SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY


S.H.N.

CHAPTER 29
The Illuminationist tradition
Hossein Ziai

Orientalists and historians of Arabic and Persian philosophy have, for the most part, ignored much of the scholarship on the systematic side of post-Avicennan Islamic philosophy. The Illuminationist tradition, founded by Subhrawardi in the sixth/twelfth century, represents the principal advancement in Islamic philosophy immediately following Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā). However, the period from Avicenna’s death in 429/1037 to the death of Averroes (Ibn Rushd) in 595/1198 encompasses three distinct types of philosophical attitude and style manifest in Arabic and, to a lesser extent, Persian texts. Each of these “schools”, or traditions of philosophical thought, tends to be associated with the person considered to be its founder or another scholar who epitomizes that philosophical attitude. The three traditions are as follows.

Firstly, the Peripatetic school. Though known throughout the early period of Islamic philosophy to follow the texts and teachings of Aristotle, after the fifth/eleventh century the Peripatetic school is usually associated with Avicenna and his followers. This tradition is characterized by the structure, technical terminology and philosophical approach of the Aristotelian texts as put forth in Avicenna’s major compositions such as Healing (“Shifāʾ”). The study of logic, for example, is divided according to the books of Aristotle’s Organon; physics in accordance with the books, chapters, and subject matter of his Physics; and similarly in metaphysics. The Peripatetic school of Islamic philosophy continues in the philosophical writings of Avicenna’s pupils, such as Bahmanyār and Abu’l-Abbās al-Lawkari; in numerous Arabic and Persian commentaries and glosses on Avicenna’s two major works, the Shifāʾ and the Ishārāt; and in monographs on specific issues relating to Peripatetic views and problems. Philosophical problems of this school that stand as cornerstones of Islamic Peripatetic philosophy are, in brief: the ontological position of primary of being, the epistemological priority given to acquired
knowledge, the Necessary Being’s knowledge of the universals rather than particulars, and the eschatological position of the soul’s immortality.

Secondly, the Averroist tradition. Although Averroës was the foremost commentator of Aristotelian texts, he has in fact had little or no impact on post-Avicennan philosophical thinking in Islam. The impact of his Arabic Aristotelianism is primarily confined to the Latin West. Almost every aspect of Averroës’s philosophical thought from logic to political philosophy has been examined in detail. Most of his works, some of which have survived only in Hebrew or Latin versions as abridgements or translations, have also been edited.

Thirdly, the Illuminationist tradition. To understand how philosophy has developed in the Islamic world, especially in Iran, it is of singular importance to examine Suhrawardi’s Illuminationist tradition of the sixth/twelfth century and its aftermath. This area of Islamic philosophy, which has long been overlooked the West, has had the most significant, widespread impact not only on Islamic philosophical thought per se but also in other areas of thought and creative activity, including speculative mysticism (‘irfan) and poetry.

It should be noted that these three schools and traditions continue well after the sixth/twelfth century, and that the Peripatetic and the Illuminationist traditions were revived in the tenth/sixteenth century when the philosophical writings and teachings of many thinkers gave rise to yet another so-called new synthesis in Islamic philosophy known as the School of Isfahan.

This chapter will examine the tradition of Illuminationist philosophy after Suhrawardi, and will discuss selected details of its two dominant trends, focusing primarily on the seventh/thirteenth century. Thinkers of other periods considered to have been Illuminationists or to have favoured Illuminationist philosophical positions in their writings will also be mentioned.

The Philosophy of Illumination grew out of reactions to certain aspects of Islamic philosophical texts, most of them associated with the Avicennan corpus. While Avicenna may have seriously intended to compose a separate and distinct “Eastern” philosophy – which he mentions briefly in his work Logic of the Easterners (“Mantiq al-mashriqiyyin”) – nowhere does he systematically develop and construct a philosophical system distinct from his monumental and predominantly Aristotelian composition, Healing. All of his works reflect a standard Peripatetic structure, terminology and philosophical intention.

A number of thinkers prior to Suhrawardi did compose works that incorporated different, sometimes anti-Aristotelian principles, however. Foremost among them is the philosopher ʿAbd Allāh Abūl-Barakāt al-Baghdādī. In his major anti-Aristotelian philosophic encyclopedia of the sixth/twelfth century, Evidential (“al-Muṭābār”), al-Baghdādī develops an alternate structure for a foundation of philosophy, especially of epistemology. As shown by Solomon Pines in his many detailed studies, al-Baghdādī also treats certain problems of physics from a distinctly non-Aristotelian perspective. Al-Baghdādī’s intent was not to reject Avicennan philosophy, nor to prove its incoherence, as Ghazzālī’s polemics would suggest, but to improve the existing structure and rectify the perceived logical and metaphysical inconsistencies of the previous texts. The Evidential is the first evidence of a non-Aristotelian trend in Islamic philosophy which was later systematized by Suhrawardi in his Illuminationist reconstruction of philosophy. Al-Baghdādī’s three-part text – consisting of logic, physics, metaphysics – differs from Avicenna’s Healing in both structure and method. Both al-Baghdādī and Suhrawardi base their constructivist philosophical ideas on the same foundation – that of a primary intuition of a knowing subject whose immediate grasp of the totality of existence, time and space, and of the whole as a self-constituted, inherently manifest and knowable object, determines both being and knowledge.

The fact that Abūl-Barakāt al-Baghdādī is among the few philosophers Suhrawardi actually mentions in his works in reference to specific philosophical problems is indicative of the impact of the Evidential on Illuminationist philosophy. Also, Suhrawardi upholds al-Baghdādī’s Platonist position. Concerning the significant question of the foundation of philosophy, both Suhrawardi and al-Baghdādī take an intuitionist stance, requiring that primary intuition must constitute the “first step” in philosophical construction. The structure of the Evidential is also reflected in Suhrawardi’s philosophical works. It is evident, therefore, that al-Baghdādī should be regarded as an important preliminary source for many of Suhrawardi’s non-Peripatetic arguments.

Finally, the anti-philosophical works of the famous theologian Abū Hamid al-Ghazzālī – especially his Incoherence of the Philosophers (“Tahāfut al-falāsīf”) – were known to Suhrawardi. Some of the terms used by al-Ghazzālī, specifically in his Mishkāt al-anwār, are terms that were later modified and employed by Suhrawardi in his Philosophy of Illumination. However, al-Ghazzālī’s polemic intention must be distinguished from Suhrawardi’s philosophical one. In spite of some similarities in terminology, Illuminationist philosophy should not be understood as resulting from theological polemics, which is basically anti-philosophical in intent. The purpose of Illuminationist thought, on the contrary, is a fundamentally philosophical one: to demonstrate logical gaps in the Peripatetic system and then to reconstruct a more consistent and holistic philosophical structure by solidifying its foundations, methods and arguments. The theologian’s aim, however, is not to construct a better philosophical system but to refute the very basis of philosophy. In support of this distinction, none of the major commentators of Illuminationist philosophy ever
mentions al-Ghazzālī’s works as immediate sources for Illuminationist methodology or formal techniques, though they were obviously aware of the widespread appeal of such texts by al-Ghazzālī, such as Miskāt al-
anzār, Tabātabīt al-falāsiṣfah and Maqāṣid al-falāsiṣfah.

Along with the Peripatetic school, the Illuminationist tradition is the only other systematic school of Islamic philosophy that has continued to be studied as a complete system of thought up to the present day. The epithet “Illuminationist” (ishrāqi) is still used, especially in Iran, to characterize the method and philosophical views of individual thinkers. As described in the previous chapter, Suhrwardī’s Illuminationist philosophy fundamentally departs from Islamic Peripatetic philosophy in respect to the logical foundations of its epistemology and its reconstructed metaphysical system. Illuminationist philosophy continues immediately after Suhrwardī, primarily in the form of several major commentators on Illuminationist texts composed in the seventh/thirteenth century, though it is not confined to these.

**COMMENTATORS ON SUHRWARDĪ’S PHILOSOPHY OF ILLUMINATION**

Of the main figures in the tradition of Illuminationist philosophy, some were designated Illuminationist; others were not yet clearly influenced by Suhrwardī’s thought. The earliest thinkers known for their Illuminationist position are the following seventh/thirteenth-century scholars, all of whom wrote commentaries on Suhrwardī’s texts and also composed independent philosophical treatises that include specific Illuminationist positions: Shams al-Dīn Muhammad al-Shahrāzūrí² and Sa’d ibn Maṣūm ibn Kammūnāh³ (both of whom are called “Illuminationist”) and Qurban al-Dīn al-Shirāzī.⁴ Other commentaries on Suhrwardī’s texts were composed later, the most important of these being the tenth/sixteenth-century works of Jalāl al-Dīn al-Dawānī⁵ and the eleventh/seventeenth-century writings of Muhammad Sharīf Niẓām al-Dīn al-Harawi.⁶ The principal commentators and their works are as follows.

Shams al-Dīn Muhammad Shahrāzūrī, al-Ishrāqī, i.e. “the Illuminationist” (d. after 688/1288) is the author of the well-known history of philosophy Nuzhat al-arwāh wa rawdat al-afrāh, as well as the author of the first major commentary on Suhrwardī’s Philosophy of Illumination and his Intimations. Among all the commentators Shahrāzūrī is the most faithful to the original conception and philosophical constructivist methodology of Suhrwardī’s Illuminationist philosophy. His independent philosophical composition, al-Shajarah al-lāhiyyah, will be examined below to show the Illuminationist concepts, method and structure of this work.

Sa’d ibn Maṣūm ibn Kammūnāh (d. 683/1284) created a major commentary, al-Tahnībat, that has earned the status of a textbook among Illuminationist philosophers in Iran. Perhaps the most significant impact of Illuminationist philosophy may be seen in Ibn Kammūnāh’s philosophical work al-Jadid fi l-bikmah (literally, “The New Philosophy”, or Novum Organum). I have detected a serious attempt in this book to elucidate further certain anti-Aristotelian philosophical principles that originate with Illuminationist philosophy. The salient features of his Commentary on al-Tahnībat will be briefly outlined here.

Qurban al-Dīn Shirāzī (d. 710/1311) is the author of the best-known commentary on Illuminationist philosophy, as well as the voluminous, encyclopedic Durrat al-tajj. However, on careful scrutiny, Shirāzī’s work indicates major borrowings from Shahrāzūrī’s text that have previously gone unnoticed. Shirāzī is a better-known figure in Islamic philosophy than Shahrāzūrī, simply because he is one of the first post-Suhrawardīan philosophers in Iran successfully to synthesize Avicennan philosophy and Suhrwardī’s Illuminationist philosophy with Ibn ‘Arabī’s “gnosis” of wujud al-wujud in a coherent and accessible independent Persian composition. Durrat al-tajj marks the beginning of philosophical compositions in which Avicennan methodology and metaphysics are harmonized with Illuminationist theories of vision and illumination (epistemology and psychology), and where the accepted Illuminationist doctrine of the fourth ontological realm, the mundus imaginalis, is fully integrated into the reconstructed cosmological system. This work is also the first Persian philosophical text that accepts Suhrwardī’s psychological doctrine of knowledge by and of the self-conscious separate “I” – generalized as “I-is-thou-ness” (manī, ta’ī, ʿīḍ) – as the primary principle in epistemology as well as an alternative proof of prophecy. The only other epistemology that concerns the self in this way is the Peripatetic theory of the holy intellect and its conjunction with the Active Intellect. Shirāzī’s work also discusses resurrection and metempsychosis (tanāsukh) within the author’s Illuminationist interpretation of gnosis (‘īrfān). In my view this new grouping of ideas in Islamic philosophy was only the popular side of the theory, however, and is indicative of a trend that culminates with Mullā Ṣadrā in the eleventh/seventeenth century. The more genuinely philosophical and theoretical Illuminationist legacy continued through less widely known texts, such as the works of Ibn Kammūnāh, which are discussed in detail later in this chapter.

The most recent of the medieval commentaries on Suhrwardī’s texts was composed by Muhammad Sharīf Niẓām al-Dīn al-Harawi, author of the most significant Persian commentary and translation of the Philosophy of Illumination. Harawi’s work, composed in 1008/1600, includes a translation and commentary of Suhrwardī’s “Introduction” and the majority of part two (al-qism al-thāni) of Philosophy of
Illumination. One of the important characteristics of Harawi’s commentary is his attempt to compare Illuminist principles with the Advaita system of Indian philosophy.

Anwārīyyah is the only Persian translation and commentary on Suhrawardi’s *Philosophy of Illumination* known to have survived, though others have been composed and may be found through further research in manuscript collections. Its author was probably an Indian Chishti Sufi who also composed an independent Illuminationist work in Persian titled *Siraj al-hikmah.* Anwārīyyah consists of a Persian translation and commentary of selected sections of the second part of Suhrawardi’s Arabic text, which is on metaphysics, cosmology and the Illuminationist accounts of visionary experience. The work is typical of the first trend in post-Suhrawardian Illuminationist interpretation (by Shahrazûrî), and is also indicative of the period’s general lack of interest in logic and philosophical methodology. It emphasizes the fantastic side of Illuminationist philosophy and draws heavily on Qutb al-Dîn’s earlier commentary but adds a great many examples drawn from popular mystical sources, especially from *Mathnawi* by Jalâl al-Dîn Rûmî (604/1206–672/1274). Harawi’s work is also of interest for the study of comparative mysticism and for its overall attempt at a mystical interpretation of Suhrawardi’s text, which was not always intended by Suhrawardi. Often, when commenting on a section, Harawi adds “and this is in accordance with the views held by the Sufi masters”, or “this argument lends support to gnostic views”. These comments are valuable in illustrating how mystics made use of the Illuminationist epistemological priority of the experiential mode of cognition.

Finally, Anwārīyyah is also of specific interest for an understanding of how tenth/sixteenth-century Muslims in India viewed the prevalent Hindu views on mysticism. On several occasions, the author attempts to compare Illuminationist views with those of the Indian Advaita system, which he mentions by name. Examples are when he compares the Illuminationist cosmology, especially the *mundus imaginialis*, with the fourfold Sanskrit divisions of *andajâ, aranyuta, udabhija* and *khanjâ*, and Suhrawardi’s discussion of eternal time with the Indian notions of *yuga.* The work is also replete with words of reverence for “Indian sages and Brahmins”, whom, we are told, the author had consulted on questions relating to philosophical and mystical questions.

Orthodox Illuminationists

Many other authors are known for having incorporated certain Illuminationist principles in their works but do not qualify as pure Illuminationists. The following is a selected list of these thinkers.

Naṣîr al-Dîn al-Ṭâṣî (d. 672/1274) is the well-known philosopher, astronomer, mathematician and statesman whose commentary on Avicenna’s *al-Ishârât wa’l-tanbîhât* has become one of the standard textbooks for the study of Avicenna’s Peripatetic philosophy. Many generations of philosophers in Persia came to learn of the quintessence of Avicenna’s teaching through this commentary. However the epistemological priority given by Ṭâṣî to knowledge by presence does not qualify him as a purely Muslim Peripatetic. Given the impact that Ṭâṣî has had on all later Shi’ite authors, however, his Illuminationist attitude should not be overlooked.

Muḥammad ibn Zayn al-Dîn ibn Ibrâhîm Aḥṣâ’î (d. after 878/1479), known as Ibn Abî Jumhûr Ishrâqî Aḥṣâ’î, is among those whom I have designated as “middle *ishrâqî*” thinkers.

Qâdî Jalâl al-Dîn Muḥammad ibn Sa’d al-Dîn Dawârî (908/1501) is the author of the celebrated work on ethics titled *Akhlaq-i jalâlî,* and held the position of vizier under the Âqquyunlu rulers of northeastern Persia. His commentary on Suhrawardi’s *Hayâkîl al-nûr,* titled *Shawâkit al-nûr fi sharh hayâkîl al-nûr,* is well known, though unpublished. It falls under the category of popular syncretistic philosophy, which had an impact on the generation of thinkers that followed him in Persia and who were instrumental in shaping the Shi’ite world view that has continued to the present.

Ghîyâth al-Dîn Maṣûr Dâshštâkî (d. 948/1541), too, wrote a commentary on Suhrawardi’s *Hayâkîl al-nûr,* entitled *Ishrâq hayâkîl al-nûr li-kashf zulamât shawâkit al-ghurîr.* This is not an important theoretical work but, once more, it is indicative of Suhrawardi’s widespread impact.

Muḥammad Baṣîr ibn Shams al-Dîn Muḥammad (d. 1040/1631), well known as Mîr Dâmdâr, is perhaps the most significant philosopher of his age, more original and systematically philosophical an author than his famous pupil, Mullâ Sa’dî. In my view Mîr Dâmdâr is to be counted among the few truly Illuminationist philosophers, a company that would include the immediate followers of Suhrawardi, Shahrazûrî and Ibn Kamûnûh, as well as, in most recent times, Sayyid Muḥammad Kâzîm Aṣârî. Mîr Dâmdâr’s poetic *Takhallus,* or pen-name, is “Ishrâq” (“Illuminationist”), a clear indication of his alignment with Illuminationist philosophy. He considers himself a genuine upholder of the Illuminationist methodology of philosophy, combining discursive (*bahhîth*) methods and principles (Avicenna’s methodology of the *Shîfāt*) with intuitive (*dhu’uqût*) ones (Suhrawardi’s methodology of *Hikmat al-ishrâq*), carefully stipulated by Suhrawardi to be the fundamental Illuminationist position. This philosophical stance is exemplified in Mîr Dâmdâr’s publicly proclaimed characteristic as “the greater teacher of the *Shîfāt* of his time” and is clearly revealed in the structure as well as the philosophical intention
of his philosophical works, especially in his al-Ufūq al-mubīn, Jadhwāt and in his best-known work, Qabāsāt. In his philosophical work, Mīr Dāmād’s intent is to construct a holistic philosophical structure based on the self-conscious I’s ability to combine perfectly examination of sense-perceivable data with visions and illuminations.Šadr al-Dīn al-Shirāzī, well known as Mullā Šadrā (d. 1050/1640), is recognized to be the main originator of still another synthesis in Islamic philosophy which has had a major impact on Shi’ite thought up to this day. This point of view will be examined in more detail in chapter 35.

The fourteenth/twentieth-century Illuminationist philosopher Sayyid Muḥammad Kāzim ‘Aṣḡār also deserves special mention. His Wahdat-i unjūd wa bāda’ represents the most recent example of a discussion of the special Illuminationist ontological principle of “equivalcnt being” (tashbīk fi’tl-unjūd).

Finally, one must consider the possible impact of Suhrawardi’s thinking in the West, specifically on the development of Jewish mysticism in the eighth/fourteenth century. This is exemplified by the remarkable, though seldom mentioned, major paraphrase of important sections of the Philosophy of Illumination composed by the famous Naṣīrīd vizier Līsān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb in his Rawdat al-ta’rīf bi’t-hubb al-sharīf. Though he is not mentioned by name, the section is clearly a paraphrase of Suhrawardi’s works.

The Illuminationist tradition and almost every other aspect of the intellectual dimension of Islam were revived and re-examined in the tenth/sixteenth century during one of history’s most active and prolifically fruitful periods of Islamic philosophy. The tenth/sixteenth-century revival of philosophy took place in Isfahan in central Persia, and is of such integral quality that it has been designated “the School of Isfahan”. The two main figures of this school – Mīr Dāmād (with the poetic name “‘Iṣṭiq”) and Mullā Šadrā, whose philosophical works are replete with Illuminationist terminology – studied and made use of the Illuminationist tradition. By this time almost all problems covering the entire philosophical corpus were discussed from both the Peripatetic and Illuminationist perspectives. It had become common practice in constructing arguments to pose the two positions first, then demonstrate the superiority of one over the other, attempt a new synthesis between the two, or formulate different arguments.

Philosophical activity from the eighth/fourteenth to tenth/sixteenth centuries is not well known. From the Illuminationist standpoint, a few commentaries on Suhrawardi’s texts by the two Dašthakī brothers and by Jalāl al-Dīn Dāwānī are known, though none has been published or studied. There is also known to be an Illuminationist tradition in India. A major commentary and Persian translation of Suhrawardi’s Philosophy of Illumination, titled Anwārīyyah, was composed in India by Harawī. This published work indicates the impact of the Illuminationist tradition on Islamic mystical philosophy in India.

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TWO MAIN TRENDS IN ILLUMINATIONIST PHILOSOPHY

Although we cannot give here an examination of the entire scope of Illuminationist tradition from the time of Suhrawardi to the present, the following will identify the two main trends present in seventh/thirteenth-century Illuminationist compositions, both of which had an impact on the School of Isfahan.

The twofold dimension of seventh/thirteenth-century Illuminationist works is exemplified first by Shahrazūrī. His commentaries on Suhrawardi’s texts – Sharḥ hikmat al-‘iṣrāq, Sharḥ al-taluwībāt and the encyclopedic al-Shajarah al-īlābiyyah – not only emphasize the symbolic and distinctly anti-Peripatetic components of Illuminationist philosophy but further elaborate on them by extending their inspirational, allegorical and fantastic side. This trend, though of less philosophical significance than the one examined below, has had more impact in shaping views concerning mystical and religious philosophy. It may well be considered the origin of mystical and religious philosophy with the most popular appeal.

Second is Ibn Kammūnāh. In his Sharḥ al-taluwibāt, commentaries on Suhrawardi’s Intimations, in his major independent philosophical work, al-Jadīd fil-hikmah, as well as in his shorter works, such as Risālah fil-nafīs and al-Hikmah, Ibn Kammūnāh emphasizes the purely discursive and systematically philosophical side of the Philosophy of Illumination. These works go so far as to define Illuminationist symbolism and allegories in terms of standard Peripatetic doctrine, thus further elaborating on the scientific aspect of Suhrawardi’s original intention.

In a way, both of these trends are valid interpretations and refinements on Suhrawardi’s system in that both are present in the original Illuminationist texts, although distinguished in terms of choice and emphasis.

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SHAHRZURÌ’S WORKS

To determine why the more animated, symbolic and inspirational side of the Philosophy of Illumination, as emphasized by Shahrazuari, gained more popular appeal than Suhrawardi’s own philosophical approach, one must first briefly examine the historical background of the Islamic medieval...
world concerning attitudes to philosophy in general. By the middle of the second/eighth century, Arab rule over most of Western Asia, the Near East, North Africa and Spain (mainly Andalusia) was well established. The 'Abbasid Empire, founded in 132/750 by the caliph al-'Aziz, emerged as a new civilization that drew material as well as intellectual strength from the conquered peoples and lands. The Qur'an and the Prophet Muhammad's teachings and personal actions became the inspiration for a gradually codified set of laws. These laws, called the Shari'ah, were sanctioned and upheld by the state and regulated every facet of the public and private life of the multitudes of Muslims from India to Spain. While it can be argued that jurisprudence remained faithful to the letter of revelation and to the Prophet's own conduct, the powerful, rich, diverse and vast empire was in need of a world view to sustain itself as a world power. Therefore it ardously sought knowledge of science, medicine and technology beyond what was revealed and written in a single book. The Greeks, Persians and Indians possessed vast learning manifest in their books, art, architecture, technology, medicine and other disciplines. "Sciences of the ancients" (al-ilm al-tauhid) was the name given to every aspect of the sciences and of the techniques of the various civilizations encountered by the ruling Arabs. Baghdad, the new capital of the caliphate, was built from scratch near the ruins of Ctesiphon, the conquered centre of the Sassanian Empire, and soon became the centre of the new civilization. Persian statecraft and art of governance was employed to rule the vast dominion. Soon learned men of all nations gathered there, libraries were established, and book dealers travelled to faraway lands in search of ancient sciences.

By the end of the third/ninth century, a tremendous translation activity was fully under way, funded by state endowments. The Dār al-İḥkāmah, literally "Place of Wisdom" – the new academy, as it were – had become a learning centre of unprecedented dimension. Even the caliphs were in attendance at this academy, where the philosophy and the sciences of the ancients were being rewritten and transformed into a new world view. Of special significance was the translation into Arabic of the Greek philosophical and scientific tradition. By this time almost all of the Aristotelian corpus, plus much of the major Platonic works, some pre-Socratic fragments, Stoic treatises, Neoplatonist works – including parts of the Enneads erroneously thought to be a work by Aristotle called the "Theology" – Porphyry's Isagoge, works by Proclus, as well as numerous shorter Greek philosophical compilations, were all translated. The translations were initially from Syriac and eventually from the Greek. The Greek heritage was the most influential element in the rise of rational thought in Islamic civilization at this time. Philosophy, which was reformulated in Arabic and eventually also in Persian, was expanded and refined by such thinkers as al-Farabi (the "Second Teacher") and Avicenna, whose philosophical method survived in the Latin West for centuries.

For a short while, the rational heritage of the Greeks was even more triumphant in state-sanctioned theology. The Mu'tazilite rationalist theologians attempted to oppose their principal view, known as the "primacy of intellect" (al-'aql), to a rational basis for revelation. They even went so far as to say that the revealed word cannot be in contradiction to rational thought. Philosophy and philosophical techniques became the sought-after tool by the empire's ruling elite, as well as philosophers and scientists. But the opposing theological view, called "primacy of revelation" (al-'urūd), was perpetuated by the Ash'arite school and eventually won out. This ended the Mu'tazilah's dominance as the official theology of the land. Rational thought, for a number of complex reasons, did not continue to influence people beyond its few proponents and never gained dominance as a widely accepted world view in Arab society.

In many respects Arabic Aristotelian philosophy had a much deeper impact in the West than in the East. Avicenna's De Revolutionibus, known as Sucta in Latin, was the primary source for the Latin West's first encounter with Aristotle many decades before any direct translation from the original Greek texts. Other works in Hebrew and Latin translation – such as abridged versions of Avicenna's works, to a lesser extent of al-Farabi's works, and most important of the major works by the greatest Aristotelian Muslim commentator, Averroes – continued to keep the Greek philosophical heritage alive in the West as it was dying in the East.

This does not mean that philosophy did not continue in the Islamic world. Rather, it was reconstructed in the form of the Philosophy of Illumination. Peripatetic in method, Suhravardi's philosophy employed a new and different technical language and revived many popularly held views concerning wisdom. It also included references to characters, themes, and sentiments of Persian mythological and religious beliefs, as well as Qur'anic decrees never discussed to such an extent in Islamic Peripateticism.

Later religious philosophy in Islam, exemplified by Shahrâzûr's works, embraced this new philosophy at least in principle and used it as a point of departure for the depiction of an animated, more personalized and recognizable universe. This is where Greek methodology, Qur'anic dicta and other Islamic religious sentiments and Persian popular beliefs converge.

For example, the Qur'an talks about "jinn", or demonic spirits. The Mu'tazilah deny the existence of the 'an' al-Farabi avoids discussing them and Avicenna denies that they exist. Nevertheless, by the seventh/thirteenth century philosophers incorporate all manner of Qur'anic jinn, as well as a host of other demonic and benevolent creatures of the "unseen" world (al-'alam al-ghayb) – which is itself a cornerstone of Qur'anic
proclamations—into their discussion of metaphysics. By doing so, the new philosophers became more accepted by both theologians and jurists as well as by the general public. Many people, learned as well as others, who had a hard time identifying with the abstract notions and terms of Peripatetic philosophy, were able to accept the new religious philosophy because it provided a scientific explanation of the world they had known and believed in as the real realm of prophecy as well as sorcery. Such an animated world is precisely what this larger audience found in Shahrazūrī’s works, some aspects of which are suggested in various places in Suhrawardi’s texts but never fully explained.16

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**SHAHRAZŪRĪ’S ILLUMINATIONIST PHILOSOPHY**

Shams al-Dīn Muhammad ibn Maḥmur Shahrazūrī (d. after 688/1288), whose voluminous philosophical encyclopedia entitled al-Shajarah al-ilāhiyyah, translated here as *Metaphysical Tree* or the “Divine Genealogy”, is best known for his history of philosophy, Nuzhat al-arwaḥ. But it is the *Metaphysical Tree* that marks the denouement of Suhrawardi’s primacy.

Shahrazūrī’s underlying method is Illuminist. Philosophical construction based on a primary intuition of time-space, personal revelation and vision are given fundamental epistemological priority over the inherently rationalist, predicated Aristotelian principles. The Aristotelian horos is rejected as the primary epistemological method. Priority is given instead to the Platonist view of knowledge based on an activity of the soul whereby innate knowledge is recovered, which then serves as the first step in constructing syllogistic arguments. Thus, knowledge recovered, or “seen”, by the inner disposition of a knowing subject serves as the foundation for all subsequent philosophical construction. The knowing subject, when related to the manifest object, comes to know the object in a time-less instant (ān). From this standpoint, definition of an object by genus and differentiae is not a prerequisite. This “knowledge by presence” has no temporal extension and supersedes acquired knowledge. Reincarnation, immortality of the soul and a cosmology that constructs a separate realm of ideas (ālam al-mithāl) as the real and lasting mundus imaginativus (ālam al-khayāl) are cornerstones of Shahrazūrī’s cosmos.

Shahrazūrī consciously invokes Plato’s authority in proving the validity of these ideas. As the Illuminationist philosophers stipulated, “this incorporates the divine philosopher Plato’s *Phaedo* where the Peripatetics fail”. The real, separate Platonic Forms may be known, not by the Aristotelian demonstration (burḥān) of the *Posterior Analytics* but by intuition and vision—illumination. The notion of philosophical intuition is of central importance for the constructivist methodology of Illuminationist philosophy. Intuition here may be shown to be, first, similar to the Aristotelian “quICK WRIT”, *agkhoiota*, where the truth of propositions may be known immediately, or a conclusion arrived at prior to constructing a syllogism; or, secondly, recovery by the subject of universals and of sensible objects. But intuition plays a further fundamental role as an activity of the self-conscious being in a state in which the subject and object are undifferentiated. To use Illuminationist terminology, this means unity of perception, with the perceived and the perceiver (ittihād al-mudrīk wa-l’idrīk wa-l-mudrīk) as an altered state in the consciousness of the knowing subject. This state exists when the subject is “linked”, or otherwise related to the separate realm of the mundus imaginativus. This realm contains a multiplicity of self-conscious, self-substantial “monads” designated as “abstract light” (al-nīr al-majīrād) in place of the finite number of Peripatetic “intelligents” (al-‘uql al-majīrādah). Unlike the intelligents, the abstract lights are continuous one with the other, differing only in their relative degree of intensity. Together they form a continuum designated as “the whole” (al-kull), which is also conscious of itself. Shahrazūrī uses the term “intuitive philosophy” (al-bikmah al-dhawiyyah) to distinguish Illuminationist thought from the purely discursive (al-bikmah al-bahthīyyah) Peripatetic approach.

Of further interest here is the manner in which fantastic beings—such as jinn, angels and so on—are incorporated within this religious-philosophical structure by Shahrazūrī, specifically in his philosophical encyclopedia but also in his other works, notably the *Commentary on the Philosophy of Illumination*. By philosophically explaining the existence of all manner of non-corporeal, “intelligent beings”—which were previously rejected by all the major Islamic Peripatetics—Shahrazūrī paves the way for the prevalent Iranian and Indian view of a world animated by spirits. This view is incorporated into subsequent religious philosophy and further affects theological development, especially of Shi’ite theology, in the tenth/sixteenth century.

To appreciate the breadth of Shahrazūrī’s *Metaphysical Tree*, one must look at its overall structure,17 which consists of five main treatises (risālah) as follows:

1. On methodology and the division of the sciences; which serves as an introduction—marking the first work of its kind in which methodological questions, as well as problems of the philosophy of language are discussed separately and systematically.
2. On logic—one of the most comprehensive compilations including the Islamic Peripatetic corpus plus Stoic fragments and additions such as the long commentary on the *Isagoge* by Ghīyāth al-Dīn al-Abhārī.
3. On ethics, political philosophy and statecraft—a recollection of such works as al-Fārābī’s commentary on Plato’s *Republic*, titled The
intellect, soul and matter. In his Illuminationist philosophy Suhrwardi adds a fourth realm, generally called "the world of forms". This is further elaborated upon and enlivened by Shahrazuri, who calls it "the intermediary realm" (al-‘âlam al-awwâl). Not confined to empirical appearance, this domain is between the purely intelligible and the purely sensory, where time and space are different from Aristotelian time as a measure of distance as well as from Euclidean space. The way to the intermediary realm is by the active imagination. In the Metaphysical Tree, the intermediary realm is considered a "real" place where all manner of extraordinary phenomena, both good and evil, are said to occur, as Shahrazuri writes: \[19\]

This realm is called the Realm of Ideas and the mundus imaginatis. It is beyond the world of sense perception and beyond extended space (makān) but below the realm of intellect (‘âlam al-‘aqīf). It is an intermediary realm between the two. Everything imagined by the mathematicians, such as shapes (round, oblong, square, etc.), quantities (large, small, one, two, etc.), and bodies (cubes, tetrahedrons, spheres, etc.) and whatever relates to them such as rest, position, idea shape (hay‘a), surface, line, point and other conditions all exist in this intermediary realm. This is why philosophers refer to the [study of] it as "intermediate philosophy" or "intermediate science". Everything seen and heard in dreams such as oceans, lands, loud noises and persons of stature, all of them are suspended Forms not in space nor situated. . . . Archetypes of all known things on Earth exist as luminous Forms in this realm. . . . There are numerous multiple levels in this realm, and only God knows their number. But two bordering levels are known. The virtuous luminous level which lies at the horizon bordering on the realm of intellects; and the lowly dark level, which borders the realm of sense-perception. The numerous other levels are in between the two, and in each level dwell angels, jinn and Satans whose numbers are uncountable. Souls, when separated from the body will come to live in this realm. . . . In this realm are rivers wider than the Tigris and the Euphrates and mountains taller than any on Earth. . . . Souls of evil-doers will encounter scorpions and serpents larger than the largest mountain in this realm. . . . Things that exist in this realm have "formal" bodies and imaginary shapes (abdān mithālī wa ashkāl khayālī). . . . Extraordinary events, miracles, sorcery and all manner of strange manifestations occur because of this realm. . . . Sages on spiritual journeys, who learn how to unravel the signs have all attested to the powers that are manifest there.

The fourth dominion of the Illuminationist cosmos, the Realm of Forms, is the region of the dark (evil) forms, as well as the luminous
realm of the mundus imaginialis. The creatures of this realm, be they luminous or dark, are "seen", according to Shahrazūr, by the visions and intuitions of the divine philosopher-sages who have strengthened their intuitions and purified their imaginations by ascetic practices, not by mere recourse to rational demonstration. At every turn the author takes issue with the Peripatetics whose preoccupation with discursive philosophy, he claims, has weakened their ability to "see" (mubāhidh), reality as it is. Although the Active Intellect is clearly considered a guiding force for the Peripatetics, there is never a hint that it is personified, or in any way "seen" or perceived by the senses.

In contrast, by the sixth/twelfth century the Active Intellect appears in Illuminationist philosophy on several levels, sometimes personified as Gabriel, the archangel of revelation in the Qur'an; as Surūsh, one of the immortals of Iranian Mazdayasman cosmology; as Isfahbad al-A'ām, the great controlling archetypal light of Illuminationist cosmology; as Simurgh, the mythological bird of the Persian epic; as the Holy Spirit (Rūh al-quds) of popular mysticism equated with Rawān Bakhsh, dātor spiritūs, of Persian legends. Finally, by the seventh/thirteenth century in Shahrazūr's Metaphysical Tree, the Active Intellect becomes fully personified as a rational creature who exists separately in the intermediary realm and who may appear to the adept who will actually see its ideal shape and imaginialis body and hear its shrill cry. This archetypal creature, now with enormous power, may serve, rule or crush the person who has, by use of magic (nayrāng) and sorcery, or by other means, tapped into its power. To support this contention the new Illuminationist philosophy now invokes the memory of past philosophers and sages, as Shahrazūr states.

The ancient philosophers such as Hermes, Aghathadlaemon, Empedocles, Pythagoras and Plato, as well as others from among the ancients, all claimed to have "seen" them [that is, the archetypal beings, angels, or demons]; and they have all clearly attested their existence by their visions in the realm of light. Plato has related that when he elevated his soul from the dark shackles of the body he saw them. The Persian and Indian sages, as well as others, all adhere to this and are in agreement. Anyone who absolves himself of the body and rids himself of prime matter would certainly have a vision of these lights, the archetypal essences [dhawāt al-aṣnām]. Most of what the prophets and other sages have indicated by way of their metaphorical language refer to this.

At this juncture Shahrazūr turns to a rebuttal of Aristotelian methodology:

(philosophy and the mystical tradition)

(good). Together they are described as constituting a land beyond the corporeal, of the essence of the fabulous (būrqiyyaḏ dībūt al-aḏiḏ), or an eighth clime (al-izālim al-thāmīn). Access to this realm is gained through the active imagination when it becomes mirroirlike, turning into a place in which an epiphany (mazhar) may occur. One is said to travel in it not by traversing distances but by being witness to "here" or "there", unsuited and without co-ordinates. Seeing sights in this region is identified as effects suffered by the soul, or experiences within the self-consciousness of the objective self. The mundus imaginialis is an ontological realm whose beings, though possessing categorial attributes - such as time, place, relation, quality and quantity - are abstracted from matter. That is, they are ideal beings with a substance, usually depicted metaphorically as "light" (niyūr). These light beings differ from the substances of other beings only in respect to their degree of intensity, or "darkness" (zubnāh) which is also expressed in gradations.

Creatures who dwell in this land exist in a space without Euclidean spatial extensions and in a time that is absolute, unrestricted and without duration. Things appear in this realm in what appear to be fleeting moments but involve processes that cover eternity and infinity. They possess shapes. This is why they may be seen, although their "bodies" are imaginary, or "ideal" (badīn mithālū wa khayālī). This land has "cities" and "pavilions" with hundreds of thousands of gates and tiers. For all its imaginal qualities, this world, in the words of Henry Corbin, is a "concrete spiritual universe". Like Jacques Duchesne-Guillemin before him, Corbin qualifies the mundus imaginialis in terms of what he calls a "neo-Zoroastrian Platonism". As he states, "it is most certainly not a world of concepts, paradigms, and universals", for the archetypes of the species that populate it have "nothing to do with the universals established in logic". Rather, they are an "autonomous world of visionary Figures and Forms" that belong to "the plane of angelology".

Despite the apparent relationship, it would be inaccurate to identify the mundus imaginialis totally with Plato's Realm of Ideas in the Dialogues. The Illuminationist philosophers are quite specific on this point and distinguish between the suspended forms (al-tawwab al-ma‘allūq), which are the real beings of the eighth clime, and the Platonic Forms. This is because Platonic Forms are considered to be discrete, distinct entities, or "things", in the realm of intelligible lights, while the beings of the intermediary realm, though considered to be real, are part of the continuum of the imaginal, whether light or dark. The significance of the realm of the mundus imaginialis to the history of Islamic philosophy is that it opens up an entirely new chapter, admitting an irrational dimension that the Islamic Peripatetics had vehemently rejected.

Shahrazūr builds upon the visionary foundations of Illuminationist philosophy by seeking to substantiate the existence of creatures in the
If the physical observations of a person in matters pertaining to astronomy are accepted, and astronomers accept Prolemy's and Proclus' and others' observations, and the First Teacher [Aristotle] even accepts the astronomical observations of the Babylonians, why should there be only not rely on the spiritual observations [irād ruḥānī] and the luminous visions [muṣḥāḥādāt wu muḵāṣṣāḥāt] of the Pillars of Philosophy and Prophecy...so spiritual observation is just as significant in providing knowledge [maʿrifah] as physical observation [irād jismānī]. Rather, many types of error may occur in corporeal observation, as explained in al-Majāṣ, while spiritual observation, when based on the abstract, separate lights, which are all arrested by Zoroaster and [King] Kay Khusraw [of Persian mythology], cannot fall into error.

The heritage of rational Greek philosophy so significant in shaping intellectual and even theological attitudes for several centuries in Islam now becomes but one dimension in Islamic Illuminist philosophy which further defines religious philosophy. This new philosophical position characterizes religious philosophy in Persia from the seventh/thirteenth century to the present.

The overall structure of Shahrazūrī’s Illuminist elaborations is syncrētistic—that is, it is composed of divergent systems and beliefs that are grouped together under one school of thought. This juxtaposition continues to characterize the fantastic, supernatural, demon-riden, and generally Shi‘i religious philosophy that allows Persian epic religious figures to roam side by side with figures of Qur‘ānic and Islamic origin.

Equally significant is the fact that Shahrazūrī’s syncrētistic interpretation and elaboration of Illuminist religious philosophy is not shunned by theologians nor even by jurists, as had been the case with earlier rational philosophies. In a recent major biographical study of philosophers in Persia from the tenth/sixteenth century to the present, some four hundred major thinkers, each with several works, were enumerated. With the exception of only a few, all were graduates of madrasahs, and many at one time or another had assumed specific public, religious, and judicial duties.28

Islamic Illuminist philosophy, as interpreted by Shahrazūrī in a religious context, was able to accommodate revelation with all its metaphysical and fantastic implications to a degree Peripatetic philosophy was never able to do. It expanded and refined the powerful Greek analytical tools into well-defined domains comprising semantic, formal, and material logic. Above all, it allowed for popular religious sensibilities, superstitions and beliefs to be given a “scientific” explanation within its reformulated cosmology. And finally, through its adoption in at least some of the higher-level school curricula, it even received legal sanction.

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The seventeenth and final chapter of the *Metaphysical Tree*, titled “On the Jinn, Satans, Rebellious Angels: and therein the principle of the Devil and its state are explained”, adds a new and significant dimension to Illuminist thinking. The chapter begins with Shahrazūrī stating that the philosophers both ancient and recent ("mutagaddimin wa muta‘akhkhirīn") have different opinions concerning the existence of jinn and Satans. Among the Muslims, three groups are identified and their views rejected. Avicenna’s position, stated in the *Book of Definitions*, is: “The jinn are [defined] as ethereal beings, and take on different shapes; this being a mere lexical definition [sharh al-ism] of the utterance ‘jinn’, and this does not indicate an existence outside the mind (i.e. real).” Shahrazūrī discounts this reasoning because, he contends, arguments based on semantics do not necessarily reject (or prove) the real existence of the thing defined. That is, the reality of the jinn may or may not be indicated simply by naming them as such. Relying on arguments drawn from Illuminist epistemology, which holds that intuitive experiential knowledge is prior to discursive knowledge, Shahrazūrī asserts that since ancient philosophers, sages and prophets have “experienced” — or, in Illuminist terms, have “seen” (yusḥāhid) — the jinn, as the Qur‘ān also confirms, they must, therefore, have a separate existence. Here evidence Aristotle’s authority is invoked along with that of a host of sages from Hermes to Plato — including Egyptian sages and Persian mythological figures, as well as Indian Brahmins — to prove the separate existence of such beings. Since actual experience of the phenomena is well verified by experts, the argument goes, therefore it must be real.

The statement concludes by claiming a substantial reality for the jinn who are embodied in the Realm of Forms and the mundus immanitus and have non-corporeal, formal bodies and imagined shapes. Shahrazūrī rebukes the Muslim theologians, insinuating that they should know better than to deny the separate reality of the jinn, who are after all authenticated in the Qur‘ān.

A summary of Shahrazūrī’s arguments in the final chapter of *Metaphysical Tree* also serves as a general account of his specific Illuminist ideas, as follows. In the intermediary realm, the mundus immanitus, there are two types of entities: light and dark. Both are equally real, according to Shahrazūrī, and are not simply the absence of the other. Suhrawardi’s view that darkness is not real but simply the total lack of light, and the Peripatetic view that non-being is the privation of being (or that darkness is the privation of light), are both rejected. Light and dark entities differ in terms of intensity. Just as there is a continuum of light substances from weakest to strongest, there is also a parallel continuum of dark entities. Illuminist philosophers vehemently deny that this position is a dualist one. Dualism in the Islamic period was identified with ancient Persian infidel beliefs, referred to as Manichaean.
idolatry (ilḥād Mānī). Shahrizārī defends his views against this attack by
confining the existence of dark entities to substances which have assumed
dark shapes, or forms — generally with imaginalis embodiment.
All of these dark forms, he contends, exist in a limited tier of the
intermediary realm of forms and the mundus imaginalis, while the light
substances cover the whole of reality.

The dichotomy of light substance and dark entity in the Realm
of Forms and the mundus imaginalis is a new addition to the Greek inspired
cosmology of the earlier Islamic Peripatetic philosophy. Some scholars,
notably Henry Corbin, have indicated that this cosmology represents an
earlier Persian world view. While I disagree with Corbin that the Persian
element of this new philosophy was based on an established textual philo-
sophical tradition, I believe that the Mazdayasnic sentiments kept alive
in popular and oral traditions and in poetic, epic and mystical
compositions have been integrated into this new Islamic Illuminationist
philosophy. The Qur’ānic category of demons, satans and other such
creatures is introduced by Shahrizārī along with others from the Persian
traditions, such as the category of creatures called the peris. However they
are all integrated into a dualist cosmological structure that explicitly
reflects the earlier tradition in which the Platonic world of Forms is used
to portray a universe permeated with archetypes, good and bad, who
affect earthly existence. Nowhere is this continuity more apparent than
in Shahrizārī’s Metaphysical Tree, and especially in the few chapters
examined here.

**IBN KAMMŪNAH’S
ILLUMINATIONIST PHILOSOPHY**

The second trend in the interpretation of Illuminationist philosophy is
exemplified by Ibn Kammūnah, whose Commentary on the Intimations
(Sharḥ al-talwīḥāt) completed around 669/1270 emphasizes the rational
side of Suhrawardi’s thought. It concentrates on the initial, discursive
cycle of the reconstruction of the Philosophy of Illumination, but also
recognizes Suhrawardi’s text to be a fundamentally non-Peripatetic work.

Moshe Perlmann, who edited and translated Ibn Kammūnah’s
Tangīb al-abhāth il-mīlal al-thalāth (1967) – translated as Examination
of the Inquiries into the Three Faiths (1971) – has examined every possible
source for Ibn Kammūnah’s biography, and is the principal source for
the following summary account.

Sa’d ibn Maṣʿūr ibn Sa’d ibn al-Ḥasan Ḥibat Allāh ibn Kammūnah was “a well-known occultist and teacher of philosophy, [and] lived in
Baghdād during the seventh/thirteenth century. He was a distinguished
member of the Jewish community.” Perlmann translates the notice given

for Ibn Kammūnah in Ibn al-Fuwaṭi’s al-Ḥawādith al-jāmi‘ah wa-l-najārih
al-naṣi‘ah under the events of the year 683/1284. This is perhaps the
most significant source on Ibn Kammūnah’s life now available.

Leo Hirschfeld had in the last decade of the nineteenth century
written a brief summary account of Ibn Kammūnah’s polemical work,
titled Sa’d b. Maṣʿūr Ibn Kumānah und seine polemische Schriften, in which
he identified several other treatises, including most of Ibn Kammūnah’s
philosophical and logical works. These include:

1. A commentary on Avicenna’s al-ʾIshārāt wa-l-tanbīḥāt titled Sharḥ al-

al-talwīḥāt min muḥimmāt al-ʾilm wa-l-ilm (the title translated into German by Hirschfeld as Kommentar zu den Grund-
lehren und dem Gesamtinhalt aus dem Gewichtigen für Theorie und
Praxis). It is important to note that during the same period two
other major commentaries on the same work by Avicenna were
composed by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and by Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī. Comments on the ʾIshārāt were the standard texts used by later
Islamic philosophers to study Islamic Peripateticism. This, in my
view, differs drastically from the manner in which the Latin West
came to know Avicenna, which was mainly through translations of the
Shīfāʾ. It remains to be seen how Ibn Kammūnah’s commentary
differs, or reflects, the synthetic style of the other two works
which later found their way into the higher level madrasah curricula.

2. Commentary on Suhravardi’s Intimations (al-Talwīḥāt), to which I
will turn later.

3. An independent philosophical work which Hirschfeld titled Al-

Hikmah al-jadidah fi-l-mantiq (Neue Abhandlung über die Logik) and
has recently been published with the title al-Jadid fi-l-hikmah, or
“Novum Organum.”

4. Another philosophical treatise by Ibn Kammūnah, not listed by

Hirschfeld or Brockelmann, is a short work called Risālah fi-l-nafs
or Risālah fi-baqaʾ al-nafs. Only one manuscript of this work is
known to have survived, published by Leon Nemoy in facsimile,
and later translated by him into English.

5. Finally, Perlmann has brought to my attention an additional philo-

sophical work by Ibn Kammūnah bearing the generic title Risālah
fi-l-hikmah. Upon brief examination, I find it to be a different
work from the one listed above. Apparently it is a summary of
seventh/thirteenth-century attitudes in philosophy which combines
Peripatetic terms and techniques with Illuminationist epistemolog-
ical principles.

In the philosophical compilations of the eleventh/seventeenth
century, numerous specific references are made only to Ibn Kammūnah’s
Commentary on the Intimations. Most notably, these references are found in al-Asfār al-arba‘ah and in al-Qabāsāt. One example will serve to indicate the significance of Ibn Kamānūh’s *Commentary* for the study of the development of Islamic philosophy in the post-Avicennan period. The reference is in Mullā Ṣadrā’s famous work, al-Asfār al-arba‘ah, in the section, “al-Safar al-thalith: iš‘il al-ilāhī: al-Mawqif al-thalith; ʿilm al-ta‘līma: al-Faṣl al-rābī‘; iš‘īf al-madhabīb al-nās fi ʿilm bi-l-asyā‘”. Mullā Ṣadrā here distinguishes seven schools of thought: four philosophical, two “theological”, and one “mystical” (which combines ʿirfān and ṭaṣawwuf).37 This is typical of Mullā Ṣadrā’s classification of the history of philosophy, theology and mysticism and further reflects the same classification found for the first time in Shahrazūrī’s al-Shajarah al-ilāhīyyah.38 The four philosophical “schools” — referred to as madhab — which concern us here are:

1. The school of the followers of the Peripatetics (madhhab tawābi‘ al-mashhā‘īn). Included in this category are the “two masters” (al-shaykhān) al-Fārābī and Avicenna, as well as Bahmāyār (Avicenna’s famous student and author of al-Tābi‘ūn), Abū‘l-ʿAbbās al-Lawkārī and “many later Peripatetics” (kabir min al-muta‘ākhkhārīn).


3. “The school attributed [al-mansūb] to Porphyry, the First of the Peripatetics [mugaddam al-mashhā‘īn], one of the greatest followers of the First Teacher.”

4. “The school of the divine Plato.”40

The “second school” represents the characteristic position of Ibn Kamānūh’s *Commentary on the Intimations*. It is distinguished from the other schools in all philosophical domains: methodology and the division of the sciences, logic, ethics and political philosophy, physics, metaphysics and eschatology. But the question of the immortality of the soul and its “ranks” after separation from the body is a fundamental eschatological position on which Ibn Kamānūh wrote an independent treatise.

Suhrawardi, Ṭūsī, Shirāzī, Ibn Kamānūh and Shahrazūrī are together considered the followers of Stoic philosophy and form the group of major Illuminationist philosophers of the post-Avicennan period. Excluded from this group is Fakhr al-Dīn Rāzī, who is considered a mutakallim by the Illuminationist philosophers, notably Shahrazūrī as well as Mullā Ṣadrā. The inclusion of Ṭūsī in this group may also be doubtful in that his views on cosmology and ontology do not coincide with the overall Illuminationist approach and philosophical technique, although his position in epistemology does.

Ibn Kamānūh’s specifically philosophical arguments may best be exemplified by considering sample problems taken from his *Sharh al-Tauvīrāt*. Before considering these, however, it is important to remember that *al-Tauvīrāt* is the first work in a series of four which constitutes the Philosophy of Illumination as Suhrawardi constructed it. As the first work in the series, this concise treatise tends to emphasize the discursive side of Illuminationist philosophy. However it is not a Peripatetic work nor was it composed during Suhrawardi’s youth when, as alleged by some scholars, his position had been that of a pure Peripatetic.41

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**METHODOLOGY AND THE DIVISION OF SCIENCES**

Al-Fārābī’s *Enumeration of the Sciences* is the model for Ibn Kamānūh’s methodology and division of the sciences, with minor modifications. However, it may be noted that by the seventh/thirteenth century every philosophical work — be it a commentary or an independent composition — is prefaced with questions pertaining to these issues. The distinction between theoretical philosophy and practical philosophy is a matter of methodology. Theoretical philosophy is said to deal with things whose existence does not depend on human action. This type of philosophy leads to pure truth (al-haqiq al-tārif). Practical philosophy is said to be a tool (al-ṭālīb) that aims to obtain the “pure good” (al-khayr al-mahfūd) to be utilized in the service of just rule, as well as for the attainment of happiness.

Ibn Kamānūh follows Suhrawardi’s divisions within theoretical philosophy, but further elaborates and fills in the gaps as follows. Theoretical philosophy is divided into three parts. First is the “highest science” (al-‘ilm al-ḥabīb), also called “first philosophy” (al-falsafat al-ḥabīb), also called “metaphysical science” (al-falsafat al-ḥabīb). This primary division is further divided into metaphysica generalis (al-‘ilm al-kullī), having as its subject “being qua being” (substance, accident, one, many, etc.), and metaphysica specialis (al-‘ilm al-ilāhī, or ilāhī bi-mar‘a al-akbas), having as its subject the Necessary Being (its essence and acts, God’s knowledge, etc.).

The second division is “middle philosophy” (al-ḥikmah al-wustah), having “quantity” (al-kamm) as its subject matter. This has two parts also: continuous quantities, such as geometry, and discrete quantities, such as arithmetic. Middle philosophy is of particular interest in Illuminationist philosophy because in the Illuminationist cosmological scheme the “fourth realm” is also called mundus imaginis, and the Realm of Forms is
designated "the intermediary or middle realm". Thus, the subject matter of both continuous imagination (al-khayāl al-muttaqīl) and discrete imagination (al-khayāl al-munfaqi) falls under this branch of metaphysics. The third division is "physics", whose subject matter is corporeal bodies.

Ibn Kammānūnah assigns subdivisions, called ḥaṭa, to each of the three major divisions. Subdivisions within metaphysics include such areas of inquiry as revelation, resurrection, angels and demons, dreams and extraordinary acts. Subdivisions within middle philosophy are more clearly defined and numbered as "twelve sciences": addition and subtraction, algebra, computational geometry, mechanics (ilm al-hiyā al-mutabarrakah), and pulleys (ilm harakat al-athqāl), measures and weights, war machines, optics, mirrors, hydro-dynamics, astronomical tables and calendars, and musical instruments. Finally, physics has the following seven subdivisions: medicine, astronomy, physiology, interpretation of dreams, talismans, occult sciences (ilm al-nayranīyyāt) and alchemy.

Logic

One of the characteristics of Illuminationist logic is that its structure divides logic into three parts: semantics, formal and material. There is no "book" of categories. As in the Stoic-Megaric tradition, the categories are first examined in physics and then in metaphysics. This structure is upheld by Ibn Kammānūnah in his Commentary as well as in his other works.

Two fundamental problems traditionally presented in logic – universal propositions and essentialist definition – are isolated by Ibn Kammānūnah and are considered to have a principal significance for the Illuminationist theory of knowledge, or "Illuminationist knowledge by presence" (al-ilm al-būdari al-ishrāqi).

First, the problem of universal propositions (al-qādāyā al-kulliyah) is introduced in formal logic. In the Illuminationist scheme, a conclusion reached by using a formally established syllogism has no epistemological value as a starting point in philosophical construction. The argument for this rests on the mode "necessary" (al-wujh al-darūri) and the modal "always" (dā'imān). For a universal affirmative proposition to have philosophical value as a foundation of logic, it must be "necessary and always true". By introducing the mode "possibility" (imkān) and by giving it an extension in time as in "future possibility" (al-imkān al-mustaqbal), the universal affirmative proposition cannot be "necessary true always", the Illuminationist position contends. This is because of the impossibility of "knowing", or deducing, all possible future instances. The epistemological implication of this logical position is clear. Formal validity ranks lower than the certitude obtained by the self-conscious subject who, when alerted to a future possible event through knowledge by presence, will simply "know" it; the future event cannot be "deduced". Therefore, philosophical intuition has precedence over deductive reasoning, and this intuitive knowledge is renewed in every age by the philosopher-sages of that era. In other words, formal structure without philosophical "wisdom" has no actual (hāqiqa) validity.

The second philosophical problem introduced by Ibn Kammānūnah is the rejection of the Aristotelian essentialist definition, horos, and of the Avicennan complete essentialist definition, al-badd al-tamm. As once again not a valid first step in the construction of philosophy. Following Suhrwardi, Ibn Kammānūnah holds that true knowledge cannot be obtained from the formula which brings together the summum genus and the differentiae. Knowledge must depend on "something else", which is stated to be a psychological process that seeks the unity of the thing defined in its Form, which is fully defined only by and in the person's self-consciousness as the individual recognizes the thing to be defined (the definendum).

These two philosophical problems bear directly on the methodology of the Philosophy of Illumination. Ibn Kammānūnah makes numerous references to other works by Suhrwardi, is clearly familiar with the range of his works and is capable at every turn of applying German arguments to the whole of the tradition. As such, the Commentary serves well to indicate the entire scope of Suhrwardi's Illuminationist compositions. Other significant areas of the numerous aspects of logic covered by this work include semantics and problems of formal logic.

Suhrwardi's theory of semantics (ilm al-dīnāyat al-alfāz) indicates a Stoic-Megaric influence, and is specifically mentioned by Ibn Kammānūnah to be different from the "standard" Avicennan. Problems in this area of logic include: types of signification; relation of class names to constituents (members) of the class; types of inclusion of members in classes (indiraj, istighraj, indihāl, shumāli, etc.); and perhaps most significantly from the standpoint of the history of logic, a fairly well defined theory of supposition (the restricted and unrestricted use of quantification).

There are a number of problems of formal logic, such as iterated modalities; the construction of a superaffirmative necessary proposition (al-qādīyyat al-darīrīyyat al-battāh); the question of negation (al-āl), especially in the conversion of syllogism (al-‘ak); reduction of terms; construction of a single "mother" figure for a syllogism (shāki al-qiṣṣā) from which all other figures are to be derived; temporal modalities (al-qādāyā al-muwwajnah); especially non-admittance of an unrestricted validity of the universal affirmative proposition (al-qādīyyat al-mūjibat al-kulliyah); and future contingency (al-imkān al-mustaqbal). All these problems, as well as others, are identified by Ibn Kammānūnah to be part of the significant changes made by Suhrwardi to Peripatetic logic. In
every case Ibn Kammūnah’s analysis both distinguishes the problem and provides a fuller account than Suhrawardī’s own short description.45

### EPISTEMOLOGY

Perhaps the most widespread impact of Illuminationist philosophy has been in the area of epistemology. The impact of Illuminationist knowledge by presence, al-‘ilm al-ḥudūr, which posits a posterior epistemological position to acquired knowledge, al-‘ilm al-ḥaṣūlī, has not been confined to philosophical and other specialist circles, as has Illuminationist logic, for example. The epistemological status given to intuited knowledge has fundamentally influenced what is called “speculative mysticism” (irfān-i naẓarī) in Iran as well as informing Persian poetry. The way Persian poetic wisdom, for example, seeks to unravel the mysteries of nature is not through the principles of physics (as with Aristotelians, for example) but by means of the metaphysical world and the realm of myths, dreams, fantasy and the emotions.

Ibn Kammūnah starts his commentary on Suhrawardī’s dream-visions of Aristotle (described in the previous chapter) by stating that “this story includes five philosophical problems” (“tashāmil bāḥīlih-i-bikayiyah ‘alā khamsah masā’il ‘ilmiyah”).46 There are: (1) unity of the intellect, thinking and the object in the rational soul, in the state when the subject and the object are not differentiated. Knowledge by presence takes place when the rational soul, aware of its essence, is related (by Illuminationist relation, al-idāfah al-ihṣāqiyyah) to the object. This is tantamount to the recovery of prior unity, which is how the soul by knowing itself can know other things. (2) The soul’s knowledge of something other than itself is not by acquiring a form of that thing within itself—what is the Peripatetic position—but by the mere presence (bi-muẓarrad ḥudūr) of the other thing. (3) Types of thinking (aqlam al-ta‘aqqul) are described. (4) How God knows its essence and knows other things is said by Ibn Kammūnah to be based on the principle of knowledge by presence. But since God’s essence and existence are the same—in other words, God’s consciousness as subject and as object are never differentiated, then God’s knowledge by presence never ceases. For God, there is no process of recovering a prior state because prior and future conditions do not apply to God. “God’s knowledge of other things is by virtue of the other’s presence to it” (“i‘lāmu bi-ma ‘aḍāhā bi-hudūru ‘alahu”), to use Ibn Kammūnah’s own phrase. (5) On the meaning of union and connection (al-itiḥād wa-l-ittiṣāl), the principle of “knowledge by presence” is explained by comparing it to the Peripatetic notion of union with the Active Intellect. Union or connection with the Active Intellect is a corporeal phenomenon, whereas the “relation” (al-idāfah) between the knowing subject and the manifest object allows the

### ONTOLOGY

Ibn Kammūnah’s views on the Illuminationist ontological position, called “primacy of quiddity”, is a longstanding problem that is said to distinguish philosophical schools in the development of Islamic philosophy in Iran up to the present day.47 It is also a matter of considerable controversy. Those who believe in the primacy of existence (wujūd) consider essence (maḥiyah) to be a derived, mental concept (amr i‘tibārī); while those who believe in the primacy of quiddity consider existence to be a derived, mental concept. The Illuminationist position, elaborated by Ibn Kammūnah, is this: should existence be real outside the mind (muḥaqqaq fi khārij al-dhīmīn), then the real must consist of two things—the principle of the reality of existence, and the being of existence, which requires a referent outside the mind. And its referent outside the mind must also consist of two things, which are subdivided, and so on, ad infinitum. This is clearly absurd. Therefore existence must be considered an abstract, derived, mental concept devoid of a real existence which may be referred to outside the mind.

### PHILOSOPHICAL ALLEGORY

Finally, among the distinguishing marks of Ibn Kammūnah’s Commentary is the manner in which he analyses the metaphorical passages in Suhrawardī’s work. What I have called the “fourth stage” of Illuminationist constructivist methodology is the use of a special language, a symbolic mode of expression designated as Lisān al-ḥaṣāq, Shahrzūrī and later Harawi are the only two Illuminationist philosophers after Suhrawardī who continue using this special language in their works. Most others, including Ibn Kammūnah, attempt to explain the symbolism in terms of standard philosophical language.

One such instance concerns Suhrawardī’s allegory of the dream-visions of Aristotle. Another example is the story of Hermes having a vision in which he meets God,48 which in my view is further indication of the fact that Suhrawardī’s Intimations includes a clear Illuminationist side. The story is short and reads as follows:

One night when the sun was shining, Hermes was praying in the Temple of Light (haykal al-nūr); when the pillar of dawn tipped
asunder. He saw a land, with cities, upon which the wrath of God had descended. They were entering into an abyss, [disappearing] therein. So Hermes cried out: "O father, deliver me from the abode of the evil neighbours." He was thus summoned: "Catch the edge of [our] rays and fly to the Heavens." So he ascended and saw the Earth and the sky beneath him.49

Ibn Kammūnah calls this story "one of the difficult metaphors" (al-rumūz al-mashkilah) and makes the following attempt at a "rational" interpretation. The ripping of the pillar of dawn is equated with the appearance of the light of knowledge to man; the earth symbolizes the body, or matter in general; the cities are equated with embodied souls, or with their faculties, and so on. Clearly, his intention is somehow to make "philosophical" sense of Suhrawardī's allegorical style.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that Ibn Kammūnah's interpretation of Suhrawardī's Philosophy of Illumination as presented in his Commentary on the Intimations greatly influenced the later development of philosophy in Persia. Specifically, both Mīr Dāmād and subsequently Mullā ʿṢādār refer to his interpretations and employ many of his arguments in their own work. Part of Ibn Kammūnah's purpose was to clarify and explain Suhrawardī's often terse and difficult style. He further attempted to reduce the philosopher's symbolic language — which was so characteristic of Suhrawardī — to a more standard analytical one. In so doing, Ibn Kammūnah helped the Philosophy of Illumination to become, in my view, more easily accepted by philosophers and accessible to them.

**NOTES**


Shahrāzūrī's Shahr bikmat al-isrā'īl ("Commentary on the Philosophy of Illumination") has not been published. I have prepared a preliminary critical edition; however, prior to its publication I shall refer to the folios of the Istanbul, Saray Ahmad III, MS no. 3230.

Moshe Perlmann's text edition and translation of Ibn Kammūnah's polemics Tanāṣib al-abbāhāt il-l-mīzāl al-thalāthā are among the few studies on Ibn Kammūnah. See Moshe Perlmann, Sa'd b. Manṣūr Ibn Kammūnah's Examination of the Inquiries into the Three Faiths: A Thirteenth-Century Essay in Comparative Religion (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967 [text] and 1971 [translation]). Ibn Kammūnah is an important figure in the history of post-Avicennan philosophy. His Shahr al-talawwāhāt ("Commentary on Suhrawardī's Intimations") has not, however, been printed. He is also an important logician of the post-Avicennan period. His al-Hikmat al-jadidah fīl-mantiq ("Neue Abhandlungen über die Logik") — which is probably the section on logic of his al-jadidah fīl-hikmah — and his commentary on Avicenna's Directives and Remarks entitled Sharh al-usūl wa al-jaymūn min muhimmāt al-ilm wa'l-amal ("Kommentar zu den Grundlehren und dem Gesamtvollständ von den Gewichtigsten für Theorie und Praxis") deserve a special study; see Leo Hirschfeld's short monograph, Sa'd b. Manṣūr Ibn Kammūnah (Berlin, 1985: 11–13).

Sec. 4: Shahrāzūrī, Shahr bikmat al-isrā'īl ("Commentary on the Philosophy of Illumination"), lithograph edition by Yūhām Ťabāzābā (Tehran, 1895).

Sec. 5: See Dāwānī, Sharh ḥayākīl al-nūr ("Commentary on the Temples of Light") (Tehran, Maḥfīz, MS no. 1412).

Sec. 6: See Harawi, Anwārīyāh ("Abodes of Light"), ed., with introduction and notes, Hossein Zia (Tehran, 1980).


Sec. 8: See my "Preface" to Harawi's Anwārīyāh: 13–19.

Sec. 9: In his Anwārīyāh, Harawi informs us of his independent Illuminationist work entitled Sāfīr al-hikmah. This work, however, has not survived, but is indicative of the impact of Illuminationist philosophy in India. See my edition of Anwārīyāh: 212, 245.

Sec. 10: See Anwārīyāh: 150–4.


Sec. 13: Sāyyid Muḥammad Kāẓim Ṭaṣğūr, "Vaḥdat-e vojūd va hadād", ed. Jalāl Ṭabādānī (Tehran, 1970). Ṭaṣğūr has been hailed by Ṭabādānī, himself one of the most important figures in the tradition of Islamic philosophy of the contemporary period, as the foremost Illuminationist philosopher of recent decades.

Sec. 14: Christian Jamet in his "Introduction" to Shahrāzūrī's Jalāl Khāṭīb, Le Livre de la Sagesse Orientale, traduction et notes par Henry Corbin (Paris, 1986) states a possible influence of Illuminationist doctrine on Jewish mysticism. See also p. 75 n. 85 where notice of Paul Fenton's Deux traités de mystérieuse joie (Lagrèse, 1987) is given. See also Paul Fenton, Treatise of the Pool (London, 1983).


Sec. 16: For example Suhrawardī in his Philosophy of Illumination (as well as in other texts) states, without further explanation, that "jinn and satans are obtained from the Suspended Forms" (Hikmat al-isrā'īl: 232), a subject taken up by Shahrāzūrī, who treats it in great detail.

Sec. 17: The work is as yet unpublished — and I am using the Berlin manuscript formerly of the Königlichen Bibliothek, Spranger Collection, now in the Staatliche Bibliothek, MS no. 5026. It is a long manuscript comprising 319 folios of 18 × 27 cm, 35 lines per page in a small highly cursive script. I have elsewhere discussed this manuscript in detail. See my "The Manuscript of al-Shajar al-lāthiyāh,
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a Philosophical Encyclopedia by Shams al-Din Muhammed Shahrazuri, Iran-


19 Shahrazuri, al-Sharh al-’ilahiyyah, fol. 267vff. Translation mine.

20 The term used here is sinjâr, probably derived from the Greek semeion.

21 See Suhrawardi, Opera II: 254–5; cf. al-Harawi, Anwârîyyah, 222, where Hûrâqalas is said to be one of the imaginary spheres, afk-klî mithâl, “travelled” to by Pythagoras.

22 Cf. Corbin, Terre celeste, 82–9. Suhrawardi’s own theory of the categories bears directly on this issue, in which he considers only substance, quality, quantity, relation and motion – all of which are given to degrees of intensity and are processes more than they are ontic distinct entities.


25 See, for example, Shirazi, Sharh, 511: “wa’t-l-tawar al-mu’allaqah layyat mutubh Afzânîn fi-insâm mutubh Afzânîn narsîyyah thâbitah fi âlam al-awwar al-’alîyith.” (the suspended forms, tawar, are not the Platonic Ideas, mutubh Afzânîn, because the latter are luminous and fixed in the realm of intelligible lights”).

26 Shahrazuri, al-Sharh al-’ilahiyyah, fol. 292vff. Translation mine.

27 The term used here is mshâhâdah, which indicates a special cognitive mode as I have explained elsewhere. See my Knowledge and Illumination (Atlanta, 1990), chapter 4.


30 This work has not been published. I refer to the Leiden MS no. Or. 137.


32 Ibid.

33 See Leo Hirschfeld, Manşûr Ibn Kamâmîn: 11–13. The list of works relies primarily on Hájjî Khâlij in and is incomplete.

34 Both Tûsî and Râzî stress the irtfân element of Avicenna’s work, which was also later integrated into al-Hikmat al-muta’âlîyah by Mullâ Şadr, influencing both the intention as well as style of religious philosophy in Persia to the present.

35 This important text by Ibn Kamâ’mah is edited by Hamîd al-Kabûs (Baghdad, 1982).


39 Mullâ Şadr, op. cit., 6: 187. The attribution of “Stoic” to the Illuminationist philosophical school appears in many places in this work. However, concerning certain “novel” philosophical issues, such as the distinction between the idea of “intellectual form” (al-sûrâh al-’alîyith) and the idea of “archetypal form” (al-sûrâh al-mithâlîyâh) – the latter also as “the idea shape”, or “imagined shape” – Mullâ Şadr is careful to use only the attribution “Illuminationist”. See, for example, al-’Aṣfîr, 3: 504ff. In general the Stoic epithet is added to the Illuminationist designation only in conjunction with questions that relate to logic and physics, but in matters that pertain to epistemology, cosmology and eschatology, “Illuminationist” is used alone. See also my Knowledge and Illumination, chapter 1, for a discussion of Stoic influences on Illuminationist logic.

40 It is possible that Mullâ Şadr here means only Plato himself and not a “school of thought” that had continued after him. I take this reading because of the phrase “mî dâhaba layatu’ Afzânî al-’ilahiyyah”. The distinction would indicate an attempt on the part of Mullâ Şadr to give the philosophical position of Plato himself as distinct from later sectarian texts designated “Platonic”. See, for example, Mullâ Şadr, op. cit., 3: 509, where he clearly attempts to specifically refer to Plato himself by stating “qâla Afzânî al-sharîf”, and not “fi mshâhâdah al-’alîyith”. Among the authors who have categorized al-Talâwiq as a Peripatetic work Helmut Ritter should be noted. See Helmut Ritter, "Philologika IX: Die vier Suhrawardi", Der Islam, 24 (1937): 270–86 and 25 (1938): 35–86.

41 Suhrawardi discusses the categories at great length in his major Arabic and Persian systematically philosophical works. His theory of categories, which is attributed by him to some Pythagorean person (shâkh fîthâghîrîsî) by the name of Arkhûsûs, has had a major impact on subsequent philosophy in Persia. What is later designated by Sadr al-Din al-Shirazi “motions in category substance” (al-barakat al-jawwarîyiyah), translated as “substantial motion” and “transsubstantial motion”, is a direct corollary to Suhrawardi’s theory. Briefly the theory states that “intensity” (shâdhdh wa dafî) is predicated of all categories which are reduced to five: substance (jawhar), quality (kayıf), quantity (kamîr), relation (nisbah) and motion (harabah). This is in direct agreement with Suhrawardi’s special theory of being as continuum, as well as with his work known as “theory of future contingency” (lit. theory of the contingence of the most noble, qâ‘alat imkân al-’asrâf). The favourite example given by Suhrawardi in summing up his arguments, one discussed in detail by Ibn Kamâ’mah in his Sharh al-Talâwiq, is: Take the universal affirmative proposition “All animals move their lower jaw when they chew”. This proposition is valid only prior to the “discovery” of the alligator, who moves both jaws when chewing. A single exceptional instance negates the proposition in question. By analogy, the Illuminationist critique goes on to stipulate that the Peripatetic definition of “man” as “rational animal” – which is reduced to the generalized form (Vx)((fx)(g)(x) – has only formal validity. This is because for it to be valid it must exhaustively enumerate all differentiae combined in the formula, which is negated because of future possibility of one differentia not known “now”. Thus, Ibn Kamâ’mah concludes that the essentialist definition of man does not establish the essence “man” – also here called “man-ness” (al-insâniyyah) – which is established by other types of argument resting in the idea of self-consciousness and is picked up in physics and further developed in metaphysics.

42 As I have shown elsewhere there may here be certain connections with the Stoic theory of lekton. See my Knowledge and Illumination: 42ff.

43 Ibn Kamâ’mah himself indicates that one of his reasons for writing the commentary is to provide the details left out by Suhrawardi. See Sharh al-Talâwiq, fol. 23v.
Abū ‘Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn al-ʿArabi al-Ṭāʾī al-Ḥātimī is usually referred to as Muḥī ṭ-Dīn ibn ʿArabi. He was born in Murcia in al-Andalūs on 17 Ramaḍān 560/28 July 1165 and died in Damascus on 22 Rabi’ II 638/10 November 1240. Known by the Sufis as al-Shaykh al-Akbar, “The Greatest Master”, he wrote voluminously at an exceedingly high level of discourse, making him one of the most difficult of all Muslim authors. His al-Fatūḥāt al-makkiyyah, which will fill a projected thirty-seven volumes of five hundred pages each, is only one of several hundred books and treatises.

Ibn ʿArabi discusses in extraordinary detail most if not all of the intellectual issues that have occupied Muslim scholars in fields such as Qur’ānic commentary, Ḥadīth, jurisprudence, kalām, Sufism and falsafah. He was both intensely loyal to the tradition and exceedingly innovative. His works present us with a remarkable reservoir of rich and fecund meditations on every intellectual dimension of Islam, and it would not be inappropriate to claim him as the most influential thinker of the second half of Islamic history. What Franz Rosenthal has called Ibn ʿArabi’s “scintillating personality and thought” have continued to fascinate and inspire Muslim thinkers down to the present. In the words of James Morris, “Paraphrasing Whitehead’s famous remark about Plato – and with something of the same degree of exaggeration – one could say that the history of Islamic thought subsequent to Ibn ʿArabi (at least down to the 18th century and the radically new encounter with the modern West) might largely be construed as a series of footnotes to his work.”

The extent to which Ibn ʿArabi can be called a “philosopher” depends, of course, upon our definition of philosophy. If we take the word falsafah to refer to the specific school of thought in Islam that goes by the name, then Ibn ʿArabi cannot properly be called a fīlasīf. But if
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