Employing Suhrawardi in the Field of Islamic Political Philosophy

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Summary

In this thesis I examine how the illuminationism of the 12th century philosopher Suhrawardi relates to the field of Islamic political philosophy. The specific question 'Is Suhrawardi a political philosopher?' is addressed, as well as the more general question 'What is Islamic political philosophy?'. I will argue that Hossein Ziai's description of an alleged 'illuminationist political doctrine' unconvincingly portrays Suhrawardi as a political philosopher. After this, certain ontological and epistemological elements of Suhrawardi's philosophy are introduced—elements that the 20th century philosopher Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi uses to embed his own thought in the field of Islamic philosophy as a whole. Ha'iri's *Hekmat va Hokumat* [Philosophy and Government] is then presented as a genuine account of an Islamic political philosophy.

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Introduction

Inspiration is the most valuable source of knowledge available to us. The 12th century metaphysician Shihab al-Din Yahya Ibn Amirak Abu al-Futuh al-Suhrawardi[1] tries to convince us of this insight, using logical, instead of ideological argumentation. That is, rather than arguing that intuitive insight *should* be the foundation of philosophy, he describes how convictions—through intuition—operate at the core of all of our philosophic endeavours. Suhrawardi then identifies intuitive philosophy itself as the path leading to the self-realisation of the human soul. He claims that the acquisition of intuitive knowledge leads the individual toward its own enlightenment—that is, to its own liberation from all that is dark (Suhrawardi 1999).

At a first glance, this brief introductory sketch of Suhrawardian illuminationism has very little to do with political theory. So little, in fact, that the question 'Is this 12th century Islamic thought a political philosophy?' seems to have an obvious answer: no. But the ease of arriving at that answer makes the question interesting again. What makes it so easy to answer this question negatively?

Perhaps in liberal-democratic cultures we have grown very accustomed to the idea that secularity in all sectors of society is a good thing. So much so, that the idea that valid political thought may spring up from a non-secular source might seem counter-intuitive. The challenge we are presented with here is to accept even the possibility that a medieval Islamic philosopher such as Suhrawardi, might offer a system of thought that has some kind of political relevance to us right here, right now.

Yet there is a good reason to accept that challenge. Taking this question seriously can grant greater insight into what some would have us believe is a paradigm, incommensurable with our own. At the moment ideas such as 'the West' and 'the Islamic world' are often played out as each other's adver-

[1]'Shihab al-Din Yahya Ibn Amirak Abu al-Futuh al-Suhrawardi,' 'al-Suhrawardi,' 'Shihabbudin Yahya Suhrawardi,' 'Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi' and 'Suhrawardi' all refer to the same individual. In this thesis, I favor the transliteration 'Suhrawardi.' Only when quoting directly will I use the transliteration used in the source material, with exception of my own translations of certain Dutch texts. Where in those Dutch text the name is transliterated as 'Soerawardi,' I have used 'Suhrawardi' instead.

saries. Two sides are manufactured by those who wish to politically exploit the divide they create and maintain. To those powers, the idea that whatever is part of 'the West' cannot be part of 'the Islamic world,' and vice versa, serves to render the existence of a common ground between them inconceivable. That makes the excavation of such common ground itself a political act. My hope is that through looking at what it is political about Suhrawardi's philosophy, the field of Islamic political philosophy itself becomes more accessible, as seen from a Western perspective such as my own.

In trying to come to an understanding of Islamic *political* philosophy, we first need to address the question what Islamic *philosophy* is as a whole. Therefore, the first chapter of this thesis begins by describing Souleymane Diagne's attempt at answering that overarching question. Based upon the insights he articulated in his book *Comment philosopher en Islam?* [How to philosophise in Islam?] (Diagne 2016), I will provide a brief and therefore crude sketch of the way he identifies Islamic philosophy. One of the main things that this will make clear, is how in states that identify as Islamic, the very subject of philosophy itself is immediately political.

The second chapter follows up on Diagne's description of Islamic philosophy, by investigating the extent to which Islamic *political* philosophy—as in, philosophy *about* politics—can be thought to exist. I will first use an article by Evert van der Zweerde (Van der Zweerde 2009) to distinguish between what might turn any philosophy into a political thing, and what constitutes political philosophy proper. In the same chapter, I will then turn to a close reading of "The Source and Nature of Authority: A Study of al-Suhrawardi's Illuminationist Political Doctrine," by Hossein Ziai (1992).

Ziai is one of the most renowned scholars on illuminationism, well-versed in all of Suhrawardi's works, and one of the two translators who translated Suhrawardi's main work *The Philosophy of Illumination* (Suhrawardi 1999) into English. In (Ziai 1992) he posits something he calls the "illuminationist political doctrine" (Ziai 1992, 304-344 passim), seemingly providing an example of an Islamic political philosophy. However, Ziai's example is puzzling, because of what he himself states clearly on several occasions in this same text: Suhrawardi never wrote any work that can be considered a work of political philosophy. I aim to show how Ziai's attempt to conceptualise the 'illuminationist political doctrine' remains problematic, despite his own caveats.

Where in the second chapter my critical reading of Ziai underscores what Suhrawardi's philosophy of illumination is *not*—namely, political theory; the third chapter gives an introductory overview of what it *is*—namely, ontology and epistemology. This time Ziai appears as an invaluable source on the subject of Suhrawardi, having contributed to a very illuminating introduction to the English translation of Suhrawardi's main work (Walbridge & Ziai

1999). Also, Michiel Leezenberg's chapter on Suhrawardi in his comprehensive *Islamitische filosofie: Een geschiedenis* [Islamic Philosophy: A History] (Leezenberg 2008), and the entry on Suhrawardi in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, written by Roxanne Marcotte (2016), have been very helpful in digesting a primary source that has turned out to be a rather hard nut to crack—or even to fit in my West-European nutcracker.

After venturing into the domain of metaphysics, we return to political philosophy again in the fourth and final chapter—only to find out we never really left that domain at all. In that fourth chapter, Suhrawardi's influence on the work of the contemporary Iranian philosopher Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi[2] takes centre stage.

Ha'iri is explicit about Suhrawardi's influence in his book *The Principles of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy: Knowledge by Presence* (Ha'iri 1992). It is a unique work for being originally written in English by an Iranian philosopher. In Ha'iri's last work—*Hekmat va Hokumat* [Philosophy and Government] (Haeri-Yazdi 1994)—he deals with political theory directly. It was published in London to circumvent Iranian state censorship—not in English though, but in Persian. Two English sources of secondary literature on this book (Farzin Vahdat's "Mehdi Haeri Yazdi and the Discourse of Modernity" [Vahdat 2004] and Meysam Badamchi's "Reasonableness, Rationality and Government: Mehdi Haeri Yazdi's *Hekmat va Hokumat*" [Badamchi 2017]), indicate that Suhrawardian illuminationist arguments are key to Ha'iri's political thought.[3]

By the end of this thesis, I hope to have shown two very different ways to employ Suhrawardi in the field of Islamic political philosophy. On the one side Ziai's attempt to distil a political doctrine out of it, and on the other side Ha'iri's political theory, built upon a Suhrawardian epistemological and ontological framework.

In the introduction to *Iran; Between Tradition and Modernity*, the editor, Ramin Jahanbegloo (2004), writes about what often happens whenever the Islamic dimension of any philosopher's work is under consideration. Such philosophers are often subjected to the "intellectual blackmail of 'being for

[2]Note that 'Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi,' 'Ha'iri,' 'Mehdi Haeri Yazdi,' 'Haeri' and 'Haeri-Yazdi' all refer to the same individual. In this thesis I will favor the use of 'Ha'iri,' as this transliteration is the one the author himself used when publishing in English (Ha'iri 1992). Only when directly quoting Vahdat and Badamchi will I use 'Haeri' as they use the name. Because 'Haeri-Yazdi' is the way that Ghobadzadeh (2015) lists the author in his bibliography, the same is also listed in the bibliography of this thesis, and in the corresponding citation (Haeri-Yazdi 1994).

[3]Concerning *Hekmat va Hokumat*, my enthusiasm at the idea of discovering and sharing something new has persuaded me to pardon myself for the academic malefaction of depending only on secondary literature, instead of reading the original.

or against the West,' or 'having to choose between tradition and modernity' " (Jahanbegloo 2004, xxiii). Throughout the course of the exploration of Suhrawardian illuminationism as sketched above, I have tried to on the one hand expose that false dichotomy, and on the other hand help avoid it.

The position I develop and defend in this thesis, is that when Ziai reduces illuminationism to a political doctrine, he inadvertently exposes Suhrawardi to the intellectual blackmail mentioned above. Ha'iri's treatment of the same source then appears in stark contrast to Ziai. I will argue that Ha'iri's thought is anchored in the tradition of Islamic philosophy by being based on Suhrawardian metaphysics. At the same time, what he builds on that foundation is a political theory that has many liberal-democratic characteristics. He offers a unique Islamic-philosophical critique of the current Iranian form of governance, which enables us to treat *Hekmat va Hokumat* as a genuine example of an Islamic political philosophy.

For me, the idea that any philosophy itself is immediately political has been one of the most difficult things to understand about the Islamic way of thinking. Investigating Suhrawardi's thought has, however, made that issue much more accessible. Not because his illuminationism is a philosophy about politics—which it is not. But because Suhrawardi addresses and clarifies exactly those metaphysical concepts that are vital to safeguarding, for instance, Ha'iri's political theory as something that belongs to the field of Islamic philosophy. Therefore, understanding the extent to which Suhrawardi's metaphysics are political, enables a better understanding of Islamic philosophy itself, and of the different ways for treating such philosophy as something *political*.

Chapter 1

Reason and Faith

Both the 12th century philosopher Suhrawardi, and the 20th century philosopher Ha'iri lived in environments in which their works met with resistance from those in power. One of the consequences for Ha'iri has been that he had to look for a foreign publisher for his book *Hekmat va Hokumat* [Philosophy and Government] (Haeri-Yazdi 1994) due to state censorship of his home country, Iran. Suhrawardi, however, paid the ultimate price, being sentenced to death by the Sultan Saladin for adversely influencing the Sultan's son Malik al-Zahir, then ruler of Aleppo (Leezenberg 2008, 272).

1.1 Who are you calling a philosopher?

Philosophy and politics have a troubled history in states that identify as Islamic. There, calling something a 'philosophy,' or someone a 'philosopher' is immediately politically sensitive. In his recently translated book *Comment philosopher en Islam?* [How to philosophise in Islam?] (Diagne 2016), Souleymane Bachir Diagne places the problematic entanglement of power and philosophy at the very root of the constitution of Islamic governance. When Mohammed was alive, there was no problem yet, as he could answer all questions pertaining to law himself:

> "A companion asked how a specific passage in the Qur'an should be read. He explained. A specific situation presented itself: what to do? He answered. But he had forbidden to invent hypothetical problems and think up clever situations that, because they only referred to themselves, had nothing to do with the actual movement of life: the only thing capable of bringing about real questions. The intention of this prohibition is clear: the future should be left open and there should be no attempt made to

> fabricate questions in order to construct ready-made answers to render the questioner mute" (Diagne 2016, 12; my translation).[1]

However, the death of the Prophet, Diagne continues, immediately made this mandate for openness problematic. When there was a passage in the Qur'an immediately applicable to the given situation it was easy to keep to the letter of the law. But when life brings about the unforeseeable, constantly renewing itself, the question how to remain loyal to the Prophet in this new situation becomes open for interpretation and, in that sense, problematic (Diagne 2016, 13). In the first chapter of his book, Diagne reaches the same conclusion over and over, cleverly capturing at least some of the Islamic world's reluctance towards the subject of philosophy: "there is no choice but to philosophise" (Diagne 2016, 11, 14, 16).

A further problem is that Mohammed, as lawgiver, had also left open who was to rule after his death. The political question who should be leading the congregation of the faithful has always been caught up in philosophic disputes regarding theology. Therefore, there has always been a clear link between the ruler and the specific philosophy he subscribed to. This meant that the acts performed by the ruler also reflected on the school of thought that he propagated.

In this respect caliph al-Mahmoon is worth mentioning, in order to understand the Islamic scholars' cautious attitude towards philosophy. In the 9th century (or the 3rd century, counting by the Islamic calendar) he inaugurated a kind of rational inquisition, forcing everybody to accept the rationalist 'truth' that the Qur'an is created—as opposed to being 'uncreated' and pertaining to the realm of all that is unending and eternal—by pain of death (Leezenberg 2008, 81). Dictating what rationality should look like has connoted the words 'rational thought' negatively. Ahmad ibn Hanbal was a jurist who resisted the imposition of this 'truth.' He survived the torture that he was put through for refusing to accept that the Qur'an was created, and thus became: "a symbol of the power of the human mind to withstand the oppression of dogmatism—a dogmatism that was in this case the dogma... of reason itself" (Diagne 2016, 22).

That cautious attitude towards reason was already apparent in Mohammed's prohibition of thinking up hypothetical situations to predetermine the outcome of future debates. It warns against the risk that at some point reason might take itself as its only goal, resulting in sophistry, striving for nothing else than skilfully winning arguments. The scenario Mohammed wanted to avoid, is one in which the act of winning and acquiring attention

[1] There are three Dutch sources used in this thesis: (Diagne 2016), (Leezenberg 2008) and (Van der Zweerde 2009). All English quotations of these texts are my own translation. The page numbers refer to the Dutch publications listed in the bibliography.

becomes more important than the actual ideas themselves. So the cautious attitude was already there. But after the period of al-Mamoon's rationalist dogmatism, the fear that overuse of reason would lead to a degeneration of morality and faith became a characteristic element of culture in Islamic states (Diagne 2016, 20-21).

1.2 Beyond Islam and unbelief

The political context that stimulates expressing caution for the overuse of reason, is in stark contrast to the political context in which free thought is prophesised. In the West, the academic's love for the instrument of reason is treated as a given. So much so, that it might be quite difficult to even think of it as reinforced, or even produced, by a certain political context. That also makes it very difficult to appreciate any grounds for being critical of the love for reason, without being critical of 'all that we stand for.' Yet to automatically dismiss the validity or *possibility* even of such criticism, is to wilfully overlook what others treat as an even greater source of inspiration. Of course, the attempt to understand the critical approach towards reason itself, is difficult when trying only to be reasonable about it. For a full embrace of otherworldly inspiration, divine insight, super-human intuition, or whatever we may call it, *something else* is required than what free thinking alone can yield. Still, such thinking still might bring us very close to understanding and appreciating the embrace of that 'something else.'

Doing justice to Islamic otherness requires acknowledging the very different direction in which thought has developed in the Islamic world, as compared to that which (despite its shared roots with Islamic philosophy) has come to be known as Western philosophy: "There are fifty-five Islamic countries and none is democratic in the Western sense. For most of the Islamic believers of these countries, Islam answers questions about the individual and his responsibilities that no political philosophy can ever propose" (Jahanbegloo 2004, xx).

The development of *Western* philosophical thought might have been hindered in the 'non-West,' but that has only allowed for something else to develop in its place. Admittedly, from a Western perspective it often takes some effort to distinguish that 'something else' as 'philosophy proper,' because of the relative ease with which we might accuse it of being little more than Islamic theology wearing a philosophical disguise. However, as unfair as it is to portrait Western philosophy as free thought, taking nothing but blasphemous liberties, so too is it unfair to portrait Islamic philosophy as nothing but theology's handmaiden. The West merely tells a history in which the excesses of faith are often cast as a hindrance to the ultimately

victorious individual freedom on which much within current Western civilization is premised. The Islamic world tells a history in which the excesses of free thought are cast as hindrances to the ultimately triumphant faith on which much within current Islamic culture is premised.

It is easy to magnify the differences between these two different narratives and their corresponding cultures, in order to divide and conquer. Power-seeking forces in the West as well as in radical Islam do this. They suggest, and in doing so, manufacture two clearly delineated sides, and use this medieval tactic on both of those self-generated sides for their gain. Reducing an otherwise complex and continuously evolving state of affairs to such a simple opposition, is much easier than arduously labouring at finding the place where free thought facilitates a leap of faith, or the place where faith inspires total individual freedom. Intuitively, this is of course one and the same place, where the Islamic and the Western world are not opposing forces, merely two different opportunities of getting there. In the words of a world famous Sufi:

> "Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
> there is a field. I'll meet you there" (Rumi 1995, 36).

Incidentally, the above is the popular American translation of Rumi, made by Coleman Barks, who doesn't master Persian (the language in which the original poem was written). In one poetry reading session, Barks jokes about his translation: "In the original, I am told, [Rumi] says: 'out beyond things that are permitted in Islam and things that are forbidden in Islam.' But I am interested more in the universalist Rumi. [...] So I'm just telling you how I mis-translate these things."[2] A more accurate translation of Rumi's original Persian quatrains renders the first line: "Beyond Islam and unbelief there is a desert plain" (Rumi 2008, 407). One of the main reasons for the translators to offer this more accurate translation, is to aid "general readers who seek a deeper understanding of [Rumi's] spiritual teachings than popularized books (often interpretive versions claimed as translations) can provide" (Rumi 2008, back cover). I cannot help but admire Barks here, for taking the liberty to actually follow Rumi beyond the ideas of Islam and unbelief.

Returning to the subject of Islamic philosophy: we could say that the most important characteristic of Islamic philosophy—its 'Islamicness'—is to be found in its cautious approach to reason, on account of the possibility for reason to undermine faith (Diagne 2016, 12-22). We should understand that when 'philosophy' is taken to mean the uninhibited application of free

[2] "2011: Coleman Barks on Rumi's 'Out beyond ideas of rightdoing and wrongdoing,' " Poets House, accessed Febuary 9, 2017, http://poetshouse.org/watch-listen-and-discuss/listen/coleman-barks-rumi-wrongdoing-rightdoing.

thought, this expresses its Western connotation. Because of that liberal-democratic connotation, Islamic scholars understand 'philosophy' to be a politically laden term. Along the lines of Diagne, we can still come to a definition of 'Islamic philosophy' all the same—a definition that by acknowledging the political charge of the word 'philosophy' connotes it accordingly. For the purpose of this thesis, I will therefore use the following definition: an Islamic philosophy is any system of thought that—whatever else it is aimed at achieving—explicitly allows for a connection of itself with the Islamic faith, safeguarding its embeddedness in it. The field of Islamic philosophy is then that which contains all Islamic philosophies. In the next chapters we investigate how we can identify Islamic *political* philosophy as part of that field.

Chapter 2

No Illuminationist Political Doctrine

The other-worldly field (or desert plain), where poetry is licensed to transcend cultures and histories, appears in sharp contrast to the worldly forces that feed their love of power by casting the West as Islam's adversary, and vice versa.

In the introduction to *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy*, the editor Charles Butterworth indicates that concerning this topic, there are two disturbing narratives that require philosophical refutation. One of them is voiced by certain authorities in Islamic countries. It goes as far as to claim that Islamic thought was never influenced by Greek political philosophy in the first place. According to this point of view, Islamic thought is unique onto itself, and has no link whatsoever to the philosophy in and of the West. This is always a precursor to the conclusion that in a world ruled by Islam there is simply no place for Western values at all. The other narrative is produced by some authoritative voices in the West that typify Islamic thought as something that hasn't fully developed yet. They accuse Islamic thought of never having made a certain crucial transition, which to them explains why it cannot reach the same level of thinking on which Western technological success is premised (Butterworth 1992, 2).

Hossein Ziai's contribution to the volume edited by Butterworth, is a chapter in which he sets forth his reading of the philosophy of the 12th century metaphysician Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi. Butterworth praises Ziai for demonstrating that the mystical philosophy of Suhrawardi apparently was politically so significant, that the Sultan sentenced Suhrawardi to death for it (Butterworth 1992, 6). In "The Source and Nature of Authority: A Study of al-Suhrawardi's Illuminationist Political Doctrine" (Ziai 1992), Ziai indeed argues that Suhrawardi—although not explicitly teaching it or writing about it in any document—can be somehow connected to a political doctrine, that

ultimately cost him his life.

It would seem then, that Ziai has found a way to answer the question 'Was Suhrawardi a political philosopher?' with 'yes,' and that this makes Suhrawardi's illuminationism available to us as an example of an Islamic political philosophy. In this chapter I will, however, point out why I think Ziai has *not* succeeded at doing so. I hope to, simultaneously: 1. illustrate how political issues and philosophy have become entangled here; 2. clarify how they might be disentangled; 3. free Suhrawardi's philosophy from being reduced to a political interpretation that is too narrow; 4. introduce Suhrawardi's thought *via negativa* (that is, by arguing what it is *not*—namely, a philosophy about politics).

2.1 Political things and political theory

Much of what makes Ziai's line of argumentation confusing has to do with the different ways that words such as 'political,' 'politics' and 'political philosophy' can be interpreted. Therefore, before turning to a close reading of Ziai, it will be beneficial to clarify how such nouns and adjectives operate.

In his article "De grens van politiek" [The Limit of Politics][1] (Van der Zweerde 2009), Evert van der Zweerde presents a means for distinguishing between different usages of words that have to do with 'politics.' Firstly, he distinguishes between practical political issues (what to do about the traffic jams), practical issues pertaining to the political process itself (who should be the next mayor), and 'meta-political' questions (how involved should government be in daily life). Not all these issues require immediate action, but however we react to them, even when we intentionally *don't* react, we're doing something *political*.

'Political,' as Van der Zweerde explains it, is the adjective we use to describe any one thing in its capacity to engender conflict. And when talking about 'the field of politics,' 'politics' is the noun that denotes all the ways of dealing with those possibilities for conflict.

Asking a political question about anything makes that something political. When it is questioned whether or not something that is labelled 'a political issue,' should have that label—in other words, when its 'politicity' is called into question—that very questioning is itself political. Van der Zweerde recounts the story of a Dutch prime minister, who argued that some things are so important (in this example: the European Central Bank), that they should be placed outside the field of politics. Yet the fact that such a

[1]Specific to the Dutch language is that the word 'politiek' is polysemous, because it has the meaning of both the noun 'politics' and of the adjective 'political.' That play on words is lost in my translation.

viewpoint itself is debatable, makes it political. Thus, raising or answering the question 'What should politics be about?' will always be a political thing to do, no matter what the answer is, and no matter what the context is in which the question in raised.

The decision to identify certain things as devoid of any capacity to engender conflict, is a political decision too. When, for instance, liberal policies effectively de-politicise the marketplace and the economy, this creates a field of politics in which the market and the economy are in fact no longer available as 'political things': "The political decision that there is a *free* market, means that *within* that market nothing is political: there conflict is called competition" (Van der Zweerde 2009, 180). This doesn't only apply to the market: "In a liberal-democratic society large sectors—economy, culture, opinion, religion—are de-politicised in this way. Citizens and politicians can find this agreeable or disagreeable, in fact, they have no choice to find it one way or the other, implicitly or explicitly. 'Politics' are unavoidable" (Van der Zweerde 2009, 177).

There is a limit to what pertains to the field of politics, and setting that limit itself is perhaps the most political thing we can do. The drawing of the line between what is in and what is outside of the field of politics, is itself political—and because such a line is subject to being drawn in the first place, it is never given as an absolute.[2] When such a line has been relatively stable for a longer time, it might seem like there is nothing political about where it has been drawn. Partially this is a simple matter of habituation, but it also happens because the 'politicity' of drawing the line is actively veiled.

Keeping a close eye on the difference between things that are political, and the field of politics itself helps us to see the 'politicity' of drawing the line again: "Making a distinction between [. . .] [all things] political and [the field of] politics is required to avoid identifying whatever factually exists as something normatively compulsory, or historically imperative. Fully recognising the political character of our system; the insight that the existence of that system and its continuation depend on repeatedly making political decisions, has, paradoxically, a liberating effect" (Van der Zweerde 2009, 180).

2.2 Turning illuminationism into a political thing

The effect that asking a political question about anything, turns that something into a political issue, is also observable in Ziai's chapter on Suhrawardi.

[2]As Diagne so aptly observes, "any literal reading of the Qur'an is only one interpretation, pretending to be the only one" (Diagne 2016, 22).

In it, Ziai tries to discover the political dimension of illuminationism. Shedding a political light on this subject is already enough to give it a political hue. Ziai then misrepresents the 'polititicy' attributed to illuminationism in this way, as an 'illuminationist political doctrine', which he then claims as his discovery.

Actively veiling that drawing the line between what *should* and should *not* be thought to belong to the field of politics, cannot prevent the fact that drawing that line is a political act in itself (Van der Zweerde 2009, 179). Here, instead of *drawing* such lines, Ziai *blurs* some of them. To be specific: he blurs the lines between a) what should be considered a philosophy about politics, and b) a philosophy that had practical consequences of a political nature.

Although asking a political question about any given thing makes a political issue out of it, this doesn't mean that if that 'thing' happens to be a philosophy, it then is automatically transformed into a philosophy about politics. To the extent that it makes the philosophy itself a political thing—understanding it as something with the capacity to engender conflict—it is both 'political' and a 'philosophy.' That is one way of semantically analysing the term 'political philosophy.' But that needs to be distinguished from philosophy that itself is *about* political things, or about the field of politics itself.

Ziai actually seems to make this distinction himself, because both in the introductory lines, as well as in his conclusion, he implies that he is aware of the difference between political philosophy and political issues. Were my criticism to amount to nothing but the assertion that Suhrawardi's philosophy can never be identified as political philosophy, Ziai can be quoted in full support of such a statement:

> "First, al-Suhrawardi does not aim to examine the principles of political philosophy as philosophers before him had done. For him, the city as such is not a subject of inquiry. He never discusses, for example, the good city or the bad city; nor does he study the question of justice and is never concerned in any theoretical sense with types of rule. There is never a discussion of the virtues commonly associated with the study of practical philosophy nor a discussion of any other subject pertaining to the science of ethics. This means that none of al-Suhrawardi's philosophical works, nor any part of them, can be described as political philosophy or practical philosophy, including the science of laws" (Ziai 1992, 306).

The problem, then, is perhaps nothing greater than an ill-chosen, misleading subtitle of the chapter, for it reads: "A Study of al-Suhrawardi's

Illuminationist Political Doctrine," and not 'A Study of One Kind of Political Doctrine for Which al-Suhrawardi's Illuminationism Can Be Used as a Justification'—perhaps for the sake of brevity. Yet, as the chapter progresses, we see that rather than avoiding the confusing phrase 'illuminationist political doctrine,' Ziai repeats it many times in exactly these words (Ziai 1992, 304, 306, 307, 309, 310, 313, 320, 323, 332, 335 and 343). He also presents it as precisely that which he claims as his discovery. Ziai must have been aware of the problems with his argumentation. In describing 'Suhrawardi's political doctrine,' he builds in caveats that seem to indicate that here we are somehow dealing with a political doctrine that is neither political theory, nor, as Ziai reasserts in the conclusion of this article, is it really Suhrawardi's either:

> "In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that al-Surawardi's political doctrine does not fall within the domain of classical political philosophy. That doctrine, based on an eclectic view of wisdom, inspiration, and divine authority vested in royal sages, is the distillation of popular beliefs of al-Suhrawardi's own time. One should not attempt to extrapolate a theory from it" (Ziai 1992, 333-334).

The recurrent use of the word 'doctrine' makes Ziai's chapter confusing. A quick check in the dictionary shows that it would be ill-advised to choose especially this word to describe something that you will argue is explicitly *not* : "1. a creed or body of teachings of a religious, political, or philosophical group presented for acceptance or belief; dogma, or 2. a principle or body of principles that is taught or advocated."[3]

So what is Ziai exactly trying to accomplish? In his own words: "I propose to examine al-Suhrawardi's works for a hitherto unnoticed political dimension and to look at the philosophy of illumination to ascertain his views on the question of political authority. Though I have no intention of delving into the details of the available historical evidence on the events of his life and death in Aleppo, I do hope to establish a political motive for the order [to execute al-Suhrawardi] given by the great Saladin" (Ziai 1992, 305).

Already in the outline for his research, Ziai suggests that Saladin's political motive is directly connected with al-Suhrawardi's view on the question of political authority. Even if we accept the very sound arguments that Ziai presents for indicating that Suhrawardi subscribed to a Neo-Platonist outlook on life, in which the image of a philosopher-king at the head of a state is desirable, then still: Saladin condemning Suhrawardi to death says most

[3] "Doctrine," Collins English Dictionary—Complete & Unabridged 10th Edition, accessed November 8th, 2016, http://www.dictionary.com/browse/doctrine.

about Saladin's political motives. It doesn't turn Suhrawardi's metaphysics and epistemology into political theory, no matter how Neo-Platonist they are. At most, Saladin's concerns turned Suhrawardi's philosophy into a practical political issue.

It seems that in this article Ziai finds a political doctrine in Suhrawardi's illuminationism, merely by looking for it there, and Ziai then reads his own discovery into the history of Suhrawardi's execution. After accurately recounting the ordeals Sultan Saladin was facing at the time, Ziai writes:

> "Clearly, the great Saladin had more pressing concerns than taking on a poor wandering Sufi. Surely he was not so much concerned about a philosopher-mystic befriending and 'corrupting' the mind of his young son as he was fearful of the practical implications of a 'new' political doctrine, as developed and taught by al-Suhrawardi in his works" (Ziai 1992, 337).

Not only does Ziai outright contradict his own assertion that "none of al-Suhrawardi's philosophical works, nor any part of them, can be described as political philosophy or practical philosophy" (Ziai 1992, 306), he also fails to appreciate that it could have been just Saladin who had a political motive for sentencing Suhrawardi to death that might have had nothing to do with the content of his philosophy at all.

An alternative story, told by Suhrawardi's biographer Shahrazuri, is that Suhrawardi had become a nuisance to the lawmakers around Al-Malik, Saladin's son, then ruler of Aleppo. Suhrawardi would pick arguments with these lawmakers, and then 'win' them: "Thereupon the fulminations against him increased, and judicial sessions were convened to declare him an infidel. The results were forwarded to Damascus to Saladin, and they said that if he were allowed to live he would corrupt al-Malik's faith, and if he were banished he would corrupt any place he went," Shahrazuri wrote, as quoted in (Thackston 1982, 3). To Saladin, conducting many different affairs simultaneously, the execution might have been nothing more than expediency; a simple way to appease the unhappy lawmakers on whose approval his rule depended. There is no record of any " 'new' political doctrine, *as developed and taught by al-Suhrawardi*" (Ziai 1992, 337; my italics), apart from the one suggested by Ziai in that very sentence.

2.3 Holding Ziai's doctrine up to the light

It is without question that Ziai was one of the greatest academic authorities on the subject of illuminationism, and particularly Suhrawardi. The amount of sources used for this article is staggering, and his familiarity with

the content of them is awe-inspiring. It is no wonder that the translation of Suhrawardi's main work (Suhrawardi 1999) was (partially) entrusted to him. Reading this particular chapter of Ziai does give a great overview of where in Suhrawardi's works the ideal of philosopher-kingship operates below the surface. My criticism of Ziai's work here should therefore not be understood as an attempt to deny the evidence of Suhrawardi's Neo-Platonism. It consists solely in emphasising that Surhawardi cannot be said to have taught or introduced any political philosophy proper.

2.3.1 Divine governance is optional, wisdom is the goal

As noted before, Ziai doesn't explicitly claim—or better: explicitly denies claiming—that a Suhrawardian political philosophy can be thought to exist. However, this remains very much at odds with his attempt to describe an 'illuminationist political doctrine.' This calls for an examination of what exactly it is about Suhrawardi's work that Ziai considers a political doctrine. Ziai's first evidence for the existence of it is as follows:

> "Whenever al-Suhrawardi discusses the concept of rule, he relates it to 'divine governance' (*tabir ilahi*) and never to any specific political process, actual or theoretical. For him, politics and the political regime are deemed meaningful if, and only if, actual politics and the political regime of a state, a nation, or city, embody and manifest a divine dimension" (Ziai 1992, 306).

In this passage Ziai reverses the original Suhrawardian perspective. Suhrawardi does not require the state or any form of politics to embody and manifest a divine dimension. Accessing divine power is his primary field of interest, and political power may fall within the scope of that power, to varying degrees. That such political power sometimes falls within that scope, is not of such particular relevance to Suhrawardi that it would merit the claim that his philosophy is designed to lead to that end.

Suhrawardi himself, in Ziai's own translation, is incredibly clear on this point:

> "The world will never be without a philosopher proficient in intuitive philosophy. Authority on God's earth will never belong to the proficient discursive philosopher who has not become proficient in intuitive philosophy—one more worthy than he who is only a discursive philosopher—for the vicegerency requires direct knowledge. By this authority I do not mean political power. The leader with intuitive philosophy may indeed rule openly, or he may be hidden—the one whom the multitude call 'the Pole.' He

> will have authority even if he is in the deepest obscurity" (Suhrawardi 1999, 3).

The authority awarded to those who are proficient in intuitive philosophy outshines the field of politics. The relation between adopting illuminationism and acquiring power is addressed, but whether or not that power is political, is of no importance to the theory set forth by Suhrawardi: "By this power I do not mean political power" (ibid.), he explicates. So the one the multitude call 'the Pole' can have no political power whatsoever, and still be God's vicegerent. Investigating the position of vicegerency of God is what Suhrawardi concerns himself with—and it would be a good thing for the world if the actual earthly ruler had this super-political authority too—because: "when the government is in his hands, the age will be enlightened, but if the age is without divine rule, darkness will be triumphant" (ibid.).

Yet even when darkness is in fact triumphant, we need not fear.[4] In that case, we may not see any examples of divinely granted authority at play in the political field. Somewhere hidden God will, however, still have a vicegerent on earth, with an authority greater than any political authority. So politics clearly aren't Suhrawardi's primary concern. Yet, Ziai concludes: "al-Suhrawardi [...] posits that rule must be in the hands of prophets, divine kings, or special categories of philosopher-sages" (Ziai 1992, 312). This way of presenting Suhrawardi isn't compatible with the idea that earthly rule is not even a prerequisite for being God's vicegerent on earth.

Ziai's own zeal at discovering a political doctrine in Suhrawardi's work, allows him to find it there:

> "al-Suhrawardi is deeply concerned with describing a special illuminationist epistemological system that aims to inform the seekers of wisdom of a process by which direct absolute knowledge, designated illuminationist wisdom (*hikmah ishraquiyyah*), may be obtained. The recipient of this wisdom will, among other things, obtain the authority to rule" (Ziai 1992, 310).

Everything up to the last sentence is an unmistakably accurate description of Suhrawardi's work. Yet in that last sentence the word 'authority' is awkwardly out of place. Would Suhrawardi's main attempt be to describe what the conditions are for somebody to have the authority for earthly rule, his would indeed be a philosophy about politics. But when reading Suhrawardi's main work (Surhawardi 1999), I understand receiving *absolute knowledge* to be his main goal; not the means to a political end. Nowhere is absolute knowledge made subservient to the achievement or justification of authority.

[4]How darkness and light are related in Suhrawardi's metaphysics will be discussed in the next chapter.

In between the lines one might read that the recipient of this wisdom will, among other things, obtain the *aptitude* to rule, perhaps even the greatest aptitude possible—but *aptitude*; not *right*.

Suhrawardi's idea is that through mystical practices certain people may become infused with divine inspiration, based upon their experience of direct knowledge, but that any such power and authority should not be mistaken for political power. Nowhere that I have been able to look does Suhrawardi claim, as Ziai suggests, that once one is infused with divine authority, one is *entitled* to rule.

Another misrepresentation of Suhrawardi's point of view occurs when Ziai turns Suhrawardi's observations about wonders and miracles into a part of his alleged doctrine. As part of his laudation of divine inspiration Suhrawardi mentions that some individuals, including past kings and sultans, have given proof of their divine inspiration because they have been said to perform miracles, or do wondrous things. Ziai incorporates these observations into his theory in the following way:

> "One of the primary pillars of the illuminationist view of politics, then, is the way living rulers develop the capacity to become recipients of divine command. In addition, they must demonstrate that they have had authority divinely conferred on them, that is, that they control qualities their subjects commonly associate with divine inspiration" (Ziai 1992, 307).

It is Suhrawardi's observation that *if* a ruler can perform miracles, his authority must be greater than mere earthly. Ziai turns this around into 'a ruler must demonstrate his ability to perform miracles, for his earthly rule to be legitimate,' leading to the following, highly misleading *non sequitur*: "al-Suhrawardi thinks that rulers demonstrate superhuman powers" (Ziai 1992, 313). Ziai writes:

> "through special exercises [...] the recipients of illuminationist wisdom experiences the light of divine majesty and obtains a quality—depicted as light—that bestows upon him the ability to perform miraculous acts. The 'political' dimension in this theme is the identification of the authority to rule with the performance of miraculous acts" (Ziai 1992, 316).

Nowhere is it made apparent that this identification is made by anybody other than Ziai himself.[5]

[5] I have only found one instance where a reference is made to Suhrawardi in a related context. There is a brief passage in Aziz al-Azmeh's *Muslim Kingship* devoted to Suhrawardi, where he is introduced as an "illuminationist metaphysician [who held] that a

2.3.2 Underexposure of liberal elements

Ziai continues his line of argumentation by comparing Suhrawardi's illuminationism to al-Farabi's political philosophy. He says that the similarities occur when the ruler is said to have to be some particularly wise man. The difference is that:

> "unlike al-Farabi, al-Suhrawardi maintains that since everyone has the innate ability to seek wisdom, potentially anyone may become a leader. As noted, the fundamental condition stipulated by al-Suhrawardi for gaining the right to rule is the attainment of wisdom, and this doctrine becomes central to his illuminationist political thought" (Ziai 1992, 312).

Again, my counterargument is that the attainment of wisdom yields the *aptitude* to rule—not the right to do so. Also, if Suhrawardi truly maintained that "potentially anyone may become a leader" (ibid.), does this not contradict Ziai's prior observation that Suhrawardi thought that "rule must be in the hands of prophets, divine kings, or special categories of philosophers" (ibid.)? The way I read Suhrawardi, is that according to him potentially anyone may become *wise*, and not 'a leader.'

The remarkable thing here, is that Ziai both emphasizes this uniquely universalist element of Suhrawardi's philosophy, and suggests disregarding it at the same time. Because when Ziai analyses Suhrawardi's previously quoted introduction to his main work *The Philosophy of Illumination*,[6] Ziai writes:

> "Given al-Suhrawardi's connection with rulers, one must ask whether introductions such as this do not foreshadow an illuminationist political doctrine, namely, divinely inspired rule by the wise as the foundation of politics. The politically significant dimension of his thought, contrary to the juridical view prevalent in his time, is his clear stipulation that revelation is continuous and unending as well as that wisdom is not confined to specific groups, Muslim or otherwise. This means that just as divinely inspired prophets, lawgivers, and wise kings of earlier era (be they Greeks, Persians, Egyptians, Brahmins or from the Judaeo-Islamic line of prophets and their progeny) ruled ancient nations, so too any present ruler

properly illuminated royal person would receive by illumination the light of kingship [...] Persons thus enlightened, who in other texts are identified with the Active Intellect, are caliphs of God, among whose number he includes the first four Medinan caliphs no less than Sufi divines like Bistami and Tustari; all capable of performing wonders" (al-Azmeh 2001, 199). In a footnote, al-Azmeh cites (Ziai 1992) as his source for this passage.

[6] See the second quote of section 2.3.1, starting on page 21.

> must be divinely inspired. The ruler, God's vicegerent, is identified as the enlightened philosopher, one who combines to a perfect degree discursive and intuitive wisdom" (Ziai 1992, 323).

Ziai only needs one comma to suggest that 'the ruler' and 'God's vicegerent' are necessarily identical in illuminationist philosophy, which directly contradicts Suhrawardi where he writes that it is possible for the vicegerent to be completely void of political power.

I do agree with Ziai that there are some politically very significant dimensions of Suhrawardi's thought. The claim that everybody has the potential to become wise, that inspiration is not limited to a time, a people or a person, but is ongoing, and that the descent of wisdom, although it includes Mohammed's revelations, can be traced back further in history—these are arguably quite liberal ideas and perhaps therefore not all too welcome in the Abbayid dynasty. Yet if all of *this* is indeed so politically significant, why do none of these liberal element resound in Ziai's blueprint of the so-called 'illuminationist political doctrine'?

2.3.3 Oversimplification and speculation

Near the end of the chapter, Ziai lists a great number of Islamic political theories that are all referred to in different places throughout Suhrawardi's oeuvre, after which he concludes:

> "Al-Suhrawardi's reputation for reading widely and evidence within his writings that he made use of the types of texts mentioned above permit the following assessment: Illuminationist political doctrine is, beyond anything else, the simple stipulation of a commonly known political proposition, namely, that wise rulers are the only ones fit to rule" (Ziai 1992, 310).

If this is indeed permitted, then what makes this 'doctrine' *Suhrawardi's*? How can one claim to discover a "hitherto unnoticed political dimension" (Ziai 1992, 305), if it amounts to "beyond anything else, the simple stipulation of a commonly known political proposition" (Ziai 1992, 310)?

Despite being well-versed in such a large a number of Islamic philosophical texts, that it makes my experience with this subject pale in comparison, Ziai's attempts at coining the phrase 'illuminationist political doctrine' remain problematic. In his chapter, he seems unable to distinguish 'central political principles' from 'central principles with political ramifications,' leading to more confusion than clarity about the political dimension of Suhrawardi's work.

Rather than addressing and clarifying his uncertainties, Ziai doubles down on his supposition, leaving little to the imagination when he suggests that

Suhrawardi's ontology and epistemology were only veils behind which he hid his own political ambition:

> "the implications for al-Suhrawardi's own time would have been clear, especially to the royal patrons who commissioned his works. A sage (here al-Suhrawardi) must be heeded by the prince or ruler, if he seeks to gain the wisdom necessary to rule with power and become victorious over the enemy. But those well disposed to al-Suhrawardi were not the only ones to discuss the practical consequences of the illuminationist political doctrine, or so the circumstances under which he was executed in Aleppo would suggest" (Ziai 1992, 335).

In other words, it was Suhrawardi's own political teachings and ambition that ultimately sealed his fate. This is a highly speculative conclusion.

I hope to have emphasised that it is questionable if Suhrawardi ever offered any political teachings at all. Perhaps there was some 'political ambition' on his account that didn't help his case. Perhaps there wasn't. Perhaps Suhrawardi attempted to lend extra gravitas to his work, by gaining the confidence and friendship of the prince. Perhaps rulers commissioned his work because they thought this 'poor wandering Sufi' has something interesting to say of which they could learn. Perhaps they thought their affiliation with him would work in their favour. There are myriad ways to speculate on this subject, most of which don't require the manufacturing of an 'illuminationist political doctrine.'

It is certainly correct to interpret Suhrawardi's illuminationism as belonging to the field of Islamic philosophy. As we have seen in chapter one, that itself is already enough to give illuminationism a political connotation. Perhaps this is what Ziai intuited, when he insisted that "al-Surawardi's political doctrine does not fall within the domain of classical political philosophy" (Ziai 1992, 333). I believe that there is in fact no such thing as an 'illumationist political doctrine,' and that Suhrawardi is not a political philosopher. His illuminationism *is* Islamic, but is *not* a philosophy about politics, and therefore is not a genuine example of Islamic political philosophy.

In the next chapter, Suhrawardi's ontology and epistemology will be introduced as such. The focus will be especially on those parts of his metaphysics that are reiterated in the work of the 20th century Islamic philosopher Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi, including Ha'iri's political philosophy. Although illuminationism itself is not a political philosophy that can be included in the history of Islamic philosophy as such, the next two chapters serve to demonstrate how it *can* serve as a source of inspiration to such a philosophy.

Chapter 3

The Illuminationist Agenda

In the previous chapter we arrived at a negative answer to the question if Suhrawardi is a political philosopher. That does, however, *not* imply there is nothing political about his thought.

At the end of the first chapter, we developed a definition of Islamic philosophy that acknowledges the political charge that the term 'philosophy' has in this constellation. We defined the field of Islamic philosophy as the collection of all systemic thought that intentionally connects itself with the Islamic faith, and safeguards its embeddedness in it. In this chapter we will discover that illuminationism meets that description, because Suhrawardi's ontology and epistemology indicate exactly where and how philosophy itself can be thought of as something that is founded by inspirational revelations. In fact, illuminationism itself is aimed at describing the logical connection between reason and the higher source that inspires it. In Suhrawardi's vocabulary, that higher source is called *light*:

> "The faith of Plato and the master visionaries is not built upon [...] rhetorical arguments, but upon something else. Plato said: 'When freed from my body I beheld luminous spheres.' These that he mentioned are the very same highest heavens that some men will behold at their resurrection 'on the day when the earth will be changed for another earth and heavens, and will appear before God, the One, the 'Triumphant' ' [Qur'an 14:48]. Plato and his companions showed plainly that they believed the Maker of the universe and the world of intellect to be light when they said that the pure light is the world of intellect. Of himself, Plato said that in certain of his spiritual conditions he would shed his body and become free of matter. Then he would see light and splendour within his essence. He would ascend to that all-encompassing divine cause and would seem to be located and

> suspended in it, beholding a mighty light in that lofty and divine place" (Suhrawardi 1999, 110).

Although in this passage Suhrawardi refers to *The Theology of Aristotle*,[1] there is no reason to believe that he was aware that this source was counterfeit. The conviction he derived from it, and with which he then made his own case, therefore, is genuine. In *The Philosophy of Illumination* (Suhrawardi 1999), he presents his world view, based upon an ontology and epistemology centered around the concept of light. Suhrawardi's illuminationism teaches that light is the essence of everything there is, as it is the most evident thing of all: "Anything in existence that requires no definition or explanation is evident. Since there is nothing more evident than light, there is nothing less in need of definition" (Suhrawardi 1999, 76). In other words: shedding light on a light in order to find it is absurd, as any light is the evidence of itself.

3.1 Ontic luminosity

Suhrawardi builds a cosmology of light on this idea. He describes how what we are and see is part of a hierarchy of lights—visible, material light being perhaps of the least interest to him. 'Immaterial lights' are the type of lights that are key in illuminationism, and these lights are not perceptible with the senses. Immaterial lights, according to Suhrawardi, include such lights as the human soul, the Active Intellect, and God as the Light of Lights.

The Light of Lights, as the Necessary Existent, is at the top of the hierarchy of lights. There is nothing more beautiful or more evident to this Light of Lights than that Light itself. It not only *has* a passion for its own essence, but *is* that passion at the same time (Suhrawardi 1999, 97). The Light of Lights, as the ultimate immaterial light is the cause of itself—the only self-causing entity there is, which is existence itself. Being all there is, the Light of Lights has the First Light as its immediate consequence, from which all subsequent lights and their realms emanate. They relate to each other by two laws: attraction and dominance, where any (realm of) light always has a passion for anything brighter, and a dominance over anything that is dimmer.

The Light of Lights is necessary in and of itself, as well as the necessary cause of all subsequent spheres of light and the lights therein, all the way down to the 'managing lights' (i.e., individual human souls). Dark barriers (heavenly spheres, celestial bodies) and fortresses (the human body) are light-containers, the latter made from matter. Matter itself is described as dark

[1] In (Suhrawardi 1999) this source is specified as: "Pseudo-Aristotle, "Theology of Aristotle," in *Aflutin 'ind al-'Arab*, ed. 'Adb al-Rahmaan Badawi (Cairo: al-Nahda al-Misriya, 1955), 22" (Suhrawardi 1999, 182).

substance, to be understood as that which has the lowest, i.e. zero-degree of luminosity. In illuminationism matter is commendable only for its capacity to receive the light that is brighter than the (zero amount of) light that matter is itself.

Here, Suhrawardi argues directly against his Aristotelian contemporaries. His approach to matter is incompatible with the idea of hylemorphism: a principle central to Peripatetic philosophy. Hylemorphism teaches that bodies are a combination of matter and form, but Suhrawardi disagrees, arguing that there is no need to posit matter as distinct from body, because: "body is simply self-subsistent magnitude" (Walbridge & Ziai 1999, xxvi). Body is matter: the dimmest light there is (thus, 'dark substance'), and what makes matter a *human* body, is the higher light of the soul that controls it.

The psychology Suhrawardi teaches is that the managing (immaterial) light of the human soul—a single ray of light from an even higher light-source—is longed for and in that way called into existence by the body that the light of the soul then becomes connected to. At the same time the soul also maintains its own love and longing for what is higher still. The body is light that exists *to the least possible degree*, infinitely less than the brighter, and therefore 'more existing' soul that controls it—while both remain in essence light, expressed in different magnitudes.

Key to understanding illuminationism is this idea of 'ontic luminosity,'[2] where light-qualities are ascribed to being itself: "To him [Suhrawardi], existence is no longer a matter of 'yes or no,' but a continuum of intensity and weakness (*shadda wa da'f*), in the way that physical light also may display different degrees of intensity" (Leezenberg 2008, 276). When we equate darkness with 'evil' and light with 'good,' we can see how this idea yields important ethical consequences. Since all there is, is light, darkness (not-light) equals non-existence: "indicating that good and bad are not two comparable ethical, ontological or cosmological principles" (Leezenberg 2008, 277). To the extent that all is light, everything in existence is a measure of 'goodness,' equal to its brightness. Only the relative dimness of a lesser light in comparison to brighter lights is expressive of that lights corresponding propensity to not-exist, which is equivalent to its measure of being 'evil.' 'Evil' itself, understood as equivalent to non-existence, is only to that which has no luminosity in and of itself at all—which is how Suhrawardi describes matter.

[2]'Ontic luminocity' is not a term introduced by Suhrawardi. I came across it as a phrase used by (Marcotte 2016), in the passage that gives (Walbridge 2000, 22-23) as its source.

3.2 Disembodiment through self-awareness

The realm of matter, then, becomes something for the light of the soul to escape. Suhrawardi claims that knowledge is its way to escape it. But knowledge, as Suhrawardi understands it, does not correspond to the way that his Aristotelian contemporaries approached the subject. Illuminationism explicitly rejects the Peripathetic notion of 'essential definitions,' that states that the essence of thing is its definition, and that definitions therefore are the very foundation of all philosophical knowledge (Walbridge & Ziai 1999, xxv). Suhrawardi denies this. His argument is that if you already know something, you have no need for its definition. And if you don't know something yet, you have no use for a definition of it, because you have no way to verify that all the parts of the definition will tell you everything that is essential for you to know. For that, you would have to know the thing prior to knowing it. And if you already knew something through direct experience, then from that it would follow that any definition of it is *not* a necessary constituent of knowledge. In short: "Suhrawardi argues that things must be known through their direct experience, and definitions can do no more than point out what is being talked about" (Walbridge & Ziai 1999, xxiv).

Light being present to itself accounts for the kind of knowledge that is immediate and intuitive. And light being present to itself *as itself*, also inaugurates its self-awareness. Man's knowledge of himself therefore is the prime example that Suhrawardi uses to illustrate the idea of direct experience and knowledge by presence. Whatever truly sees itself, can only do so directly: it cannot happen by seeing an image of itself in itself, because the image is not the same thing as that which is perceiving. If you would come to know yourself by seeing an image, you would already need prior knowledge about yourself to determine the accuracy of that image: "How could something be conceived to know itself by something superadded to itself—something that would be an attribute of it? [...] If you examine this matter closely, you will find that that by which you are you is only a thing that apprehends its own essence—your 'ego' " (Suhrawardi 1999, 80).

In Suhrawardi's metaphysics, his notions of the intensity and graduation of light and his notions of presence and self-awareness are linked: "The intensity of light corresponds to the degree of their self-awareness" (Marcotte 2016). Directly perceiving whatever is to be known, knowing that entity as it is, means having the light-nature of that entity present within. It means experiencing a thing within as part of the light that one is oneself. In this way true knowledge of the reality of things is achieved: "Direct knowledge occurs through 'vision-illumination,' as a person realises that what is to be defined becomes available to one's self through self-consciousness. At such time, the soul becomes directly aware of the reality of that which is to be defined. The

soul is then able to grasp directly these essences whose elements can then be translated using proofs and demonstrations to develop a discursive type of knowledge about that original apperception of reality" (ibid.).[3]

Before, Suhrawardi spoke of the difference between intuitive and discursive philosophers.[4] We can now further clarify that difference: intuitive philosophy deals with 'knowledge by presence' (that is, direct, experiential knowledge), and discursive philosophy with knowledge by correspondence (that is, knowledge about all things falsifiable).

Achieving self-consciousness through meditating on the inner reality of who and what we are, is illuminationism's recipe for acquiring the kind of knowledge we need to set us free from the darkness of matter. While anybody has the potential to achieve this kind of knowledge, the actual achievement of it requires unending commitment to self-reflective meditation and it requires taking up the mystical and ascetic practices of old. Those who persist in this manner of seeking might then at one point be granted the illumination of themselves *to* themselves, and in that way become an immaterial light onto themselves. At that instant, the act of *knowing* that one is an immaterial light, is identical to *being* that immaterial light. That is the instant that the immaterial light of the soul, through its realisation of its light-nature, frees itself from matter.

Here we have the full scope of the illuminationist agenda: achieving detached self-realisation through the acquisition of intuitive knowledge:

> "Those who have ascended in the soul and cut themselves off from their bodies have at that moment experienced a clear contemplation more perfect than that which the eye possesses. At that moment, they know with certainty that these entities which they behold are not engravings in one of the bodily faculties and that visual contemplation endures as long as the managing light does. Whoso strives in the path of God as he ought and subdues the shadows beholds the light of the all-highest world more perfectly than he beholds the objects of vision here below" (Suhrawardi 1999, 139).

[3]'At such time' is a problematic choice of words, as Suhrawardi indicates that 'vision-illumination' occurs in a moment that is not in time: " 'Before' and 'after' are so considered in relation to the instantaneous moment of imagination, and time is that which is around it" (Suhrawardi 1999, 20).

[4]See the second quote of section 2.3.1, starting on page 21.

3.3 Re-incorporating inspiration

'Here below' is where discursive knowledge is gathered, in an attempt to express and attest to the real, intuitive knowledge by presence that we can only find 'up there,' or 'in here.' According to Suhrawardi, certainty can only be based on direct experience, which has an intuitive nature. Knowledge by presence yields insights that are so true to those who have them, that they themselves have no way to question them. Yet the only way to express those certainties in a way that can answer the inwardly felt call to report on them, is through the medium of discursive philosophy: "Intuitive knowledge provides access to *a priori* truths of which discursive knowledge can only be subsequently validated through *a posteriori* demonstrations" (Marcotte 2016), here citing (Ha'iri 1992).

Identifying knowledge by presence as the most reliable source of knowledge does not imply dismissing discursive knowledge as superfluous. In illuminationism, discursive knowledge is auxiliary to knowledge by presence. That is, of course, a far more humble role than Suhrawardi's Aristotelian contemporaries attributed to it. Suhrawardi holds that light is the only thing that is real about anything, to the extent that even "the capacity for reason is accidental and posterior to the reality of man" (Suhrawardi 1999, 10).[5] Even concepts such as existence, necessity, contingency, unity, duality, relation and substance are all labelled 'beings of reason' by Suhrawardi. He identifies them as ideas that only exist in the mind and that themselves are the effects of our thoughts about the world. Pretending that these thought-produced attributes exist outside the mind only creates insoluble puzzles, that would require a third person's perspective to verify if what 'out-there' corresponds to what is in the mind. That would then require a fourth person's perspective to check the accuracy of the third person's finding, *ad infinitum* (Walbridge & Ziai 1999, xxv).

Calling to mind that according to Diagne one of the characteristics of Islamic philosophy is its concern that the overuse of reason might lead to a degeneration of morality and faith (Diagne 2016, 20-21), Suhrawardi's illuminationism seems to fit this description, because it attributes a more humble role to reason. It is not, however, to be mistaken as a conservative attempt to 'guard faith' by some kind of fear. The degeneration of morality and faith does not seem to be much of a concern to Suhrawardi. He is much more concerned with expressing his love for intuitive knowledge and with advo-

[5] Anything 'accidental' or 'contingent' is interpreted by Suhrawardi as being 'necessary by a cause' (as opposed to 'necessary in and of itself'), practically taking the concept of 'contingency' out of the equation of logic itself all together. Accordingly, illuminationist logic holds that all propositions can be reduced to the necessary affirmative (Suhrawardi 1999, 17-18).

cating the restoration of philosophy based on the wholehearted embrace of rock-steady inner convictions.

In illuminationism, intellect is not positioned in opposition to faith, but rather, Suhrawardi stretches the reach of epistemology to accommodate inner visionary experiences. Not only does he deem it a legitimate and valuable form of knowledge, he actually considers it a source that is primary to discursive knowledge. Discursive knowledge, to him, is simply not worth considering as a goal in itself. Nevertheless, his own systematic approach in making this point can be taken as a clear indication of both his appreciation of discursive knowledge and his grasp of it. Moreover, even though Suhrawardi does report of his own moment of 'suddenly seeing the light,' he never retorts to claiming any kind of intellectual superiority because of it, or to any kind of exaltation above the need to explain himself. Quite the contrary: his experience of exaltation is to him the primary source of inspiration, motivating him to explain himself discursively.

Still, the immunity of the philosophy of illumination as a theory is a given. Proof of the existence of immaterial light, is given only through beholding it—in other words, through its own direct experience of itself. Suhrawardi knew of this immunity. That is why, when referring to his own masterpiece in the introduction, he wrote: "There is nothing in it for the discursive philosopher not given to, and not in search of, intuitive philosophy" (Suhrawardi 1999, 4). I consider it one of the great strengths of *The Philosophy of Illumination* that Suhrawardi acknowledges this up font. He warns that his book should only be made available to those already quite accustomed to intuitive philosophy (ibid.), yet everything that is written after the introduction is written in a language that is emphatically *not* 'for insiders only.' This offers even those discursive philosophers who don't wish to commit themselves to becoming 'intuitive' in advance the opportunity to follow, comment on, and debate Suhrawardi's line of argumentation.

The Philosophy of Illumination is the result of Suhrawardi's attempt to analyse the nature of the kind of truth we feel when we have what we would now call 'a gut-feeling': something that we cannot put into words precisely, yet is the evidence of an inner conviction that simply won't go away, no matter what arguments we are presented with. Intuitive knowledge is the phenomenon of simply knowing something to be indubitably true, true to ourselves *directly*, which never becomes any less true on account of what the rest of the world has to say about it. The promise of illuminationism is to arrive at a clear consciousness beyond the vagueness of the 'gut-feeling.' It's goal is the clear vision of inner convictions as indubitable truths, which fully reveal themselves *as* convictions and as *a priori* truths. This immediately rules out the possibility of truly sharing such experiences, because receiving an inner conviction from somebody else, or adopting an *a priori* truth

retrospectively are logical impossibilities. It also inspires us to the highest possible degree to report on our findings all the same, because of how sure we are of the truth of our direct experience. Discursive philosophy then appears as the saving grace for the intuitive philosopher, for it is only by wielding this tool that he or she can even *attempt* to talk about their experiences with others. With *The Philosophy of Illumination* Suhrawardi offers us a theoretical framework that we can use as a logical justification for treating our inner convictions as the most relevant form of knowledge available to us.

Even though the previous chapter made clear that illuminationism is not a philosophy about politics, it is a philosophy that is political. Not just because it has the Islamic-philosophical characteristic of advocating a humble positioning of reason. It is also political because illuminationism describes the logics behind the subordination of discursive philosophy to intuitive philosophy. Because of that *The Philosophy of Illumiantion* offers a means to safeguard the connection of *any* philosophy to its higher source of inspiration.

Earlier, we have identified the critical attitude towards a too liberal interpretation of the term 'philosophy' as one of the main characteristic Islamic philosophy. It is that critique that immediately renders the subject of philosophy itself a political thing in Islamic intellectual environments. Suhrawardi's illuminationism equips any philosopher with the tools needed to render their philosophies, if not 'Islamic,' then at least *compatible* with Islamic philosophy. That means that understanding illuminationism is not merely understanding one example of an Islamic philosophy; it contributes to understanding the *field* of Islamic philosophy as a whole.

This is how the specific question 'Is Suhrawardi a political philosopher?' is linked to the more general question 'What is Islamic philosophy?'. That still leaves open the question: 'What is Islamic *political* philosophy?'. The answer that we have already touched upon and that suffices for now is: it is a) Islamic philosophy that b) takes the subject of politics as its main theme. Although illuminationism conforms to the first criterium, chapter two has made clear that is does *not* meet the second requirement. Even the added 'politicity' of illuminationism as indicated above, doesn't change it into a philosophy *about* politics. A genuine example of an Islamic political philosophy has, therefore, yet to be given. That is the objective of the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Ha'iri's Illuminationist Individualism

Suhrawardi's plea to reinstate intuition as the foundation of knowledge remains influential in Islamic philosophy until this day. When the Iranian philosopher Mehdi Ha'iri Yazdi came to the West to satisfy his curiosity about Western philosophy, he didn't come empty-handed. He wrote one original work of philosophy in English, which is, in part, a reformulation of Suhrawardi's call to rediscover mystical contemplation as a valid and vital part of philosophical investigation.

This makes Ha'iri of particular interest, for bringing Western philosophy and Islamic thought into contact. As Ramin Jahanbegloo notes in the introduction of *Iran: Between Tradition and Modernity*, Ha'iri's thought as a whole is "a good example of a tolerant and democratic effort in creating the dialogical bridge between 'modernity' and 'tradition' in contemporary Iran" (Jahanbegloo 2004, xv).

Ha'iri was the son of Sheikh Abdul Karim Ha'iri Yazdi, who founded the seminary of Qom and was one of the principal teachers of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini. Khomeini, the famous student of Ha'iri's father, would lead the 1979 Iranian Revolution, and become Iran's first Supreme Leader. It was a remarkable revolution, in the sense that it inaugurated a theocratic state with great popular support, which came as a big surprise to everyone who believed that progress necessarily equalled secular modernisation. Khomeini was instated as head of the country, based on his new interpretation of the old idea of *Vilayat-e Faqih* that led him to conclude that in Islamic states, the most proficient jurist should have the last say in everything.

Ha'iri grew up as part of the Iranian intellectual elite. He even was a student of Khomeini in the 1940's—although not belonging to that group of politically active students who sought to topple the Shah (Badamchi 2017, 124). Ha'iri was ordained as an ayatollah himself (Vahdat 2004, 52) and

received a doctorate in theology from the university of Tehran. Later he would augment this knowledge with a career in Western philosophy, earning a doctorate in analytical philosophy at the University of Toronto in 1979. After this, he returned to Iran, teaching Islamic philosophy at the University of Tehran, where he stayed until his death in 1999.

Two of his mayor works are of particular interest to us here. Firstly, the work in English, mentioned before, called *The Principles of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy: Knowledge by Presence* (Ha'iri 1992). Secondly, his last work, published in London (but not in English) two years later, called *Hekmat va Hokumat* [Philosophy and Government] (Haeri-Yazdi 1994). In the latter Ha'iri concludes, amongst other things, that 'a republic ruled by a guardian jurist' is a self-contradictory concept, in that it is illogical to call a state 'a republic' when its citizens are not taken for full, on account of being subjected to guardianship (Vahdat 2004, 65; Badamchi 2017, 132).

In this chapter I will explain how Ha'iri's own thoughts are developed, based on a Suhrawardian ontological framework. His thoughts culminate in an original Islamic political philosophy, which, as we will see, advocates a democratic form of government. In that philosophy, the individual is identified as both the sole beneficiary *of*, as well as the only possible carrier of responsibility *for* government.

4.1 Suhrawardi in Ha'iri's history of Islamic philosophy

On the back cover of *The Principles of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy*, Ziai appears again, this time as the first one to praise Ha'iri for: "not [falling] back on value-laden spiritual arguments. He carefully demonstrates to the trained analytical philosopher that presence-knowledge is a viable and meaningful epistemological mode" (Ha'iri 1992, back cover).

Ha'iri begins that careful demonstration with a brief account of the history of Islamic philosophy, presenting it as a history of epistemology. According to him, the main concern throughout the history of Islamic philosophy has been the reconciliation of the epistemology of Plato with that of Aristotle. The main idea in Islamic philosophy, so claims Ha'iri, is that human knowledge functions in different ways: "being perceptive of intelligible substances on the one hand, and speculative about sensible objects on the other" (Ha'iri 1992, 8). He holds that above and beyond these two modes there is one ontological foundation that forms the basis of both Aristotelian abstraction *and* Platonist intellectual vision.

After taking his readers through a brief history of several Islamic philosophers who tried to unearth that ontological foundation, Ha'iri identifies Suh-

rawardi as the first to successfully and systematically do so. According to Ha'iri, Suhrawardi's work is the first complete system of thought to take the whole program of Islamic philosophy into account. It confirms the earlier Islamic attests that God is completely separate from human spatiotemporal existence, and provides a system that clarifies how the relation between God and man can be established by intentionally acquiring intellectual knowledge. In Suhrawardi's philosophy, knowledge of the self, in the sense of self-realisation, indicates how the self can be absorbed in God, linking earth to heaven. Ha'iri identifies these subjects as the common features on which the whole structure of Islamic philosophy is built (Ha'iri 1992, 21).

As the book's subtitle indicates, the Suhrawardian concept of 'knowledge by presence' is central to Ha'iri's work. Making this concept more accessible to an audience of Western philosophers was without a doubt one of his main goals. In any case, elements of illuminationism appear throughout the course of the book. The argument that existence comes before essence, the idea of different degrees of existence (Suhrawardi's 'ontic luminosity'), the logical reformulation of contingencies to things that are necessarily caused by something else than themselves, to name a few. Ha'iri introduces these illuminationist principles in the course of his own philosophy. In the foreword to (Ha'iri 1992) Seyyed Hossein Nasr commends him for doing so "in a language that is comprehensive to both the traditional student of Islamic philosophy and the person nurtured upon the Anglo-Saxon or Continental schools of philosophy of recent decades" (Ha'iri 1992, xi).

4.2 Illuminationism in analytical terms

Ha'iri bases his explanation of knowledge by presence on a logical analysis of the act of knowing. After identifying it as an immanent action, his first step is to make a distinction between the knowing subject and the object known. That known object is then again split up in the internal object (what is in the mind) and the external object (what is 'out there'). He then stipulates that the object known (the whole of it, disregarding for a moment the possibility of analytically splitting it up into internal and external object) plays a role in organising and determining the act of knowledge, by motivating such an act in the first place: "Had the idea of the object not been present in the mind of the knowing subject, the potential subject would never come to the act of knowing at all" (Ha'iri 1992, 29).

These three elements—the subject as the knower, the object as the thing known, and the relation between them as knowing itself—make up Ha'iri's theory of knowledge. Since the whole act is intentional and immanent, so too all its parts should be thought of as intentional and immanent. For this

reason, only the *internal* object (the object known as it appears in the mind) is thought to be essential to the structure of knowledge. In other words, when we think of the act of knowledge as an immanent process, the only object that is truly necessary for it, is the immanent object, not the transitive one. The act of knowing doesn't bring any external object into our minds. It is just the fact that our minds exist, with our knowledge inside of them, and that external objects exist *likewise*,[1] that through the act of knowing the two are united. But even if there were no external objects, having internal objects before our mind's eye would still make the act of knowledge possible. Only if *immanent* objects (or the knowing *subject*) went missing, would knowledge be truly impossible (Ha'iri 1992, 29-32).

For example: in order to think of 'the illuminationist political doctrine,' the thought of 'the illuminationist political doctrine' is necessary, not any actual 'illuminationist political doctrine' out there. Even if there was such a doctrine 'out there,' knowledge of it would still only consist of the immanent object of it 'in here.'

The implication of this is the very same distinction that Suhrawardi makes: the distinction between knowledge by correspondence (processed by discursive philosophy) and knowledge by presence (that which intuitive philosophy yields). Both the external and internal versions of the object known have a role to play in the acquisition of knowledge by *correspondence*. The objects under consideration in the act of knowledge by *presence* have no external dimensions. There, any known object is always exclusively *immanent*. Because knowledge by presence doesn't require external objects, it is "literally subsumed, as the prime example, in the category of knowledge as such, because it is noetic and objective by its nature and it satisfies all essential conditions of the conception of knowledge, although it has no transitive accidental object. Thus, there is no reason to deny a sense of objectivity for this kind of knowledge simply because it possesses no extraneous object" (Ha'iri 1992, 40-41).

Having thus made a case for the logical validity of knowledge by presence, Ha'iri elaborates on the theme of knowledge by presence, explaining it as self-realisation. Whereas in the case of knowledge by correspondence the knowing subject and the thing known can never be conceived as being identical, in the case of knowledge by presence, there is no contradiction in ultimately identifying *the thing known* as *the knowing thing*. Ha'iri hopes that examining the relation between knowledge and the knower will lead to the discovery of "the very foundation of the human intellect, where the word *knowing* does not mean anything other than *being*. In this ontological state of human

[1] Remember that Suhrawardi considers existence itself a 'being of reason': see section 3.3 on page 32.

consciousness the constitutive dualism of the subject-object knowledge is overcome and submerged into a unitary simplex of the reality of self that is nothing other than self-object knowledge" (Ha'iri 1992, 1).

In this respect, Ha'iri also considers mystical self-annihilation and the subsequent absorption of the self in the totality of existence as forms of knowledge by presence. Such self-annihilation and absorption (also known in Sufi-terms as the 'annihilation of annihilation')[2] are "depicted as two separate notions, interrelated in a unitary simplex, where God and the self are existentially united. While this unitary consciousness signifies and absolute oneness in truth, intellectual reflection on it yields a material equivalence between God and the self. In that case it can be inferred that the formal equation of mysticism is: 'God-in-self = self-in-God' " (Ha'iri 1992, 3). Knowledge by presence is the experience of 'absolute oneness in truth'; 'intellectual reflection' is synonymous to knowledge by correspondence.

4.3 Practical philosophy in speculative disguise

To Ha'iri, presential knowledge contributes in a very practical way to the perfection of the self, and his views on this seem to be the same as Suhrawardi's. Both point to philosophy as the tool necessary for the individual to transform from a state of unawareness (where the self is locked in by its bodily confines), to the fully aware consciousness that roams freely in the sphere of intellect. As Farzin Vahdat (2004) points out in his chapter "Mehdi Haeri Yazdi and the Discourse of Modernity," Ha'iri holds that this transformative power of philosophy "is the goal of and the ultimate desire of humans seeking perfection and release from entanglement in matter. The high status that Haeri attributed to philosophy led him to view philosophy as constitutive of human authenticity, a far cry from a conservative Islamic notion of authenticity" (Vahdat 2004, 53).

Through that transformation, however, the human subject *itself* cannot be thought to acquire a superhuman status. Along the same lines as Suhrwardi and his idea of 'ontic luminosity,' Ha'iri also claims that everything in existence, God as well as man, has the same 'substance of existence'—only to varying degrees of it. God, being all, exists most; man, comprised out of the same substance of existence, but having lesser of it, exists to a lesser degree. Yet to the degree that he *does* exist, man is like God, in the way that a weak light is like a strong light—both being light itself. So although

[2]See (Ha'iri 1992, 145-158) for an elaboration on the topic of mystical double annihilation.

in this theory Being/God/Existence is primary, and all else, including the existence of human beings, is secondary and derivative, human subjectivity is anything but negated; neither in Suhrawardi's thought, nor in Ha'iri's.

To Ha'iri, the creative capacity of the human subject is closely connected to its free will. Because of our free will, we are enabled to be creative in the production of our own norms and values. That process is totally immanent, and in being such a unique character of the human condition, occurs independent even from divine oversight: "In his book on practical reason, titled *Investigations of Practical Reason*, Haeri argued that as God is the creator of nature and universe, in the realm of norms and values humans are the sovereign" (Vahdat 2004, 59). Vahdat quotes Ha'iri here, in what I assume is his own translation, where Ha'iri writes that we are in fact:

> "the lord of the 'created world' of our actions... That means that we possess a volition similar to that of God and if we want we can give order to our *maqdurat*[[3]] or make them disorderly. The difference is that our will is not applicable to the entire universe and is confined to our *maqdurat* within the parameter of our power" (Ha'iri, as quoted in [Vahdat 2004, 59]).[4]

Within that parameter though, humans are capable of changing the being of things or creating them from nothingness.

To summarise, philosophy sets us free through knowledge by presence, which carries the promise of complete self-realisation; and evidence of the divine spark in all of us, is our ability to freely create and modify norms and values. What becomes clear here, is that the epistemological and ontological considerations that lead to these insights, are not just speculative, but have a very practical application too. That, of course, was already implied by Ha'iri's idea that the acquisition of knowledge is key to the betterment of individual human beings.

In the line of thinking that is Ha'iri's, speculative philosophy is concerned with what is 'out there,' i.e. everything beyond the reach of our own making, and practical philosophy is concerned with what lies within the scope of our own capabilities (our *maqdurat*). One form of philosophy deals with immanent objects that relate to transitive objects (speculative philosophy), and the other form of philosophy studies immanent objects that are not concerned with transitive objects (practical philosophy). Returning to Suhrawardi's argument that in both cases the immanent objects constitute our knowledge,

[3]Translated elsewhere by Vahdat as: "the objects over which one has power" (Vahdat 2004, 58).

[4]Vahdat's citation is unclear. He gives no clarification of publisher or year of publishing, nor does he use a bibliography to clarify his sources. Here only "*Aql-e almali*, 85." is given as source.

Ha'iri finds a way to theoretically adjourn the strict separation between the two:

> "There is no difference between practical philosophy and speculative philosophy with regard to acquiring knowledge and thinking about the realities of existence... [T]he only difference is that some of these realities are under the power and control of humans and some of them are without their control... Otherwise, there is no substantial difference in our mode of acquiring knowledge and manner of thought" (Ha'iri, as quoted in [Vahdat 2004, 59]).[5]

According to Ha'iri, the more you come to know through speculative philosophy, the better you learn to act and reconstruct the world around you. To him, this means that practical philosophy is a branch of speculative philosophy. The only difference is that practical philosophy deals with whatever is within the scope of our control (Vahdat 2004, 60). Ha'iri follows this through to a very far reaching conclusion, namely that both branches of philosophy are just two sides of the same coin:

> "The baffling gap that Hume promulgates between 'is' and 'ought'[[6]] is entirely invalid and unacceptable in Islamic philosophy" (Ha'iri, as quoted in [Vahdat 2004, 61]).[7]

4.4 Guarding the individual

In striving to act according to what 'ought' to be, it is ultimately the free individual that is responsible and accountable for it's own actions and choices. It is my own free choice to commit to, or take responsibility for whatever I experience as good or bad: "The determination of good and evil by reason (*aql*), itself grounded in free human volition, is therefore even outside the sphere of religion. The determination of good and evil by religion, Haeri thought, runs into logical contradiction, because perception of good and evil has an *a priori* character in humans and is in this sense outside the sphere of religious ordinances" (Vahdat 2004, 61).

Ha'iri stresses the importance of the individual to such an extent, that he even criticised the political philosophies of Rousseau and Marx. He claims they treat the individual as a part in relation to the whole, rather than as an individual in relation to the universal. The difference is that, according to Ha'iri, individuality relates to universality in such a way that the one

[5] See footnote 4 on page 40. Here only "*Aql-e almali*, 85-86" is given as source.

[6] See (Hume 1739, 335).

[7] See footnote 4 on page 40. Here only "*Aql-e almali*, 9" is given as source.

has all of the important characteristics of the other. A mere part does not have to have any characteristics of the whole at all (Badamchi 2017, 137). Ha'iri argues that Marxism and socialist regimes treat the individual as instruments; as parts that don't have the same rights as the whole. He is also critical of Western democracies for counting individuals mostly as numbers and statistical facts, instead of truly honouring individuality (Vahdat 2004, 63).

Taking the individual to be a complete entity onto itself, Ha'iri claims it is logical that it has all the privileges and rights that apply to the universal group of which it is a member: "he believed that the truth of the individual is only realisable in society and the collectivity, and conversely, the reality of the collectivity can only materialise in that of each member of the society" (Vahdat 2004, 63).

Because to Ha'iri government is a human phenomenon and as such is itself not superior to the reality of the divine, he disagrees with the idea that Islamic jurisprudence alone can be sufficient to produce a valid theory of state. He argues that philosophy is required. In cases where Islamic philosophy and jurisprudence are at odds, such philosophy should even be prioritised, to avoid despotism. This immediately conflicts with the concept of the 'Guardianship of the Jurist,' as it is interpreted by those governing Iran today.

4.4.1 Khomeini's *Vilayat-e Faqih*

In Shia Islam, the belief is that somewhere hidden in the world there is a male descendant of Mohammed, who will one day return and bring justice and peace to the world—and that until that day, an Islamic jurist has custodianship over the people. This is the concept of *Vilayat-e Faqih*, or 'Guardianship of the Jurist,' which was elaborated upon by Khomeini and developed into the doctrine that one single jurist is granted the right to be the head of the state and to rule absolutely (Marlow 2004, 552). Khomeini presented this doctrine in his *Islamic Government* (Khomeini 2002), first published in 1970, which would later form the basis of the very constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Within Iran, anything less than a full acceptance of this concept as something self-evident is perhaps already too much of a political statement to allow for further philosophical consideration. The opening words of Khomeini in *Islamic Government* are clear on this:

> "The governance of the *faqih* is a subject that in itself elicits immediate assent and has little need of demonstration, for anyone who has some general awareness of the beliefs and ordinances of

> Islam will unhesitatingly give his assent to the principle of the governance of the *faqih* as soon as he encounters it; he will recognise it as necessary and self-evident. If little attention is paid to this principle today, so that it has come to require demonstration, it is because of the social circumstances prevailing among the Muslims in general, and the teaching institution in particular" (Khomeini 2002, 1).

Khomeini directly follows this up by pointing out that the Jews and the imperialists with materialistic ambitions are to blame for this. Opening the subject of the Guardianship of the Jurist up for debate through a philosophical analysis, can very easily interpreted as move hostile to it, aiding the political agenda of "the orientalists who work in the service of the imperialistic states" (ibid.). Ha'iri's bald criticism of the concept is indubitably why his *Hekmat va Hokumat* didn't make it past the state sensor.

In this political work, Ha'iri points out where in certain religious Islamic verses (*hadiths*) some people are identified as 'protectors of Islam,' or 'trustees of the Prophet.' These people are called *fuqaha* (the plural of *faqih*). 'Jurists' is one way to interpret that word; 'persons well-versed in the mystical and spiritual sciences of Islam' is the other way, which Ha'iri favours (Badamchi 2017, 131). Jurisprudence itself can only apply to the earthly realm, whereas those endowed with mystical knowledge can relate to other-worldly experiences. It is thus more likely for the latter to earn the accolade 'protector of Islam.'

Ha'iri challenges the idea that the rule of the Jurist is, as Khomeini claims, a continuation of the right to earthy rule bestowed upon the Prophet Mohammed and the Twelve Infallible Imams that ruled after him. He points out that even the Infallible Imams themselves were revealed to be the legitimate political leaders, only *after* their Muslim communities had already expressed their desire for them to take charge: "This makes it very unlikely that the jurists have a divine right of leadership when even the Infallibles, who according to Shia theology have a special ontological status in the universe, did not themselves have the right to rule the Muslim community without the consensus of the governed" (Badamchi 2017, 132).[8]

4.4.2 Ha'iri's alternative

Instead of the self-contradictory idea of a 'republic ruled by a guardian jurist,' Ha'iri calls for a democratic recalibration of the Islamic state. He identifies certain traditional notions of ownership, already existing in Islamic legal literature, as adequate starting points. One of these Islamic legal dictums is

[8]Often when Badamchi uses the word 'consensus,' I suspect he means 'consent.'

that "people are sovereigns of their property" (Badamchi 2017, 134), relating to the idea of exclusive private ownership. Everybody is a private owner of that small space of the world that they find themselves in, the place they can call truly theirs. In addition to that *exclusive* private ownership, the idea of *joint* private ownership stipulates that you are also a shareholder of the larger environment that you inhabit together with certain others. This applies to any scale, meaning that the idea of joint private ownership of the neighbourhood can be inflated to the idea of joint private ownership of the city, region, province, nation.

Between residents of those jointly owned spaces, disputes will arise as to what is their specific share. That is where, according to Ha'iri, the need for a government surfaces. Such a government should be thought of as nothing more than an agency that settles the disputes *of* the residents, *for* the residents, *by* (representatives of) the residents. Joint private owners set up a contract between themselves and certain agents they choose amongst themselves. They are then charged with the organisation of the joint private owners' affairs:

> "Government is thus the transference of some of the powers and responsibilities of joint owners to their agents through a private agency contract, which is why Haeri's thesis of government as the agency of joint private owners rejects all forms of government that are not grounded on the democratic consensus of the people" (Badamchi 2017, 134-135).

On these grounds alone, Khomeini's interpretation of guardianship is not suitable as a foundation for government. But Ha'iri goes further still, claiming that the state enforcing the *sharia* (God's law) through coercion is vicious, self-contradictory and ultimately even un-Islamic. God's law is no longer *God's* when the state imposes it. The state, a worldly institution, can only deprive *sharia* of its divine nature when it tries to instate it. The choice to become Muslim or to commit yourself to *sharia* law (taken as a divine principle) cannot come from anywhere else but from within, Ha'iri argues. It must come voluntarily. This is why, "although *Hekmat va Hokumat* considers philosophical secularism as incompatible with Islam, it regards political secularism as a requirement of *sharia*" (Badamchi 2017, 138).

To choose for Islam, or to choose to subject yourself to divine *sharia* law, the freedom to do so is a prerequisite. That of itself implies the freedom to choose otherwise.

There is an Islamic principle, saying that one should always command right and forbid wrong, which is often used by those in Islamic states who wield earthly power to justify their position (Badamchi 2017, 138). *Hekmat va Hokumat* makes it very clear that this is not a valid way to inter-

pret that principle. Ha'iri recommends the righting of all that is wrong with Khomeini's interpretation of guardianship. He calls Khomeini's theory un-Islamic, because according to another principle of Islamic jurisprudence: "whatever is clearly against reason is clearly against the commands of *sharia* as well" (Badamchi 2017, 132)—and 'a republic that is not a republic' is clearly against reason.

As a reasonable alternative to Khomeini's state, Ha'iri suggests a democratic form of government, based on the idea of the free individual. He sees individuals as individual human *souls*, who in their capacity as joint private owners of the country are the citizens of a state. Ideally, that state is ruled by a government that is the agency that the citizens have contractually commissioned for themselves. It is populated by representatives of themselves, who are charged with settling the peoples disputes. "Based on these views, Haeri firmly believed in individual and social freedoms such as the freedom of thought and even of religion in a politically pluralist system for both the Muslims and non-Muslims in an ideal state" (Vahdat 2004, 63).

It was the individual human being, understood primarily as the guiding light of his or her soul, that Suhrawardi deemed capable of self-liberation of matter through self-realisation. It is again the individual, understood in that same way, that Ha'iri places at the core of all of his work, including his political philosophy. In his own words:

> "In the most glorious Qur'an as well as in the religious rules and requirements and in Islamic ethics, whenever humans in general, or as Muslims, or the faithful, are addressed, whether [they are called upon] as individuals or as collectivities, the real addressee is the individual. Because in the same way that individuals are autonomous due to essence of being human, so are they absolutely independent in their ethical responsibilities and religious duties. Even if such terms as tribe and community (*ommat*) and the like have been used [in the Qur'an and other religious sources], the reference is to the individual in the community, not their sum total. A collective unit is nothing but an imaginary and abstract phenomenon and it is not reasonable to charge an unreal entity [i.e., the collectivity] with responsibility. It is only the real and autonomous individual who must accept the burden of human responsibilities and discharge them" (Haeri-Yazdi 1994, 159), as quoted in (Vahdat 2004, 64-65).

4.5 Beyond Post-Islamism and tradition

In recounting all of the above I have depended greatly on Vahdat's and Badamchi's introductions to Ha'iris thought—simply because I have not been able to find any additional sources in any languages I master. 'Ha'iri Yazdi' does not appear as an entry in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, or any other academic encyclopedia. Even his Wikipedia-page is, as yet, very concise.[9]

Instead of attempting to summarize both publications, I have tried to reproduce key parts of these introductions to Ha'iri's thought in the context of his indebtedness to Suhrawardi. The rather unsatisfactory consequence is that wherever I have not immediately understood Vahdat or Badamchi, I have not been able to turn to further clarifications. Vahdat's introduction elaborated less on the topic of political philosophy than I hoped, and the quality of Badamchi's text is subpar.[10] Between the two, however, I think I now have a reasonably clear outline of Ha'iri's political thought.

Not having been able to read the primary literature itself obviously gives me no clue as to how comprehensive the two secondary sources have actually been. It also makes it inappropriate for me to criticise any of Vahdat's or Badamchi's reading of *Hekmat va Hokumat*, since I cannot compare them to my own reading. Still, there is a certain element of Badamchi's work that I am critical of, which has to do with the logic of his argument that the first part of *Hekmat va Hokumat* is "unconvincing" (Badamchi 2017, 141). This relates in part to Badamchi's classification of Ha'iri as a 'post-Islamist.' From what I gather, a 'post-Islamist' is any non-ideological Muslim philosopher that can be thought of as compatible with what Rawls deems reasonable and rational.[11] Perhaps I am not doing Badamchi enough justice here, because I am reluctant to investigate the concept further.

The choice not to dive too deep into this subject is deliberate. I am cautious not to validate Badamchi's classification too readily by thinking along its lines: that might increase the 'politicity' of Ha'iri's philosophy. It then becomes a political thing, with an ever increasing capacity to engender conflict—especially in those places where this kind of discussion is not de-politicised. All of that distracts us from what the philosopher himself thought about the political dimensions of his work, and from the political theory he tried to bring across.

[9] "Mehdi Haeri Yazdi," Wikipedia contributors, last modified March 19th, 2017, 12:54, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mehdi_Haeri_Yazdi.

[10] Parts of the text seems to have been published without going through any editorial stage. Although in some cases this truly obscures what the author is trying to say, on the whole the line of argumentation is easy to follow. The current form of the publication does not do justice to the work that has gone into it.

[11] See (Badamchi 2017) for a more detailed discussion.

Still, politics are unavoidable: I am forced to address the issue, because I have presented Ha'iri's philosophy as an example of Islamic political philosophy proper. I have done so from the start, because Seyyed Hossein Nasr introduced Ha'iri as such in the introduction to *The Principles of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy* (Ha'iri 1992, xi). When I started writing this thesis, I had not yet heard of the term 'post-Islamist.' It has, therefore, been rather inconvenient to discover that Badamchi praises *Hekmat va Hokumat* for its alleged 'post-Islamism'—or at least the last two parts of it.

In the first part of *Hekmat va Hokumat*, Ha'iri embeds his political thought in his meta-ethical, illuminationist framework. It is precisely *this* that Badamchi calls "unconvincing" (Badamchi 2017, 141). He claims that "the elaborate defense of moral realism in the first part of *Hekmat va Hokumat* does not appear to be necessary" (ibid.). That is, not necessary for endorsing Ha'iri's political theory as 'reasonable' and 'rational' in the Rawlsian sense of the terms. In Badamchi's own words: "Haeri's intuitionism is a comprehensive doctrine that cannot be seen as a necessary step towards [...] a type of liberalism the endorsement of which demands the least controversial metaphysical presumptions" (ibid.). It seems to me that what Badamchi finds unconvincing about part one of *Hekmat va Hokumat* is merely how it doesn't meet the Rawlsian standards that *are* met in the last two parts of the book.

What Badamchi calls 'unconvincing' is nothing less than Ha'iri's attempt to safeguard the connection between his political thought and its higher source of inspiration. It would not surprise me if that judgement can be considered unconvincing in itself, based on a number of meta-ethical arguments that can be endorsed by, say, the first part of *Hekmat va Hokumat*. Badamchi seems to do little more here than to interpret Ha'iri as being in favour of 'modernity,' and against 'tradition,' providing ammunition to those who stand to gain by dismissing Ha'iri as an "orientalist working in the service of the imperialistic states" (Khomeini 2002, 1).

I don't think Ha'iri's meta-ethics can be set aside so easily. I suspect that the whole of *Hekmat va Hokumat* just doesn't fit in the mould of Badamchi's classification, simply because it is something genuine and unique onto itself—something that is non-ideological, deeply rooted in Islamic metaphysics, and has liberal-democratic elements. It is a non-secular political philosophy, yielding some of the same conclusions that can also be arrived at when departing from a secular point of departure. To deny the significance of its embeddedness in Islamic thought seems to me a very harsh verdict that would require a stronger line of argumentation than the one presented by Badamchi in this chapter.

Badamchi may be right that liberal political philosophies do not of themselves require embedding in Islamic metaphysics. Yet for liberal elements of this specific Iranian political philosophy to have any chance at all to take

root in its place of origin, such metaphysical imbedding is a must.

I agree with Nasr's presentation of Ha'iri, and so in this thesis I too have presented the latter as an original Islamic philosopher. Ha'iri's whole comprehensive philosophical project is based on a description of what to him, as an Islamic philosopher, actually are the "least controversial metaphysical assumptions" (Badamchi 2017, 141): his own convictions, acquired and deepened through the experience of knowledge by presence. Ha'iri builds a great deal of his thought on Suhrawardian illuminationism, which he considers a complete system that honours the whole program of Islamic philosophy. That is why I consider his *Hekmat va Hokumat* to be a genuine example of a work of Islamic political philosophy. Because of its liberal elements, the Suhrawardian illuminationism on which it is based also appears in a new light.

Conclusion

Suhrawardi's illuminationism is the subject of this thesis, written at Western university, under supervision of its chair of social and political philosophy. Suhrawardi is not a familiar name there. The question to what extent his illuminationism belongs to the field of political philosophy, is the very question we have been exploring.

Understanding a political thing as something in its capacity to engender conflict one could argue that in debating Ziai and Badamchi, I have followed their example of making a political thing out of Suhrawardi's and Ha'iri's philosophies. However, the de-politicisation of the field of higher education in a liberal-democratic society, such as the one in which this thesis appears, means that within that sphere of education, 'conflict' is called disagreement, inspiring an exchange of ideas. Had I written this thesis for a university in a state where higher education was *not* de-politicised, then this thesis would indeed have contributed to the 'politicity' of Suhrawardi and Ha'iri, and I might have been thought to be in a very real conflict with both Ziai and Badamchi.

As has become clear through our exploration of the history and the current state of affairs in Islamic states: here there are *no* sectors of society that are de-politicised—or more accurately, no sectors of society are 'de-religified,' including the field of politics, always connecting the one to the other. Thus, even the intention to theoretically isolate the field of political philosophy, or to disentangle it from religious arguments in itself is a move that runs counter to the state of affairs in Islamic countries, most notably Iran. As Diagne pointed out, even calling something a philosophy, or somebody a philosopher already hints at the isolation of theory, and a disconnection with the religious sphere.

Only in safeguarding and explicating its predicate 'Islamic,' can anything with the title 'philosophy' land in fertile ground within Islamic states. In that sense 'what does Islam mean?' is a question that no Islamic philosopher can really avoid. This puts him or her in an uncomfortable position, since the act of asking the question itself is counterintuitive to the idea that Islam is self-evident. Self-evidence itself then, becomes a key subject in Islamic

philosophical investigations—at least in both the philosophies of Suhrawardi and Ha'iri.

One of the ways to answer the question 'what does Islam mean?' is in political terms. Whenever that is the principal aim of a theory, we have treated this as an Islamic political philosophy. Chapter two has made clear that Suhrawardi's illuminationism does not meet that description. No matter how successfully we might treat Suhrawardi's philosophy as a political issue (which is always possible due to the entanglement of politics and philosophy labelled 'Islamic') this doesn't turn him into a political philosopher. Had any of his work met the basic criteria for being called a doctrine that would have merited the predicate 'political philosophy.' Yet as we have seen, it is not a doctrine as such. Ziai's attempt to turn it into one is based on a questionable reading of Suhrawardi where all of Suhrawardi's descriptions of certain *aptitudes* to rule are presented as descriptions of entitlement to power.

What Suhrawardi was in fact concerned with, was explaining the 'identical connection' between the knowing element in the here and now, and its knowledge in and of itself. He sought to create a theory of knowledge that unites the abilities of the human mind of "being perceptive of intelligible substances on the one hand, and speculative about sensible objects on the other" (Ha'iri 1992, 8). Suhrawardi's work can be seen as an attempt to safeguard the value of intuitive philosophy through explicating its logical validity, and its primacy with regard to discursive philosophy. We have seen that he attempted to restore philosophy's connection with inner conviction, by logically analysing how certain carefully acquired inner knowledge can function as indubitably true and self-evident. *Being* the knowledge that is present, occurs in the "instantaneous moment of imagination" (Suhrawardi 1999, 20) that is outside of time. When illumination occurs, *this* is the non-spatiotemporal now, the "field" (Rumi 1995, 36) or "desert plain" (Rumi 2008, 407) where it happens.

Here we call to mind Mohammed's prohibition of thinking up ready-made answers to hypothetical problems that would render future questioners mute, allowing the actual movement of life to answer questions in the here-and-now, where and when those questions might present themselves (Diagne 2016, 12). Suhrawardi's intuitive philosopher is a part of, and has direct access to, that movement of life. Such a philosopher's presential knowledge is what is called for to answer the questions as they arise in the present moment.

Of course, when Khomeini describes the 'Guardianship of the Jurist' as "a subject that in itself elicits immediate assent and has little need of demonstration" (Khomeini 2002, 1), he is talking about something that to him is 'knowledge by presence.' In his interpretation, such knowledge requires his expertise, because of the condition that Muslim society is in. Something *like*

presential knowledge is presented here as a commodity only accessible to the most wise. His simple logic is that the highest religious authority has the best kind of access to that knowledge, and on that account deserves to rule. Khomeini then casts himself in the role of the highest religious authority. That asked nothing less of him than to become the first *faqih* to demonstrate the self-evidence of his own absolute rule by bringing it into practice—which he did.

On the one hand, Ha'iri attempted to open up the Islamic gates surrounding the theory of knowledge by presence to Western philosophical consideration. On the other hand he tried to give knowledge by presence back to the individual. Those are bold steps to take. The embeddedness of his political philosophy in Islamic metaphysics maximises the effect of his thorough logical demolition of Khomeini's ideas about guardianship. At the same time he uncovers new ground for democratic principles to find their way into a unique environment, where they are often called for, but not commonplace.

When certain Western enthusiasm about this liberal common ground leads to overemphasizing the 'modern' tendencies of the philosopher, this might lead to classifying him in a way that puts him at a distance from what he considers to be the roots of his thought. When the first and foremost attempt of the philosopher is to safeguard the connection with his philosophic roots, and this is then dismissed for being unconvincing—based on liberal arguments—this makes matters even worse. Conversely, when *Hekmat va Hokumat* is treated as the unique contemporary work of Iranian philosophy that it is—with traditional elements, non-traditional elements; sometimes in favour of modernity, sometimes against it—this allows for the discovery that the liberal ideas that are presented in it *can* actually be embedded in Islamic metaphysics. This, in turn, may increase Western attention for (and perhaps even appreciation of) Islamic metaphysical arguments. I believe that to be an opening by which all involved stand to gain.

There is no denying that Western philosophy and Islamic philosophy are different. As Ha'iri has noted, philosophical secularism is incompatible with Islam (Badamchi 2017, 138). And as is readily intuited by any philosopher reared in a liberal-democratic society, non-secular philosophy is, more often than not, at odds with a liberal-democratic vantage point. What become clear now though, is that the presumption that philosophy should preferably be secular, is a liberal-democratic presumption. And that the requirement for philosophy to remain non-secular, is an Islamic requirement. Both are inherently political stances.

The 'politicity' of Islamic philosophy might seem very foreign at first. It causes us to treat Islamic philosophy as something quite different from the kind of philosophy we are familiar with. But when the understanding of that 'politicity' develops, it suddenly also appears there where we previously

couldn't see it. We then discover the 'politicity' of 'our own' philosophy, which we thought we knew so well. This is a strange, maybe even scary realisation, but it is liberating too. It frees us from the situation where we aren't able to deliberately adopt the point of view we had, on account of being unaware that there is actually something to choose here.

The feeling that we really have something to choose last as long as we can manage not to treat any one choice as inherently better than the other. The challenge in this case is to not identify 'the West' and 'the Islamic world' as competing, incommensurable paradigms. The challenge is to simply acknowledge the existence of differences between these two current, contemporary world views. Acknowledging those differences clears the way for the eventual appreciation of them. We can then grow to appreciate both the real differences, and the differences that actually turned out to just be similarities in disguise.

Asking the question if Suhrawardi is a political philosopher has yielded the answer that he is *not*—at least, not in the way that Ziai portrayed him. His illuminationism is, however, *political*. Firstly, it is political just by being an example of Islamic philosophy itself. But, more importantly, illuminationism is also political on account of what it enables Ha'iri to do with it. Ha'iri builds his own philosophy upon the Suhrawardian metaphysical framework, and that is why we can understand his philosophy as an *Islamic* philosophy. Because of this, Ha'iri's *Hekmat va Hokumat* is a genuine example of an Islamic political philosophy; an Islamic political philosophy that calls for a type of governance that many *secular* political philosophies also call for.

Wanting to make the lives of individual human beings flourish is the point where the Islamic philosophies addressed in this thesis and liberal-democratic political philosophies meet. According to both Suhrawardi and Ha'iri, it is the individual soul that holds the greatest moral authority over its own early creations, for which it also bears full responsibility. Ha'iri points out that those creations include our social and political realms, which take shape only on account of what each of us contributes to those realms individually.

Whenever individuals are kept in the dark about their own power this is a reason for concern—whether the forces that feed off of the power of the individual are thought of as absolutist rulers, materialist empires, populist political parties, extremist groups or anything else. In all of these cases, the countermeasure is bringing the power of the free and creative individual into the full light of day. Secular and non-secular philosophers can draw inspiration from each other in aid of their individual contributions to that shared objective.

Epilogue

I believe we all can picture some examples in current free democratic civilisations that teach us that when it comes to freedom, one can have too much of a good thing. In this respect, Van der Zweerde points out that in liberal democracies any plea to limit, for example, the freedom of self-expression, is what will inspire more modest forms of self-expression. To him, such things are part of the self-regulatory operation active in free democratic states: "Bobbing in the surf it is difficult to perceive the exact form of the wave, but there is no reason to assume that the tides of licentiousness and debauchery will only swell higher and higher; there are in fact many reasons to assume that they will, as has always been the case in history, subside, however unpredictably. The same is true for liberal democracy: members of society will—in unpredictable ways—find new methods to preserve the freedom by treating her in a different way" (Van der Zweerde 2009, 178).

Whatever one might think of Ha'iri's Islamic political philosophy, and its way of employing Suhrawardian illuminationism, it certainly seems to be treating the freedom of the individual in a different way. For a Western public to determine the extent to which it is a promising way to treat freedom, a translation of his work into a West-European language would be most welcome.

The remarkable otherness of the Persian language to the languages of the West will call for a lot of work, care and creativity on the part of any translator. Some things will be lost. But, as Coleman Barks' translation of Rumi indicates, the moment of translating and the context that the translator finds himself in can bring new life, and new relevance to a text, unforeseen by the original author. Maybe philosophy is not the exact same as poetry, but still, when it comes to *Hekmat va Hokumat*, I am looking forward to see what might be *found* in translation.

Thank you for reading my thesis—and thank you to all who have enabled me to write it. I leave you here with two English versions of one poem by Rumi, and with the great expanse of yet to be discovered common ground that exists between them:

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase 'each other'
doesn't make any sense.

(Rumi 1995, 36)

Beyond Islam and unbelief
there is a desert plain. For us there is
a yearning in the midst of that expanse.
The knower of God who reaches that plain
Will prostrate in prayer,
For there is neither Islam nor unbelief,
nor any 'where' in that place.

(Rumi 2008, 407)

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