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*The Source and Nature
of Authority: A Study of al-Suhrawardī's
Illuminationist Political Doctrine*

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INTRODUCTION

Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Ibn Amīrak Abū al-Futūḥ al-Suhrawardī was born in Suhraward in Northwestern Iran in 549/1154 and executed in Aleppo in 587/1191.¹ The order for his execution

1. The major biographical sources on al-Suhrawardī are Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah, *Uyūn al-Anba' fi Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā'*, ed. N. Riḍā (Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, 1968), 641–646; Yāqūt, *Irshād al-Arib*, ed. D. S. Margoliouth (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1923–31), 6:269; al-Qiftī, *Ta'riḫ al-Ḥukamā'*, ed. Bahman Dārā'ī (Teheran: Teheran University Press, 1347 A.H.), 345; Ibn Khallikān, *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, ed. I. Abbās (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1965), 6:268–274; and Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Shahrazūrī (died ca. 687/1288), *Nuzhat al-Arwāḥ wa Rawḍat al-Afrāḥ fi Ta'riḫ al-Ḥukamā' wa al-Falāsifah*, ed. S. Khurshid Aḥmad (Heyderabad: Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyyah, 1976), 2:119–143. Part of al-Shahrazūrī's biographical notice, based on S. H. Nasr's partial edition of the text in *Shihaboddin Yahya Sohrawardi, Oeuvres Philosophiques et Mystiques: Opera Metaphysica et Mystica III* (Teheran: Institut Franco-Iranien, 1970), 13–30, has been translated into English by W. M. Thackston, Jr. in *The Mystical and Visionary Treatises of Shihabuddin Yahya Suhrawardi* (London: Octagon Press, 1982), 1–4.

was given directly by the Ayyubid Sultan Saladin and conveyed to his son al-Malik al-Zāhir al-Ghāzī, governor of Aleppo, in at least two letters.² The circumstances that led to the execution are enigmatic and the reasons given for it controversial.³ Here I propose to examine al-Suhrawardī'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 given by the great Saladin.

2. Al-Shahrazūrī, the most sympathetic of al-Suhrawardī's biographers, states that Saladin had been aroused by the "jealous" jurists of Aleppo and wrote a letter to his son asking for al-Suhrawardī's execution lest he corrupt religion (*afsad al-dīn*). When al-Malik al-Zāhir refused, the Sultan wrote a second time warning the young prince that he would take the rule of Aleppo away unless he complied; see *Nuzhat al-Arwāḥ*, 2:125–126.
3. Most of the biographers, who had gone to Aleppo years after the execution, report that the inhabitants of the city differed in the opinions they gave regarding al-Suhrawardī's execution. For example, Ibn Khallikān states: "I saw her people differ concerning his case . . . some attributed him with heresy [*al-zandaqah wa al-ilḥād*], while others were of the opinion that there was good in him and that he was from among the people blessed with miraculous powers"; *Wafayāt* 6:273. In the same vein, al-Shahrazūrī states: "I saw people differ concerning his execution"; *Nuzhat al-Arwāḥ*, 2:125–126.

Muḥammad Abū Rayyān is the only recent scholar to discuss the circumstances of al-Suhrawardī's execution in Aleppo at length. He examines the debates between al-Suhrawardī and the jurists of Aleppo and goes on to cite al-'Imād al-İṣfahānī who, in his *al-Bustān al-Jāmi' li-Tawāriḫ al-Zamān*, reports that two brothers among the jurists of Aleppo had engaged al-Suhrawardī in a debate on the question of prophethood and God's powers and found his position that God can create anything He wants at any time so blasphemous that they sought his execution. See Muḥammad Abū Rayyān, *Uṣūl al-Falsafat al-İshraqiyyah* (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalabah al-'Arab, 1969), 25–26; and "Kaifa ubiḥ dam al-Suhrawardī al-İshraqī," in *Majallat Thaqāfah* 702 (1952).

To ascertain al-Suhrawardī's views on the source and nature of political authority, we must pay special attention to three questions: (1) what account, if any, of a "theory" of political philosophy can be determined from the texts; (2) what kinds of political rule and political governance are discussed in his writings; and (3) whether a distinctly illuminationist political doctrine can be identified in them.

First, al-Suhrawardī 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.⁴ 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-Suhrawardī's philosophical works, nor any part of them, can be described as political philosophy or practical philosophy, including the science of laws.

Second, governance and management, even political rule, are never discussed in relation to the city. Whenever al-Suhrawardī discusses the concept of rule, he relates it to "divine governance" (*tadbīr ilāhī*) 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. Legitimate rule is said to relate to a wholly other source, the "unseen realm" (*'ālam al-ghayb*), and should not fall under, nor initiate from within, the vicissitudes of the "sensed realm" (*al-'ālam al-maḥsūs*), that is, the corporeal.

4. The term *madīnah* never occurs in a political sense in his writings. The only cities mentioned are those in the wonderland *mundus imaginalis* such as Jābulqā and Jāburṣā of the region Hūrḡalyā. See note 5 below.

Rulers—whether they are kings, sages, or philosophers, and in a state of occultation or in actual command of temporal rule—must possess and somehow show a "sign" of their divine inspiration, a sign that indicates a real relation with the "unseen" source of authority. Such rulers serve as the "link" between the world of sense perception and the world of pure being and light, from which source emanate all things including political authority. In the illuminationist scheme, this is not simply an abstract idea. Divinely inspired rulers actually experience and "reside" in a separate realm designated the "eighth clime" (*al-iqlīm al-thāmin*), from which they receive their authority to rule.⁵ One can be a legitimate ruler only by the command of God (*al-ḥākīm bi-amr allāh*); thus governance or actual political dominion (*ḥukūmah*) is justified in the strict sense if and only if it is by and through linkage with the divine, i.e., by the command (*amr*) of God. 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.

Third, and as a corollary to the first two questions, what I propose to call "illuminationist political doctrine" must be viewed from a perspective comprising the following components: the Islamic theory of prophethood and of the manifest

5. In this realm, located between the purely intelligible and the purely sensory, time differs from Aristotelian time as measure of distance and space from Euclidean space. It is a realm not confined to empirical appearance. The way to this realm, called *mundus imaginalis* (Arabic, *'ālam al-mithāl* and *'ālam al-khayāl*; see notes 39–40 below), is by the active imagination. Henry Corbin has discussed this realm in many of his works. See especially *Terre Céleste*, trans. Nancy Pearson, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 82–89.

miraculous powers of prophets (*anbiyā'*) and saints (*awliyā'*);⁶ the Iranian tradition of a special manifest "glory" or "royal light" (*kharrā-yi kīyānī*) given to kings who thus possess healing and "occult" (*nayranj*) powers;⁷ the Iranian tradition of divine glory (*khvarnah*), as retold by al-Suhrawardī in a way that allows for any person who obtains wisdom (*hikmah*) to gain the divine glory that will come to radiate openly in that person as a divine light (*farra-yi īzādī*);⁸ the widespread Islamic tradition of awe-inspiring occult powers exercised by saints and mystics;⁹ and the Iranian tradition of high court dignitaries—in the person of wise viziers—whose knowledge and occult powers are placed at the disposal of the ruler, which, however, usually leads to their tragic martyrdom and demise.¹⁰

Though space limitations preclude extensive discussion of these questions and corollaries, most readers will be familiar with the way they are treated in the Arabic and Persian sources

6. See al-Suhrawardī, *Intimations*, in *Opera Metaphysica et Mystica I*, ed. Henry Corbin (Istanbul: Ma'arif Matbaası, 1945), 111–113. Prophets use metaphorical language to inform man of secrets. Those who unravel the hidden meaning gain a "union" with the source of "light," which gives them knowledge, hence power and authority. The mystics within Islam gain such access to the source of divine majesty: "The Šūfīs and other Muslim 'abstracted ones' [those who are freed from the bondage of corporeality] travel paths of wisdom and unite with the source of light [*yanbū' al-nūr*]."

7. See M. Moin, *Mazdayasnā va Adab-i Pārsī* (Teheran: Teheran University Press, 1986), 1:412–424.

8. See, for example, al-Suhrawardī, *Philosophy of Illumination*, in *Opera Metaphysica et Mystica II*, ed. Henry Corbin (Teheran: Institut Franco-Iranien, 1954), 156–158.

9. See, for example, J. C. Bürgel, *The Feather of Simurgh* (New York: New York University Press, 1988), 27–50.

10. The idea that wise viziers help maintain political authority is a common theme in many books designated "Mirrors of Princes." See F. R. C. Bagely's "Introduction" to al-Ghazālī's *Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk* (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), ix–xxxviii.

prior to al-Suhrawardī. Given the general development of Islamic philosophy before his time, we may safely assume that several textual traditions influenced the formation of his "illuminationist political doctrine." In theoretical political philosophy, these include works of al-Fārābī such as *The Political Regime* (*Kitāb al-Siyāsah al-Madaniyyah*) and *The Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City* (*Kitāb Mabādī' Ārā' Ahl al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah*). In practical philosophy, especially ethics, the widely read Persian work of al-Ghazālī, *The Alchemy of Happiness* (*Kīmīyā-ya Sa'ādat*), must be singled out. Works that fall under the category of 'Mirrors of Princes,' because of their reference to the conduct of ancient Persian kings as exemplars of just and legitimate rulers, must also be kept in mind. Among the more well-known ones are, e.g., al-Ghazālī's *Counsel for Kings* (*Naṣīḥat al-Mulūk*),¹¹ Kai Ka'ūs Ibn Qābūs Ibn Vushmgīr's *The Epistle of Qābūs* (*Qābūs-nāma*),¹² and Qavām al-Dīn Niẓām al-Mulūk's *The Epistle on Politics* (*Siyāsat-nāma*).¹³ Finally, the various works of Avicenna, apart from their direct and evident impact on the philosophy of illumination as a whole (including logic, epistemology, and metaphysics), must be regarded as sources for al-

11. This work, said to have been completed by the famous theologian in 502/1109, represents a synthesis of Islamic political philosophy and older Iranian views on politics and government. It sets forth anecdotes, stories, and tales to illustrate the exemplary conduct of Caliphs, Sasanian kings, Sufi saints, and Iranian sages. Even maxims from Mazdaism are used to portray a universally accepted standard of morality and political conduct.

12. This work, written ca. 475/1082, retains an earlier Iranian attitude toward ethics and morality and draws from a wide range of "rules of conduct" that pertain to the social, ethical, and political behavior of rulers in general and kings and princes above all.

13. This work, written ca. 484/1091 by the famous vizier of the Seljuk ruler Malikshāh, includes the theme of universal justice and discusses principles of ethics. The role of the philosopher-sage who acts as the royal advisor is artfully woven into the tales and anecdotes.

Suhrawardī's views on the relation between prophethood and governance by the wise.

Al-Suhrawardī'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. Moreover, the doctrine, while Platonic in essence, includes a reformulation of Iranian mythical and practical criteria for rule by kings. Finally, the philosophical component of the doctrine is the correlation between wisdom gained through the practice of philosophy and the manifest authority that should accrue to the sage-philosopher-ruler.

That primary emphasis should be given to the rule of the enlightened was well defined in Islamic political philosophy before al-Suhrawardī. A famous statement by Leo Strauss, for example, stresses this very doctrine: "Fārābī . . . was so much inspired by Plato's *Republic* that he presented the whole of philosophy proper within a political frame-work."¹⁴ The additional emphasis on the question of authority and on divinely inspired legitimate rule marks al-Suhrawardī's philosophical attitude, which, in his reconstruction of the philosophy of illumination, is decidedly more Platonic than Aristotelian. In this "new" philosophy, al-Suhrawardī 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 (*ḥikmah ishrāqiyyah*), may be obtained. The recipient of this wisdom will, among other things, obtain the authority to rule.

14. See Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe: Free Press, 1952), 9.

Simply stated, perfect harmony between intuitive wisdom (*ḥikmah dhawqiyyah*) and discursive wisdom (*ḥikmah baḥthiyyah*) characterizes the wisdom made available to certain types of individuals.¹⁵ These individuals then become perfect rulers of their age and, should governance be manifest in their hands, the time of their rule will be an enlightened one (*zamān nūrī*).¹⁶

Starting from a basic agreement with al-Fārābī about the character of the ruler, al-Suhrawardī moves to a quite different position. For example, al-Fārābī's view that the ruler of the virtuous city cannot be just any man¹⁷ is categorically accepted

15. Divine philosophers (*al-ḥukamā' al-muta'allihūn*) represent the highest rank of the wise in the philosophy of illumination. The ranks of such sages are discussed in full by al-Harawī in his *Anwāriyyah*, where it is said that such sages combine philosophy with prophecy; see Muḥammad Sharīf al-Harawī, *Anwāriyyah: An 11th Century A.H. Persian Translation and Commentary on Suhrawardī's Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, ed., with intro. and notes, Hossein Ziai (Teheran: Amir Kabir, 1980), 6.

The philosophy of illumination uses the term *al-ḥikmah al-baḥthiyyah* to designate "discursive wisdom," as opposed to *al-ḥikmah al-dhawqiyyah*, which means "intuitive wisdom."

16. See al-Suhrawardī, *Philosophy of Illumination, Opera II*, 11–13. Al-Harawī discusses the institution of rule and governance both as something manifest and apparent—for example, the rule of prophets and certain kings (he cites Alexander and the mythical Persian king Kaykhusraw)—and as esoteric rule, which he identifies with the spiritual dominion of certain mystics, such as *aqṭāb* and *abdāl*; see *Anwāriyyah*, 14. Al-Shahrazūri, in his *Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, equates *ri'āsah* with "rule of the corporeal world" and goes on to state: "when political rule, [legal] judgment, and the sword [i.e., military power] are in the hands of one who is learned in divine matters and discursive philosophy or in the hands of one who is learned in divine matters, that time is enlightened because he will be able to spread knowledge, wisdom, justice, and all the other agreeable moral virtues"; see MS Istanbul, Saray Aḥmad III, 3230, fol. 17v.

17. "The ruler of the virtuous city may not be just any man chanced upon"; see al-Fārābī, *Mabādī' Ārā' Ahl al-Madīnah al-Fāḍilah (The Principles of the Opinions of the Inhabitants of the Virtuous City)*, ed. and trans.

by al-Suhrawardī, who posits that rule must be in the hands of prophets, divine kings, or special categories of philosopher-sages.¹⁸ Moreover, al-Suhrawardī's ruler, like al-Fārābī's "holds the most perfect rank of humanity and has reached the highest degree of felicity."¹⁹ The difference between the two stems from the conditions set by al-Fārābī for political dominion, namely, natural disposition (*al-fiṭrah wa al-ṭab'*) and acquired attitude and habit (*al-hai'ah wa al-malakah al-irādiyyah*). These are not stipulated by al-Suhrawardī, nor does he ever discuss the natural qualities of the ruler as does al-Fārābī.²⁰ Indeed, unlike al-Fārābī, al-Suhrawardī 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-Suhrawardī for gaining the right to rule is the attainment of wisdom, and this doctrine becomes central to his illuminationist political thought.²¹ Another difference arises from the way each views the activity of the ruler and the way he is received. While al-Fārābī's ruler "should be able to lead people well along the right path of felicity" and "rouse [their] imagination by well chosen words,"²² al-Suhrawardī's becomes a "controlling, captivating, and brave man . . . who himself is elevated to the rank of the 'archetype' [*arbāb ṭilasm*] of felicity, love and glory" which is why "nations will revere him."²³ Furthermore, al-

Richard Walzer, in *Al-Farabi on the Perfect State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 238.

18. See al-Suhrawardī, *Intimations, Opera I*, 178–179; and *Philosophy of Illumination, Opera II*, 11.

19. See al-Fārābī, *Virtuous City*, 244 (Walzer trans. 245). Al-Fārābī adds immediately after this: "His soul is united, as it were, with the Active Intellect."

20. Al-Fārābī even discusses qualities such as bodily perfection; see *ibid.*, 246.

21. See al-Suhrawardī, *Epistle on Emanation, Opera III*, 80–81.

22. See al-Fārābī, *Virtuous City*, 246 (Walzer trans. 247).

23. See al-Suhrawardī, *Paths and Havens, Opera I*, 504.

Fārābī considers the manifest signs of rulership to be human qualities, whereas al-Suhrawardī thinks that rulers demonstrate superhuman powers.²⁴

Since, however, no single work in al-Suhrawardī's illuminationist corpus is given a political title, unlike what occurs in al-Fārābī's works and those of the authors mentioned above, we must examine all of them. This we must do in order to determine where, within the numerous works that together constitute al-Suhrawardī's philosophy of illumination, discussions of subjects pertaining to the "illuminationist political doctrine" are to be found, even though they may not be developed systematically.

AL-SUHRAWARDĪ'S WORKS

In most of his writings, al-Suhrawardī attempts to formulate a metaphysics based on principles different from those of the Peripatetic philosophy of his time (predominantly Avicennan). Though he has no independent work on political philosophy, he does provide a systematic and detailed discussion of Avicenna's well known division of philosophy in the introduction to the *Intimations (al-Talwīḥāt)*.²⁵ This, however, is the only place where standard reference to a political subject is made. Everywhere else, as will be made clear, al-Suhrawardī's discussion of questions that relate to his political doctrine centers on the qualities associated with kings and philosopher-sages.

Al-Suhrawardī's works consist of three groups or types. The

24. Such as walking on water, flying in the sky, arriving at the heavens, and traversing distances on earth in instantaneous moments. See, for example, *ibid.*, 505, and pp. 329–330 and note 69 below.

25. See al-Suhrawardī, *Opera I*, 2–3. Avicenna begins by dividing philosophy into speculative (*nazariyyah*) and practical (*'amaliyyah*), then further divides the latter into ethical (*khulqiyyah*), economical (*manzaliyyah*), and political (*madaniyyah*).

first comprises the major philosophical works: *Intimations* (*al-Talwīḥāt*), *Apposites* (*al-Muqāwamāt*), *Paths and Havens* (*al-Mashārī' wa al-Muṭārāḥāt*), and *Philosophy of Illumination* (*Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*).²⁶ Though they are of lesser significance philosophically, we may add the Arabic *'Imādin Tablets* (*al-Alwāḥ al-'Imādiyyah*) and *Temples of Light* (*Ḥayākil al-Nūr*) as well as the two Persian works, *Epistle on Emanation* (*Partaw-nāma*) and *On Knowledge of God* (*Yazdān Shinākht*).²⁷ The *'Imādin Tablets* and the *Epistle on Emanation* are especially relevant for our investigation into the source and nature of political authority, in part because they were commissioned by Seljuk rulers.²⁸

In each of al-Suhrawardī's major works, the final section is devoted to a discussion of subjects bearing directly on political authority, e.g., the special attributes and qualities obtained by

26. Only the sections on metaphysics in the first three of these writings, namely, *Intimations*, *Apposites*, and *Paths and Havens*—each referred to by al-Suhrawardī as “The Third Science On Metaphysics” (*al-'Ilm al-Thālith fi al-Ilāhiyyāt*)—appear in *Opera I*. The *Philosophy of Illumination* is in *Opera II*. I have shown in *Knowledge and Illumination*, (Brown University Judaic Studies Series no. 97 [Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990]), that, based on al-Suhrawardī's own explicit statements, these works together constitute a whole in which he carefully and systematically presents the genesis and development of the philosophy of illumination.
27. The Arabic text of *al-Alwāḥ al-'Imādiyyah* has been edited by Najaf 'Alī Ḥabībī in *Sī Risālah az Shaykh-i Ishrāq* (Teheran: Academy of Philosophy, 1977), 1–78; the Persian version has been edited by S. H. Nasr in *Opera III*, 109–195. In the *Prolegomenes* to that volume, Corbin speaks about the royal patron for whom the work was composed; see note 48 below. The Arabic text of *Temples of Light* has been edited by Muḥammad Abū Rayyān (Cairo: al-Maktabah al-Tijāriyyah al-Kubrah, 1957) and the Persian version by S. H. Nasr in *Opera III*, 83–108. The Persian texts of *Partaw-nāma* and *Yazdān Shinākht* have been edited by S. H. Nasr in *Opera III*, 1–81, 404–459.
28. See note 48 below.

the practice of illuminationist philosophy that are associated with enlightened wise philosophers and sages. Al-Suhrawardī begins most of these works with a passage addressing the audience for whom the work is composed as “my brethren” or “my companions.” The message is one of how they might gain a special kind of knowledge based on illumination, intuition, and vision, which will give them access to wisdom and power and even bestow upon them a special quality of “light” associated with the divine kings of Iranian myth, namely, *farra-yi īzādī* or *kiyān kharra*.²⁹ This theme is also developed more fully in the final sections of these works, e.g., in *Philosophy of Illumination*, II.5, “On Resurrection, Prophecy, and Dreams,” especially, II.5.5, “On Explaining the Causes of Divine Admonitions and Knowledge of the Unseen”;³⁰ *Intimations*, III.4, “On Prophecy, Signs, Dreams and Other Such Matters,” especially, III.4.2, “On the Causes of Extraordinary Acts”;³¹ *Paths and*

29. See, for example, al-Suhrawardī, *Epistle on Emanation*, *Opera III*, 81. Cf. H. Corbin, “Prolegomenes II” in *Opera II*, 35–38. Al-Suhrawardī discusses the special divine light called the *kharra* and distinguishes two types: simple *kharra* bestowed by the Holy Spirit (*al-rūḥ al-qudus*) on any human and *kiyān kharra* bestowed upon kings. Whoever obtains this latter type of light will have manifest powers. See, e.g., *Epistle on Emanation*, *Opera III*, 81; *'Imādin Tablets*, *ibid.*, 186; and *Paths and Havens*, *Opera I*, 504.
30. See al-Suhrawardī, *Philosophy of Illumination*, *Opera II*, 236 ff. The principle of illuminationist philosophy put forth is: when a person transcends the elemental world (done through praxis of wisdom), and when the negative attributes of the activity of the faculty of imagination are done away with, the person will become aware of unseen things and his true dreams will testify to the correctness of his visionary experience. Only those with such “powers” are fit to be called God's viceregents on earth. Cf. *al-Alwāḥ al-'Imādiyyah*, ed. Ḥabībī, 77, where reference is made to the Quranic passages in which God tells man that He has bestowed viceregents for him on earth (2:30, 6:165, 7:129, and 38:26).
31. Al-Suhrawardī, *Intimations*, *Opera I*, 95 ff. “Extraordinary acts” (*af'āl*

Havens, III.7, "On Perception, Knowledge of the Necessary Being, Separate Entities, Immortality of the Soul, and on Happiness and What Pertains to It," especially III.7.3, "On How Unseen Things May Appear," and III.7.6, "On the Spiritual Journey of the Divine Philosophers."³² In addition, the last section of the *Epistle on Emanation*, entitled "On Prophecy, Miracles, Miraculous Powers, Dreams, and other Similar Things" is of special significance.³³ The theme in each chapter is the same: Through special exercises (*riyādāt*, *khal' 'an al-badan*, *taqlīl shawāghil ḥawāss al-zāhir*, etc.) the recipient of illuminationist wisdom experiences the light of divine majesty and obtains a quality—depicted as a 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.

Also of importance are other works where the same questions are treated in lesser detail but more directly. For example, in

khāriqah li-al-'ādah) are those performed by prophets and by philosopher-sages. On numerous occasions, al-Suhrawardī attributes the performance of such acts—as miracles—not just to prophets but to divine philosophers as well. That is, miracles continue to be performed by men in every age. And miracles are "signs" that the sages who perform them have special powers.

32. Al-Suhrawardī, *Paths and Havens*, *Opera I*, 474 ff. This provides the most extensive account of al-Suhrawardī's political doctrine, where many "political" themes such as the attainment of happiness, intellectual pleasure, reward and punishment, and, especially, a theory of divine kingship are discussed; see *ibid.*, 504.
33. Al-Suhrawardī, *Epistle on Emanation*, *Opera III*, 75 ff. In this section, al-Suhrawardī defines the conditions for prophethood and stipulates that certain sages who have been given the elixir of wisdom and power (metaphorically said to be a light just like the *kiyān kharra* or royal light) may be called to aid the activity of the law-giver (*al-shārī'*) of the age. Strong intuition (*ḥads-i qawī*) is among the intellectual qualities of prophets as well as divine sages, and the performance of miraculous acts is their manifest sign.

the last section of the Persian version of *Temples of Light*, al-Suhrawardī provides a succinct account of the power associated with divine sages: The souls of the divine philosophers and pure ones (*pākān*) will receive the light of God, which will give them power over the "elemental entities" (*'unsuriyyāt*).³⁴ Also, in the final section of the Persian version of the *'Imādin Tablets*, he identifies the enlightened as "God's vicegerents on earth," who are said to be certain types of kings.³⁵

Though somewhat similar to what Avicenna says in the ninth

34. See al-Suhrawardī, *Temples of Light*, *Opera III*, 108. Obedience (*tā'ah*) is due the sages by all beings. Illumination is the principle at work that gives a human divine powers to such a degree that the elemental world in its totality will become obedient.
35. Al-Suhrawardī, *'Imādin Tablets*, *Opera III*, 194. Until al-Suhrawardī, the activity of "viceregency" in Islamic philosophy had been equated with the Active Intellect; see Herbert A. Davidson, "Alfarabi and Avicenna on the Active Intellect," *Viator: Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 3 (1972): 110: "Avicenna construed the active intellect as an activity with an astonishingly wide range of functions, virtually the vicar of God on earth, responsible for all existence and all thought in the sublunar world." Al-Suhrawardī goes beyond Avicenna in according men—albeit a special category of men such as philosopher-sages, divine rulers, etc.—"powers" formerly associated with the Active Intellect (see, e.g., *On the Knowledge of God*, *Opera III*, 447). For al-Suhrawardī, these miraculous powers are not obtained because of union (*ittiḥād*) or connection (*ittiṣāl*) with the Active Intellect, which he rejects, but because of self-realization of the light of God, which is potentially in everyone, through the experience of illumination. See, for example, al-Suhrawardī, *Paths and Havens*, *Opera I*, 501–502; *Philosophy of Illumination*, *Opera II*, 155 ff.; and *my Knowledge and Illumination*, chap. 4. By establishing the multiplicity of intellects, al-Suhrawardī modifies the Peripatetic theory of the Active Intellect. His theory, associated with a multiplicity of lights differing only in terms of their respective intensities, called the Isfahbad lights, indicates a "continuity" of light from the source down to the elemental; see al-Harawī, *Anwāriyyah*, 32–38, where the question of the multiplicity of intellects and the continuity of light is taken up. To say that the Active Intellect is personified and thus personalized in the philosopher-sage points to the alternative introduced by the illuminationist doctrine.

and tenth *Namaṭs of Directives and Remarks*,³⁶ al-Suhrawardī's account differs in important respects. The ninth *Namaṭ* is entitled "On the Stations of Gnostics" and the tenth "On the Secrets of Signs."³⁷ However aware he may have been of Avicenna's opening a new chapter in Islamic philosophy through his teachings in these last two sections of the *Directives and Remarks*—and here the question of union with the active intellect and its political implications are central³⁸—al-Suhrawardī's treatment of ostensibly the same subject matter leads to a different end. To begin with, Avicenna refers to a general group of people as gnostics and distinguishes three types: ascetics, pious worshippers, and gnostics proper. Corresponding to this is al-Suhrawardī's group of divine philosophers and sages. It consists of a wide range of types and includes the perfect divine philosopher, referred to as God's viceregent and identified as the ruler of an age. Thus Avicenna's mystics with special insight and knowledge—that is, gnostics proper—are elevated by al-Suhrawardī to the rank of divinely inspired rulers.

The second and perhaps more significant difference is that Avicenna seeks to explain the natural basis for the occurrence of extraordinary events, such as a mystic's ability to foretell the future, while al-Suhrawardī is more intent on relating the miraculous powers with the experience of the "unseen" in the

36. See Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa al-Tanbihāt*, ed. Ḥasan Malik-Shāhī (Teheran: Soroosh, 1984), 438 ff.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 439 ff. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, a friend and fellow student of al-Suhrawardī (both had studied with Majd al-Dīn al-Jīlī in Marāghah), states in his *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* concerning this tenth *Namaṭ*: "This is the most important chapter of this book, because in it he has ordered the science of the Sufis in a way no one has done before or after him." See *ibid.*, 439 n. 1; throughout this edition, Malik-Shāhī reproduces passages of al-Rāzī's *Sharḥ al-Ishārāt* in the notes.

38. See Davidson, "Alfarabi and Avicenna on the Active Intellect," 166–168; and Fazlur Rahman, *Prophecy in Islam: Philosophy and Orthodoxy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1958), 19–20.

separate realm of the imaginal. For al-Suhrawardī, this imaginal realm (*al-‘ālam al-mithālī*), rendered *mundus imaginalis* by Corbin³⁹—wherein the illuminationist experience takes place—is a real one and occupies a distinct place in illuminationist cosmology.⁴⁰

The second type of works by al-Suhrawardī are his Arabic and Persian allegorical treatises. These include *A Tale of the Occidental Exile* (*Qiṣṣat al-Ghurbat al-Gharbiyyah*), *The Treatise of the Birds* (*Risālat al-Ṭayr*), *The Sound of Gabriel's Wing* (*Avāz-i Par-i Jibrā'il*), *The Red Intellect* (*‘Aql-i Surkh*), *A Day with a Group of Sufis* (*Rūzī bā Jamā'at-i Ṣūfiyyān*), *On the State of Childhood* (*Fī Ḥālat al-Ṭufūliyyah*), *On the Reality of Love* (*Fī Ḥaqīqat al-Ishq*), *The Language of the Ants* (*Lughat-i Mūrān*), and *The Simurgh's Shriill Cry* (*Ṣafīr-i Sīmurgh*).⁴¹ In these treatises, al-Suhrawardī is mainly concerned with describing the theme of the mystical journey. Said to begin with the individual's heightened level of self-consciousness, its end is invariably marked by the individual's vision of truth—a percep-

39. See, for example, Henry Corbin, *Mundus Imaginalis: or the Imaginary and the Imaginal*, trans. by Ruth Horine (Ipswich: Golgonooza Press, 1976), from sections in Corbin's *En Islam iranien: aspects spirituels et philosophiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972).

40. The cosmology admits of four realms, namely, that of controlling lights (*‘ālam al-anwār al-qābirah*), managing lights (*‘ālam al-anwār al-mudab-birah*), and two intermediary realms (*barzakhiyyān*)—luminous suspended forms (*‘ālam al-ṣuwar al-mu'allaqah al-mustanirah*) and dark suspended forms (*‘ālam al-ṣuwar al-mu'allaqah al-zulmāniyyah*). Evil spirits, Satan, pain, suffering, etc. belong to this latter realm; see, e.g., *Philosophy of Illumination, Opera II*, 232–235. The first of the two intermediary realms is also called the realm of suspended forms (*‘ālam al-muthul al-mu'allaqah*), the *mundus imaginalis* (*‘ālam al-khayāl*), and the realm of abstracted forms (*‘ālam al-ashbāh al-mujarradah*).

41. *Qiṣṣat al-Ghurbat al-Gharbiyyah* is in *Opera II*, 274–297; it has been translated by Thackston, *The Mystical and Visionary Treatises*, 100–108. The other treatises are published in *Opera III* and have also been translated by Thackston, *ibid.*

tion likened to experiencing unity with the divine. The manifest result of the experience of the mystical quest-journey is the attainment of knowledge and power.

The third type of works by al-Suhrawardī consists of devotional prayers or invocations. Other minor treatises, aphorisms, and short statements also fall under this type.⁴² The lengthiest two prayers or invocations composed by al-Suhrawardī are addressed to “the great Heavenly Sun, Hürakhsh.”⁴³ The Heavenly Sun, also referred to as the Great Luminous Being (*al-nayyir al-a‘zam*), is the heavenly counterpart of a king on earth; both have manifest “luminous” qualities, which is why they are obeyed by their “subjects.”⁴⁴

THE BEGINNINGS OF A POLITICAL DOCTRINE

From this brief indication of the nature of al-Suhrawardī's works, it should be clear that their introductions and final chapters are of special importance. The most succinct and clear statement made by al-Suhrawardī concerning political doctrine is to be found, for example, in the introduction to his most famous work, the *Philosophy of Illumination*. To point to sa-

42. Most of the aphorisms had been collected by al-Shahrazūrī in his *Nuzhat al-Arwāh*, 2:136–143.

43. These lengthiest two prayers or invocations, entitled “The Great Hürakhsh,” have been published by M. Moin in *Majala-yi Amūzish va Parvarish* 24 (1945): 8–12. One of them has also been reprinted in *Si Risālah az Shaykh-i Ishrāq*, 18–19.

44. One of the lengthier prayers or invocations, for example, starts by bestowing greetings on “the most luminous, alive, rational, and manifest being” and goes on to attribute the qualities of royal authority and perfect power to it. The idea is that just as Hürakhsh shines in the heavens, so does the *kiyān kharrā* of kings on earth; see al-Suhrawardī, *Opera I*, 494; *Opera II*, 149–150.

lient features of the political doctrine, as well as to illustrate the three questions sketched out in the “Introduction” above, I present here a translation of some parts. After invocations to God, al-Suhrawardī begins:

Know, my brethren, that your frequent demands for writing down the philosophy of illumination have weakened my resolution to refrain and eliminated my desire not to comply. Were it not for an incumbent obligation, a message that has appeared, and a command given from a place disobedience of which will lead to going astray from the path, I would not have felt obliged to step forward and openly reveal the philosophy of illumination. [I will write for you] a book in which I mention what I have obtained by my intuition during my retreats and moments of revelation. In every seeking soul there is a portion of the light of God, be it abundant or little. And every scholar has intuition, be it perfect or not. Knowledge resides not only among a particular group of people, so that the doors of Heaven be shut behind them and the rest of the world be denied the possibility of obtaining more. Rather, the Dator Scientis [*wāhib al-‘ilm*]⁴⁵ who stands by the “clear horizon” is not stingy with the unseen.⁴⁶

As is usual with al-Suhrawardī, the passage commences with an address to his “brethren.” Subsequently, he stipulates that a command has been given him, which is why he is setting forth illuminationist principles in writing. The source of the command is stated by the commentators to be the Divine Himself.⁴⁷ However, judging by al-Suhrawardī's close association with several

45. Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī equates *wāhib al-‘ilm* with *al-‘aql al-fa‘āl*, i.e., the active intellect; see *Sharḥ Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, (Teheran, 1316 A.H.), 14. For the reference to the “clear horizon” that follows immediately here, see Quran, 71:23.

46. For this and the passages immediately following, see al-Suhrawardī, *Philosophy of Illumination*, *Opera II*, 10–12.

47. See al-Shahrazūrī, *Sharḥ*, fol. 11r. Cf. al-Harawī, *Anwāriyyah*, 3–8.

rulers and princes for whom at various stages in his life he had composed treatises on illuminationist philosophy, as well as by the tone and style of the passage itself, the source of the command may have been none other than the Ayyubid al-Malik al-Zāhir himself:⁴⁸

The most evil age is the one lacking in personal endeavor, in which the movement of thought is interrupted, the door of revelations locked, and the way of visions closed. . . . The world has never been without philosophy nor without a person in charge of its wisdom, possessing proofs and explanations. Such a person is God's viceregent on earth, and this will be the situation so long as there are heavens and earth. . . . The group [of philosophers] includes the "messengers," the "lawgivers," . . . and others. Should it happen that, in some period, there be a philosopher proficient in both divine wisdom and discursive wisdom, he will have the leadership, and will be God's viceregent. . . . Should this not happen to be the case, then a philosopher proficient in divine wisdom, but of middle ability in discursive wisdom [will have the leadership]. Should even this not happen to be the case, then a philosopher proficient in divine wisdom, but who lacks discursive wisdom will be God's viceregent. The earth will never be without a philosopher proficient in divine wisdom. Leadership

48. The rulers with whom al-Suhrawardī had close association, indicative of his desire to be involved in politics in a fashion analogous to the well-known legacy of the wise Iranian viziers, include the Seljuk prince 'Alā' al-Dīn Kay-Qubād, said by at least one source to have been a disciple of al-Suhrawardī in philosophy; the Seljuk Sulaymān-Shāh, a great patron of philosophy, who reportedly asked al-Suhrawardī to compose for him, in Persian, the epitome of illuminationist philosophy, the *Epistle on Emanation*; and the Seljuk ruler of Kharpūt, Malik 'Imād al-Dīn Urtuq, al-Suhrawardī's well-known patron and the one for whom he composed the philosophical epitome *'Imādīn Tablets*. Ibn Bībī's *Mukhtaṣar-i Tārīkhī Salājiqa*, as quoted by B. Furūzānfar in his *Zindgāni-yi Mawlānā Jalāl al-Dīn* (reprint; Teheran: Zavvār, 1987), 24–28, 184, is the source for this information. See also M. J. Mushkūr, *Muqaddama-'i bar Akhbār-i Salājiqa-yi Rūm* (Teheran: Teheran University Press, 1961), 93.

on earth will never be given to the proficient discursive philosopher who has not become proficient in divine wisdom. So, the world is never without a proficient divine philosopher, who is more worthy than he who is only a discursive philosopher; for, inevitably, viceregency must be held [by someone]. By this leadership, I do not mean only temporal control. Rather, the imām-philosopher may openly be in command or in occultation—he whom the multitude refer to as "the pole"—and he will have the leadership even if he is in utmost concealment. When earthly rule is in such a philosopher's hands, the age will be a luminous one; but if the age is without divine management, darkness will be triumphant.

Given al-Suhrawardī'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 an 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 must be divinely inspired. The ruler, God's viceregent, is identified as the enlightened philosopher, one who combines to a perfect degree discursive and intuitive wisdom.

The best political state rests on the wisdom and authority of an individual—philosopher-sage, or divine philosopher—who may be termed imam, pole, or king. There is much discussion in the philosophy of illumination as to the historical origins of wisdom, and the manner in which it has proliferated. Consequently, illuminationist political doctrine rests on discovering who the inspired "leaders" are and on determining how they

obtain their divine inspiration as well as how they portray the authority of their acquired wisdom. The "history" of the dissemination of such wisdom, and thus political authority, is the first component of the doctrine.

THE HISTORY OF WISDOM

The authority of wise rulers derives from their ability to obtain a certain quality of wisdom, metaphorically depicted as a light. The philosophy of illumination is the way to pursue the path that leads to the attainment of this light or wisdom. As al-Suhrawardī states on a number of occasions in his works, including the introduction to the *Philosophy of Illumination*, the "science of lights" is constructed by him with the aid of "all those wayfarers in the path of God." In this endeavor, he has been guided by the intuition of the leader of philosophy (*imām al-ḥikmah*), Plato, the "possessor of divine support and light" (*ṣāhib al-ayd wa al-nūr*).⁴⁹ Wisdom is a light that has been passed down by generations of divine philosophers, and with the aid of this light the affairs of man are regulated. The history of the "science of lights" goes back to Hermes, "father of philosophers" (*wālid al-ḥukamā*), and continues through Empedocles, Pythagoras, and others until it reaches Plato. Just as there is an ancient Greek source for the light of wisdom passed down through history, so is there a Persian, as well as an Indian, source. "The Eastern theorem of light" is said by al-Suhrawardī to comprise the method of the Persian sages such as Jāmāsf, Farshāwashtar, Buzurgmihr, and others before them who passed down the authority of wisdom.⁵⁰ Al-Suhrawardī enumerates

49. See al-Suhrawardī, *Philosophy of Illumination*, Opera II, 11.

50. "This theorem, however, is not the theorem of the infidel *majūs*, the

ancient philosophers, saints, prophets, and kings who are said to have experienced this light in themselves and then passed it down. For example, the divine Plato is said to have experienced wisdom as a light in his soul when he was freed from Prime Matter, and this gave him special powers associated with the "elevated noble world."⁵¹ Such stories are also told of Hermes and other Greek thinkers, even Aristotle.

Though not frequent, similar stories are told of the Prophet Muhammad, who said: "when I remove myself from the shackles of the body and become united with the elevated noble world, then my food and drink are from the real sciences and from divine lights."⁵² And there are other stories concerning the experience of light by Amīr al-Mu'minīn 'Alī, the fourth of the Rāshidūn Caliphs and the first Shīi Imam. In one such story, al-Suhrawardī relates that 'Alī had been aided in one of his battles by the radiating divine light.⁵³ Moreover, stories such as these are told of Abū Yazīd, al-Ḥallāj, and other prominent Muslim mystics. Even Old Testament figures such as Noah, Solomon, David, and Jacob are the subjects of similar stories; they are all said to have also experienced the divine light and thus to possess manifest extraordinary power.⁵⁴

The implication drawn from all these stories is the same: Whoever experiences the divine light will gain wisdom and power and thereby have the ability to perform extraordinary

heterodoxy of Mānī, or whatever leads to associating other deities with God, exalted is He above anthropomorphic attributes"; *ibid.*, 10–11.

51. See al-Suhrawardī, *Intimations*, Opera I, 112.

52. See al-Suhrawardī, *Imādin Tablets*, Opera III, 128.

53. *Ibid.* A similar story is related concerning Jesus Christ.

54. See, for example, in al-Suhrawardī, *Opera III: Epistle on Emanation*, 76; *Imādin Tablets*, 189; *The Red Intellect*, 229; *On the Reality of Love*, 273, 281, 284, 285; *The Language of the Ants*, 297; *The Simurgh's Shriill Cry*, 316, 332; and *On the Knowledge of God*, 444.

acts, tell of future events, and rule justly. In fact, the light given to those who experience illumination is said to have been passed down through several groups or branches of philosophers, sages, and mystics. And it is this passing down that constitutes al-Suhrawardī's view of the history of "wisdom."⁵⁵ This type of wisdom has, in the illuminationist scheme, proliferated in history through several sources and channels: a Hermetic "source," Hermes himself being the greatest source in this branch and called the father of philosophy;⁵⁶ a Greek "source" or group, the greatest among them being the divine Plato and including Pythagoras, Empedocles, and Asclepius; a Persian "source," *al-Fahlawiyyūn*, originating with Kiyumarth, designated Earth-King (*Malik al-Ṭīn*, an Arabic translation of the Persian *Gil-Shāh*, the well known epithet of the Avestan king Gayomaratan), passed down through his followers Afrīdūn and Kaykhusraw; and an Indian "source," the Brahmins.

According to al-Suhrawardī, the fountainhead of wisdom (diffused through the four sources just mentioned and manifest among special sages and prophets of various nations) and the lights associated with the path of wisdom have merged in times near to his own era and have all passed down to him in three ways. First, the quintessence (*khamīrah*)⁵⁷—also metaphorically

55. See, for example, in al-Suhrawardī, *Opera I: Paths and Havens*, 502 ff; and *Intimations*, 10 ff. Cf. Arnaldez, "Ishraqiyyūn," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, new ed.

56. Much has been written concerning the influence of Hermetic writings in Islam. See, for example, S. H. Nasr, "Hermes and the Hermetic Writings in the Islamic World," in *Islamic Studies* (Beirut, 1967), 67–68. Concerning Hermetic sources and their influence on illuminationist thought and on Ibn Sab'īn, see Abū al-Wafā al-Taftāzānī, "Ibn Sab'īn wa Ḥakīm al-Ishraq" in *al-Kitāb al-Tadhkārī Shaykh al-Ishraq*, ed. Ibrahim Madkour, (Cairo: al-Maṭba'ah al-'Arabiyyah, 1974), 293–319.

57. The term *khamīrah*, which may mean "essence" or the "essence of essences" (*ustuqs al-ustuqsāt*), has been identified by the late M. Moin as an *ishraqī* term meaning "the sum total of the beliefs of a philosophical

depicted as a light—of the Pythagoreans has passed down to a person whom al-Suhrawardī calls "my brother Ikhmīm" (probably, Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī), then from Ikhmīm to Abū Sahl al-Tustarī, "the wanderer of Tustar" (perhaps the star of Tustar),⁵⁸ and from the latter to his followers. Second, the *khamīrah* of the Persian Khusrawaniyyūn mythological kings has passed down to Abū Yazīd al-Bastāmī, "the wanderer or star of Bastām," from Abū Yazīd on to al-Ḥallāj, "the youth of Baydā," and then to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Kharraqānī, "the wanderer or star of Amul and Kharraqān."⁵⁹ Third, the *khamīrah* resulting from the admixture of the *khamīrahs* of the Persians and of the followers of Pythagoras, Empedocles, and Asclepius, from the direction of the east and of the west, has fallen upon a people who talk in the presence of God and are identified in ancient and remote books.⁶⁰ Thus do the sages receive from God His Command giving them power and authority.

Al-Suhrawardī informs us that any divine philosopher from among the above-mentioned groups who has undergone the ordeals of the quest for wisdom and freed himself from the shackles of the body will inform humankind of the Sacred Knowledge. Such sages may ascend to the light and appear in whatever form they wish.⁶¹ They are the true rulers of the best

school." See M. Moin, *Farhang-i Fārsī* (reprint; Teheran: Amīr Kabīr, 1984), 1:1441.

58. See al-Suhrawardī, *Paths and Havens, Opera I*, 503 and nn. 1–2. The Arabic reads *sayyār tustar*.

59. *Ibid.*, n. 3.

60. On one occasion (*Intimations, Opera I*, 105), al-Suhrawardī refers to a category of divine sages by the name *Āl Tāsīn*. The commentator, Ibn Kammūnah, considers them to be descendents (*ahl al-bayt*) of the Prophet and refers to them collectively as all those who have reached the highest perfection; see *ibid.*, n. 9, where sections of Ibn Kammūnah's commentary have been printed.

61. See al-Suhrawardī, *Paths and Havens, Opera I*, 503.

city, and all nations bow before them.⁶² The station reached by the sages, as reported by all of the great sages themselves, is called the most noble station (*al-maqām al-‘azīz*), akin to the “station *kun*.”⁶³

The way or religion adhered to by all such sages, including al-Suhrawardī, who in his own time has captured the very *khamīrah* of all of the sources combined, is “the religion of the ancients adhered to by the Babylonians, the [Persian] Khusrawiyyūn sages, the Indians, and all the ancients from Egypt and Greece, as well as others.”⁶⁴ Finally, whoever receives the light representing the quintessence of wisdom—no mean thing, because such an event is referred to as the experience of a light so powerful as to obliterate (*al-nūr al-tāmis*) and lead to the lesser death (*al-mawt al-aṣghar*)—will gain divine powers.⁶⁵ The light given to such men is called *kharra*, and whoever obtains

62. Ibid., 503–504.

63. See al-Suhrawardī, *Philosophy of Illumination, Opera II*, 255. *Maqām kun* is a reference to the Quran, 16:42, *naqūl lah kun fa-yakūn* (“We say to it ‘be!’ and it comes to be”), that is, the command given by God when He desires a thing to come to be. It is a testimonial to the creative powers of the philosopher-sage.

The epithet, *khāliq al-barāyā* (creator of images) was used to describe al-Suhrawardī himself; see al-Shahrazūri, *Nuzhat al-Arwāh*, 2:122. The ability to create images at will is among the most significant manifest powers of the philosopher-ruler and is attributed, for example, to the Persian mythological king, Afrīdūn, by al-Suhrawardī (*‘Imādīn Tablets, Opera III*, 186), who uses the term *nayrang*. The term, rendered into Arabic as *nayranj* (plural, *nayranjiyyāt*), may convey a sense of sorcery.

The only biographer who tells of al-Suhrawardī’s ability to perform *nayranj* is Muḥammad al-Dimashqī, who in his *al-Dāris fī Ta’rikh al-Madāris* (Damascus: Maṭba‘ah al-Taraqqī, 1951), 2:184, states: “*ya’rif [al-Suhrawardī] al-kīmīyā wa shay’ min al-sha’wadḥah wa al-abwāb al-nayranjiyyāt*.” Other biographers refer to al-Suhrawardī’s knowledge of *al-sīmīyā*, but never of his ability to perform *nayranj*; see note 99 below.

64. See al-Suhrawardī, *Paths and Havens, Opera I*, 493.

65. Ibid., 502–504.

this light will become courageous and dominant, have control, have people incline toward him, and have all nations obey and revere him.⁶⁶

It is possible that when the Heavenly Master, the Great Luminous Being,⁶⁷ increases the luminous quality of the light given to the sage—which light is now called *kiyān kharra*—the sage will become a magnificent king. Such a sage-king will thus come to possess royal authority, knowledge, virtue, and auspicious fortune.⁶⁸ The royal sage will then be endowed with all manner of extraordinary powers, such as walking on water, flying in the sky, arriving at the heavens, and traversing the earth.⁶⁹ The sign of such powers is manifest in the “visible” possession of this light, the Great Royal Light. In an especially revealing passage at the end of the *Epistle on Emanation*, al-Suhrawardī describes the one to whom this light is given:

Any king⁷⁰ who learns wisdom and persists in his consecration [*taqdīs*] of the Light of Lights, as we said before, will be given the Great Royal Light [*kiyān kharra*] and the luminous light [*farra*]. Divine light will bestow upon him the robe of Royal Authority and of majesty. He will become the natural ruler of the world. He will receive aid from the lofty realm of heavens. Whatever he says will be heard in the Heavens. His dreams and his personal inspirations will reach perfection.⁷¹

Any divinely inspired sage who becomes such a king will rule with utmost benevolence, times under his dominion will be

66. Ibid., 504.

67. That is, Hūrakhsah or the “Heavenly Sun.” See notes 43 and 44 above.

68. See al-Suhrawardī, *ibid.*

69. Ibid., 505.

70. I read *har pādshāhī* instead of *har-ki*, *ibid.* Corbin follows the same reading, but not Nasr; see *Prolégomènes, Opera III*, 81.

71. See al-Suhrawardī, *Epistle on Emanation, Opera III*, 80–81. Cf. *‘Imādīn Tablets, ibid.*, 194.

enlightened, and he will have manifest powers. Conversely, whoever can perform extraordinary acts, see the future, and be counted among the sages of the age is the one fit to rule.

This is the essence of al-Suhrawardī's political doctrine. Should a young prince desire to become ruler of the world, be given the robe of Royal Authority, and gain majesty such as the ancients (especially the ancient Persian kings) had obtained, then he should study the "science" that leads to obtaining the necessary wisdom and authority. This science is none other than the "science of lights," the philosophy of illumination. Al-Suhrawardī and others after him, named upholders of illumination, are the only ones who know its secrets. This knowledge is not to be found merely in books nor is it the political philosophy of the Peripatetics: "We do not know among those who follow the way of the Peripatetics anyone who has a firm footing in divine wisdom, I mean knowledge of the lights."⁷² The "practical" end of the philosophy of illumination distinguishes al-Suhrawardī's political doctrine.

Wisdom and its special history, as told by the illuminationist sages in the service of Royal Authority, are the quintessence of al-Suhrawardī's political doctrine. But while he associates the source of wisdom with its manifold branches and history, his discussion of kingship and authority is mostly confined to a discussion of the ancient Persian kings. In one passage on the theory of kingship in his *'Imādin Tablets*⁷³ al-Suhrawardī discusses this question in detail. Here the light of truth—which bestows goodness, nobility, and justice—is said to have been obtained by the greatest of Persian kings:

When the soul is purified, it will be illuminated with the light of God. This is as God has said in His revelation: "God guards

72. See al-Suhrawardī, *Paths and Havens, Opera I*, 505.

73. See al-Suhrawardī, *'Imādin Tablets, Opera III*, 185–187.

those who believe and will deliver them from darkness unto light."⁷⁴ That is, from the darkness of ignorance unto the light of knowledge. . . . And when divine light and the Sacred Tabernacle appear to the purified one, he will become illuminated. He will then influence corporeal bodies as well as other souls. . . . Luminous authority will appear in him . . . and as he becomes acquainted with the Great Luminous being and becomes illuminated with the sacred light, [other] beings will obey him. Matter will be affected by him. And his call and prayer will be heard in the Heavens, especially by the Angel. . . . As he will be attributed with auspicious fortune, goodness, nobility, and justice, he will travel to the lofty horizons, triumph over his enemies and be protected. He will gain a magnificent countenance and obtain powerful royal authority. . . . He will capture the light of [divine] confirmation and victory as did the great Persian Kings.

It should be noted, incidentally, that al-Suhrawardī's references here and elsewhere to the wise kings of Persian mythology simply serve a political purpose. By no means should such references be taken to suggest a desire on his part to revive ancient Persian "philosophy." By al-Suhrawardī's time, it was common practice to invoke names from Iranian myth and legend as exemplars of wise and just rule. The passage continues:

The light which bestows divine confirmation, which strengthens both body and soul, is called *kharrā* in the Persian tongue. That part of this light which pertains to kings specifically is called *kiyān kharrā*. Among the people who gained this light of divine confirmation was the possessor of occult powers, King Afrīdūn, who ruled justly . . . and became triumphant. This he did because he became united with the Holy Spirit. And, because his soul was illuminated and became powerful through [receiving] rays of the divine light, he found Royal kingship and [thus] ruled over his own humankind. In command of royal power, triumph, and

74. See Quran, 2:258 (my translation).

confirmation, he conquered his enemy Zahhāk, the one with the two evil insignia, and killed him. By the command of God, he spread justice . . . and knowledge and overcame evil.

The next in this royal lineage was Malik Zāhir, the king Kaykhusraw, who established the sacred prayer and was spoken to by the Divine. The Unseen spoke unto him. His soul was elevated to the Heavens; he was impregnated with God's own wisdom; and the divine light came to reside in him and came before him. He recovered the meaning of *kiyān kharra*, which is a light that appears to the triumphant soul, due to which all else becomes obedient unto him.

The above passage is among the most indicative of his illuminationist political doctrine with respect to authority, kingship, and just rule. It also shows how central the nature and being of the person of the "ruler"—whether a king or philosopher-sage—is to al-Suhrawardī's views on politics. Thus to complete our understanding of the illuminationist political doctrine, we must now turn to an examination of this "type" of man and his qualities.

SAGES AND DIVINE PHILOSOPHERS

The divine philosopher is one who combines discursive wisdom with intuitive wisdom and is thus given the status of God's viceregent on earth. Al-Suhrawardī uses the name Brethren of Abstraction (*Ikhwān al-Tajrīd*) to designate the "group" of the wise. This group or brotherhood is not confined by time and space. Thus Plato, as well as al-Ḥallāj, belongs to the brotherhood. Members of the brotherhood are called by a host of different names, among them: perfect souls (*al-nufūs al-kāmilah*), ascetics (*aṣḥāb al-riyāḍāt*), wayfarers (*aṣḥāb al-sulūk*), visionaries (*aṣḥāb al-mushāhadah*), possessors of the command

(*aṣḥāb al-amr*), people of insight (*ikhwān al-baṣīrah*), those with pure souls (*rawshan ravānān*, *ravān pākān*), and brethren of truth (*barādarān-i haqīqat*).⁷⁵

The Brethren of Abstraction are defined as those who "have perfected their knowledge of speculative philosophy and practical philosophy."⁷⁶ They combine qualities associated with prophets, can learn without a teacher, and are blessed with strong intuition. However, they are not called prophets as such, because they are not specifically charged (*ma'mūr*) by God.⁷⁷ They enjoy a special station, that of *kun* (be!),⁷⁸ and can "create" forms whenever they want. If man is to be characterized as a knowing subject, then those in the category of illuminationist sages, the Brethren of Abstraction, have become knowing, creating subjects. That is why they are seen to perform extraordinary acts, such as telling of future events, controlling the elemental world, being able to create such natural phenomena as earthquakes, and so on. In short, they are creators of

75. Al-Suhrawardī uses such terms as *al-nufūs al-kāmilah* (*Intimations*, *Opera I*, 105), *aṣḥāb al-sulūk* (*Paths and Havens*, *ibid.*, 501), *sālikūn* (*Philosophy of Illumination*, *Opera II*, 252), *aṣḥāb al-amr* (*ibid.*, 249), *ikhwān al-baṣīrah* (*ibid.*, 245), *ikhwān al-tajrīd* (*ibid.*, 242), *ravān pākān* (*Epistle on Emanation*, *Opera III*, 81), *barādarān-i haqīqat* (*The Treatise of the Birds*, *ibid.*, 198), *al-su'adā'* (*Intimations*, *Opera I*, 90), *nufūs-i qudsī* (*On the Knowledge of God*, *Opera III*, 447), *javāhir-i rawḥānī* (*ibid.*, 444), *muḥaqqiqān dar ḥikmat* (*ibid.*, 440), *al-zuhhād* (*Philosophy of Illumination*, *Opera II*, 229), *al-muta'allihūn* (*ibid.*, 11), as well as others to designate the ranks of philosopher-sages. They are the ones who may—should they choose to pursue wisdom and be illuminated by the light of the Light of Lights through the intermediation of the Isfahbad Light, the great luminous being—attain power, control, and royal authority and thus join the ranks of the great Persian kings.

76. See al-Suhrawardī, *Philosophy of Illumination*, *Opera II*, 242 n. 1.

77. See al-Suhrawardī, *Intimations*, *Opera I*, 95 ff.

78. See al-Suhrawardī, *Philosophy of Illumination*, *Opera II*, 242.

images (*aṣḥāb al-barāyā*)—a quality that is the manifest sign of their divine authority.

Many important Muslim figures—Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān, ‘Alī, Ḥudhayfah, Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī, Sahl al-Tustarī, Abū Yazīd al-Baṣṭāmī, Ibrāhīm Ibn Adham, and even Junayd and Shiblī⁷⁹—are counted among the Brethren of Abstraction. However, none of the philosophers, such as al-Fārābī or Avicenna, is mentioned. In fact, the visionaries are said to be in opposition to the Peripatetics.⁸⁰ All of the intelligibles become known to them in a very short time without their ever having had a teacher or studied books.⁸¹ Intuition, vision, and illumination allow them to dispense with cogitation (*fikr*).⁸² A strong intuition is what makes such a person God’s viceregent on earth.⁸³

Those who submit to the arduous ordeal of the ascetic practices undergone by the Brethren of Abstraction, will be given power, control, and management, all of which pertain to the majestic secret of illuminationist wisdom.⁸⁴ Political authority rests on such manifest qualities, and those who have it are so known because they can exercise their powers at will. Prophets and the Abstracted ones alike have been seen to perform extraordinary acts. Among the kinds of acts associated with the category of divinely inspired sages, for example, are such extraordinary deeds as creating tempests and earthquakes, ruining entire nations, curing the sick, sating the thirsty, and making wild beasts obey. Even clear revelation (*wahy ṣarīḥ*) may be

79. See al-Suhrawardī, *Epistle on Emanation*, *Opera III*, 76.

80. See al-Suhrawardī, *Paths and Havens*, *Opera I*, 496.

81. See al-Suhrawardī, *On the Knowledge of God*, *Opera III*, 446.

82. *Ibid.*

83. See *ibid.*, 447: *ū khalīfa-yi khudāy buvad dar zamīn*.

84. See al-Suhrawardī, *The Apposites*, *Opera I*, 192.

given to them, or they may have true dreams.⁸⁵ For example: “They can make anything they want appear before them at will, such as food, shapes, and beautiful sounds and other things.”⁸⁶ In their special station, the Brethren of Abstraction may even talk with things that appear from the world of the unseen, be elevated from one rank to another, take great pleasure in their experience, and appear before God—the Light of Lights.⁸⁷ As we saw in the long passage from the *‘Imādīn Tablets* quoted above, ancient Persian kings like Afrīdūn and Kaykhusraw became endowed with special qualities once they purified themselves and received wisdom and divine glory. Thus they could rule with justice.

The implication for al-Suhrawardī’s own time would have been clear, especially to the royal patrons who commissioned his works. A sage (here al-Suhrawardī) 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-Suhrawardī 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. On another level, however, an understanding of the reasons for his execution helps explain the political doctrine of manifest divine powers in the service of temporal rule, that is, why a philosopher must become involved in politics.

85. See al-Suhrawardī, *Intimations*, *Opera I*, 103–104.

86. See al-Suhrawardī, *Philosophy of Illumination*, *Opera II*, 230. Among the stories related by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘ah and Ibn Khallikān, but not transmitted by al-Shahrazūrī, are those that tell how al-Suhrawardī was reported to have made things appear as though by magic.

87. *Ibid.*, 243.

AL-SUHRAWARDĪ'S EXECUTION IN ALEPPO

Why was al-Suhrawardī, a young man from a Kurdish region in Iran who entered Aleppo around the year 1183—only a year after the city had been entrusted to the young prince al-Malik al-Zāhir al-Ghāzī—and who managed, almost on his arrival, to find his way to the court, executed within a few years?⁸⁸ Why should a poor, ill-clothed Sufi⁸⁹ pose such a threat to the great Sultan Saladin that he would demand that the young “mystic” be killed and have a letter demanding the execution written by one of his judges of the land, the Qadi al-Fāḍil?⁹⁰

To be sure, 1191 was a most important year. During this year, the battles between Muslims and Christians over the Holy Land became more intense, and King Richard the Lion Heart landed in Acre.⁹¹ In earlier years, Saladin was engaged in battle against the crusaders in and around most of the major cities of

88. See Muḥammad Abū Rayyān, *Uṣūl al-Falsafat al-Ishrāqīyyah*, 19, n. 1, and Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah, *Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā*, 643–644. See also *A History of the Crusades*, ed. Kenneth M. Setton et al. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1955), 583 ff. In this work, the year 1183 is cited as that in which Saladin had first invested his “ten-year-old son . . . as Sultan, with a number of trusted officers to support him, but the arrangement was challenged by al-'Adil.” However, the young prince could not have been ten in 1183 (the year al-Suhrawardī entered Aleppo), for he was born in Egypt in 568/1171; see H. A. R. Gibb, *The Life of Saladin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 48 n. 5. Saif al-Dīn al-'Adil, who had opposed al-Zāhir's rule of Aleppo, finally gave in, and the city was restored to the latter's rule in 1186. During the years 1183–1186, al-Suhrawardī had presumably been in the service of the young prince.

89. The story of al-Suhrawardī appearing so lowly and dirty that he was mistaken for a donkey-driver (*kharband*) is told by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah (*Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā*, 644) and repeated by most later biographers.

90. See *ibid.*, 642. According to Gibb, the qadi had been a trusted counsellor of Saladin; see *Life of Saladin*, 49.

91. See, for example, G. Slaughter, *Saladin* (New York, 1955), 221 ff.

the region while trying to overcome the espionage and political intrigue carried on by Rashīd al-Dīn Sinān, “the old man of the mountain.”⁹² Saladin was also faced with the Abbasid Caliph's intrigues, to say nothing of political conspiracy by the Fatimids and others left in Cairo.⁹³ Clearly, the great Saladin had more pressing concerns than taking on a poor wandering Sufi.⁹⁴ 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-Suhrawardī in his works. Indeed, al-Suhrawardī's teaching—as it had been developed in, for example, the *‘Imādin Tablets*—could call for an enlightened person, the young al-Malik al-Zāhir taught by the sage, to invest himself as the legitimate ruler of the age and regain the glory of the ancient kings of Persia.

Bahā' al-Dīn Ibn Shaddād, the famous biographer of Saladin and the qadi of Jerusalem and the army, may have played an important role in the execution of al-Suhrawardī by warning the king of the political implications in the young philosopher's teachings. Ibn Shaddād, who was born in Mosul in 539/1145

92. See, for example, J. J. Saunders, *Aspects of the Crusades* (Christ Church: Whitcombe and Tamar, 1968), 26. There may also have been an assassination plot against Saladin by Sinān's guerillas; see Setton et al., eds., *A History of the Crusades*, 567.

93. See Shihāb al-Dīn al-Muqaddasī, *Kitāb al-Rawḍatayn fī Akhbār al-Dawlatayn* (Cairo, 1287 A.H.), 2:120.

94. We know that Saladin was not, in fact, against Sufis per se. Consider, for example, what is said by Stanley Lane-Poole in his *Saladin and the Fall of the Kingdom of Jerusalem* (New York: AMS Press, 1978), 20: “The ranks of the wise and learned recruited from Nishapur delighted audiences at Damascus. Persian mystics like es-Suhrawardī met traditionalists like Ibn-Asakir.” Further, Bahā' al-Dīn Ibn Shaddād gives an example of Saladin's noble character by relating a story of his generosity to a Sufi; see *al-Nawādir al-Sulṭāniyyah*, ed. Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1964), 31–32.

and had taught in the Nizāmiyyah in Baghdad for four years, had joined the service of Saladin in 584/1188 and remained a close companion until the Sultan's death in 589/1193, at which time he became al-Malik al-Zāhir's advisor, a position held by al-Suhrawardī prior to his death.⁹⁵ The great historian Ibn Khalikān, one of the important sources for al-Suhrawardī's biography, had visited Ibn Shaddād and perhaps first obtained from him some of the information recorded in *Wafayāt al-A'yān*. Ibn Khalikān is the only historian who refers to Ibn Shaddād's biography of Saladin.⁹⁶

Given these background facts, it seems reasonable to conjecture that Ibn Shaddād knew more than he related. He speaks about the "youth" al-Suhrawardī in a section in his biography entitled "Mention of what we have seen concerning his [Saladin's] strict adherence to religious principles and his reverence for matters pertaining to the *Sharī'ah*."⁹⁷ As an example of Saladin's religious fervor and upholding of the religious law, Ibn Shaddād cites the order for al-Suhrawardī's execution:

Saladin had great respect for religious practices. He believed in bodily resurrection . . . and confirmed all that is given by the religious laws. . . . He loathed the philosophers, those who deny God's attributes, those who believe in the eternity of time and space, and whoever opposes the *Sharī'ah*. He [thus] ordered his son, the ruler of Aleppo al-Malik al-Zāhir—may God glorify his victories—to kill a youth called al-Suhrawardī who had risen [to a high position in Aleppo]. For it was said of him that he opposed the religious laws, considering them to be abrogated. Thus the

95. See Franz Rosenthal, *A History of Muslim Historiography* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), 170 ff. Ibn Shaddād died in 631/1234.

96. See *Wafayāt al-A'yān*, 273: "The qadi of Aleppo, Bahā' al-Dīn, known as Ibn Shaddād, mentions [al-Suhrawardī] early in the biography of Saladin."

97. See Ibn Shaddād, *Nawādir al-Sultāniyyah*, 7. The term "youth" (*al-shābb*) appears to be pejorative.

forementioned son of Saladin captured al-Suhrawardī when he learned of the news concerning him, informed the Sultan, and ordered that he be killed. He was crucified for a while and was [later] killed.⁹⁸

The implication of these words, perhaps the most important contemporary official version of the charges against al-Suhrawardī, is clear. The young mystic-philosopher was engaged in activity deemed contrary to the divine law and thus considered a threat.

Part of what might contribute to such a reputation is the belief that al-Suhrawardī had "magical" powers,⁹⁹ such as those he himself had discussed in association with the royal authority of King Afrīdūn. Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah states that al-Suhrawardī was reputed to know the science of magic.¹⁰⁰ He further states that even extraordinary acts had been performed by him in this art, that is, magic. "The one who is informed of the divine secrets" is how al-Shahrazūrī describes al-Suhrawardī,¹⁰¹ however, and then goes on to relate that the authority of the ancient

98. *Ibid.*, 10.

99. The terms used to describe the powers in the pejorative include *simīyā'*, *sihr*, *sha'wadhab*, or *sha'badhab*, *hiyal*, and *nayranj*. However, al-Shahrazūrī considers it incorrect to describe al-Suhrawardī's powers as magical and uses the term *karāmāt* instead; see *Nuzhat al-Arwāḥ*, 2:124. Al-Suhrawardī himself uses the term *nayrang* in the positive sense; see, e.g., *Imādīn Tablets, Opera III*, 186. The controversy is crucial, namely, whether or not al-Suhrawardī is a magician or sage with miraculous powers.

The term *simīyā'* may be derived from the Greek *sēmeion*. See R. Dozy, *Supplément aux Dictionnaires Arabes*, 1:708–709. The term, in construct with either *'ilm* or *fann* (i.e., *'ilm al-simīyā'* or *fann al-simīyā'*), indicates some kind of magic. It is sometimes used with *al-sihr*, sorcery, and with *al-kimīyā'*; and all denote nonstandard practices. The term *nayranj*, however, has definite occult connotations.

100. See Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah, *Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā'*, 642–643.

101. See *Nuzhat al-Arwāḥ*, 2:119–120.

sages and philosophers is to be considered quintessential in illuminationist philosophy. A much later historian, al-Dhahabī (d. 748/1347), also chooses to emphasize al-Suhrawardī's knowledge of ancient wisdom, mentions that he was foremost in such knowledge, and specifies that one of the major charges against him was his corrupting the faith of Saladin's son al-Malik al-Zāhir.¹⁰² Moreover, there is an unusual statement by al-Shahrazūrī, extant in the edition of the Arabic text but omitted in Nasr's version of the Persian text and also in Thackston's English translation: "I have heard that some of his [al-Suhrawardī's] companions used to say to him 'Abū al-Futūh, messenger of God!'"¹⁰³ If textually correct, this statement, coming from one of al-Suhrawardī's most ardent followers, has serious implications. It is a central political principle in the philosophy of illumination that prophecy ceases neither with any single man nor in any single age.

In sum, we have various and conflicting accounts of al-Suhrawardī's life. Called a sorcerer dealing in tricks by some, he is designated the most unique divine sage of his time by others. So wide a spectrum of opinion attaches to no philosopher before him. Only if he is the initiator of a new and radical "branch" in philosophy or mysticism, a view ardently held by many of his contemporaries, does his execution make sense.¹⁰⁴

102. See al-Dhahabī, *Kitāb al-'Ibār fī Khabar man Ghabar*, ed. Šalāh al-Dīn al-Munajjid (Kuwait: Wizārat al-Irshād wa al-Ta'lim, 1963), 4:263–265. I am grateful to Professor S. Bonebakker for bringing al-Dhahabī's account to my attention.

103. See al-Shahrazūrī, *Nuzhat al-Arwāh*, 2:126: *Abū al-Futūh, rasūl Allāh*.

104. The famous Nāširid vizier, Lisān al-Dīn Ibn al-Khaṭīb, provides a most interesting view of al-Suhrawardī (whom he never mentions by name, simply referring to him as *al-mu'allif*). In his *Rawḍat al-Ta'rīf bi-al-Ḥubb al-Sharīf*, ed. Muḥammad al-Kattānī (Rabat: Dār al-Thaqāfah, 1978), Ibn al-Khaṭīb gives several categories for philosophers and mystics: the Peripatetics, the Stoics, the People of Light from among the Ancients (*ahl al-anwār min al-mutaqaddimīn*), the Religious Philosophers

A summary of al-Suhrawardī's life after he entered Aleppo seems to be in order. One version, something like the "official" one, was handed down by Bahā' al-Dīn Ibn Shaddād and reported in part by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'ah, Ibn Khallikān, and others. They speak of a young man who entered Aleppo, perhaps with a group of companions, and attended its leading schools—initially the Jalāwiyyah, and eventually the Nūriyyah—where he engaged Hanbalite jurists in debate. He managed to gain access to the court of Saladin's son, al-Malik al-Zāhir al-Ghāzī, who befriended him and brought him to his court. His anti-*Sharī'ah* sentiments soon became apparent to the jurists and learned scholars. The fact that he was putting his own authority above the divine law and even proclaiming to be a prophet capable of performing miracles became known. Some of his own pupils called him "Abū al-Futūh, the Messenger of God!" Thus, he was deemed an infidel and sorcerer who by recourse to the use of magic had won over the young prince and was corrupting his mind; and it was feared he would ultimately undermine the authority of the law and the Abbasid Caliphate in whose name the great Sultan Saladin was ruling Egypt and Syria and fighting off the crusades. So he was declared a *zindīq* and killed, whereupon the conspiracy was ended and his companions dispersed.

According to this version, al-Suhrawardī was charged with claiming to be a prophet, not believing in God's attributes, holding heretical opinions, and corrupting the mind of al-Malik al-Zāhir. He was said to be against the law of the land, to claim

from among the Muslims (*al-ḥukamā' al-mutamallilīn min al-islāmīyyīn*)—this one including Avicenna, al-Fārābī, Averroes, Ibn Ṭufayl, and many others—etc. The category "People of Light" is devoted solely to al-Suhrawardī, and the only other philosopher named is Hermes, so quoted when Ibn al-Khaṭīb is paraphrasing *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*; *ibid.*, 2:555 ff. The position accorded al-Suhrawardī is, as far as I know, unique in the history of Islamic philosophy.

powers that put him above the *Sharī'ah*, and to have performed certain acts to prove his divine inspiration. He was also accused of believing in the wisdom of the ancients. Finally, though this was not a charge, he was alleged to have been a sorcerer and magician. Nonetheless, the formal accusations were clearly sufficient to warrant a death sentence.¹⁰⁵

The unofficial version of the events in Aleppo (that conveyed by al-Shahrazūrī), though certainly different in tone, is not substantially different from the official one. Al-Shahrazūrī admits that al-Suhrawardī had become a confidant of the prince in Aleppo, but denies that he sought to corrupt the prince's mind. It is unquestionable that al-Suhrawardī debated the jurists of all schools and "won" these debates due to his scholarship and learned capabilities. There is agreement that Saladin, "armed with a prescript from the judge al-Fāḍil, sent to al-Zāhir saying that this Shihāb must be executed and under no circumstances merely exiled."¹⁰⁶ There is also agreement that the jurists of Aleppo gave decrees to the effect that al-Suhrawardī should be executed. In all these matters, then, there is agreement.

Al-Shahrazūrī's account differs, however, because the tone in which he reports these matters is more favorable:

105. Abū Rayyān (*Uṣūl al-Falsafat al-Ishrāqiyyah*, 27) cites M. Hörten who, in his *Die Philosophie des Islam* (Munich: Verlag Ernst Reinhardt, 1924), 66–67, had considered that al-Suhrawardī's Ismaili views may have led to his execution. However, there is no evidence in al-Suhrawardī's writings to support this notion. His claim that the world is never devoid of wisdom and a person who is God's vicegerent does not suffice to make him an Ismaili. There is not a single reference to any association between him and the Batinites by the biographers. Nor can Nasr's claim that al-Suhrawardī believed in the institution of *wilāyah* be substantiated; see S. H. Nasr, "Shaykh al-Ishrāq," in Madkour, ed., *al-Kitāb al-Tadhkārī*, 17–36, esp. 21. Indeed, there is no evidence that the concept had been well formulated at that time at all.

106. See Thackston, *The Mystical and Visionary Treatises*, 3.

Thereupon [i.e., as the result of his triumphs against the jurists], 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.¹⁰⁷

Nor does al-Shahrazūrī make any attempt to deny al-Suhrawardī's special attention to, and belief in, ancient wisdom and philosophy. In fact, he informs us that among the philosophically important things al-Suhrawardī had done was to refute the principles of the Peripatetics, while reenforcing the beliefs of the ancient philosophers.¹⁰⁸

Yet there is, curiously, no denial on the part of al-Shahrazūrī of the charge that al-Suhrawardī claimed to be a prophet. In fact, al-Shahrazūrī is the only biographer who—albeit in an indirect way—even confirms it, as though there was nothing wrong in al-Suhrawardī claiming to be a divine sage who is aided by heaven itself. All this suggests that al-Suhrawardī was thought to be engaged in a political "conspiracy" aimed at establishing the young Ayyubid prince as ruler of the age, divinely aided and guided by the divine philosopher—namely, al-Suhrawardī—who possessed manifest signs of divine inspiration. It seems to me, then, that what I have here designated as "illuminationist political doctrine" was viewed as having such compelling practical implications that it led to al-Suhrawardī's death.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that al-Suhrawardī's political doctrine does not fall within the domain of classical

107. Ibid.

108. See al-Shahrazūrī, *Nuzhat al-Arwāḥ*, 2:120: "He criticized in it [that is, *Paths and Havens*] the principles of the doctrine of the Peripatetics and re-enforced [literally, "constructed," *shayyad*] the belief of the ancient sages." This passage is among the sections not translated by Thackston.

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-Suhrawardī's own time. One should not attempt to extrapolate a theory from it. Part of the doctrine is a symbolic use made of a host of ancient figures, as older recipients of divine authority, for practical political ends. Nor can his account of the dissemination of wisdom in the service of benevolent rule be called history in a strict sense. It is a metahistorical reformulation of commonly known myths and legends of ancient nations. Al-Suhrawardī's intention in promulgating such a history is to illustrate and legitimize his own idea of divine inspiration, with its manifest signs, as the basis for authority to rule.