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**A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS
OF THE METHOD OF HISTORIOGRAPHY
OF PHILOSOPHY,
AS ENVISAGED BY SUHRAWARDI,
ARISTOTLE AND HEGEL**

The historiography of philosophy, in the modern sense of the word, began in the West in the eighteenth century,¹ and perhaps the first person who endeavored to specialize in this field of philosophy — namely, the historiography of philosophy — was the German philosopher Hegel, whose book, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, is deemed an important effort in this field. Before him, another philosopher from Germany, Schelling,² had written a small but meaningful book on the subject. The historiography of philosophy nonetheless has, since a long time, been of interest to philosophers, and they have always taken a historical approach to philosophy and its subject matter. A more or less lucid and clear view on the development of philosophy and history can be found in the writings of Plato and Aristotle.³ Although the views of philosophers on this issue are not discussed in great detail in the books on the history of philosophy, their com-

¹ Although historiography of philosophy, in the modern sense of the word, began with Hegel, for a long time, since the days of ancient Greece and in the Islamic world, books have been written on the views of philosophers, among which the most important are: Diogenes Laërtius' *Lives of the Famous Philosophers*, Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a's *'Uyūn al-Anbā'*, Abū 'Alī Miskawayh Rāzī's *Al-Ḥikmat al-Khālida*, Qādī Ṣā'id Andalusī's *Ṭabaqāt al-Umam*, Ibn Fātik's *Mukhtār al-Ḥikam*, Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-'Āmirī's *Al-amad 'alā al-abad*, Ibn Jiljil's *Ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā' wa 'l-ḥukamā'*, Shahrastānī's *Al-milal wa 'l-niḥal*, Abū Sulaymān Sijistānī's *Ṣiwān al-ḥikma*, Qifṭī's *Ta'riḫ al-ḥukamā'*, Bayhaqī's *Tatimmat Ṣiwān al-ḥikma*, Shahrastānī's *Nuzhat al-arwāḥ wa rawḍat al-afrākh*, and dozens of other books and treatises; for more details refer to Muhammad Taqī Danishpazhuh and Muhammad Sarwar Mawla'yi's introduction to Shahrastānī's *Nuzhat al-arwāḥ* (Tehrān: Academic and Cultural Publications 1365 S.H.).

² Schelling. *On Modern Philosophy*. English translation. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

³ In Plato's works that are written in the form of dialogue the views of the past philosophers are expressed through participants of the conversation, especially Socrates. Aristotle's habit is to begin a discussion on a philosophical issue by outlining the views of the past philosophers.

ments on it, nevertheless, have been influencing the development of philosophical thought, and philosophy in general, until this day.

One of the philosophers who has an explicit opinion on the beginning of philosophy and its historical development is Suhrawardi.⁴ It is noteworthy that Suhrawardian theory, at this point, is in binary opposition to the Aristotelian theory that has been dominant in the Western philosophy for the past twenty-three centuries, and, also, in terms of its contents, it is in total disagreement with Hegel's historiography of philosophy to which a special importance has been attributed in the modern times. If the history of philosophy had been written from Suhrawardi's point of view, then, evidently, philosophy would have acquired a different meaning and a different conception of its historical development would have been proposed.

In this article, efforts will be made to discuss some of the presuppositions concerning the beginnings of philosophy and, subsequently, to provide a critical analysis of the strong points of Suhrawardi's theory on the historiography of philosophy against the perspectives advanced by Aristotle and Hegel.

One of the first philosophers who turned his attention to the issue of the origin of philosophy and its historical development was Plato. From Plato's point of view, philosophical thought had had a regressive movement against the bedrock of history; the greatest philosophers in the history of humankind (such as Hermes) had lived in ancient times, and the closer philosophy got to our (i.e., Plato's. — *transl.*) times, the weaker and emptier it became.

The Greek philosophy, contrary to what is nowadays asserted by historians of philosophy, from Plato's perspective, is not representative of the culmination of perfection. The true philosophy is embodied in the person of the philosopher and is passed from generation to generation orally and, so to speak, from heart to heart. The discussion of philosophical issues in a written form and in books testifies to the degeneration and decadence of philosophy,⁵ and philosopher is compelled to turn to writing only because of fear of the extinction and disappearance of philosophy.

Plato, in particular, strongly criticizes the theory according to which philosophy originated in Greece. In the *Timaeus*, Plato relates a surprising but certainly true tale.⁶ This legend relates to Solon's (who was the wisest among the seven Greek sages) encounter with some Egyptian priests in the Nile delta, in a place called Sais. Solon, who has recently entered the city, is received with special honors. In the course of conversation with the priests, Solon finds out that neither him, nor any of the Greeks, knows of the ancient wisdom anything worth men-

⁴ Suhrawardi's opinion on the types of philosophical thought and its development is expounded in the introduction to the book *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, as well as in part 6 of the book *al-Mashāri' wa 'l-Muḥārahāt*.

⁵ Letter Seventh, 3465 1344c, 3775 677c, 675a.

⁶ *Timaeus*, 22–24.

tioning. Suddenly, one of the priests addresses Solon, saying: "O Solon, you Greeks are nothing more than children!" Solon inquires about the cause of these words, and the Egyptian priest responds: "I meant to say that you, the Greeks, all are young in mind; you have no old opinions among you, which have passed to you through culture. There is no knowledge among you, which is old as gray-haired men." Then, he says again: "As for the story of your own people you just mentioned, o Solon, it is not better than a story for children." Certainly, Plato's purpose in telling such a story, which has a solid truth behind it, is that the Greeks possess nothing of the ancient philosophy, or, in his own words, "the old opinion," or "old knowledge," and that the Egyptians and other peoples are much older, more "gray-haired" and with a longer "beard" than the Greeks. In fact, Greece is not the birthplace of philosophy and is not rooted in the tradition of philosophy or "ancient wisdom."

Among other Greek sources dealing with the issue of the origin of philosophy and its historical development, is Diogenes Laërtius' *Lives of the Famous Philosophers*.⁷ At the beginning of his book, he discusses the question of the place of birth and origin of philosophy. In this regard, he relates many opinions, which, in their entirety, testify that philosophy has come into being among non-Greeks or "Barbarians" and, in this connection, he singles out for a detailed discussion three probabilities. According to the first of them, philosophy has appeared among the Iranians, especially, among the caste of Magians.

According to the second opinion, philosophy originated among the Babylonians, especially among the Assyrians and Chaldeans. The third theory argues that the Indians, particularly wandering philosophers (gymnosophists) were the first to engage in philosophy. Yet another conjecture is that philosophy has first appeared along the Nile River among the Egyptian priests. At the same time, Diogenes Laërtius asserts that, during his lifetime, Greece was the place where philosophy flourished. Diogenes relates various stories from the authoritative sources of his time in support of each of these opinions.⁸

Concerning the spread of philosophy among the Iranians, Diogenes states that the history of Magians that began with Zoroaster goes back to five thousand years before the fall of Troy, referring to Hermodorus the Platonist as the source of this information. He also relates another story from Xanthus, the Lydian, to the effect that the time of Zoroaster precedes the expedition of Xerxes against Greece by six thousand years, and names some of the famous Magian sages, such as Ostanas, Astrampsychos, Gobryas and Pazatas. Regarding the Magians, he says that they spend most of their time worshipping their gods, performing sacrifices and observing prayers; they refrain from worshipping statues and idols and, in particular, avoid attribution of male or female gender to angels. They talk

⁷ *Diogenes Laërtius*. *Lives of the Famous Philosophers*. Loeb Series of Classical Greek Texts, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. Vol. I, p. 3.

⁸ *Ibid.*

about justice and retribution and regard burning the dead as a sign of impiety, and believe that the air is full of forms that emerge from it in the shape of vapors, but these forms are manifest only to the possessors of inner vision and sharp intelligence. They refrain from using ornaments, especially adorning themselves with items of gold, dress in white robes and sleep on the ground, and their food consists of dry bread, cheese and greenery. They believe the order of existence to rest on the twin principles of good and evil, that is, Orosmasdes (Hurmuzd) and Arimanius (Ahriman), and believe in the life hereafter and the eternity of the soul. Among the amazing opinions, attributed to the Magians by Diogenes Laertius and deserving to be reflected upon, is the belief that the world exists owing to their invocation (that is, that the existents have perpetuity and continuity through their invocation). He attributes this claim to Eudemus of Rhodes.⁹

Aristotle's commentary on the origin of philosophy, its substance and historical development, however, has significant differences from the above claims. Here, it is necessary to point out that the philosophical life of Aristotle can be divided into two periods – Platonic and non-Platonic (or purely Aristotelian). During the first or Platonic period, in which he (Aristotle) wrote such treatises as *On Philosophy* (on the origin of philosophy), he seems to have paid a great attention to the opinions of the ancient sages.¹⁰ Unfortunately, only scattered fragments of this work survive. Diogenes Laërtius, who seems to have had the afo-rementioned work at his disposal, in his book, *The Lives of Famous Philosophers*, says: "In the first book of his treatise, called *On Philosophy*, Aristotle explains that the Persian Magians have precedence over the Egyptians in philosophy, and that they believe in the twin principles of good and evil, and he calls the first Zeus or Hurmuzd and the second Hadis or Ahriman."¹¹ In this treatise, Aristotle, undoubtedly, accepts the opinion of his master, but later abandons it, as in many other cases.

Aristotle's later opinion was subsequently approved by the common people in the West and later was adopted and further developed by such scholars as Hegel. Based on this latest proposition, philosophy is essentially of Greek origin, whereas other peoples, like the Indians or Iranians, lack any philosophy. The application of the word "Barbar" to non-Greeks refers to this very issue. On the other hand, Aristotle interprets the development of philosophy in Greece in such a way that the first philosophers that were renowned for wisdom, in his view, turn out to be the merely naturalists (*physiologoi*), having no share in wisdom, especially, the divine one (*theologia*).¹² He interprets the *arche*, or the first cause of existents, of which the early philosophers spoke, as the material principle and material cause, and explicitly asserts that the preceding philosophers had given

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Jaeger Werner W. Aristotle: Historical Foundations of His Thought. 2nd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1948, Chapter 6.

¹¹ Diogenes. Ibid., p. 11.

¹² Aristotle. Metaphysics. Book 3.

their attention, of the four causes, solely to the material one, while it was he alone who managed to establish all four causes. One mentioned air, another water, and yet another fire as the first cause. Aristotle is unaware of the symbolic and metaphoric meaning of these elements, and interprets them in the literal sense of the word. He says about his master, Plato, that he, in his theory of ideas, somewhat approached to the notion of formal cause.¹³ The key terms of the earlier philosophers acquire a completely different meaning and sense in Aristotle's philosophy. *Arche* is interpreted as a material principle; *physis* (in fact, meaning the manifestation of the reality of existence) as nature, in the Aristotelian sense of the word, i.e., the source of motion and peace; truth as a mere logical truth (as opposed to falsehood); existence as substance; symbol and allegory (*mythos*) as myth or legend. Even for philosophy, Aristotle finds a different meaning. But what is important in Aristotelian interpretation of philosophy is that he limits the history of thought and reflection to Greece and considers himself the last of the philosophers. Like Hegel, he thinks of himself as a philosopher who has solved all philosophical problems.

Needless to say, this Aristotelian opinion is diametrically opposed to the opinions of Plato and Suhrawardi. On the other hand, it is this Aristotelian vision that has shaped the destiny of the Western thought for the past twenty-three centuries, eventually leading to the negation of philosophy and complete nihilism in the West.

Hegel's view of philosophy and its historical development in many aspects starkly differs from that of Suhrawardi, and this difference mostly stems from the principles and fundamental approaches of these two philosophers. One of the instances of disagreement between Suhrawardi and Hegel has to do with the meaning and notion of philosophy. In Hegel's opinion, philosophy is merely a human attempt to articulate the ultimate concept of the "Absolute" in accordance with the conditions of time and place and cultural circumstances within which it emerges. Hence, philosophy for Hegel is, by necessity, a temporal, spatial and historical affair, and it changes when these circumstances and conditions alter. In other words, philosophy as the "absolute consciousness" under various circumstances manifests itself in different forms, and creates various philosophical systems, each of which is a necessary stage for attaining this consciousness. Philosophical systems originate in the bedrock of history in different historical periods, and philosophical truth by necessity takes on a historical coloring and form. Temporality and historicity constitute the reality of human being and the essence of philosophy, and, in the Hegelian perspective, as opposed to those of Plato and Suhrawardi, the development of philosophy is not a regressive movement, but, on the contrary, is subordinate to the compelling motion towards perfection, in accordance with the principle of historical necessity. According to

¹³ Ibid.

Hegel, the logical and intellectual development of philosophical systems is in total conformity with their historical development, and their historical orientation is inseparable from the logical one, whereas the historical succession of the chain of events is united with their logical continuity. As if some type of hidden historiography appears in his thought, to the effect that philosophical truth merges with the historical one, assuming a shape of historiography.¹⁴

By contrast, Suhrawardi's thought is far from historical relativism. In his view, philosophy, especially the "perennial philosophy" and "eternal leaven" that are manifested in various forms, is not subordinate to time and space, nor limited by historical conditions, and, therefore, can exist in various cultures and different historical periods. For example, Jamasp and Frashostar among the philosophers of the ancient Iran, Budhasuf (Buddha) among the philosophers of the East, Pythagoras and Empedocles and Plato among the philosophers of the ancient Greece, and Junayd, Bayazid and Suhrawardi among the Islamic philosophers, who lived in different times and places, were illuminated by the light of this perennial wisdom. If this wisdom is manifested in a certain time and period, this time is a luminous one; otherwise, it is a dark one.¹⁵

Another difference between Suhrawardi and Hegel is that Hegel, unlike Suhrawardi, treats reality as becoming, not perceiving within the objective existence anything else except this becoming. Hegel's Absolute also does not enjoy any other reality within the realm of external objectivity apart from this becoming. From Hegel's point of view, pure existence is a mere abstraction and negation, lacking any determination whatsoever. Simple existence is not anything determined, and, in Hegel's own words, it is "nothing" or a privative affair. Since it is not determined, it is not intelligible. Nevertheless, this privative and purely abstract affair, or pure existence, constitutes the first stage in the development of dialectic thought. This abstract and indeterminate beginning is indispensable for reaching anything determinate.¹⁶

In Hegel's view, since absolute existence lacks any determination and objective content, it therefore contains non-existence in its very essence and is negated through it. This non-existence is the perfection of existence and its opposite or antithesis.

On account of this, for Hegel, non-existence is a more definite affair than existence and, unlike existence, it is intelligible, because non-existence and privation determine the non-determined existence and make it manifest. For this reason, talking about non-existence, Hegel adds the definite article *das*, which refers to determination, to the expression "pure non-existence" (*das reine nichts*), rather than to the expression "pure existence," which tells us that, in Hegel's view,

¹⁴ Hegel. *The Phenomenology of Spirit*. English translation. 2nd ed. 1966.

¹⁵ Suhrawardi. *Collected Works*. Vol. 2. Ed. H. Corbin. Tehran: Anjuman-i falsafa, 1356 S.H. P. 11.

¹⁶ Hegel. *Logic*. Part 1, Chapter 1.

non-existence is the determinator of pure existence. Thus, non-existence is intelligible and, therefore, existent, and, consequently, he exclaims all of a sudden, “non-existence exists” (*das Nichtsein ist*).¹⁷

However, in Hegel’s view, existence and non-existence are not opposites and, as it is said, existence contains non-existence in its essence. Rather, these two become united with each other on a higher level of dialectic movement. This transcendent union of existence and non-existence is the same becoming that is considered to be the synthesis of these two. In fact, existence and non-existence, in addition to *not* being one another’s opposites, are each other’s concomitants, and it is not possible to perceive one without the other.

From Hegel’s viewpoint, not only becoming precedes existence, but also the infinite is the same as the finite, and the absolute is the same as the determined. In other words, Hegel’s Absolute has no existence independent of [delimited] existents, and the absolute being (*Sein*) has a reality to the extent in which it exists in determined existents. *Dasein*, Hegel’s Absolute, in terms of Islamic philosophy is the non-conditioned existence as a division that is the same as existents and has no independent existence outside them. The two parts of the transcendent being, which the Islamic philosophers have called “the non-conditioned being as the source of division” (*al-wujūd lā bi sharṭ muqsamī*) and “negatively conditioned being” (*al-wujūd bi sharṭ lā*), cannot be found in Hegel’s philosophical system. If, for instance, we call Hegel’s God the “Absolute,” then his God or Absolute has no existence apart from the existence of the world. In his interpretation, his God is a totality,¹⁸ and this totality is the same thing that is referred to as “the world.” In addition, Hegel’s Absolute, in addition to not preceding the [other] existents in existence, also lacks any preceding knowledge of them, and his knowledge and awareness is actualized only in the locus of the manifestation of the spirit, that is, in the self-consciousness of a philosopher. From this concise exposition, it is clear to what extent Hegel’s philosophy is subject to [the tendencies of] assimilation (*tashbīh*) and inhering (*ḥulūl*), and how far his God is distanced from the station of dissimilarity (*tanzīh*). These are only a few examples of the foundations and principles that Hegel sets in opposition to Suhrawardi and, more generally, to divine philosophers.¹⁹

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Substance according to Spinoza is the sum total (*kull*). His God, in certain aspects, is also a sum total. God as a sum total entered philosophy from the time of Spinoza, and the later philosophers, in particular Hegel, were influenced by this interpretation. Hegel’s Absolute, in a way, is also the same sum total or the entirety of the world, the only difference being that while Spinoza stresses its substance, Hegel emphasizes its dimension of consciousness and self-consciousness. Spinoza’s substance is, in a word, his God, with the attributes of dimension and thought. Hegel’s Absolute in its natural manifestation also has the attributes of dimension and extension, or time and space, while in its spiritual manifestation, it has, in addition to these, the attributes of consciousness and self-consciousness.

¹⁹ Islamic theologians, Sufis and philosophers, in particular Mulla Sadra, have thoroughly discussed the issue of *tashbīh* and *tanzīh* and their interrelationship. Ibn al-Arabi and his fol-

Like Aristotle (but unlike Suhrawardi), Hegel believes that Greece is the place of origin and the source of philosophy, while the peoples of the East completely lack it. He explains this view as follows: man is a creature that exists in itself and for itself, and his being for itself is manifested through his choice and freedom.²⁰ Hegel believes that this freedom has never emerged in the Eastern civilizations.²¹ If we interpret philosophy from Hegel's perspective as the fullness of freedom and its concomitant, that is, self-consciousness, this implies that philosophical self-consciousness has never emerged in the East. In his view, the East, as a whole, lacks history and historical self-consciousness. Hegel says that "the Easterners will never understand that the spirit or human-being in itself is free and, since they are not aware of this, one can never say that they are free. They only know that one person (the king) is free, and for this reason, this is the freedom of oppression, fear and bestial instinct ... This free person is that despotic individual." We see that Hegel is an heir of Aristotle's prejudice, for he believes that the first people who understood the meaning of freedom were the Greeks. Awareness of freedom appeared for the first time among the Greeks and, for this reason, they perceived the meaning of freedom, however, like the Romans, they believed that only some but not all men are free. Even Plato and Aristotle were not aware of this.

According to Hegel, philosophy, in its truest meaning, emerged among the Germans and Hegel, as the last philosopher of his time, perceived himself as the embodiment of the Absolute Spirit and fullness of self-consciousness. With the emergence of Christianity, Germanic peoples were the first to comprehend that human-being is free by its nature, and that this freedom of spirit forms the essence of human being. It is evident that Suhrawardi is not party in this discourse with Hegel as far as many of these claims are concerned, and, in particular, he (Suhrawardi) would have been surprised to hear that Plato and Aristotle were unaware of the meaning of freedom, and did not reach the truth in the Hegelian sense of the word.²²

Certainly, Suhrawardi lived in a time when there was no trace of the modern West and its great personalities, such as Hegel, but Suhrawardi, undoubtedly,

lowers have also had subtle discussions on this issue. In a nutshell, he believes that, in order to know God properly, these two must be brought together, through *tashbīh* of attributes and *tanzīh* of the essence, or, in another sense, through *tashbīh* of the essence and *tanzīh* of the attributes. *Tanzīh* without *tashbīh* leads to the profession of unification and inheritance, and atheism and materialism, and the negation of the essence that is purified and separated from the world, a striking example of which is Hegel's thought. Hegel is purely a *hulūlī* philosopher, and his Absolute has no aspect of *tanzīh*. His Absolute Being, as it was pointed out, is the non-conditioned being, considered the source of division, that is, the Absolute Being that has become identical not only with the existents, but also with the becoming and historical becoming itself.

²⁰ *Hegel*. Reason in History. Translated into Persian by Hamid Inayat. Tehran: Sharif Industrial University 1356 S.H. P. 11.

²¹ *Ibid*. P. 257.

²² *Ibid*. P. 243-5.

carefully examined and critically assessed the fortunes of philosophy in Greece, ancient Iran and the Islamic world up to his time and, as it is said, the outcome of his effort was that he refuted the current views of the contemporary philosophy, which were heavily influenced by Aristotle, attempting to create a new pattern of the meaning of philosophy and its historical development, and to establish another foundation for philosophy, based on the principles of divine wisdom.

One of Suhrawardi's greatest achievements was the new meaning and concept that he gave to philosophy and its historical development. Before him, in the Islamic world, Farabi and Avicenna had developed philosophy as a discourse and demonstration. Suhrawardi defined philosophy as the intuitive wisdom, that is, as illumination. According to his philosophical principles, discourse and demonstration do not represent the highest and most elevated stages of philosophy – the station of intuitive wisdom, based on unveiling, witnessing, and divine illumination, is much higher than these two. Like Plato,²³ Suhrawardi believes that the seeker of wisdom must first master the sciences of discourse and demonstration, and when he has acquired a full command of discursive philosophy, he must purify his soul and engage in ascetic practices, until divine lightnings and holy illuminations suddenly pour upon his heart. So, the true knowledge cannot be obtained except through divine illumination. The beginning of philosophy is separation from the world (or in Suhrawardi's own words, "taking off the [bodily] skin [of the soul]" (*insilākh*)); the halfway is the witnessing of the divine lights; and it is an infinite path that has no end. Again, in the *Paths and Havens* (*Al-Mashāri' wa 'l-Muṭārahāt*) he states: "The name of philosopher cannot be conferred on anyone except on the one, who has risen to the witnessing of the higher affairs, and the taste of the witnessing these affairs is present in him, and who also possesses the station of *theosis* (*ta'alluh*)."²⁴ Therefore, intuition and witnessing, rather than discourse and demonstration, are the basis and foundation of the philosophy of illumination.²⁴

The introduction of the *Philosophy of Illumination* (*Hikmat al-Ishrāq*) contains a very profound discourse on philosophy, its stages and stations, as well as on the development of philosophy in the ancient world. Suhrawardi there proclaims his philosophy of illumination to be the result and outcome of retreats and [wayfaring through] spiritual way-stations, and regards it as a portion of the Divine Light. He believes the worst time to be the time in which the path to the acquisition of true knowledge — which is this very discursive and intuitive knowledge — is closed. The worst age is the age, in which the carpet of striving (*ijtihād*) has been folded, the development of thought interrupted, the door of unveiling sealed off, and the path of witnessing closed.²⁵

²³ On the relationship between discursive philosophy (*dianoia*) and intuitive philosophy (*noesis*), see the parable of the divided line at the end of the Book 6 of Plato's *Republic* (509d–511e).

²⁴ See the introduction to the *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

In his exposition of the stations of philosophy, Suhrawardi first divides it into the discursive and intuitive one, and calls the latter *theosis* (*ta'alluh*) and its possessor the "divine sage." In other words, although discursive philosophy is treated as a part of philosophy, its recipient by no means can be regarded as a *theosophos* (divine sage). The highest stage of philosophy is that which combines discursive and intuitive thought. Its best paragons are Plato in Greece and Suhrawardi in the Islamic world. After it, comes the station of philosophy, whose possessor is perfect in intuition but mediocre in discourse; then comes the philosopher perfect in discourse but mediocre in *theosis*; and, finally, the philosopher who is perfect in discourse but ignorant of *theosis*. Beyond these, there are the stations of seekers of wisdom that rank in the same order. The basis of philosophy, however, in Suhrawardi's view, is the intuitive wisdom, the wisdom of unveiling and *theosis*. At the end of the discourse on the stations of wisdom, Suhrawardi says: "The world has never been lacking a sage who is perfect in *theosis*, and, in God's land, leadership will never be given to a philosopher who is perfect in discourse but ignorant of *theosis*."²⁶ The sage who is perfect in *theosis* is the vicegerent of God on earth. What is understood by vicegerency, is the receipt of knowledge from the Real and the inheritance of knowledge directly from God, but never domination. Such a person is the possessor of the title of God's vicegerent, even though he may be completely unknown and hidden from the eyes of people.

Suhrawardi's opinion on the origin of philosophy is diametrically opposite to those of Aristotle and Hegel. From his point of view, the East is the place of origin of the true philosophy, that is, the intuitive philosophy and the ancient wisdom. One of the peculiarities of the Eastern philosophy is that, in the Eastern lands, in Suhrawardi's opinion, philosophy has never declined from the intuitive wisdom to the discursive one. The sudden turn in philosophy from the intuitive wisdom to the discursive one took place only in the West, in particular in Greece. It changed the essence of philosophy in the Western world. The philosopher who transformed the divine intuitive philosophy into the philosophy of discourse and demonstration was none but Aristotle, usually regarded in the West as a very important philosopher. This is not incidental, and should not be easily ignored. The transformation of philosophy from intuition to discourse took place in Greece, and this happened in the lifespan of only one generation. Plato, the master of Aristotle, was both a *theosophos* and a man perfect in discourse, but his disciple, Aristotle, repudiated the intuitive Divine philosophy and downgraded philosophy to the level of the philosophy of discourse.²⁷

In Suhrawardi's view, not only is Aristotle in no way a paradigm of the perfection of philosophy in Greece – he is also the initiator of its decline and de-

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

mise. Among the philosophers who precede Aristotle, a purely discursive philosophy had never existed, but this lack is in no way a proof of its deficiency, for, in Suhrawardi's words, they possessed a station and status of "God's messengers" (*arbāb al-safāra*).²⁸ Although Aristotle had no match in discursive philosophy (which is the cause of amazement and praise among the modern philosophers), from Suhrawardi's perspective, it is a sign of the decline and deterioration of philosophy. After Aristotle, philosophy has predominantly developed in the shape of discourse and demonstration, especially in the West. It is important to pay heed to the fact that such an event took place in Greece rather than in the East. From Suhrawardi's viewpoint, the transformation of philosophy from intuitive wisdom to the discursive one may be treated as the greatest calamity that ever took place in the history of philosophy.

Suhrawardi lived in a time when era of the scholasticism had not yet begun in the West and, even if the philosopher knew it, he would perhaps say that, although the last period of medieval philosophy is known as the period of scholasticism, scholastic philosophy did not begin in the Middle Ages of the Christian era — rather, its beginnings must be sought in Greece; and he would possibly go even further to say that Aristotle is the first scholastic philosopher, as it was he who, for the first time, transformed intuitive philosophy into the discursive one.²⁹ If Suhrawardi were to live in our times, perhaps he would also say that another great calamity in the history of philosophy has happened in the modern times, that is, after the Renaissance, more precisely, with the advent of the philosophy of Descartes and modern philosophical thought. This second transformation has left no room for [divine and intuitive] wisdom and has totally transformed it into philosophy in the modern sense of the word.

If we asked Suhrawardi: "What is the difference between intuitive and discursive philosophy?", he would say in response that intuitive philosophy, in addition to emphasizing unveiling, witnessing, inner purification, retreat and ascetic practices, is based on several principles. First, intuitive philosophy is based on symbol and parable, whereas the discursive philosophy rejects symbol, and its followers dismiss its original and true meaning and, instead, interpret it in its outer and literal sense.³⁰ All the pillars of philosophy have spoken in symbols, and symbolic talk is always open to [spiritual] exegesis, and, in order to understand such talk properly, a profound exegesis is needed. The ability to understand symbols is only given to the divine philosophers, firmly rooted in wisdom.

²⁸ Ibid. § 4.

²⁹ In one of his books, Étienne Gilson says that scholastic philosophy began at the time when the philosophical concepts transformed into abstract notions, not pertaining any more to the states of existent in so far as it is existent. But, according to this view, scholastic philosophy began when intuitive philosophy transformed into the discursive one and, since the initiator of this affair was Aristotle, he must be regarded as the founder of scholastic philosophy.

³⁰ *Philosophy of Illumination*. P. 10 (§ 4).

If someone rejects the words of those talking in symbols, his rejection and denial always pertains to the outer literal meaning of the words and expressions, and never refers to their inner meaning and [hidden] purpose. In one of his well-known sayings Suhrawardi tells us that the words of the first philosophers are symbolic, and symbolic words or symbols can never be refuted (“there is no refutation for symbol”). If someone rejects or denies the words of those who talk in symbols, this only means that he has not correctly understood the intent. In Suhrawardi’s view, the words of all pre-Aristotelian philosophers were symbolic, and Aristotle, being unable to understand their words properly, rejected and denied them. Thus, in Suhrawardi’s opinion, the discarding of symbols in philosophy began with Aristotle.

Among other peculiarities, which Suhrawardi recounts for the pre-Aristotelian philosophers, is their complete agreement concerning the principle of [God’s] Oneness.³¹ Indeed, these Suhrawardi’s words must not be interpreted in the sense that Aristotle was not a monotheist, or that this issue has not been discussed by the later philosophers. What Suhrawardi emphasizes is that the first philosophers or, in Suhrawardi’s own expression, the possessors of the “wisdom that comes directly from God” (*hikmat-i laduniyya*), believed in pure oneness, and the problem of the reduction of the manyness to oneness had found its final solution in their thought. Therefore, Plato, Parmenides and Heraclitus interpret the origin of being as the [non-differentiated] One (*ahad*), making a clear distinction between [non-differentiated] oneness and [differentiated] unity, which cannot be seen in such philosophers as Aristotle. Aristotle’s God possesses a unity but not oneness. His God is an Intellect who intellects (perceives) itself, but, in the Platonists view, the Intellect is tainted with manyness.

Among other differences that exist between these two kinds of philosophy, is that those who profess intuitive philosophy, unlike those who adhere to the discursive wisdom, believe in three worlds.³² This principle has an extraordinary importance for cosmology. A sudden and unprecedented change takes place in Aristotle’s cosmological doctrine. Plato, Aristotle’s master and all of the first philosophers, in Suhrawardi’s view, believed in the existence of three worlds, and did not limit the world to its material and sensible level. These three worlds are known among religious people as “the world of Kingdom” (*‘alam-i mulk*) (or corporeal world), “the world of Dominion” (*‘alam-i malakūt*) (the angelic world of the souls) and “the world of Invincibility” (*‘alam-i jabarūt*) (the world of pure intellects or spiritual realities), and among the philosophers as “the world of the body” (*‘alam-i jism*), “the world of the soul” (*‘alam-i nafs*), and “the world of the Intellect” (*‘alam-i aql*). Plato calls them “the world of witnessing,” “the world of the mathematical likenesses (symbols)” and “the world of the spiritual intel-

³¹ Ibid. P. 11.

³² Ibid. P. 11.

ligible likenesses”; in turn, Mulla Sadra refers to these three worlds as “the sensed world,” “the world of the Isthmus of likenesses” (*‘ālam-i barzakh-i mithālī*) and “the spiritual world”.³³ Aristotle, while accepting the substantiality of the soul and the intellect, does not believe in the existence of the world of intellect, and even denies the existence of Plato’s intelligible world (*kosmos noetikos*), which contains in itself the world of mathematical symbols and that of intelligible ones, limiting the substance of the intellect and the soul (which represent two stages of existence, elevated above the sensory substance) to a few individuals of cosmic intellects and cosmic souls. In other words, Aristotle negates the world of intellect and the world of soul, and replaces them with a few individuals, related to fifty-six heavenly spheres of the universe, as well as to individual human intellects and souls. In Hegel’s cosmology and, more generally, in the mechanistic cosmology of the modern era, any other world except the sensory one is meaningless.

On the other hand, since Suhrawardi does not reduce philosophy to the philosophy of discourse and believes intuitive philosophy to be much higher than the discursive one as regards the attainment of the truth, for him, the history of philosophy and philosophy itself, embraces all the veritable sages of the history of humanity, whose names are not mentioned in the formal books on the history of philosophy, and thus the East, as well as Greece before Aristotle, become the true cradle of philosophy and the “Yemeni wisdom” (*ḥikmat-i yamānī*) and the “wisdom of faith” (*ḥikmat-i imānī*) are described as part of the true and God-inspired wisdom. Therefore, in Suhrawardi’s opinion, the great Gnostics, such as Bayazid, Hallaj, Junayd and Abu Sahl Tastari, who reached the station of divine unveiling and were conversant in the intuitive wisdom like the mythical kings of the ancient Iran, such as Kayumarth and Faridun, partook in this wisdom.³⁴

In addition, according to Suhrawardi, philosophy has a divine origin and was conveyed to the prophets by means of prophetic inspiration (*wahy*). He believes the prophet Idris, or Hermes, who taught mankind all the sciences and crafts, to be the first sage and philosopher. Philosophy then split into two parts, one of which went to the ancient Iran and the other to Egypt. The Egyptian branch of philosophy then reached Greece and, eventually, both branches were transmitted to the Islamic world.³⁵

³³ Plato. Timaeus. *Idem*. The Republic. Book 6, 509d–511e (allegory of the straight line); *Qaysari*. Muqaddima bar Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam. Chapter 5. *Idem*. Rasā’il. Edited S. J. Ashtiyāni. Tehran: Anjuman-i falsafa 1355 S.H. Risālat al-tawḥīd wa ’l-nubuwwa wa ’l-walāya. P. 14.

³⁴ *Philosophy of Illumination*. Introduction. P. 10–11.

³⁵ See: *Nasr S.H.* Three Muslim Sages. Translated into Persian by Ahmad Aram. Tehran: Kharezmi 1352 S.H. P. 71–72, and also: *Ibrahimi Dinani Gh.* Shu’ā-i andisha wa shuhūd dar falsafa-i Suhrawardi. Tehran: Ḥikmat 1364 S.H. P. 15–21.