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**HOW AVICENNIAN
WAS SUHRAWARDI'S THEORY
OF KNOWLEDGE?¹**

In what follows, I will argue that, despite apparent differences and adherence to two different schools of thought, Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi essentially offer the same theories of knowledge. It will be argued that Ibn Sina's Peripatetic orientation and Suhrawardi's *ishraqi* perspective have both maintained and adhered to the same epistemological framework while the philosophical languages, in which their respective epistemologies are discussed, are different. Of particular interest in our investigation is to show that both masters have adhered to a hierarchy of knowledge which is as follows:

1. Knowledge by definition;
2. Knowledge by sense perception;
3. Knowledge through *a priori* concepts;
4. Knowledge by presence;
5. Knowledge through direct experience: mysticism.

To begin with, the question of epistemology is inevitably intertwined with the ontological scheme upon which a philosophical school is built. In this regard, both Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi follow the same ontological structure although the "fabrics" of their ontologies are different, for Ibn Sina it is Being and for Suhrawardi it is light. It is this similarity, which allows us to engage ourselves in a comparative study of their respective views on the question of knowledge.

Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi both adhere to a hierarchical ontology whose various levels are emanations from One source. For Ibn Sina, this source is the *wājib al-wujūd* whom he equates with pure Being and for Suhrawardi it is pure light whom he refers to as the Light of Lights. Since it is only the Absolute Truth (God), which knows Itself absolutely, it then follows that the knowledge by all other beings of the Absolute is relative. While the relativity of knowledge in an act of cognition with regard to the knowledge of God is self-evident, how it is

¹ This is a revised version of the article, which was first published in the *Philosophy, East & West*, April, 53:2 (2003), P. 203–214.

that the knower comes to know the object of its cognition is complex and subject to debate.

Both masters begin by discussing the place and significance of empiricism and rationalism in acquiring knowledge. Since particulars are known only through the senses, it can be concluded that knowledge on its most basic and concrete level is that which is acquired through the sense perception. Ontologically speaking, as we move away from Ibn Sina's pure Being and Suhrawardi's Light of Lights, abstraction and purity decreases and the hierarchy solidifies until it loses its purity completely and that is the material domain where particulars are. Therefore, since particulars represent the knowables on the lowest level, the means by which particulars are known, i.e. sense perception, are of the least significance insofar as epistemology is concerned.

1. Knowledge by definition

Sense perception is the basis for knowledge by definition, a method elaborated upon by both philosophers and criticized severely by Suhrawardi who realized the limited scope of it in providing us with knowledge. According to Peripatetics, an existent being consists of an essence and existence and all attributes are merely accidental. In a chapter entitled "Destruction of the Rules of Definition",² in his *Hikmat al-ishrāq*, Suhrawardi criticizes the Peripatetics for the distinction they made between "general essence" (*jins*) and "differentiae" (*faṣl*). Also, in *al-Muṭārahāt*³ and *al-Talwīhāt*⁴ he offers his criticism of knowledge by definition as an inadequate means of cognition and argues that a good definition is one that is not only inclusive of the essence but also includes the attributes, which Suhrawardi regards to be "other constituent elements."⁵

This radical departure from the Aristotelian approach implies that, since all the constituent elements or attributes of an existent being cannot be known, the object in question can therefore never be defined properly. In three sections of the *al-Talwīhāt*, "Essential Nature," "Description," and the "Fallacies in the Construction and Use of Definition",⁶ Suhrawardi discusses the shortcomings of knowledge through definition. Also, in the *al-Muṭārahāt*⁷ Suhrawardi maintains that Ibn Sina is mistaken in attributing a major epistemic role to definition, since simple entities (*ḥaqā'iq basīṭah*), such as colors, do not lend themselves to definition. Suhrawardi's treatment of the problem of definition is not limited to his

² *Sohrwardi. Opera Metaphysica et Mystica*. 3 vols. Eds. H. Corbin and S.H. Nasr. 3rd edition. Tehran: Institut d'Etudes et des Recherches Culturelles, 1993. Vol. 2. P. 20.

³ *Ibid.* Vol. 1. P. 17.

⁴ *Ibid.* Vol. 1. P. 199.

⁵ *Ibid.* Vol. 1. P. 14.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

Arabic works — in some of his Persian works, such as *Partaw-nāmah*⁸ and *Hayākil al-nūr*,⁹ he continues to stress that an acceptable definition is one in which the genus, species and differentia, as well as all other existing attributes, are included and not only the essence, as Aristotle and his followers have indicated. In his major work *Hikmat al-ishrāq*, Suhrawardi sums up his criticism of the Peripatetics' theory of definition and states:

“He who mentions a number of essentials cannot be certain that there may be not another essential which he has ignored. The commentator and critic should inquire (of his certainty), and if he says that were there another essential, we would have known it, (we should say) there are many attributes that are unknown to us... The truth of things is known only when all of the essentials are known, and if there be another essential that we are unaware of, then knowledge of that thing is not certain. Thus, it becomes clear that the limits and the definitions (*hadd*), as the Peripatetics have accepted, will never become possible for man. The master of the Peripatetics (Aristotle) has confessed to this existing difficulty. Therefore, the limit and definition cannot exist except in regard to those items whose collective body is an indication of particularity.”¹⁰

2. Knowledge by sense perception

Both Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi react to Aristotle's notion of sense perception but it is interesting to see how their approach differs. Ibn Sina's critique reduces empiricism to rationalism by showing that sense perception necessitates *a priori* concepts in order to be functional. Before analyzing Ibn Sina's critique of sense perception, let us see what the “First Teacher” has to say about this. Aristotle states:

“Out of sense-perception develops what we call memory, and out of frequently repeated memories of the same thing comes experience. For multiple memories make up a single experience. From experience, in turn — i.e. from the universal, now stabilized in its fullness within the soul, the one standing over and against the many, as a single identity running through them all — arise the skill of the craftsman and the knowledge of the scientist — skill in the realm of what comes to be; and knowledge in the realm of what is. In short, these states of knowledge are neither in us in their determinate form, nor derived from a priori, higher states of knowledge. Rather, they emerge from sense perception — as in a battle a rout is stopped if one man makes a stand, and then another, until the company is regrouped. And the soul is so constituted as to be capable of this.”¹¹

⁸ Ibid. Vol. 3. P. 2.

⁹ Ibid. Vol. 3. P. 85.

¹⁰ Ibid. Vol. 2. P. 21.

¹¹ Aristotle. Posterior Analytics. II. 19. 100a 4–14.

Relying on the above argument, Ibn Sina directs his criticism at the assumptions that sense perception makes, that is, if repeated instances of observation give rise to a conclusion, there must be more primitive and fundamental concepts, which allow observation and inference from sense perception to be made. Empiricism therefore, for Ibn Sina, is of a lower order since it has to rely upon rationalism. On this, Ibn Sina states:

“These are the assumptions which are warranted neither by reason alone nor by senses alone but which can be known by the two working together. Thus, when the senses always find the same behavior in a given thing, or see the same state always having the same outcome, reason can recognize that this is by no means the result of chance. Otherwise, the same pattern would not be repeated, and the observed pattern would not be the commonest. Examples are the burning of fire and the purging of bile by scammony.”¹²

Suhrawardi’s approach, though different than Ibn Sina’s, bears some similarity to it. In the *Hikmāt al-ishrāq*, he elaborates on the inadequacy of sense perception in a chapter entitled “On the Evidence that Peripatetic Principles Necessitate that Nothing Can Be Known or Defined.”¹³ Having offered a number of arguments, Suhrawardi concludes with the following: “The simple truths, such as colors, can only be known by sense perception, these truths neither lend themselves to analysis nor description.” It is from this conclusion that Suhrawardi draws his second inference against the Peripatetics’ concept of definition that is, knowledge of these simple truths are private, exclusive and non-verifiable by outsiders.

3. Knowledge through *a priori* concepts

Suhrawardi, having demonstrated the inadequacies of knowledge by sense perception, then offers an argument which brings him and Ibn Sina closer together. In fact, both philosophers seem to realize the need for a pre-cognitive ability which is based on *a priori* concepts and which serves as the fundamental epistemic ground. One of the many arguments Ibn Sina offers in this regard is his ontological argument for the existence of God. He maintains that, since God is incorporeal, it cannot be known by the senses and therefore either God cannot be known or it can be known though some other way. He then argues that, since we know God, it follows that empiricism fails and rationalism or mysticism may be other available alternatives. Ironically, as we will see, rationalism and mysticism are unified in what Ibn Sina calls “Oriental philosophy” (*al-ḥikma al-mashriqīyah*) and Suhrawardi calls “experiential wisdom” (*al-ḥikma al-dhawqīyah*). Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi, who seem to agree with regard to the above, proceed to

¹² *Ibn Sīnā*. Dānīsh-nāma-yi ‘Alā’ī. Ed. M. Mishkāt and M. Mu‘īn. Tehran: Tehran Univ. Press, 1353. A.H.s. P. 111.

¹³ *Sohrawardi*. Opera. Vol. 2. P. 73.

maintain that, if sense data are synthesized by the mind and the construction of new conceptual and intellectual schemes is made possible in the mind, there have to be more basic and primitive concepts which constitute the mind and are not made by it. L.E. Goodman argues¹⁴ that Ibn Sina offers two lines of arguments against empiricism and for rationalism. The first is similar to Hume's criticism of induction and the second one is concerned with the location of concepts in our anatomy. Induction, Ibn Sina argues, is merely universalization of finite experiences which does not lead to universally true conclusions, nor does it imply necessity.¹⁵ Regarding a physical location for rational knowledge, Ibn Sina states that it can not be in the body since it is a single simple truth and indivisible. Therefore, it can not have a physical location and be material, for that would make it divisible. On this Ibn Sina states:

“One thing of which there is no doubting is that a man has something in him, some substance responsive and receptive to conceptual ideas, and we argue that the substance which is the seat of these ideas is not a body and does not depend for its existence on a body, even though in a certain sense it is a power in a body, or a form to a body. For, if the locus of our concepts were a body, or any sort of extended thing, such ideas would have to be located either in a single, indivisible part of it, or in some divisible part. But the only thing that is indivisible in a body is a point ... and a point is a final limit of a line, or of an extended body in a particular location; it can not be separated from that line or body, allowing something else to exist in it, as opposed to existing in that body...

So suppose now that conceptual ideas were located in some divisible body. It would follow that they would be divided when that body was divided, and their parts would be either homogeneous or heterogeneous. If homogeneous, how could they be conjoined to form something different from themselves, for the whole as such is not the same as its parts, unless it is the sort of whole that is augmented by mere addition to its measure or its number, not by a specific form. If a concept could be formed in this quantitative way, it would be some figure or number. But not every idea is a mere shape or number. That would make concepts nothing more than images and not conceptual at all. Concepts, in fact, as you know, can not be treated as formed of homogeneous parts. How could they be, when one part of a concept implies another, and is in turn implied by a third... Obviously ... the part of a concept can not be heterogeneous unless it is as the parts of a definition: genus and differentia... And since every portion of a body in principle is infinitely divisible, genera and differentia would have to be so as well, if ideas were materially embodied... But it is well established that genera

¹⁴ Goodman L.E. *Avicenna*. London: Routledge, 1992. P. 136. Also, for Ibn Sina's rational intuition, see: Gutas D. *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*. Leiden: Brill, 1988. P. 19, n. 15; 49 n. 22; 50 n. 1; 55–6; 62; 159–76, and: Davidson H.A. *Alfarabi, Avicenna and Averroes on Intellect*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1992. P. 95–103.

¹⁵ *Ibn Sīnā. Al-Shifā'*: Burhān. Ed. A. 'Afifi. Cairo, 1956. P. 93–98, 222–224.

and differentia, the components of the definition of a single thing, do not go on forever but are finite in every sense – and, if they were not, they certainly could never be gathered up in a single body!”¹⁶

Suhrawardi also addresses the subject of knowledge through innate ideas in his *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*¹⁷ by showing the place and significance of rationalism among four different modes of cognition. He argues that in order to know something one has to know it at least partially, otherwise a thing that is completely unknown can never be known. If partial knowledge of an object or subject is required prior to its knowing, then it follows that that which is known must have come to be known through prior knowledge of the known and so on. This process, which can go on *ad infinitum*, Suhrawardi maintains, is impossible and, therefore, the only explanation is that there are innate ideas, which provide the required pre-knowledge of that which one seeks. As Suhrawardi states:

“Human knowledge is either innate (*fiṭriyyah*) or it is not. Whenever in recognizing an unknown, if focusing one’s attention [i.e. sense perception] and referring to one’s heart is not sufficient, and if it is not an affair that can be known through the vision (*mushāhadah*), which is a characteristic of the great *ḥakims*, then necessarily in knowing we need pre-given knowledge ... and the process, if carried out in certain order, will lead to the innate ideas.”¹⁸

Having briefly discussed Ibn Sina’s and Suhrawardi’s theories of knowledge by sense perception, definition and rationalism, we can now summarize them as follows: both philosophers recognize the epistemological significance of sense perception and its by-product, knowledge by definition, as well as innate ideas. Furthermore, these two modes of cognition are interdependent, each one relying on the other one. As Suhrawardi says:

“All definitions inevitably lead to those *a priori* concepts which themselves are in no need of being defined; if this were not the case there would result an infinite succession.”¹⁹

To further emphasize the limited role and place of empiricism and rationalism, Suhrawardi states:

“As we observe the sensible world through which we gain certainty of their states of affairs, we then base a thorough and precise science on this basis (mathematics, astronomy). By analogy, we observe certain things in the spiritual domain and then use them as a foundation upon which other things can be based. He whose path and method is other than this will not benefit from this and soon will be plunged into doubt.”²⁰

¹⁶ *Ibn Sina*. *Al-Shifa: De Anima*. Vol. 2. Ed. and trans. F. Rahman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952.

¹⁷ *Sohrawardi*. *Opera*. Vol. 2. P. 18.

¹⁸ *Sohrawardi*. *Opera*. Vol. 2. P. 104.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

²⁰ *Ibid*. P. 13.

4. Knowledge by presence

Now that we have established how knowledge of the external world is determined, let us go further and investigate how knowledge of one's self is attained, a knowledge that is regarded by Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi to be the necessary condition for the attainment of any knowledge. The theory that addresses this epistemological concept is referred to as "knowledge by presence", a perspective which both Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi elaborate upon.

Traditionally, the theory of knowledge by presence is identified with Suhrawardi and is regarded to be his major contribution to Islamic philosophy. However, I am inclined to say that the theory of knowledge by presence in its early forms is found in Ibn Sina's philosophy. Ibn Sina's concept of knowledge by presence, as will be shown, is not as refined as Suhrawardi's, who makes it the centerpiece of his epistemology.

Ibn Sina distinguishes between two cognitive (self-consciousness) processes with regard to the knowledge of the self. The first one he calls *al-shu'ūr bi'l-dhāt* (consciousness in itself) and the second one *al-shu'ūr bi'l-shu'ūr* (consciousness through consciousness).²¹ One's self-consciousness, Ibn Sina argues, is a continuous stream whose beginning and end are unknown. "Our self-consciousness occurs in an unqualified sense," Ibn Sina states and goes so far as to say that "my self-consciousness is my very existence."²² This is a major claim since it implies the following:

- A. Self-consciousness is that which constitutes the identity of a person.
- B. To be conscious of oneself is "to be".

Ibn Sina then turns to the underlying epistemological questions by asking how it is that one is conscious of himself at all times and all places? Furthermore, by what means does this self-consciousness is the consciousness of itself, an argument which is remarkably similar to Suhrawardi's on the distinction between self-consciousness and consciousness through consciousness. Ibn Sina tells us, the fact that I perceive myself as myself is not verifiable either by outsiders or by myself. How do I know that I am who I think I am? In order for me to recognize myself, I have to have known myself prior to the act of recognition. Even if I am to recognize myself through the accidental attributes of the self, i.e. the body, etc., I have to know that it is this self which matches this body and this knowledge has to be present to the self at all times.

The knowledge of myself, therefore, has to be of a primary nature, an *a priori* concept which knows itself through itself directly and without mediation and it is in this sense of knowing that *al-shu'ūr bi'l-shu'ūr* is arrived at. Ibn Sina maintains that, had this not been the case, we would have had to assume that the self knows itself through something else, i.e. A, but A through which the self is

²¹ *Ibn Sīnā*. *Al-Ta'liqāt*. Ed. A. Badawi. Cairo, 1973. P. 160–161.

²² *Ibid.* P. 79.

known can only be known through **B** and this process can continue *ad infinitum*.²³ F. Shayegan in her analysis of Ibn Sina's argument states:

“One can conclude that ‘self-consciousness’ is the pre-judgment state of grasping of existence and ‘consciousness through consciousness’ is the judgment of cognition of existence.”²⁴

Whereas clearly the theory of knowledge by presence exists in its early form in Ibn Sina, whereby the self is conscious of itself through itself, it is Suhrawardi who brings this theory to its fruition and treats it extensively. Suhrawardi offers three arguments for knowledge by presence²⁵ which in a sense are elaborations and elucidations on Ibn Sina, who equates the consciousness of one's self with the reality of one's self.

Suhrawardi's first argument, which can be labeled as I/It distinction, is as follows: if my knowledge of myself is not direct and unmediated, i.e. my knowledge of my headache, then I have come to know myself through something other than myself, i.e. X. Since clearly X is not I but a representation of the I, it then follows that I have come to know my I through what is not my I and this is a contradiction. As Suhrawardi states:

“A thing that exists in itself (*al-qā'im bi 'l-dhāt*) and is conscious of itself does not know itself through a representation (*al-mithāl*) of itself appearing in itself. This is because if, in knowing one's self, one were to make a representation of oneself, since this representation of his ‘I-ness’ (*anā'iyyah*) could never be the reality of that ‘I-ness’, it would be then so that representation is ‘it’ in relation to the ‘I-ness’, and not ‘I’. Therefore, the thing apprehended is the representation. It thus follows that the representational apprehension of ‘I-ness’ would be exactly what is the apprehension of ‘it-ness’ (*huwa*), and that the apprehension of the reality of ‘I-ness’ would be exactly the apprehension of what is not ‘I-ness’. This is an absurdity. On the other hand, this absurdity does not follow in the case of apprehension of external objects, for the representation and that to which that representation belongs are both ‘it's’.”²⁶

Suhrawardi's second argument relies on the necessity of the existence of a precognitive knowledge of the self if the self is to be known at all. If the self is not known directly then it must have been known indirectly, i.e. through X. This, however, implies that when I “see” X, I realize that this is the representative of the self, a clear indication that I must have already known myself — otherwise

²³ *Shayegan F.* Avicenna on Time. Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1986. P. 24.

²⁴ *Ibid.* P. 24.

²⁵ For an extensive discussion of Suhrawardi's theory of knowledge by presence see the following works: *Ha'iri Yazdi M.* The Principle of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy: Knowledge by Presence. New York: SUNY Press, 1993. P. 43–114; *Amin Razavi M.* Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination. London: Curzon 1997. P. 102–117; *Dinani Gh.* *Shu'ā'-i andīsha wa shuhūd dar falsafā-yi Suhrawardī.* Tehran: Hikmat, 1364.

²⁶ *Sohrawardi.* Opera. Vol. 2. P. 111.

I would not recognize its representation. If one is seeking that which is completely unknown to him, then one will not recognize it even if one comes upon it. From this it follows that the self is either completely or partially known to itself. On this Suhrawardi states:

“Indeed, that which is unknown to you, if it becomes known, then how do you know that it is what you sought? For, inevitably either [your] ignorance remains, or [your] prior knowledge of it existed, so that it could be known as such [...] For, that which is sought, if it is unknown from all aspects, it could never be known.”²⁷

Suhrawardi argues that if the self knows itself through its representation A, then the question can be raised as to how the self knows that A represents the self? If this knowledge is not direct then it should be through some other representation of A, such as B. But the same problem arises with regard to B which can be said to have known itself through C and this process can go on *ad infinitum*, which Suhrawardi considers to be impossible. Therefore, from his second argument, he concludes that the correct mode of knowledge is one by which the self comes to know itself through its mere presence.

Suhrawardi's third and final argument for knowledge through self-awareness or knowledge by presence is from attributes.

“Indeed, the thing which necessarily exists and which is self perceived does not know itself from a representation of itself, in itself. If it knows [itself] through its representation, and the representation of I-ness is not itself, then in regard to it [I-ness], it is the one perceived and it is the representation at that time. The perception of I-ness must be, by itself, the perception of that which it, itself, is, and must be the perception of itself, by itself, just like the perception of other than itself, — and that is impossible — in contrast to the external representation, and that which it has of it are both of it. Moreover, if it is through a representation, it, itself, did not know it was a representation, and thus then it knew itself through representation. And how was it? It imagines that it knows the very thing by that which is attributed to itself from outside. It is an attribute of it. If it is judged according to every super-added attribute to itself, then it is a knowledge of other than itself. It already knew itself before all attributes and the like. It did not know itself through attributes which are super-added.”²⁸

In this argument, which is a modified version of the previous two arguments, Suhrawardi once again establishes the impossibility for the I to know itself through its representation. If the self comes to know itself through its representation, then it ought to have known itself — otherwise, how did the self know that it is this representation which matches this self? Furthermore, knowing oneself through one's representation would lead to a succession of contingent dependent representations that continues *ad infinitum*.

²⁷ Ibid. P. 110.

²⁸ Ibid. P. 111.

5. Knowledge through direct experience: mysticism

A direct result of knowledge by presence is that it paves the path for mysticism to be taken seriously by both masters.²⁹ For Ibn Sina, who devotes the fourth chapter of his *al-Ishārāt wa 'l-tanbīhāt* to Sufism and *'irfān* (he uses these terms interchangeably), mystical knowledge is not only a possibility but a necessary consequence of asceticism. Ibn Sina distinguishes between an ascetic, a worshiper and the knower, and states:

“The name ‘ascetic’ is reserved for one who shuns the delights and goods of this world. The name ‘worshiper’ is reserved for one who persists in exercising worship by prostration, fasting and what resembles them. The name ‘knower’ is reserved for one who disposes one’s thought toward the sanctity of divine power, seeking the perpetual illumination of the light of the truth into one’s innermost thought.”³⁰

Ibn Sina disregards asceticism and piety through worship alone as “a kind of business deal”³¹ and considers the context within which asceticism and worship take place to be the determining factors in the final outcome of these activities. If asceticism and worship are performed on utilitarian grounds, then they are inconsistent with what he calls “the proper objective of the knower”. This objective, Ibn Sina states, is one which only the true seeker may pursue. He says: “The knower seeks the First Truth not by anything other than *Itself* and prefers nothing to the knowledge and worship of *It* alone.”³²

Ibn Sina, in a clear and radical departure from the principles of the Peripatetic philosophy, advocates two stages for the attainment of truth through direct experience. The first is the stage of willingness (*al-irādah*) or, as some Sufis have called it, *himmah*, to be followed by the second stage, spiritual exercises. The latter consists both of asceticism and such traditional Sufi practices as the invocation of divine names (*dhikr*), prayer, etc. Ibn Sina then in a detailed manner explains the stations and states of the spiritual path and alludes to various types of knowledge that are attained through asceticism and other spiritual exercises. Some of those that Ibn Sina discloses are traditionally considered to be too esoteric to reveal to the uninitiated. In his “On the Stations of the Knowers”, he puts the number of stations and the states of the path as twenty seven.³³ In a chapter entitled “On the Secrets of Signs”,³⁴ Ibn Sina offers a prescription for the spiritual illnesses of the soul, which range from abstinence from food to the observa-

²⁹ For more information on Ibn Sina’s view on mysticism see: *Inati Sh.C. Ibn Sina on Mysticism*. London: Kegan Paul, 1996. P. 81.

³⁰ Quoted from: *Inati*. *Ibn Sina on Mysticism*. P. 81.

³¹ *Ibid.* P. 82.

³² *Ibid.* P. 83.

³³ *Ibid.* P. 81–91.

³⁴ See: *ibid.* P. 92.

tion of various spiritual substances. For those who doubt the presence of a mystical dimension or "Oriental Philosophy" in Ibn Sina's thought,³⁵ "On the Stations of the Knowers" leaves no doubt regarding the presence of a mystical component in Ibn Sina's philosophy.

The attainment of knowledge for Suhrawardi too, as we have discussed, is hierarchical with the direct and unmediated mode of cognition being the most desirable one. Suhrawardi in his numerous Persian Sufi narratives³⁶ has discussed the spiritual path at great length and in detail, stating:

"Know that the 'I' (*nafs nāṭiqah*) is of a divine substance, which the powers and engagements of the body withdrew from its abode. Whenever the soul is strengthened through spiritual virtues and the body is weakened through fasting and not sleeping, the soul is released and unites with the spiritual world."³⁷

Suhrawardi, whose choice of titles for his mystical narratives is based on traditional Sufi themes, in a highly metaphorical language reveals his esoteric epistemology. This epistemological doctrine, which is discussed throughout Suhrawardi's Persian writings, resembles to a great degree Ibn Sina's esoteric views, as it can be seen in the following passage in the *Bustān al-qulūb*:

"Know that there are two tendencies in your 'I', just as there are in the body. One tendency is toward the spiritual world, from which it attains knowledge and benefits, and that is called scientific and theoretical knowledge. The other tendency aims at the corporeal world, from where it attains perfection and that they call practical knowledge."³⁸

Like Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi distinguishes between practical and theoretical knowledge, each of which pertains to a different domain. The knowledge of the incorporeals for Suhrawardi is only possible if one is engaged in austere forms of asceticism, in particular hunger, as Suhrawardi says: "Know that the foundation of asceticism is hunger."³⁹ The spiritual and intellectual prescriptions of both Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi coincide, both acknowledging that asceticism leads to the opening of the intellectual intuition, the highest form of knowledge possible for mankind. Suhrawardi in an explicit language offers the following instructions:

"I asked the Shaykh, 'I do not have that insight. What is the solution?' The Shaykh said, 'You have indigestion. Fast for forty days and then drink laxative, so that you may vomit and your eyes may open.' I asked, 'What is the prescription for that laxative?' He said, 'The ingredients of that are attained by you.'

³⁵ For more information, see: *Gutas D. Ibn Tufayl on Ibn Sina's Eastern Philosophy // Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 120 (2000).

³⁶ See: *Sohrwardi. Opera. Vol. 3*, and the introduction of S.H. Nasr to Suhrawardi's Sufi narratives. Also see: *Kazem Tehrani. Mystical Symbolism in Four Treatises of Suhrawardi. Ph.D. diss., Columbia Univ., 1974.*

³⁷ *Sohrwardi. Opera. Vol. 3. P. 107.*

³⁸ *Ibid. P. 373.*

³⁹ *Ibid. P. 396.*

I said, ‘What are the ingredients?’ He said, ‘Whatever is dear to you, of wealth, property, possessions, and the pleasures of the body and such things, are ingredients of this laxative. For forty days, eat pure but little food... If you must use the bathroom soon, then the medicine has been effective, your sight will be illuminated, and if the need arises, fast for another forty days and use the same laxative, so that it may work this time. If it does not work, apply it time and time again, until it works...’

I asked the Shaykh, ‘Once the inner eye is opened, what does the seer see?’ The Shaykh said, ‘Once the inner eye is opened, the external eyes and lips should be shut and the five external senses should be silenced. The inner senses should begin to function so that if the patient grasps, he may do so through the inner hand and if he sees, he sees with the inner eye and if he hears, he hears with the inner ear and if he smells, he smells with the inner sense... [then] he sees what he sees and when he sees.’⁴⁰

Concerning mysticism, both Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi follow the same path and even predict that the same set of ascetic practices may lead to the same result. Their respective views on mysticism are neither conjecture nor relying on a single passage, as Gutas states, “on the basis of a single paragraph in Ibn Sina’s prologue to the *Shifā*’, Ibn Tufayl has created the following fiction... ‘the truth, however, is something else and it is contained in Ibn Sina’s other book’.”⁴¹ The fact is that mysticism, both in its philosophical and practical sense, is a component of the philosophical edifice of Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi, and the type of knowledge that is attained through mysticism is regarded by both philosophers to be the purest form of knowledge — one, which is clear, distinct, unmediated and direct. The knowledge attained through mysticism for Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi is not only informative but transformative as well, a quality which both philosophers allude to in a very specific and clear language, leaving no doubt that mysticism is an inseparable and integral part of the philosophical schools of Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi.

⁴⁰ Ibid. P. 248.

⁴¹ Gutas D. Ibn Tufayl on Ibn Sina’s Eastern Philosophy. P. 231.