and it belongs to prophets and saints. It is called taste because it is understood by those who possess but not by those who do not, in an analogy to people's taste in music or poetry. It is also called *rūḥ* (spirit, but denoting in this case a knowledge faculty) *qudsī* (saintly), because it perceives the perceptibles of the invisible and holy world, the world of sanctity (*ʿālam al-quds*), which is that whose contents transcend the senses and imagination.[222] Through this faculty prophets and saint experience inspiration (*ilhām*), unveiling (*mukāshafah*), witnessing (*mushāhadah*) and states (*aḥwāl*) and, through these, acquire knowledge of the unseen world.

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[218] The word *rūḥ* here does not refer to an angel or a soul, but to a faculty of knowledge, so it is not to be confused with *rūḥ al-quds* (the Holy Spirit, the archangel Gabriel). In *Mishkāt al-Anwar fī Tawḥīd al-Jabbār*, 81-3, Ghazālī speaks of the internal senses using the word *rūḥ* in place of *ḥiss* (sense) – which he uses more commonly in other works -. In that passage he also includes among these five senses the *rūḥ qudsī*, which is unusual.

[219] Ghazali, **Mishkat Al-Anwar Fi Tawhid Al-Jabbar**, 82–83.

[220] Ghazali, **Al-Ghazali's Path to Sufism: His Deliverance from Error, Al-Munqidh Min Al-Dalal**, 60.

[221] Ghazali, **Al-Ghazali's Kitab Sharh 'Ajaib Al-Qalb - The Marvels of the Heart**, xxvi.

[222] Ghazali, **Mishkat Al-Anwar Fi Tawhid Al-Jabbar**, 70, 82–83.

Dhawq does not seem for Suhrawardī to be an attribute or faculty per se. It is rather an intuition, a way in which some things are apprehended rather than a faculty as such. Through the idea of knowledge by presence and the soul's essence being awareness, he does not need an additional faculty or attribute to perceive the invisible world, the world of lights. When the soul is not distracted by the senses, it perceives the world of lights through its own self in a clarity greater than that in which it perceives the physical world.

As for the five internal senses, Suhrawardī recognizes them in some of his works in the same way as Ghazālī[223] but he gives them a different explanation for them in *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. He says that these faculties (along anger, lust, the capacity to reproduce, acquire nutrition and others from the faculties of the vegetal, animal and human soul of Aristotelian philosophy) are in principle a reflection of determinations within the managing light. For example, lust and anger derive from the managing light's love for the higher lights and domination over the lower. When the light takes possession of the body, which Suhrawardī calls its 'fortress' (*ṣīṣīyah*), it diffuses throughout it. The light of the soul occupies cavities and places in the body by which the faculties within the soul become related to those cavities and parts, so that they are impaired if the part they are attached to is damaged. Those knowledge faculties that are located in different cavities of the brain, for example, are damaged if their area of the brain is damaged.[224]

As for the faculty of memory, both for sensible images and for concepts, Suhrawardī says that it is located in the "world of memory, one of the places belonging to the lord of celestial (*falakiyyah*) commanding (*isfahbadhiyyah*) lights. These forget nothing."[225] By placing the world of memory outside of the body, he is trying to explain our capacity to forget. Had memories been stored in our body with its faculties, nothing should have prevented memory from finding them whenever desired, although Suhrawardī concedes that there may be a faculty devoted to memory, even if the memories are stored in their own world.[226] In a sense, placing memory in another world which is part of the world of lights, so that implicitly it is the soul's connection to that world that determines the strength of its ability to

[223] see for example Suhrawardi, **Al-Mu'allafat Al-Falsafiyyah Wal-Sufiyyah: Al-Alwah Al-'Imadiyyah, Kalimat Al-Tasawwuf, Al-Lamahat**, 34–38.
[224] Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination**, 133–40.
[225] Ibid., 136.
[226] Ibid., 136–39.

remember, agrees with a general notion within Islamic culture and also *taṣawwuf* that sinning reduces memory while piety strengthens it.

As for compositive imagination (*mutakhayyilah*), the estimative faculty (*wahmiyyah*) and the retentive imagination (*khayāl*), Suhrawardī says they are a single faculty able to deal with both sensible images and concepts and to separate concepts from forms.[227]

As we have seen, Ghazālī attaches a world to each faculty, so that there is a world containing sensible images for the faculties of common sense, retentive imagination and compositive imagination, a world containing the objects of ratiocination, the intelligibles (*maʿqūlāt*) and a world (the spiritual world) pertaining to the apprehensions of the spiritual *dhawq*, along with the physical world. This distinction of four world is not rigid nor explicit in Ghazālī. As we have mentioned, he associates one world to each faculty of perception. Each of the senses then has its own world for example. The number of worlds simply varies with the way we enumerate the faculties of knowledge.

Of the four worlds I listed, it is clear that Ghazālī sees the physical and the spiritual as objective, having an external existence and containing sentient entities one can interact with. As for the world related to the faculties of imagination, Ghazālī connects metaphors and dreams to it. He does not seem to me to ascribe to it the same degree of objectivity as he does for the other two worlds, except for a puzzling statement in the *Mishkāt.*

Ghazālī is speaking of the glass (*zujājah*) as a metaphor for the prophets' imaginative faculty. Glass can be gross, so that it prevents from seeing clearly behind it, or refined and polish, so that it becomes transparent. If light is placed in it while it is gross, the light will not be seen. If it has been refined however the light will shine through it and also (if it is like a candle) it will be protected from the winds. This is to say that, if someone's imaginative faculty is refined, like that of the prophets', it reveals the invisible world instead of occluding it with images from the visible world, because these images will be arranged so as to allow one to understand their spiritual meaning.[228] Here Ghazālī says: "the apparent representation (or form) is true (or real) and behind this lies a secret" (*al-mithāl al-ẓāhir ḥaqq wa warāʾa hadha*

[227] Ibid.
[228] Ghazali, **Mishkat Al-Anwar Fi Tawhid Al-Jabbar**, 78–79.

sirr).[229] I do not know what the secret Ghazālī is referring to could be, but this statement may perhaps be an allusion to the fact the these forms of the imagination possess an actual external reality of sort.

As for the world of intelligibles (*maʿqūlāt*), concepts and rational judgments like necessity, possibility and impossibility, I have not come across any statement by Ghazālī to discuss whether these are real entities in their own world or simply mental constructions with no external existence of any kind. His general association of a perceptible world to each faculty of perception may perhaps suggest that he does ascribe to concepts and rational judgments an external existence. Without additional evidence however we are left with speculation.

Suhrawardī speaks mainly of three[230] to four worlds[231] instead of two. The first two are the world of lights and the physical world. The world of lights can also be divided in the world of the triumphant lights (*qawāhir*) and the world of managing lights (*anwār mudabbirah* or *isfahbadhiyyah*). As we have seen, the triumphant lights are the archangels and the 'lords of the species' (*arbāb al-anwāʿ*), which for Suhrawardī correspond to the Platonic archetypes. The managing lights are the guardian angels of people on earth as well as the human souls. In fact, Suhrawardī also says that each human soul has a guardian angel whose soul split upon entering the body. One half remains in the heaven while the other half is in body longing to reunite with it celestial half. The lord of the human species is also identified with the archangel Gabriel, the Holy Spirit (*rūḥ al-quds*) also identified with the spirit of the Prophet Muhammad.[232] This is also for Suhrawardī the active intellect (*ʿaql faʿʿāl*) through which human beings derive knowledge and whose relation to our souls is like the relation of the pen (*qalam*) to the tablet (*lawḥ*) as he inscribes our souls with knowledge of the primary (*awā'il*) and secondary (*thawānī*) intelligibles (*maʿqūlāt*).[233] This is very similar to Ibn Sinā's doctrine regarding the active intellect.

[229] Ibid., 79.
[230] Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination**, 2.
[231] Ibid., 149.
[232] Amin Razavi, **Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination**, 82–83.
[233] Suhrawardi, **Al-Mu'allafat Al-Falsafiyyah Wal-Sufiyyah: Al-Alwah Al-'Imadiyyah, Kalimat Al-Tasawwuf, Al-Lamahat**, 91–93.

The third world recognized by Suhrawardī is the world "of the dark and illumined suspended images"(*ṣuwar muʿalliqah ẓulmāniyyah wa mustanīrah*).[234] Later tradition has referred to this world as the imaginal world (*ʿālam al-mithāl*). Henry Corbin in particular has devoted considerable attention to this world and integrated it in his own philosophy.[235] This world contains the disembodied forms perceived by human beings in dreams and visions, but also in some supernatural occurrences: Suhrawardī relates that the people of Darband and Mīyānaj (two cities from the area Suhrawardī is from) have many times experienced mass visions of this sort, but the passage does not tell us clearly what they saw. My understanding of it is that they saw some kind of jinns or devils that would be visible but untouchable.[236]

Suhrawardī explains that some souls, particularly those that manage the heavenly bodies are able to create for themselves such forms, making them real from their imagination. Alternatively, they could show themselves to blessed people on Earth by assuming beautiful forms, like in visions and apparitions. Jinns and devils, or a type of them, are also said to belong to this world. Following the idea that the pleasures and pains of the afterlife are imaginary and not physical – an idea of the *falāsifah* supported by Ibn Sinā and condemned as disbelief in the *Tahāfut* -, he says that those pleasures and pains are part of this imaginal world. One must be careful however here not to think that imaginary or imaginal means unreal, because for Suhrawardī this is a real experienced world like the physical one and the world of lights.[237] As we have seen, Ghazālī's view about the external reality of this world seems to generally disagree with Suhrawardī, unless the enigmatic statement we cited earlier somehow refers to a similar idea.

As far as the question of the world of intelligibles (*maʿqūlāt*) and concepts (*maʿānī*) is concerned, Suhrawardī does not recognise these and the universals (*kulliyyāt*) as possessing external existence.[238] We have seen that he acknowledges Platonic archetypes through the idea of the lords of the species (*arbāb al-anwāʿ*). These do not only manage the species of plants, animals and the human world, but also things such as water, fire and love. "Suhrawardi uses Zoroastrian names for

[234] Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination**, 149.
[235] see Henry Corbin, **Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi**, Bollingen Series 91 (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998).
[236] Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination**, 149.
[237] Ibid., 149–50.
[238] Ibid., 7–8.

these forms such as *Urdibihisht* for fire, *Khurdād* for water, *Murdād* for plants *Shahriwar* for minerals and *Aspandārmaz* for love."[239] It is important to understand however that these are real sentient entities, unlike the universals.

Suhrawardī's denial of the external existence of universal leads him to give primacy to quiddity or essence over existence, differing from Ibn Sinā. Existence is not an actual part (*juz'*) of a thing in addition to its essence, but it is only something we predicate in our mind.[240] By acknowledging only the existence of particulars (*juz'iyyāt*), Suhrawardī does not fall in the problem of God's knowledge that the other *falāsifah* had found. Ghazālī had judged the idea that God knows only universals and not particulars as disbelief. For Suhrawardī, God, being the supreme light, perceives all that which His light reaches, that is, the whole creation, whether bodily or incorporeal and He thus has full knowledge of all *juz'iyyāt*.[241]

3.6. The soul's ascent

Both for Ghazālī and Suhrawardī, the soul is distracted from the apprehension of the invisible world by its involvement with the physical world that preoccupies both its external and internal senses. When it is freed from this disturbance, such as in the state of sleep or with the strengthening of the soul and the weakening of the body through spiritual striving, it is free to perceive the invisible world, ascending in it according to the degree of its freedom from the lower world, until it reaches the presence of God, from where it can know all things. When the soul perceives the spiritual world in the state of sleep, the impressions are sometimes codified through the faculty of imagination, giving us dreams that require interpretation .Since the invisible world contains the causes of all that happens in the visible world as well as God, the angels and the souls of other human beings – including prophets and saints that can assist one in one's path to God – from there one can effectively learn all things, past, present and future.[242]

To achieve this, one must reduce the power of the physical senses over him and strengthen the soul and its focus on the higher world, which is achieved through

[239] Amin Razavi, **Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination**, 82.
[240] Ibid., 33–35.
[241] Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination**, xxvii.
[242] Ghazali, **Mishkat Al-Anwar Fi Tawhid Al-Jabbar**, 52–88; Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination**, 76–164.

abstinence from the world, constant remembrance of God, reflection on divine things, love for Him and the noble denizens of the invisible world (angels, prophets and saints), and in general the Ṣūfī path.[243]

Ghazālī says that at first what he receives will be conveyed in sensual form through the imaginative faculty. As he transcends the senses, his inspirations will become free from forms resembling physical objects or he will experience states and tastes of the spiritual realities.[244] He might reach a state where he is able to see God in or before all things, even the physical world, after having realized that there is no real light or existence but His. He might reach such a state either through a form of gnostic knowledge (*ʿilman ʿirfāniyyan*) that does not make him confused regarding his distinction from God, or through a state of tasting (*ḥālan dhawqiyyan*) that makes him believe there is union (*ittiḥād*) between him and God, so that he may say things as if it was God speaking, such as "Glory be to Me" (*subḥānī*) or "I am the Real (*ana al-ḥaqq*)", like al-Bistāmī and al-Ḥallāj. He will eventually return however from such a state to the 'authority of the intellect' (*sulṭān al-ʿaql*) and realize what he felt was not real union, but something that resembled it.[245]

Suhrawardī speaks similarly of the path to the purification of the soul and the attainment of visions, flashes of light and similar experiences mentioned in Ṣūfī literature. The idea of removing the attachment to the physical body through spiritual striving is more emphasized in Suhrawardī than that of a moral purification and rectification (such as freeing oneself from envy) because it is the attachment to the body that prevent the soul from witnessing the divine lights and ascend to them. Presence with them, by itself, purifies the soul further.[246] He also provides a description of some of the lights encountered in the spiritual journey:

> According to Suhrawardi, these fifteen lights, some of which have peculiar descriptions are "the purpose of the path of knowledge." These visionary lights which emanate from the world of intellect are the essence of power and knowledge and he who experiences these lights also attains the power to rule over the material

[243] Ghazali, **Mishkat Al-Anwar Fi Tawhid Al-Jabbar**, 52–88; Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination**, 72–164.
[244] Ghazali, **Al-Ghazali's Path to Sufism: His Deliverance from Error, Al-Munqidh Min Al-Dalal,** 57.
[245] Ghazali, **Mishkat Al-Anwar Fi Tawhid Al-Jabbar**, 58–59.
[246] Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination**, 72–164.

world. The necessary condition for this experience is, however, separation (tajrīd) from one's corporeal body. These lights are:

1. A light which shines upon the novice and is pleasant but not permanent.

2. A light that shines upon others and is more like a lightningbolt.

3. A light that is soothing and enters the hearts of the gnostics. It is as if warm water is poured on you, a pleasant sensation is then experienced.

4. A light that descends upon the hearts of the men of vision and lasts a long time. This is a dominant light which induces a form of intoxication.

5. A light of extreme grace and pleasure which is induced through the power of love.

6. A light that burns and is induced through knowledge that is attained through intellection.

7. A light which at first is luminous and is more intense than the light of the sun.

8. A luminous and pleasant light appearing as if it comes from the hair and lasts a long time.

9. An emanating light which is painful but pleasurable.

10. A light coming from some figures and lies in the brain.

11. A light that emanates from the self (nafs) and shines upon the entire spiritual components.

12. A light whose attainment is marked by intensity.

13. A light that gives birth to the "self' and appears to be suspended. The incorporeality of the self can be observed through this light.

14. A light which induces a special heaviness such that it exerts a pressure beyond one's ability.

15. A light that is the cause of the movements of the body and the material self.[247]

Ghazālī says that the heart can be dirtied and veiled from the spiritual world by its diseases, such as envy and arrogance, or by certain other causes. Among these causes there are not having fully developed its faculties yet, such as in the case of children; its being damaged, like in the case of a mad person; its being turned in the wrong direction, such as a pious man who is preoccupied with the details of the rituals of the body instead of turning his thought to God; and its being veiled by wrong beliefs that have become ingrained in it because of having been taught to him as a child or from authorities he trusts, so that even when he does receive knowledge

[247] Amin Razavi, **Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination**, 61.

from the unseen, it is distorted by these beliefs. If the heart is pure and turned toward the spiritual world, the latter is reflected in it like in a mirror, so that he becomes aware and cognizant of what lies in the invisible world. Since it contains all realities, the angels, the souls of the universe and the causes of everything that takes place in the physical world, the heart acquires access to sure knowledge of all things and can come to know God.[248]

3.7. The two ways to knowledge

For Ghazālī, knowledge can therefore be pursued either by study and speculation, which is like engraving the heart and decorating it, or by purifying it so that it will reflect the divine realities. This second route is more arduous but the station of those who practice it and succeed is higher than those who know only through study and speculation. Ghazālī mentions that the religious scholars prefer that one seeks knowledge through study before becoming engrossed in the spiritual practices necessary to purify heart. This is because this route is hard and long and the person may lose years without having acquired any of this knowledge.[249] This two ways of acquiring knowledge can easily be compared to Suhrawardī's distinction between discursive wisdom (*ḥikmah baḥthiyyah*) and divine wisdom (*ḥikmah ilāhiyyah*) presented in the previous chapter. Divine wisdom is always superior to discursive wisdom, but joining both is perfection.

Ghazālī encourages pursuing knowledge by purifying the heart. However a careful reading of his works reveals that he was not calling away from other types of learning. To begin with, he is clearly concerned with teaching logic, as he encourages the religious scholars to learn it, practice it and use it to solve theological and legal issues as seen in his other works *Mi'yār al-'Ilm* and *al-Qisṭās al-Mustaqīm*. Second, works like the *Iḥyā'* and *al-Arba'īn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn* begin with a discussion of the importance of acquiring outward knowledge of correct beliefs and of how to practice the Sharīʿah. The purification of the heart comes after having completed those two. In addition to this, his work *Bidāyat al-Hidāyah* insists that the problem with seeking knowledge is the intention of the seeker: if he is sincere in seeking it for

[248] Ghazali, **Al-Ghazali's Kitab Sharh 'Ajaib Al-Qalb - The Marvels of the Heart,** 29–44.
[249] Ibid., 51–76.

God's sake, there is only good waiting for him; if however he seeks it for worldly reasons he will be causing his doom. [250]

Ghazālī is well aware of this, as this was his own experience until he left the Niẓamiyyah in Baghdād. In the *Bidāyah* he prescribes to the student to be steadfast in the observance of worship and the remembrance of God in the morning and evening. However, after the student has completed his morning devotions, he is told that the best activity in which he can spend the rest of the day is to acquire knowledge of his soul and how to purify it. Once he has succeeded in this, he can engage in pursuing other sciences for the benefit of God's slaves. Only if his circumstances prevent him from seeking knowledge he should engage in additional devotions, helping others or providing for his family throughout the rest of the day.[251] This shows that Ghazālī did not encourage, in itself, pure seclusion and worship at the expense of study.

Another issue is Ghazālī's interest in logic. It is evident from his works and from what we said so far that he was influenced by Ibn Sinā's philosophy and made use of his ideas when he considered it appropriate. As far as logic was concerned however Ghazālī seems to have been really intentioned in make it well accept among the religious scholars, which led him to author books like *Mi'yār al-'Ilm* and *al-Qisṭās al-Mustaqīm.* Frank Griffel[252] has elaborated more on Ghazālī's role in leading the *mutakallimūn* to approach the philosophical sciences and logic in particular.

He says in the *Munqidh* that, after doubting the primary intellectual judgments, such as that ten is more than three and that a thing cannot be something and its opposite in all the same respects, which are the basis of logic, he eventually regained trust in them, not through a logical argument, but through a light from God.[253] This is a strong statement regarding the importance he gave to this science also in light of his spiritual experience.

Suhrawardī's educational program also was concerned with inculcating logic along with spiritual experience. It is for this reason that, before *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, he instructs its readers to study the *Talwīḥāt*, the *Lamaḥāt* and the *Mashāri'*, where he presents Peripatetic logic, physics and metaphysics, gradually introducing *Ishrāqī* thought. Even though they belonged to different traditions (*falsafah* in Suhrawardī's

[250] Abu Hamid Ghazali, **Bidayat Al-Hidayah**, ed. Muhammad Al-Hajjar (Beirut, Lebanon: Dar al-Bashair al-Islamiyyah, 2001), 13–22.
[251] Ibid., 45–91.
[252] Griffel, **Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology**.
[253] Ghazali, **Al-Ghazali's Kitab Sharh 'Ajaib Al-Qalb - The Marvels of the Heart**, 23.

case and religious scholarship in *uṣūl al-fiqh* and *kalām* for Ghazālī), while sharing the connection to the Ṣūfīs, they both seemed to have aimed at forming students that would be able to use both logic and *taṣawwuf* to attain divine knowledge. They both defend some of their insights acquired through spiritual striving through logic, such as in the case of Ghazālī's defense of the existence of prophethood and of a faculty to apprehend the invisible world[254] and Suhrawardī's numerous logical arguments throughout the *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq.*

3.8. Suhrawardī's certainty

We have spoken of Ghazālī's way to acquire certainty before our exposition of some elements of Ghazālī and Suhrawardī's epistemology and we left suspended the issue of Suhrawardī's own way to certainty. Suhrawardī's solution to doubt is presented in a succinct form in the introduction of *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* and relies on his ideas of knowledge by presence and of the possibility to perceive the world of lights by divesting oneself of the distraction of the body.

> … whoever wishes to learn only discursive philosophy, let him follow the method of the Peripatetics, which is fine and sound for discursive philosophy by itself. We have nothing to say to such a person, nor do we discuss illuminationist principles with him. Indeed, the system of the Illuminationist cannot be constructed without recourse to luminous inspirations, for some of their principles are based upon such lights. Should Illuminationists fall into doubt about these principles, they will overcome it by climbing the ladder of the soul. Just as by beholding sensible things we attain certain knowledge about some of their states and are thereby able to construct valid sciences like astronomy, likewise we observe certain spiritual things and subsequently base divine sciences upon them. He who does not follow this way knows nothing of philosophy and will be a plaything in the hands of doubt.[255]

Suhrawardī compares certainty about the spiritual world to certainty about the physical and says that the way to both is to behold the things directly, observing their states so as to be able to construct valid sciences based on these observations.

[254] Ibid., 59–64.
[255] Suhrawardi, **The Philosophy of Illumination**, 4.

We have seen from this exposition of Ghazālī and Suhrawardī's ways that they both see *taṣawwuf* as a way able to provide better and surer knowledge, but that they do not intend to call their students away from learning through study, whether the religious sciences (in Ghazālī's case) nor the philosophical (in Suhrawardī's case). Perfection lies in joining both and they give particular value to the study of logic.

CONCLUSION

Ghazālī and Suhrawardī's lives, works, relation to philosophy and mysticism, path to certainty and some of the elements of their ontology and epistemology have been presented in this research. The picture that has emerged is that of two figures with much in common. Having both been influenced by Avicennianism, their ideas about the external and internal senses and the soul are similar, even though they interpret them in different ways. One of the crucial distinctions is that Ghazālī sees knowledge as an attribute of the soul by which the soul knows, while Suhrawardī believes the soul knows by its very essence, which leads him to formulate his concept of knowledge by presence.

Another element in common, as we have seen, is the attempt to join logic with spiritual apprehension of the invisible realm. In relation to this, Ghazālī mostly uses logic to prove the possibility of the Ṣūfī path and of receiving knowledge from the unseen to those who have never experienced it, while Suhrawardī goes further and uses it to demonstrate the rational validity of his spiritual apprehensions.

We have seen that both believe in the existence of a physical and a spiritual realm, but disagree on the ontological status of the mind's concepts and intelligibles (*maʿqūlāt*). As for the world of imagination, Suhrawardī sees it as being a real world, external to us, hence objective, hosting suspended dark and luminous forms. This is the world we experience in dreams, but it is also the same world of the images seen in mirrors, of the pleasures and pains of the next life and of a type of devils and phantoms. Ghazālī never says that this world has the same degree of reality enunciated by Suhrawardī, but we have seen that he leaves us with a mysterious statement that leaves the door open to interpretation.

Both believe that the souls of angels and human beings are similar and that the angels assist the human beings, provide them with knowledge, have different degrees of luminosity and are among the real causes of the effects of the physical world. Suhrawardī's description of the division of the angels, however, is much more detailed than Ghazālī's and draws also on Zoroastrian names.

They both rely extensively on the symbolism of light and agree in many aspects of its use, identifying it with knowledge, existence, self-awareness, the angels and

the souls, God, power, the spiritual as opposed to the physical and so on. Suhrawardī's ontology of light is more developed than Ghazālī's though.

They both were of Persian origin and spent some time wandering, probably encountering or learning from Ṣūfīs. As for Ghazālī, we do not know of him that he spent the ten years he was away with other Ṣūfīs, but it is likely that he would have met some. Rather, this is certain, because he admits to have consulted some masters or people whose spiritual experience he respected before deciding to return to teaching.[256] I am tempted to suggest that Ghazālī and Suhrawardī's use of the symbolism of light, along with Ibn Sinā writing the mostly lost *Manṭiq al-Mashriqiyyīn* be considered together. Ghazālī never refers explicitly to the concept of *ishrāq* or *mashriq*, but it is a possibility, even if purely speculative for now, that him and Suhrawardī encountered some group of wandering Persian Ṣūfīs – similar to a proto-*ṭarīqah*, who relied heavily on the symbolism of light and darkness and who perhaps even considered themselves heirs to ancient Persian wisdom and spirituality within Islam. These may have possessed chains of initiation passing through al-Ḥallāj and al-Bisṭāmī. As for Ghazālī, he makes often reference to these two. As for Suhrawardī, they feature in his spiritual lineage as the Ṣūfīs through which he inherited the wisdom of ancient Persia (while Dhu al-Nūn al-Miṣrī and al-Tustarī are his connection to Egyptian wisdom). Ibn Sinā might have encountered this group of Ṣūfīs as well, if they existed in his time, and this encounter may have to do with his lost *Manṭiq al-Mashriqiyyīn* (accepting Corbin[257] and Nasr's[258] view of a connection between this lost work, Ibn Sinā's supposed mysticism, and Suhrawardī's own project). I admit that I know no evidence for this except for the similarity of the symbolism of light employed by Ghazālī and Suhrawardī and the term *mashriqī* used by the latter and Ibn Sinā. Nonetheless, given how difficult it is to know what were the beliefs and practices of the wandering Ṣūfīs of that area between the 10th and the 12th century CE and how easily esoteric ideas and the remnants of pre-Islamic religions can circulate and survive in such a peripheric and unchecked cultural environment (that of the wandering Ṣūfīs), I believe it would be appropriate for research.

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[256] Ghazali, **Al-Ghazali's Path to Sufism: His Deliverance from Error, Al-Munqidh Min Al-Dalal**, 71.
[257] Corbin, **Nell'Islam Iranico: aspetti spirituali e filosofici. Vol.2: Sohrawardi e i platonici di Persia**.
[258] Nasr, **Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna - Suhrawardi - Ibn 'Arabi**.

Finally, they are example of the richness and pluralism of Islamicate culture, by joining their religion with ancient Greek and Persian thought while remaining fully part of the intellectual and spiritual milieu of the Muslim community in which they live. They both demonstrate an abundance of critical thought in their relation to ancient and contemporary thought. Ghazālī is severe and critical in his analysis of the doctrines held by the ancient philosophers and by his contemporaries. Suhrawardī on the other side is also critical in his acceptance of what he believes to be not mere rational speculation by the Greeks, but the fruits of their accomplishment as mystics: he confirms the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle not by blind imitation, but by a rational and spiritual assent grounded in his own mystical experiences.

In the introduction we mentioned three approaches to the study of mysticism (Traditionalism, Unity Thesis and Constuctionism) and proposed to relate Ghazālī and Suhrawardī epistemology and ontology of mystical experiences to these three approaches. As for Traditionalism, both our authors share the view that there existed Ṣūfīs at all times, as we have seen in the second chapter, but Ghazālī does not seem to believe in or contemplate a singular tradition of wisdom transmitted since the beginning of humanity to his time aside from prophecy. As for Suhrawardī, he clearly believes that Idrīs-Enoch-Hermes was the father of philosophy and that different traditions of philosophy have come from him until they reached Suhrawardī. This however is only a limited point of contact with the Traditionalist school and, in general, this approach does not seem to fit our authors.

As for the Unity Thesis and Constructionism, we have seen that Ghazālī and Suhrawardī surely believe that mystical experiences are of many kinds (*ilhām, mushāhadah,* revelatory dreams and so forth) and not just experiences of union. Some are unmediated, such as those in which imagination has been transcended. Some, like dreams, are mediated by imagination and therefore possibly influenced by culture. We have also seen that for Ghazālī erroneous beliefs attached to the heart may confuse or corrupt one’s spiritual apprehensions, which is lends support to Constructionism from a certain point of view, but that the heart is also able to have unmediated experiences if it is free of this veil. It seems, from these observations, that neither the Unity Thesis nor Constructionism would work very well in analysing Ghazālī and Suhrawardī’s mysticism, which shows our need for alternative methods of analysis.

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