



Hossein Ziai

ACADEMIC CAREER

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Hossein Ziai's academic career began in Iran in 1977 at Aryamehr Polytechnic University (later, Sharif) and the Department of Philosophy and the Humanities at the University of Tehran. His courses covered Greek and Islamic philosophy, symbolic, predicate, and Classical logic, the philosophy of mathematics, the place of Iranian intellectual traditions in world civilization, and comparative philosophy, including an original graduate seminar on Western philosophical texts based on Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations* that compared phenomenological concepts to problems in Islamic philosophy.



Aryamehr Technical University



Tehran University main gate 1970s

From 1977 through 1980, he was also in charge of the Information Resources and Publications Department at the Center for the Study of Civilizations—an academic organization dedicated to exploring and stimulating an East-West philosophical discourse that he had set in motion in 1974 as a graduate student and co-founded in Tehran in 1977. He directed numerous research projects at the Center that resulted in the writing, translation, and publication of more than twenty books on Eastern and Western intellectual and religious history, and conducted seminars on Iranian/Islamic studies both at the Center and at the Iranian Academy of Philosophy. He also helped develop a series of international symposia in collaboration with the Center's director, Dariush Shayegan, titled "Dialogue among Eastern and Western Cultures and Civilizations," and supervised the editing and publication of the proceedings of the first symposium (Tehran 1977), *L'impact de la pensée occidentale rend-il possible un dialogue réel entre les civilisations?* Paris: Berg International, 1979.

His academic interests and artistic creativity coalesced in "The Song of Gabriel's Wings," a short film based on Sohravardi's Persian philosophical allegory, which he produced at the National Iranian Radio and Television (NIRT) in collaboration with Javad Taheri, director. It was to be the first in a series of thirteen educational films on Persian allegorical, mystical, and philosophical accounts, a plan that was abandoned when Islamic revolutionaries took over NIRT.

On 10 December 1980, concerned about the educational horizon for their son as the Islamic Republic's doctrines became institutionalized, the family left for Paris. In 1982, he went on to the United States and joined Harvard University's Center for Middle Eastern Studies as a Research Fellow (1982-1983). While awaiting to obtain a work permit, he wrote research papers, among them, "Knowledge and Illumination," which he presented at the Fifth International Congress, Neoplatonism and Islamic Thought, held in November 1982 at Baruch College of the City University of New York under the auspices of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies and the Society for Islamic Philosophy and Science.



Harvard Yard
main gate



Brown University
Robinson Hall



Oberlin College
Bosworth Hall



UCLA Royce Hall

Hossein's teaching career was restarted in 1984 at Harvard's Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations (NELC), first as a visiting scholar, and later as a visiting assistant professor. His course offerings through 1986 included Introduction to Islam; Symbolism in Islam: Religious, Literary and Artistic Manifestations; Classical Arabic: Elementary, Intermediate, and Advanced; and Readings from the works of Avicenna, Suhrawardī, Kisā'ī, Ibn Khaldūn, Tabarī, and Ibn Tufayl. In 1985, he presented two papers, "Post-Avicennan Religious Philosophy" and "The Influence of Hikmat al-Ishrāq on the Development of Mystical Thought in Shi'ite Iran (at UCLA), and "Suhrawardī's Political Philosophy" (at MESA), plus a series of lectures on "The Political Philosophy of Shi'ism in Post-18th Century Iran" at Harvard. In 1985, he also taught a course on the theory, development, and typology of Sufism at Harvard Extension, and in 1986 and 1987, served as adjunct assistant professor at the Harvard Summer School offering an intensive course on Persian language and literature that included textual analysis of Sa'dī's *Gulestān*, Hafez' *Divan*, Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, Nezāmi's *Chahār Maqāleh*, and selected modern Persian prose; another course covered the most salient themes in the rise and development of Islam to the end of the Abbasid period and the origins and spread of Islamic revivalist movements from the 19th century to the present.

He joined the Department of Religious Studies at Brown University as an adjunct assistant professor, 1985-1987, during Vartan Gregorian's tenure as president. His course listings included Introduction to Islam; Topics in the History of Religions: Sufism; Medieval Islamic Institutions; and Classical Arabic. While at Brown, he also presented a faculty paper, "Soul, City and Being: The Impact of Platonism and Neoplatonism on Iranian/Islamic Religious Thought" and conducted several seminars on Iranian/Islamic religious, intellectual, and mystical institutions.

In 1987, he joined the faculty of Oberlin College as assistant professor of religious studies in the Department of Religion. His courses included Comparative Religion (Hinduism, Buddhism, Zoroastrianism, Mithraism, and Islam); Phenomenology of Religion; Classical Islam (intellectual and literary institutions); Medieval and Modern Islam; Sufism: The Religious Quest in Islam; and Medieval Islamic Political Institutions.

In 1988, Hossein assumed a tenure-track position at the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA) where he became Professor of Islamic and Iranian Studies and Director of the Program in Iranian Studies in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Cultures (NELC). In the same year, his wife earned her Ph.D. in Sanskrit and Indo-European Folklore and Mythology from Harvard and their son went away to boarding school at St. Paul's in New Hampshire. Hossein became a naturalized U.S. citizen on 16 March 2001.



Announcing
Judeo-Persian visiting
professorship, 2000

Hossein Ziai grew Iranian studies at UCLA into the strongest and most distinguished program of its kind among U.S. academic institutions. His teaching ranged from Islamic philosophy and Persian language and literature to political philosophy and theory, textual analysis, and Iranian intellectual history. In recognition of his achievements and the promise of his vision for the future, he was appointed the inaugural holder of the Jahangir and Eleanor Amuzegar Chair in Iranian Studies in July 2008.

Ziai's singular achievements at UCLA included establishing a Bachelor of Arts degree in Persian in 1989, a first of its kind in the country, and grew the student body from about forty to four-hundred. To expand the horizon of Iranian studies and make it inclusive of Iran's non-Muslim populations, he created The Habib Levy Distinguished Visiting Professorship in Judeo-Persian in 2000, which made UCLA the first institution in the U.S. to offer Judeo-Persian as a standing component of Iranian Studies. The course was taught by Professor Amnon Netzer, co-founder of Iranian Studies at the Hebrew



R-L Hossein Ziai, Amnon Netzer,
Nahid Pirnazar

University in Jerusalem, and later by Nahid Pirnazar, Ph.D. who had facilitated the early discussions with the donors to underwrite the endowment. Finally, in spring 2011, he established the Taslimi Lectureship in Baha'i History and Religion in Iran at NELC, which was taught by the late Professors Firuz Kazemzadeh (Yale) and Amin Banani (Emeritus, UCLA).

At UCLA, Hossein also served as a member of numerous advisory boards and committees, among them, Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies; Von Grunebaum Center for Near Eastern Studies (Chair, Fellowship Committee); Chancellor's Committee on Religion, Ethics and Values; Council for Iranian Studies; Islamic Studies; Council on Undergraduate Affairs; and the Academic Senate Legislative Assembly; he also chaired the Academic Freedom Committee, Los Angeles Division Academic Senate from 2003-07.

Hossein was a member of the editorial board of *Iranian Studies* and *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* and Coordinator of Special Persian Programs at the Arthur M. Sackler Gallery and the Freer Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C.

He served as a referee for national and international academic funding agencies, including the National Endowment for the Humanities, Guggenheim Foundation, Stanford Humanities Center, Fulbright, American Council of Learned Societies, and several journals, including *Hekmat va Falsafeh* (Tehran, Tabataba'i University); *Transcendental Philosophy* (London, SOAS affiliate); *Arabic Philosophy and Science* (C.N.R.S., Paris), and *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* (Chicago, The Oriental Institute).

Among international organizations, he was an elected member of *La Société internationale pour l'étude de la philosophie médiévale*, The Hague, Netherlands, and elected president of the *Société Internationale des Sciences et de la Philosophie Arabes et Islamiques* (SIHSPA), C.N.R.S., Paris, 2010, and chaired the International Society of Iranian Studies conference in Los Angeles in 2010.

Hossein Ziai was a caring and inspiring teacher with a distinctive gravitas, and a passionate pillar of support for his students' aspirations. They returned his devotion with hard work and dedication and praised his course materials, teaching method, character, and values in their written assessments. One of his graduate students, Ghazzal Dabiri, referred to him as Doctorvater once, and the name stuck. A partial list of his other graduate students includes Ahmed R.D. Alwishah, Amir Hosein Pourjavady, Ani Honarchian, Dalia Yasharpour, Daniel Rafinejad, David Bennett, Fariba Taghavi, Firouzeh Matin-Papan, George W. Maschke, Henning L. Bauer, Monica Ringer, Nahid Pirnazar, Pari Iranmanesh, Peyman Malaz, Sahba Shayani, Shahwali Ahmadi, Shervin Emami, Touraj Daryae, and Wendy Desouza.



Graduate seminar, UCLA



Sahba Shayani, H. Ziai, Shervin Emami 2010

The last graduate student that Hossein admitted to the Iranian Studies Program at UCLA was Michelle Quay who started in September 2011 and completed her Ph.D. at Cambridge University, UK.

An overview of Hossein Ziai's research and [scholarship](#) appear in his biography under PROFILE. The abstracts of his books—ten in all, one of which, *Knowledge and Illumination: A Study of Suhrawardī's Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, was translated into Persian—plus a list of the thirteen titles he produced as founder and editor-in-chief of *Bibliotheca Iranica: Intellectual Traditions Series*, and a bibliography of his more than forty book chapters, articles, and encyclopedia entries, are available in [PUBLICATIONS](#).

Books



Anwāriyya

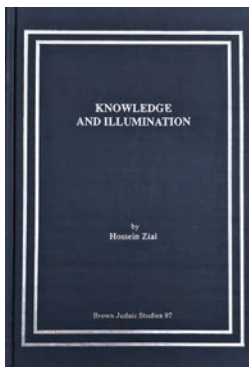
Anwāriyya is a translation and the only known commentary in Persian of Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī's *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, Philosophy of Illumination. It was written in 1629 by Muḥammad-Sharif Nizām al-Dīn Ahmad b. al-Hirawī and rests, in part, on the commentary by Qutb al-Dīn Shirazi (d. 1311) in Arabic. Hirawī compares Illuminationist philosophy—the revival and reformulation of Platonism in the post-classical period founded in Iran in the 12th c—with the Advaita school of Hindu philosophy. This volume is based on the only known manuscript of *Anwāriyya*, which in Berlin's Königlichen Bibliothek, and edited, with an introduction, by Hossein Ziai.



فلسفه ریاضی

Philosophy of Mathematics

A collection of articles by Rudolph Carnap, Arend Heyting, Bertrand Russell, Raymond L. Wilder, Reuben L. Goodstein, Hilary W. Putnam, E.A. Maziarz & Thomas Greenwood, and David Hilbert, translated into Persian by Iranian scholars, edited, with an introduction, notes, and glossary of technical terms by Hossein Ziai. Tehran: Iranian Center for the Study of Civilizations, 1980. Ziai notes in his introduction that the philosophy of mathematics is a branch of philosophy that studies the axioms, foundations, and generally the logical and structural nature of mathematics and asks questions about the source and nature of mathematical truth. He details theories in the philosophy of mathematics from Pythagoras' "everything is mathematics" through the development of mathematical realism, anti-realism, Platonism, Empiricism, Mathematical Monism, Logicism, Formalism, and Conventionalism in the 20th century.



Knowledge and Illumination

Hossein Ziai's *Knowledge and Illumination* (1990) is an analysis of Illuminationist philosophy, methodology, and logic in Suhrawardī's four major works: *Intimations*, *al-Talwiḥāt*, *Apposites*, *al-Muqāvamāt*, *Paths and Havens*, *al-Mashāre'*, and his magnum opus, *Philosophy of Illumination*, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. The book examines Illuminationist philosophy, methodology, and logic; Suhrawardī's theory of definition, knowledge, illumination, and cosmology; and his critique of the Peripatetics. The appendices include translations of Suhrawardī's introduction to his *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* and *Part One: The Seventh Rule*; and an analysis of *al-Mu'tabar fi'l Ḥikmat*, Abu'l Barakāt al-Baghdadī's *Evidential: Logic*. Also included is a glossary of Arabic/English terms, and an index.



معرفت و اشراق در اندیشه سهروردی

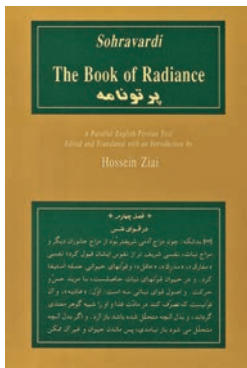
Ma'rfat va Eshrāq dar Andīshe-ye Sohravardī is a Persian translation by Sima Noorbakhsh (2005) of Hossein's Ziai's *Knowledge and Illumination* (1990), an analysis of Shihāb al-Dīn Sohravardī's ("Suhrawardī" in Arabic) four major works: *Intimations* التلویحات, *Apposites* المقامات, *Paths and Havens* المشارع والمطارحات, and *Philosophy of Illumination* حکمت الاشراق. It examines Illuminationist philosophy, methodology, and logic; Sohravardī's theory of definition, knowledge, illumination, and cosmology; and his critique of the Peripatetics. The appendices include Persian translations of Sohravardī's introduction to his *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, and *Part One: The Seventh Rule*, and an analysis of Abu'l Barakāt al-Baghdādī's *Evidential: Logic*, المعتمد فی الحکمت.



Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq

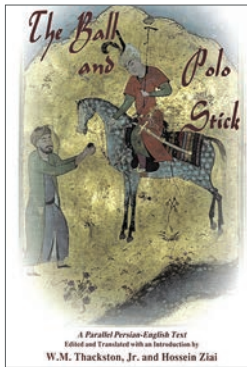
Commentary on the Philosophy of Illumination

Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq, written in the late 13th century by the Kurdish Iranian physician and scholar Shams al-Dīn Muhammad Shahrazūrī, is the first and most extensive commentary (*sharḥ*) on Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī's (d. 1191) *Philosophy of Illumination*. This work—plus many other manuscripts that are yet to be examined and published—disproves the common fallacy that Islamic philosophy ended in the 12th century. This edition by Hossein Ziai Torbati, in Arabic with an introduction in English, helps fill the void in our understanding of the continuity of Islamic philosophy, notably through the Illuminationist school of thought in Iran.



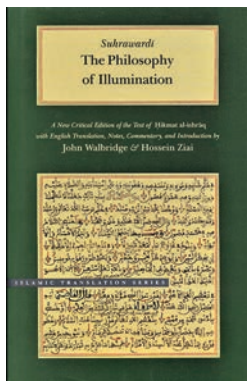
Sohravardī, *The Book of Radiance*

The first volume in the Bibliotheca Iranica: Intellectual Traditions Series, *The Book of Radiance* پرتو نامه is Shihab al-Dīn Sohravardī's (d. 1191) major philosophic work in Persian and a condensed account of his Illuminationist philosophy. *Partow Nāmeḥ* is cited by Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Shahrazūrī in a list of forty-six treatises by Sohravardī that includes his four major works, in Arabic: *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, *Intimations*, *Apposites*, and *Paths and Havens*. This bilingual Persian-English edition is an important primary source for understanding the new school of philosophy founded in Iran in the 12th century, and for the study of Persian.



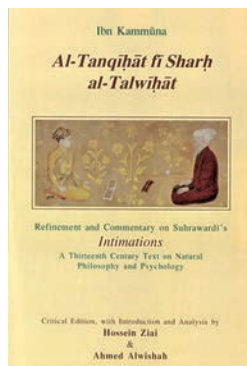
The Ball and Polo Stick

Composed by Mawlānā Mahmūd ‘Arifi of Herat at the height of Timurid power in 1438-39, *The Ball and Polo Stick* چوگان گوی و حالنامه, *Book of Ecstasy*, is an allegorical *masnavi* on the Sufi ideal of love. A dervish lets his head roll across the polo field in ecstasy so he may be absorbed into the consciousness of his royal beloved, i.e., the godhead. Based on a MS at Harvard University’s Fogg Art Museum once owned by Emperors Akbar, Jahangir, and Shahjahan, and a 1932 edition by R.S. Greenshields, this is a parallel Persian-English text, edited and translated with an introduction by W.M. Thackston, Jr. and Hossein Ziai.



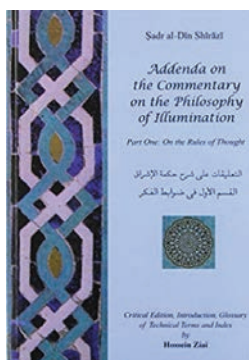
The Philosophy of Illumination, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*

The Philosophy of Illumination, Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī’s magnum opus, was completed in 1186, three years after he arrived in Aleppo from his birthplace in Sohravard in northwestern Iran via Marāqa and Isfahan where he had studied philosophy, theology, and logic, and after traveling in Anatolia and Syria. Composed in two parts, *The Rules of Thought*, and *On the Divine Lights*, it is a critique of Peripatetics that combines discursive and intuitive philosophy into a consistent philosophical system, and allows for the use of allegory and mystical experience. This is a new critical edition in Arabic and English with an introduction and a glossary of technical terms, by John Walbridge and Hossein Ziai.



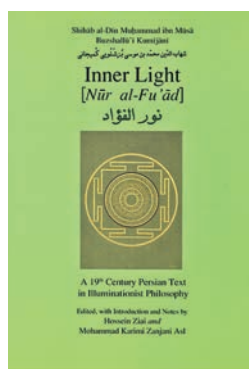
Ibn Kammūna, *Al-Tanqihāt fī Sharḥ al-Talwihāt*

Jewish philosopher and oculist Ibn Kammūna’s *Al-Tanqihāt fī Sharḥ al-Talwihāt*, written at the Nizāmiyya in Baghdad in 1268, is an analytical refinement and commentary on Suhrawardī’s *Intimations*. His definitions of the body—form, matter, space, and time; and the soul—theoretical and practical intellect, intuition, and other mental states, demonstrates the rationalist essence of the Philosophy of Illumination and helped solidify its position as a new and alternative system to Islamic Peripatetic philosophy. The critical edition of the second part—on natural philosophy and psychology—is published here for the first time, with an introduction and analysis in English, by Hossein Ziai and Ahmed Alwishah.



Mullā Ṣadrā, *Addenda on the Commentary on the Philosophy of Illumination*

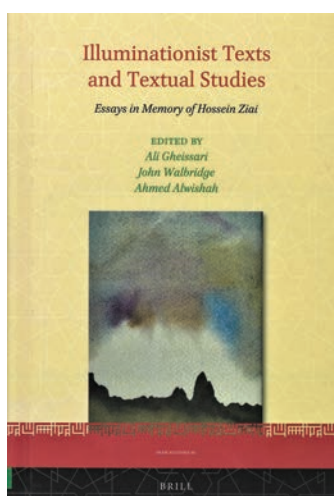
Addenda on the Commentary on the Philosophy of Illumination by the 17th century Persian Shi'a philosopher, Ṣadr al-Dīn Shirāzī, Mullā Ṣadrā, is an extension of Illuminationist philosophy founded by Suhrawardī in the 12th century, and one of the most significant works in post-classical Islamic philosophy. *Part One: On the Rules of Thought* is Mullā Ṣadrā's most innovative work and exemplifies the revivalist scholastic tradition in Iran known as the "School of Isfahan". This is the first critical edition of *al-Ta'liqāt 'ala Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, with an introduction in English, glossary of technical terms, and index, by Hossein Ziai.



Inner Light, *Nūr al-Fu'ād* A 19th Century Persian Text in Illuminationist Philosophy

Nūr al-Fu'ād is a treatise in Persian by Shihāb al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Mūsā Buzshallūṭ Kumijānī (d. 1895), an innovative exponent of Illuminationist (*Ishrāqī*) philosophy. Kumijānī who was likely an Iranian Kurd had studied with Hādi Sabzevāri in Khorasan and has been extolled as "The Second Master of Illumination". Based on four unpublished manuscripts—two in Berlin, and one each in Qom and Los Angeles—this first edition of his *Inner Light* by Hossein Ziai and M. Karimi Zanjani Asl is testament to the continuity of the philosophical discourse in the Islamic east, especially in Iran, into the late 19th century.

Hossein Ziai's scholarship is further reviewed in a [memorial volume](#) titled, *Illuminationist Texts and Textual Studies: Essays in Memory of Hossein Ziai*, Ali Gheissari, John Walbridge, and Ahmed Alwishah, eds., Brill: *Iran Studies* Vol 16, Leiden 2018.



As noted in the preface, the publication "deals with the post-Avicennan philosophical tradition in Iran, in particular the Illuminationist school, and later philosophers such as those associated with the School of Isfahan who were fundamentally influenced by it."

With a focus on epistemology, logic, and metaphysics, the articles are organized in fifteen chapters under four headings:

1. Introduction
2. Suhrawardī and the Philosophy of Illumination
3. The Illuminationists or Suhrawardī's Commentators
4. The Wider Tradition

and introduce "new texts into the modern canon of Islamic and Iranian philosophy" previously unavailable in translation that have not been "the subject of significant Western scholarship."

Contributors to the volume include the editors—Gheissari, Alwishah, Walbridge—and Charles E. Butterworth, Eiyad S. al-Kutubi, Jon McGinnis, Khaled El-Rouayheb, L.W. Conelis van Lit and Christian Lange, Malihe Karbassian, Mohammad Krimi Zanjani Asl, Nasrollah Pourjavady, Reza Pourjavady, and Y. Tzvi Langermann.

Hossein Ziai

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