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SUHRAWARDĪ'S REALM OF THE IMAGINAL

Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191) introduced a new “imaginal” world — a *mundus imaginalis* (a term coined by Corbin) about half a century earlier than Ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240).¹ In his *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* (The Philosophy of Illumination), Suhrawardī writes: “I myself have had trustworthy experiences indicating that there are four worlds”, helping him refute the philosophers’ thesis that there were only three.² Corbin explains that the imaginal world “possesses

¹ For a biography of Suhrawardī, cf.: *Marcotte R.D.* Suhrawardī al-Maqtūl — the Martyr of Aleppo // *al-Qanṭara: Revista de estudios árabes*, 22.2 (2001). P. 395-419; cf.: *Marcotte R.D.* Suhrawardī // *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2007). Edited by Edward N. Zalta. (Summer 2008 edition.) Available online: <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/suhrawardi>>. For a discussion of the imaginal world, cf.: *Corbin H.* Spiritual Bodies and Celestial Earth. Translated by Nancy Pearson. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977. P. 135-43; cf.: *Morris. J.W.* Divine “Imagination” and the Intermediate World: Ibn ‘Arabī on the Barzakh // *Postdata*, 15.2 (1995). P. 104-9. Available online: <http://escholarship.bc.edu/james_morris/5>.

² *Suhrawardī. Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, in: *idem.* Majmū‘ah-yi Muṣannafāt-i Shaykh-i Ishrāq. 3 vols. Vol. 2. Edition and French introduction by Henry Corbin. Tehran: Mu‘assasah-yi Muṭāli‘āt va Taḥqīqāt-i Farhangī, 1372/1993 (reprint of 2nd ed., 1976). § 247. P. 232. Lines 2-4; cf. (*Sagesse Orientale*, 149; cf. with the French translation in: *Sohrawardī. Le livre de la sagesse orientale. Kitāb Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq. Commentaires de Qoṭboddin Shīrāzī et Mollā Ṣadrā. Translation and notes by Henry Corbin, edition and introduction by Christian Jambet.* Paris: Verdier, 1986. P. 319-20 and 408-9 [hereafter, *SO*]); cf.: *Suhrawardī. The Philosophy of Illumination. A New Critical Edition of the Text of Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, with English translation, notes, commentary and introduction by John Walbridge and Hossein Ziai. Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1999 [hereafter, *PI*]. These are the world of intelligences, or *Jabarūt*, the world of souls, or *Malakūt*, and the visible world of material bodies (*ajrām*), or *Mulk*. Cf.: *Suhrawardī. I’tiqād al-Ḥukamā’*, in: *idem.* Majmū‘ah-yi Muṣannafāt-i Shaykh-i Ishrāq. Vol. 1. Edition and French introduction by Henry Corbin. Tehran: Mu‘assasah-yi Muṭāli‘āt va Taḥqīqāt-i Farhangī, 1372/1993 (reprint of 2nd ed. 1976). P. 262-72, especially § 12; P. 270. L. 1-2; cf.: *Suhrawardī. Partū Nāmāh*, in: *idem.* Majmū‘ah-yi Muṣannafāt-i Shaykh-i Ishrāq. Vol. 3. Edition and Persian introduction by Seyyed Hossein Nasr, French introduction and commentary by Henry Corbin. Tehran: Mu‘assasah-yi Muṭāli‘āt va Taḥqīqāt-i Farhangī, 1372/1993 (reprint of 2nd ed. 1977). P. 2-81, especially VIII, § 72, P. 65. L. 3-11; cf.: *Sohrawardī. The Book of Radiance. A Parallel English-Persian Text*, edited and translated with introduction by Hossein Ziai. Costa Mesa: Mazda Pub., 1998.

its own reality and its own noetic function, and the world that corresponds to it has, on its own accord, its ontological reality".³ The introduction of a truly independent imaginal world addressed particular ontological and eschatological issues raised by the existence of a number of difficultly accountable manifestations and by the posthumous fate of souls.⁴

In the *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, the world of intelligences is mentioned as the world of the dominating (*qāhirah*) lights, the world of (celestial and human) souls is identified with the world of the ruling (*mudabbirah*) lights,⁵ the world of bodies (*mulk*) is the third world, divided into two corporeal realms (*barzakhiyān*), one for the celestial spheres and one for the sublunar elements,⁶ and finally, the imaginal world which is described as a world of "luminous and tenebrous suspended forms" (*ṣuwar mu'allaqah ḡulmāniyyah wa mustanīrah*).⁷ Suhrawardī writes about this fourth imaginal world in the following manner:

"In the [fourth world of luminous and tenebrous suspended forms], the damned are tormented. The jinn and demons result from these souls and suspended images (*al-muthul al-mu'allaqah*). The estimative happiness (*al-sa'ādāt al-wahmiyyah*) is also there. These suspended images may be renewed and destroyed like the images in mirrors and the imaginative faculty (*takhayyulāt*). The managing lights of the spheres may create them to serve as the loci (*maḡāhir*) in which they are made evident in barriers (*barāzikh*)⁸ to the chosen ones. Those created

³ Corbin also adds that "it seems that Suhrawardī has been the first to systematically establish the 'regional' ontology of that intermediary universe ... this *mundus imaginalis* ('*ālam al-mithāl*) ... the *jism mithālī*, for example, the subtle body is an *imaginal* body, but not an 'imaginary' body." Cf.: Corbin H. En Islam iranien. 4 vols. 2nd edition. Paris: Gallimard, 1991. Vol. II. P. 60; cf.: *idem*. Histoire de la philosophie islamique. 2nd edition. Paris: Gallimard, 1986. P. 92.

⁴ See the commentary and the notes of Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī: *Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī. Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* [with Mullā Ṣadrā's glosses]. Edited by Asad Allāh Harawī Yazdī. Tehran: facsimile 1315/1895–7. P. 352. L. 1–13 (*SO*, 319–20) and P. 517. L. 10–9 (*SO*, 408–9); cf. and: Mullā Ṣadrā. Al-Ta'liqāt 'alā Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq. Tehran: facsimile of Harawī. PP. 348 (*SO*, 544–5) and 518 (*SO*, 654–5); cf.: Walbridge J. The Science of Mystic Lights: Quṭb al-Dīn Shirazi and the Illuminationist Tradition of Islamic Philosophy. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992. P. 148–59.

⁵ These would be attached to the celestial spheres and the human bodies, cf.: *Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī. Risālah fī Taḡhīq 'Ālam al-Mithāl* [...] (Epistle on the Reality of the World of Image). Edited and translated by John Walbridge in: *idem*. The Science of Mystic Lights. P. 200–71, especially P. 241.

⁶ The bodies of spheres and elements, cf.: *Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī. Risālah fī Taḡhīq 'Ālam al-Mithāl*. P. 241. Miṣbah Yazdī notes that the Illuminationists proved the existence of another world called "the world of immaterial figures (*ashbāḥ mujarradah*) or of suspended forms (*ṣuwar mu'allaqa*)", an intermediary world between the intellectual world and the corporeal. This was called the world of *barzakh*, or "imaginal" world ('*ālam al-mithāl*). Cf.: Yazdī M. An Introduction to Muslim Philosophy. Part 6. P. 104–5.

⁷ *Suhrawardī. Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. § 247. P. 232. L. 2–3 (*PI*. P. 149); cf.: *ibid.* § 259. P. 242. L. 10 — P. 243. L. 8 (*PI*. P. 155).

⁸ Variant reading of Walbridge and Ziai, "in barriers", is omitted in Corbin's edition.

by the managing lights (*al-mudabbirāt*) are luminous and are accompanied by a spiritual munificence (*ariyaḥiyyah rūḥāniyyah*). The fact that these images (*muthul*) have been witnessed and cannot be attributed to the common sense indicates that being opposite [of the perceived object] is not an absolute condition of beholding; vision alone is dependent on it because being opposite is one sort of removal of veils.

The above-mentioned world we call ‘the world of incorporeal figures (*al-ashbāḥ al-mujarradah*)’. The resurrection of images (*amthāl*),⁹ the lordly figures (*al-ashbāḥ al-rubbāniyyah*), and all the promises of prophecies (*nubuwwah*) find their reality through it. Certain intermediate souls possess illuminated suspended figures (*al-ashbāḥ al-mu‘allaqah al-mustanīrah*) whose loci are the spheres (*aflāk*). These are the numberless angels in their classes — rank upon rank in accordance with the levels of the spheres. But the sanctified godly sages may rise higher than the world of the angels.”¹⁰

The fourth imaginal world, a substance made of figures (*ashbāḥ*), forms and images thus operates like an intermediary realm, or an “isthmus”, between the world of pure light and the physical world of darkness. It lies somewhere between the physical world and the world of the species and of Platonic Forms (the horizontal lights). It may perhaps lie at the lower threshold of the world of souls. There, entities somehow possess an existence of their own, with some prior to their coming into existence in the world. Images found in the imaginal world are not embedded in matter. The imaginal world is best viewed as a plane of “ghosts, of the forms in mirrors, dreams, and worlds of wonder beyond our own” which light can existiate.¹¹ The imaginal world provides the material for the miraculous and the “metahistorical” (another term coined by Corbin) visions of Imams. It is where eschatological forms and images will perhaps be existiated for the souls of the deceased, so that they may continue to perfect their souls, as well as where elements not fitting conveniently into the Peripatetic hylomorphism (Aristotle) scheme are found. Suhrawardī did not, however, systematically develop the concept of the imaginal world, something his followers sought to address.

In his *Risālah fī Taḥqīq ‘Ālam al-Mithāl* (Epistle on the Reality of the World of Image), an expansion of discussions already broached in his commentary on Suhrawardī’s *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī (d. 710/1311), for example, tries to work out some of the philosophical implications of a fourth world of images.¹² He locates this world between the worlds of bodies and of souls,

⁹ Corbin’s and Quṭb al-Dīn’s texts read “of bodies”, rather than images.

¹⁰ *Suhrawardī. Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. § 247. P. 232. L. 2 — P. 234. L. 3 (*PI*. P. 149–50) and § 248. P. 234. L. 4 — P. 235. L. 3 (*PI*. P. 150).

¹¹ *Walbridge J. The Leaven of the Ancients: Suhrawardī and the Heritage of the Greeks*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000. P. 26.

¹² *Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī. Risālah fī Taḥqīq ‘Ālam al-Mithāl*. P. 206–9; cf.: *ibid.* P. 209–11; cf.: *ibid.* P. 154–59.

somehow more immaterial than the former and less than the latter. At times, the imaginal world is coextensive with our world (as when we see its manifestations in miracles). At other times, the souls of the dead are manifested in one of the spheres of the planets, such that “the World of Image seems to be wrapped around our world, with its ground being our heaven”.¹³ Šadr al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, better known as Mullā Šadrā (d. 1050/1640), admits the existence of an immaterial world, but disagrees with Suhrawardī regarding the nature of imaginal forms, which “are present in the soul, as soon as the soul, using imagination, produces imaginal forms. Those [forms] are not in a world outside the soul by the effect of something other than the soul”.¹⁴ In his *al-'Arshiyyah* (Wisdom of the Throne), Mullā Šadrā, however, defines the imaginal power of the soul as “a substance whose being is actually and essentially separate from this sensible body”.¹⁵

In what follows, we would like to explore some elements of Suhrawardī's fourth imaginal world to help us better understand the “suspended” forms (*šuwār mu'allaqah*) he associates with the imaginal world, the location of the imaginal world in the cosmological understanding of the time, and the eschatological role he attributes to the suspended forms and the imaginal world.

The Suspended Forms

The luminous and tenebrous suspended forms Suhrawardī associates with the imaginal world appear to possess, at least, two different statuses. First, imaginal forms can be equated with the traditional Peripatetic forms that are grasped by individual human souls, as products of their faculty of imagination. This faculty also seems to play an important role in the philosophical explanation of the manifestations of the divine that can occur in the few chosen ones, like the Prophets. The ruling celestial (*mudabbirah falakiyyah*) lights, or the celestial souls, can, for instance, create imaginal suspended images (*muthul mu'allaqah*) in those chosen individuals in order that these manifestations may become accessible to them, resembling what happens in mirrors or in the imaginative faculties (*takhayyulāt*).¹⁶ The luminous and tenebrous imaginal or suspended forms also provide the means by which the miserable souls experience pain and the souls of those who have achieved a certain degree of perfection experience imaginative

¹³ Walbridge. *The Science of Mystic Lights*. P. 150.

¹⁴ Zarean M.J. *Sensory and Imaginal Perception according to Šadr al-Dīn Shīrāzī* (Mullā Šadrā): An Unpublished MA Thesis. Montreal: McGill University, 1994. P. 79–80.

¹⁵ Mullā Šadrā *al-Shīrāzī*. *al-'Arshiyyah*. Edited by G. Ahanī. Isfahan, 1341/1961. P. 248. For an English translation, see: Morris J.W. *The Wisdom of the Throne: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Mulla Sadra*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981. P. 89–258.

¹⁶ Suhrawardī. *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. § 247. P. 232. L. 5. — P. 233. L. 1 (*PI*. P. 149–50). Cf.: *ibid.* § 246. P. 231. L. 1–2 (*PI*. P. 149).

happiness (*sa'ādāt wahmiyyah*) in the afterlife.¹⁷ While resurrection would, on the whole, be but spiritual, Suhrawardī can now envision it partaking in some sort of corporeality, even if merely imaginative. These forms, therefore, play an eschatological role, permitting the fulfillment of the promises of prophecy, as well as the imaginative resurrection of bodies.¹⁸

Suhrawardī attributes a second, more metaphysical status to the suspended forms (*ṣuwar mu'allaqah*), or what he sometimes calls suspended bodily forms (*ṣayāṣī mu'allaqah*). These forms are distinct from the mental forms or representations that abstraction generates and are part of what Suhrawardī calls the “world of immaterial figures” (*‘ālam al-ashbāh al-mujarradah*).¹⁹ These are not the Platonic forms or self-subsisting Ideas, as he indicates in a number of passages of the *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*.²⁰ Some of the suspended forms, Suhrawardī informs us, are “tenebrous (*ḡulmāniyyah*) and others are luminous (*mustanīrah*)”.²¹ The perception, by the human soul, of the various degrees of luminescence of those forms in the afterlife becomes the measure of the soul’s promised rewards or punishments. Hence, the souls of those who have reached a certain level of purification (*su'adā*), whether it be intellectual or spiritual, can perceive luminous forms, while those whose souls have remained miserable (*ashqiyā*) can only perceive tenebrous forms.²²

The capacity of souls to perceive those forms varies: the more the soul has progressed in its detachment from everything bodily and material and has ascended to the luminous (the intellective), the more it is able to receive those forms, whose most perfect manifestation is equated with utmost luminosity. Their reception equally depends on the extent of the soul’s moral character which assists souls in the development and the acquisition of a receptive capacity that will allow certain human beings to perceive, in this world, suprasensible realities, as well as determine the eschatological fate of their souls.²³

¹⁷ *Suhrawardī*. *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. § 247. P. 232. L. 3–5 (*PI*. P. 150). For a comparison of Avicennan and Suhrawardian eschatology, cf.: *Marcotte R.D.* Resurrection (*ma'ād*) in the Persian *Ḥayāt al-Nufūs* of Ismā'īl Muhammad Ibn Rīzī (fl. ca. 679/1280): The Avicennan Background // *McGinnis J.*, with the assistance of *D. Reisman* (eds.). *Interpreting Avicenna: Science and Philosophy in Medieval Islam*; Proceedings of the Second Annual Avicenna Study Group. Leiden: Brill, 2004. P. 213–35, especially P. 215–9.

¹⁸ *Suhrawardī*. *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. § 248. P. 234. L. 4–5 (*PI*, 150) (demonstration which Mulla Ṣadrā will view as unsuccessful); cf.: *Corbin*. *Histoire*. PP. 297–8, 261, 475.

¹⁹ *Suhrawardī*. *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. § 248. P. 234. L. 4–5 (*PI*. P. 150).

²⁰ *Suhrawardī*. *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. § 94. P. 92. L. 6. — P. 93. L. 6 (*PI*. P. 65–6); cf.: *ibid.* §§ 165–71. P. 155. L. 3. — P. 165. L. 1 (*PI*. P. 107–11); cf.: *ibid.* §§ 172–3. P. 109. L. 5. — P. 110. L. 13 (*PI*. P. 111–2).

²¹ *Suhrawardī*. *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. § 246. P. 230. L. 10. — P. 231. L. 1 (*PI*. P. 149).

²² *Suhrawardī*. *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. § 246. P. 231. L. 1–2 (*PI*. P. 149). Mulla Ṣadrā notes that Suhrawardī understands the forms that are promised in the other world in a number of ways: as forms attached to a celestial body, forms attached to some material place of manifestation, or forms as pure intelligibles. Cf.: *Mulla Ṣadrā*. *Ta'liqāt*. P. 913 (*SO*. P. 652).

²³ *Suhrawardī*. *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. § 244–5. P. 229. L. 10. — P. 230. L. 9 (*PI*. P. 148–9).

Moreover, suspended forms can also inhere and be manifested in this world. In the *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, Suhrawardī notes: "Since these suspended forms (*ṣayāṣī mu'allaqah*) are not in the mirrors or in something else and do not possess a substratum, therefore, it is possible that they may have a place of manifestation in this world. Perhaps, they can even move from their [different] places of manifestation".²⁴ He believes that "amongst these [forms] are a variety of djinns and demons (*shayāṭīn*)".²⁵ The latter are produced by suspended forms and souls (most probably, after death).²⁶ These forms may sometimes be out of human reach, while at other times, they are felt as corporeal entities with which one may struggle (for example, jinns and demons). The latter manifestations and experiences help establish that these forms are not mere mental representations that occur in the faculty of *common sense* (*ḥiss mushtarak*),²⁷ but that their reality is corroborated by their physical and worldly manifestations. By appealing to the existence of this fourth world, Suhrawardī is thus able to account for a number of this worldly manifestations like jinns and demons.²⁸

More generally, however, the locus of these suspended forms remains the human soul. This is because these forms, which may be imaginative representations of hidden realities (*mughayyabāt*), require the existence of some sort of corporeal, albeit subtle locus in order to be existentially instantiated as particular forms. Suhrawardī is quite categorical that the suspended images (*muthul mu'allaqah*) that are "seen" in dreams are "all self subsisting images" (*kullu-hā muthul qā'imah*).²⁹ These are "true" visions witnessed not only during sleep, but also while awake. In this particular context, the imaginal forms, as suspended forms, acquire a certain type of independent existence. Their real essence lies somehow outside the human mind or the human soul whose faculties only act as the receptacle: the soul becomes the "locus (*mazhar*) of the suspended forms".³⁰

But how does one experience those suspended forms? According to Avicenna, imaginative and intellective forms are grasped as a result of the rational soul's process of abstraction. Suhrawardī, however, emphasizes the soul's passivity and capacity for receiving those (imaginal) suspended forms without resorting, at least in the initial stage of perception, to abstraction, although those forms are, nonetheless, integrated into, and made a part of the process of representation (itself within a more general process of intellection). The perception of suspended forms (not intelligible forms) occurs through the perception of particulars. These are perceived either through the "presence" (*ḥuḍūr*) of particulars

²⁴ *Suhrawardī*. *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. § 246. P. 231. L. 2–4 (*PI*. P. 149).

²⁵ *Suhrawardī*. *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. § 246. P. 231. L. 4 (*PI*. P. 149).

²⁶ *Suhrawardī*. *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. § 247. P. 232. L. 1–9 (*PI*. P. 149–50).

²⁷ *Suhrawardī*. *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. § 246. P. 231. L. 8. — P. 232. L. 1 (*PI*. P. 149).

²⁸ *Suhrawardī*. *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. § 248. P. 234. L. 4–5 (*PI*. P. 150).

²⁹ *Suhrawardī*. *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. § 240. L. 8–10 (*PI*. P. 147).

³⁰ *Suhrawardī*. *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. § 260. P. 244. L. 5 (*PI*. P. 155).

to the soul or through the “presence” of particulars to a matter or an entity which is present (*hādir*) to the soul, such as the imaginative forms (*ṣuwar khayāliyyah*).³¹ Although Suhrawardī here departs from the traditional Avicennan position by postulating the existence of suspended forms, he explains that their perception is analogous to the perception of imaginal forms: both are integrated into representation. Their perception, however, is no longer the product of a process of imprinting or of abstraction. Rather, perception now results from the “presence” to the soul of forms, which exist at a loftier metaphysical level.

The Survival of the Imaginative Faculty

Suhrawardī appears to introduce his fourth, imaginal, world, in part, to account for the posthumous retribution promised to souls by the religious tradition. In the realm of the imaginal world, souls are able to experience their imagined posthumous felicity or damnation.³² Since retribution is often described in sensitive terms, some of the internal faculties responsible for representation, such as the imaginative faculty, would need to survive in the afterlife. Suhrawardī writes that the function of the faculty of imagination permits some souls, for example, those of the innocent or the simple-minded, to attain an imaginative happiness.³³ In a similar fashion, it would also account for the imaginative nature of misery experienced by some of the miserable souls. Suhrawardī envisions human souls being able to attach themselves to a subtle body that would guarantee the proper posthumous functioning of their imaginative faculty and allow the soul to make use of an imaginative faculty and experience imaginal sensibilia.

This is not as far-fetched an extrapolation, from what is found in Avicenna’s Peripatetic eschatology, as it may sound. Avicenna alluded to the possibility, for some individual souls, to imagine or to witness (*tushāhid*) imaginative forms (*ṣuwar khayāliyyah*) in the afterlife with the help of the celestial bodies, the latter serving as their (bodily) instruments (*ālah*).³⁴ The theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-

³¹ *Suhrawardī*. al-Mashāri‘ wa al-Muṭārahāt // *idem*. Majmū‘ah-yi Muṣannafāt-i Shaykh-i Ishrāq. Vol. 1. P. 194–506, especially § 210. P. 487. L. 15–16.

³² Suhrawardī “envisions an entire, objective existing ‘other world,’ a world of ‘images’ (*muthul*) and ‘disembodied spectres’ (*ashbāh mujarrada*), where certain souls receive their ‘imagined *eudaemonia*’ in the hereafter” (*Davidson H.A.* Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes on Intellect. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992. P. 175, n. 225; cf.: *Fazlur Rahman*. Dream, Imagination and ‘Ālam al-Mithāl. *Islamic Studies* 3 (1964): 167–180, especially P. 168–71).

³³ *Suhrawardī*. *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. § 247. P. 232. L. 2. — P. 234. L. 3 (*PI*. P. 149–50).

³⁴ *Avicenna*. al-Shifā’: al-Ilāhiyyāt (1–2). Eds. Georges C. Anawati, Sa’id Zayd et al., revised and introduction by Ibrāhīm Madkūr ([reprint [?]] of Cairo: al-Hay’ah al-‘Āmmah li-Shu’ūn al-Maṭābi‘ al-Amīriyyah, 1380/1960. 2 vols]; Iran [?]: n.p., n.d.). Ch. IX. § 7. P. 431. L.17. — P. 432. L. 8; cf.: *idem*. *The Metaphysics of the Healing. A parallel English-Arabic Text*, translated, introduced and annotated by Michael E. Marmura. Provo: Brigham Young University, 2004.

Rāzī (d. 606/1209), a contemporary of Suhrawardī, did not reject the possibility of the survival of the imaginative faculty after the death of the body and its separation from corporeality, as divine retribution would depend on its survival (or part of it).

Like Avicenna and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī before him, Suhrawardī concedes that the posthumous survival of the faculty of imagination requires some sort of bodily locus, whether in this world or in the afterlife. In the *Talwīḥāt*, he explores at least two possible solutions to explain the existence of a bodily locus that would allow the soul's imaginative faculty to continue to function in the afterlife. One solution would consist in positing a pneumatic body in the air, as a kind of compounded body of vapor and smoke, which could act as a locus for the products of the active imagination. Suhrawardī rejects, however, this solution as being devoid of foundation, since what is found in the air cannot maintain a state of equilibrium, as it becomes hotter or colder according to its proximity to, or distance from sources of heat and cold.³⁵

Suhrawardī views more positively another solution proposed by scholars (left unidentified) that consists in positing the existence of a celestial body (*kawn jirm samāwī*) that would serve as a substratum (*mawḍū'*) for the products of the imaginative faculty. This allows the souls of the intermediary group and those of the ascetics "who have attained [a relative] happiness, [to] perceive by means of their faculty of active imagination wondrous and pleasant images and forms with which they experience pleasure".³⁶ These imaginal forms possess a quality and an intensity they did not have in this world, qualities that are associated with the celestial realm, since perception within that realm is nobler than perception, in this realm, of worldly bodies. Hence, the forms, like the celestial body itself, would not suffer corruption.³⁷ It is still not, however, the real happiness experienced by those who are able to access the realm of pure intelligence and the superior happiness of those who are in the proximity of God (*muqarrabūn*).

The possibility of an attachment of some part of the human soul with a celestial body in the afterlife raises a number of issues: What type of correspondence should exist between the number of souls and the celestial body? How could there be more than one soul attached to a single celestial body, while each celestial body is ruled over by its own celestial soul? To the latter issue, Suhrawardī offers the following solution. While there is a celestial body that serves as the

³⁵ *Suhrawardī*. al-Talwīḥāt al-Lawḥiyyah al-'Arshīyyah // *idem*. Majmū'ah-yi Muṣannafāt-i Shaykh-i Ishrāq. Vol. 1. P. 20–121, especially § 61, P. 89. L. 8–15. Interestingly enough, these are objections that echo Avicenna's objections against Thābit Ibn Qurrā and the Galenic notion of *pneuma*.

³⁶ *Suhrawardī*. al-Talwīḥāt. § 61. P. 89. L. 15. — P. 90. L. 1–2.

³⁷ *Suhrawardī*. al-Talwīḥāt. § 61. P. 90. L. 3–5; cf.: *idem*. Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq. § 244. P. 230. L. 2–5 (*PI*. P. 148–9); cf.: *ibid.* § 141. P. 132. L. 6–10 (*PI*. P. 94); cf.: *Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī*. Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq. P. 509 (*SO*. P. 403, n. 2 and n. 3).

substratum for every faculty of imagination (*takhayyul*), “it is not far-fetched that there should be, for many souls, a single body in which each one of them would contemplate (*yushāhid*) the forms”.³⁸ Suhrawardī may have followed here Avicenna’s speculation found in his commentary on the pseudo-*Theology* of Aristotle where he wrote: “If what we think about our souls is true, that is, that they have an attachment with the celestial souls such that they would be, for example, like mirrors for them — a single mirror that would be common to many that look at it — then it is possible that [...]”.³⁹ In his commentary, Avicenna alludes to the possibility for many souls to be associated with a single celestial body (*jirm*). This seems to be precisely the position Suhrawardī adopts. He acknowledges that human souls do not possess the ability to move that particular celestial body, as celestial bodies are moved by their own individual and celestial souls, which impart on them their will. Hence, no possibility exists for human souls to influence other souls, each having their own will.⁴⁰

The Sphere of Zamharir

But how does Suhrawardī conceive of such a celestial body and where might it be located within the traditional Peripatetic cosmological system? In one passage, he mentions what he terms a “barrier” (*barzakh*), what appears to correspond to the particular receptive celestial sphere he has in mind:

“As for the miserable souls (*ashqiyā*), they do not have a relation with these noble bodies⁴¹ which possess luminous (*nūrāniyyah*) souls, and the faculty [of representation] makes them require a bodily imagination (*takhayyul jirmī*). *It is not impossible that below the Sphere (falak) of the Moon and above the Sphere (kurrah) of Fire, there exists a spherical body which would not be pierced through [and] which would be of the species of its soul (huwa naw‘ nafsi-hi). It would be a body (barzakh) [located] between the ethereal (athīrī) and elemental (‘unṣurī) worlds, becoming a substratum (mawḏū‘) for the products of their imaginative faculty. [Miserable souls] would imagine, by means of [this body], their bad deeds as images (muthul) of fire and snakes.*”⁴²

³⁸ *Suhrawardī*. al-Talwīḥāt. § 61. P. 90. L. 9–10; cf.: Michot J. La destinée de l’homme selon Avicenne: Le retour à Dieu (*ma‘ād*) et l’imagination. Lovanii: Aedibus Peeters, 1986. P. 186, n. 144.

³⁹ *Avicenna*. Tafsīr Kitāb Uthūlūjiyā // ‘*Abd al-Rahmān al-Badawī* (ed.), Aristū ‘inda al-‘Arab. 2nd edition [Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍah al-Miṣriyyah, 1947]. Kuwait: Wakālat al-Maḥbū‘āt, 1978. P. 37–74, especially P. 72. L. 7–8; cf.: *Vajda G.* Les notes d’Avicenne sur la «Théologie d’Aristote» // *Revue Thomiste*, 51 (1951). P. 346–406, especially Ch. VIII. § 4. P. 404.

⁴⁰ *Suhrawardī*. al-Talwīḥāt. § 61. P. 90. L. 10–11.

⁴¹ The celestial bodies.

⁴² *Suhrawardī*. al-Talwīḥāt. § 61. P. 90. L. 15–19; cf.: *idem*. Hayākil al-Nūr. Edition, introduction and commentary by Muḥammad ‘Alī Abū Rayyān. Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Tijārī al-Kubrā, 1957. Ch. V. P. 78. L. 3–5 (Arabic); cf.: *Suhrawardī*. Hayākil-i Nūr // *idem*. Majmū‘ah-yi Muṣannafāt-i Shaykh-i Ishrāq. Vol. 3. P. 84–108, especially § 32. P. 104. L. 4–5

With the help of this barrier, or celestial body, or sphere,⁴³ miserable souls would, therefore, be able to perceive imaginatively the pains and the torments they have been promised in the Qur'ān, like the burning of scorpions or the pains experienced by drinking from the Zaqqūm.⁴⁴ In this passage and the one introduced earlier (both from the *Talwīḥāt*), Suhrawardī does not identify this particular sphere whose existence he postulates.

In *Rūzī bā Jamā'at-i Sūfiyān* (A Day with a Group of Sufis), however, Suhrawardī describes a hierarchical cosmological scheme that now includes a new sphere whose role may serve to account for a numerical correspondence between the existing two higher spheres, the Sphere of Spheres and the Sphere of the Fixed Stars, that lie above the last of the seven spheres (planets) and what lies below them.⁴⁵ To the question, "Why is the body of the Sun bigger and brighter than the other stars?", the Sufi master replies, "Because it is in the middle ... If you count the seven planets, the Sun is in the middle. And just as there are two spheres above the seven, there are two other spheres below them, Ether and Zamharīr", both associated with the world of elements and situated below the sphere of the Moon.⁴⁶

The term Zamharīr is Qur'ānic (Q 76:13). The term was also used in the meteorology of the Ikhwān al-Safā', who divided the air of the sublunar region into three layers: first, the higher layer of Ether (*athīr*), heated by contact with the lunar circle; second, the middle layer of Zamharīr, extremely cold; and finally, the lower layer of Nasīm, the moderate temperature.⁴⁷ For Avicenna, Zamharīr does not constitute a sphere per se, but only one of the layers of the elements that are loci of extreme coldness.⁴⁸ For Suhrawardī, the sphere of Zamharīr, and in some passages along with Ether, would now serve as bodily substratum for the

(Persian) cf.: *Sohravardi*. L'Archange empourpré. Quinze traits et récits mystiques. Translation from Persian and Arabic by Henry Corbin. Paris: Fayard, 1976. P. 370–1 [hereafter, *AE*] (P. 60); see translation found in: *Kuspinar B*. Ismā'īl Ankaravī on the Illuminative Philosophy. Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1996. P. 53–250, especially P. 192.

⁴³ In various passages, Suhrawardī uses all three terms.

⁴⁴ The infernal tree with exceedingly bitter fruits, mentioned in the Qur'ān. Cf.: *Suhrawardī*. al-Talwīḥāt. § 61. P. 90. L. 19. — P. 91. L. 1.

⁴⁵ Under Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, and Mercury. Cf.: *Suhrawardī*. *Rūzī bā Jamā'at-i Sūfiyān* // *idem*. Majmū'ah-yi Mušannafāt-i Shaykh-i Ishrāq. Vol. 3. P. 242–250, especially § 4. P. 244. L. 10. — P. 245. L. 3 (*AE*. P 370–1)) and: *ibid*. § 6. P. 245. L. 18. — P. 247. L. 11 (*AE*. P. 373); and: *Thackston W.M.* (trans.). *The Mystical and Visionary Treatises of Shihabuddin Yahya Suhrawardi*. London: Octagon Press, 1982. P. 45–6 [hereafter, *MV*]; cf.: *Suhrawardī*. *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. § 150. P. 138. L. 9. — P. 139. L. 1 (*PI*. P. 99).

⁴⁶ *Suhrawardī*. *Rūzī bā Jamā'at-i Sūfiyān*. § 5. P. 245. L. 5–7 (*AE*. P. 371; *MV*. P. 46).

⁴⁷ *Nasr S.H.* *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964. P. 85–6 [based on: *Ikhwān al-Safā'*. *Rasā'il*. 4 vols. Cairo: 'Arabiyyah Press 1928. Vol. 2. PP. 57–9, 66, 67–9, 70–3].

⁴⁸ *Avicenna*. *al-Najāt min al-Gharq fī Baḥr al-Ḍalālāt*. Edition and introduction by Muḥammad Dānish-Pazhūh. Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tihirān, 1364/1985. Ṭab'īyyāt. Ch. 5. P. 305. L. 15. — P. 307. L. 12.

images and forms available to posthumous souls, although it too is “connected to the elemental world”.⁴⁹

Suhrawardī does not specify if he limits the existence of suspended forms only to the particular sphere of Zamharīr or Zamharīr and Ether (a second sphere) as would seem to be implied in the passage from the *Rūzī bā Jamā‘at-i Sūfiyān*. One might argue that Suhrawardī envisioned different roles for these two spheres that could be associated with the various fates of souls, for example, Ether for the (relatively) happy and Zamharīr for the miserable souls who do not enjoy any relation with the higher noble spheres, as the latter is situated closer to sublunar matter.⁵⁰ This would be consistent with the hierarchy of celestial bodies he establishes according to their respective nobility (*sharaf*) and could thus make it possible for souls to attach to different celestial bodies, in accordance with the level of their spiritual developments (not only Zamharīr and Ether).⁵¹ Suhrawardī remains, however, inconsistent when he discusses the ethereal realm. At times, he makes Ether and Zamharīr independent spheres, located below the Sphere of the Moon, or, as in the passage above, both being connected to the elemental world. At other times, he distinguishes between the different types of separated (*mufāraqah*), ethereal (*athīrīyyah*), and elemental (*‘unṣuriyyah*) entities,⁵² noting that, just like the intellective substance is nobler than the soul,⁵³ the ethereal entities (*athīrīyyāt*) are nobler than the elemental entities (but without specifying their number).⁵⁴ In light of these few indications, Suhrawardī may be including Zamharīr among the elementals, but viewing it now as an independent celestial body or sphere capable of being the locus for the suspended forms (at times, alongside Ether).

The Realm of the Imaginal

Suhrawardī may be attempting to identify a specific realm — one or even two spheres — with whose assistance sensitive perceptions occur in the form of imaginal representations, the soul being able to imagine the forms and images of pleasant or unpleasant things.⁵⁵ While this remains in line with Peripatetic specu-

⁴⁹ *Suhrawardī*. *Rūzī bā Jamā‘at-i Sūfiyān*. § 6. P. 245. L. 18. — P. 247. L. 11 (*AE*. P. 373).

⁵⁰ *Suhrawardī*. *al-Talwīḥāt*. § 61. P. 91. L. 1–4; cf.: *Michot*. *La destinée de l’homme selon Avicenne*. P. 200, n. 36.

⁵¹ He also considers plausible some of the indications found in the Qur’ān that allude to such degrees, for example, that Paradise is located in the fourth Heaven or that it is the width of the heavens and the earth. Cf.: *Q*. 57:21.

⁵² *Suhrawardī*. *al-Mashāri‘*. § 169. P. 433. L. 14–15. In Avicenna, the different elements occupy different levels (*tabaqāt*) (higher and lower) and are not defined as spheres. Cf.: *Avicenna*. *al-Najāt*. *Ṭabī‘īyyāt*. Ch. 5. P. 305. L. 15. — P. 307. L. 12.

⁵³ *Suhrawardī*. *al-Mashāri‘*. § 134. P. 389. L. 9–10.

⁵⁴ He notes that this is mentioned in Aristotle’s *On the Heavens* (*al-Samā‘*), cf.: *Suhrawardī*. *al-Mashāri‘*. § 170. P. 435. L. 11–12.

⁵⁵ *Suhrawardī*. *al-Talwīḥāt*. § 61. P. 90. L. 1–2.

lations, from at least the time of Avicenna onwards, as we have briefly noted, one would be tempted to conclude that here lies the realm of the independent imaginal world that Suhrawardī proposes.

Suhrawardī, however, alludes to the fact that celestial spheres possess faculties, similar to those of the human body, that are associated with suspended forms. While celestial spheres do not become the substratum of these forms (which do not inhere in a body), Suhrawardī does note that: “Those who have attained an intermediate bliss and the ascetics whose worship is pure may escape to the world of the suspended images, whose locus (*mazhar*) is some of the celestial barriers (*ba‘d al-barāzikh al-‘ulwiyyah*)”.⁵⁶ Suhrawardī appears to allude to the existence of more than one celestial barrier, or sphere, which would act as loci for the perception of suspended forms. These celestial barriers or spheres could well be the elemental spheres of Zamharīr and Ether, but nothing would preclude them to be associated with all of the celestial spheres. This could help account for the fact that different degrees of luminosity can be associated with suspended forms, some being loftier than others.⁵⁷ Celestial spheres would become the (subtle) material substance that posthumous souls would require for the actualization of imaginative forms, in a way that is not dissimilar to the psychic *pneuma* that serves as the (subtle) material locus for the internal faculties.⁵⁸ The various celestial spheres may perhaps constitute different modalities of the imaginal world. Suhrawardī does not, however, provide any clear indication that this could not be the case.

The Avicennan Peripatetic tradition, with the importance it attributed to the faculty of imagination, set the conditions for a theory of imaginal perception in the afterlife that provided necessary elements for the later introduction, by Suhrawardī, of an independent imaginal world of suspended forms. The existence of such an imaginal world builds on allusions and speculations already present in the latter philosophical tradition with which Suhrawardī's work dialectically engages. With Suhrawardī, the imaginal world of suspended forms now serves a variety of functions: soteriologically, it guarantees the future salvation of souls; cosmologically, it may be one (or two) independent sphere or barrier (perhaps even all luminous celestial bodies) that can nicely fit into traditional Peripatetic cosmology; epistemologically, it guarantees the possibility of posthumous perceptions and prophetic knowledge; and ontologically, it can provide an explanation for the existence of such things as the jinn and demons, for it is in this imaginal world that immaterial figures occur. Here seems to lie one of the many original contributions of Suhrawardī.

⁵⁶ *Suhrawardī*. *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. § 244. P. 230. L. 1 (*PI*. P. 148); cf.: in the “lofty citadels”, that is, the celestial bodies (*al-barāzikh al-‘ulwiyyah*) — *ibid.* § 252. P. 237. L. 5–6 (*PI*. P. 152).

⁵⁷ *Suhrawardī*. *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. § 259. P. 243. L. 5–8 (*PI*. P. 148).

⁵⁸ *Suhrawardī*. *al-Mashāri‘*. § 210. P. 487. L. 19. — P. 488. L. 1; cf.: *ibid.* § 210. P. 488. L. 10–11.