



## **“The Human Being in the Philosophy of Suhrawardi”**

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Received: 2025/ 04/29

Accepted: 2025/06/06

### **Abstract**

Understanding human being is a fundamental quest and a core concern of human thought, with many sciences and branches of knowledge relying on diligent inquiry and research into its various dimensions. This study with an analytical-contemplative approach examines the nature of humanity from the perspective of Sheikh Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi, the founder of The Philosophy of Illumination (Hikmat al-Ishraq). Suhrawardi, through a synthesis of philosophical, mystical, and revelatory traditions, considers human being as a luminous being. Their soul (nafs), conceptualized as the "Esfahbadi Light," is an immaterial substance that is creation in time (hadith), not eternal. This luminous soul, originating from the Highest Divine Realm, connects with the body in a managing (tadbirī), rather than imprinting, manner and it acts as a manager that controls the body. Drawing upon his system of light, Suhrawardi explains the relationship between the soul and the body not as a union or indwelling, but as an "affectionate attraction (‘alāqa shāwqi)," akin to a

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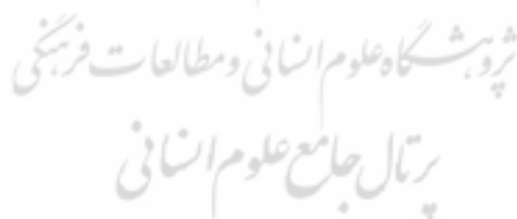
\* Rajabi, A. & Tabatabaei, S. M. (2025). "The Human Being in the Philosophy of Suhrawardi". Bi-quarterly Journal of *Theosophia Islamica*, 3(6), pp 7-32.

Doi: 10.22081/jti.2025.71724.1069

magnet's pull on iron. He substantiates origination of the Soul through four arguments and robustly affirms its immateriality (tajarrud) using three key proofs: the changeability of bodily organs, the indication of "I-ness" (anāniyya), and the impossibility of substantial decomposition. In Suhrawardi's philosophical system, the perfection of the soul hinges on human being 's luminous journey through asceticism, detachment, and intellectual illuminations. This process allows the soul to ascend through the stages of material intellect (ʿaql hayūlānī), intellect in possession (bi'l-malaka), actual intellect (bi'l-fi'l), and acquired intellect (mustafād). Death is not annihilation but rather the shedding of the Esfahbadi Light from the darkness of the body and a return to the true "East" (the world of Dominant Lights). This perspective, by emphasizing the survival of the souls of the righteous and wise after death, establishes an unbreakable link between epistemology, the metaphysics of light, and practical spiritual discipline within The Philosophy of Illumination.

### Keywords

Esfahbadi Light, Immateriality of the Soul, Origination of the Soul, The philosophy of illumination, Luminous Perfection.



## 1. Problem statement

Understanding human being, the most complex product of creation and the most unknown of beings, has been one of the most fundamental concerns of human thought. The more humanity has spurred the horse of reason in the fields of thought to understand its own existence, the more it has fallen into astonishment and bewilderment, and the less it has attained pure gems. This is because the best way to understand humanity is to surrender to its Creator, from whom and to whom the essence of human existence derives, whether in terms of its original nature, attributes, or actions. Therefore, thinkers who have sought to understand humanity through pure reason alone have either failed, or, empty-handed and unsuccessful, have turned to another path. Amidst this, thinkers who have placed their intellect at the service of divine revelation have, by expounding the word of revelation, taken steps towards a demonstrative explanation for success in the realm of understanding humanity. Although they haven't achieved complete success in some matters due to unavoidable errors, one of these great thinkers is Sheikh Shahab al-Din Suhrawardi, known as Sheikh al-Ishraq. In his works, he addresses this important issue. The problem before this article is to examine, from Suhrawardi's perspective, the definition and true nature of humanity, the creation of humanity, the status and virtue of humanity, the Origination and eternity of humanity, the relationship between the soul and body, the immateriality of the soul, the faculties of the soul, the perfection of the soul, and finally, the issue of death.

## 2. The truth of human being

Suhrawardi considers the soul and what is beyond it as pure "I-ness" (aniyyat) and absolute existences.<sup>1</sup> He views the human being,

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1. "Indeed, I became detached in my essence and looked into it, and I found it to be 'I-ness' and existence..."

possessing a rational soul, as having a luminous identity (hoviyyat-e noori) that governs the body but is not imprinted within it. For this reason, he calls the human rational soul the Esfahbad of Nasut or Sepahbad of Nasut (commander/general of the corporeal world), which, due to its immateriality (tajarrud) from matter, is in the utmost state of subtlety and luminosity, with its origin in the divine realm (Sheikh Ishraq, 1374, Vol. 1, p. 115).

In The Philosophy of Illumination, Suhrawardi posits that the elemental temperament of humans is the most perfect temperament. This perfect temperament necessitates the reception of perfection from the Giver (Wahib). Since change in the Dominant Lights (Anwar-e Qahira) is impossible—as their alteration would entail a change in their Agent, the absolute Lights (Nur al-Anwar), which is inconceivable—it follows that while the Agent may be perfect, its act of giving is contingent upon the receptivity of the recipient (isti'dad-e qabil). Thus, to the extent of its equilibrium, the human elemental temperament accepts form and disposition. Subsequently, from certain Dominant Lights that possess the talisman of the rational species—specifically, Gabriel, referred to as the Near Father (al-Ab al-Qarib), one of the great chiefs of the Dominant Kingdom (Malakut Qahira), the bestower of spirit, the Holy Spirit (Ruh al-Qudus), the giver of knowledge and divine aid (Wahib al-Ilm wa al-Ta'yid), and the dispenser of life and virtue—a pure light is imparted to this most perfect human temperament. This pure light is the very light that controls the human body's fortresses (sayasi insi). This light is a managing light, identified as the Esfahbad of Nasut or Sepahbad of Nasut (the commander/general of the corporeal world), and it is to this light that our "I-ness" (ana'iyyat) refers (Sheikh Ishraq, 1374, Vol. 2, pp. 200-201).

«والمزاج الاتم ما للانسان فاستدعى من الواهب كمالا. و الانوار القاهرة علمت استحالة  
تغييراتها فان تغييرهم لا يكون الا لتغير الفاعل، و هو نور الانوار. و يستحيل عليه، فلا تغيير له و لا

لها. و انما يحصل من بعضها الأشياء لاستعداد متجدد لتجدد الحركات الدائمة. و يجوز ان يكون الفاعل تاما و يتوقف الفعل على استعداد القابل، فبقدر الاعتدال يقبل من الهيات و الصور التي ذكرناها في النسب العقلية في الانوار القاهرة و الوضعية التي للثوابت، ما يليق. و يحصل من بعض الانوار القاهرة، و هو صاحب طلسم النوع الناطق، يعنى جبرائيل عليه السلام، و هو الاب القريب من عظماء رؤساء الملكوت القاهرة «روانبخش»، روح القدس، و اهب العلم و التأيد، معطى الحياة و الفضيلة، على المزاج الاتم الانساني نور مجرد هو النور المتصرف في صياصي الانسية، و هو النور المدبر الذي هو «اسفهبذ الناسوت»، و هو المشير الى نفسه بالانائية.

(Sheikh Ishraq, 1374, Vol. 2, pp. 200-201)

### 3. The Creation of Human being

In his work "Alwah-i Imadi," Sheikh al-Ishraq (Suhrawardi) writes about the nature of human creation: "And know that our souls are initially in a state of potentiality when they first come into being. From this potentiality, primary (perceptions) then arise, and these subsequently transfer to secondary (perceptions) through the very existence of our soul. The one who perfects them and brings them from potentiality to actuality is what philosophers call the 'Active Intellect,' and what sacred law calls the 'Holy Spirit.' Its relationship to our intellects is like the sun's relationship to our eyes. And that is the spirit that was rightly attributed (to God) in verses... where it is stated: «وَنَفَخْتُ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِي» ("And I breathed into him of My Spirit) And it (the Active Intellect/Holy Spirit) is the intermediary for the existence of the elemental world and the steward of elemental beings by the command of the Exalted Truth. It is this (Active Intellect/Holy Spirit) that imprints our souls with virtues when we connect with it, just as it is stated in the Quran: «اقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ» ("Recite! And your Lord is the Most Generous, Who taught by the pen") And the Pen of the Exalted Truth is not made of wood or reed, but rather it is the very essence of the Intellect, which is the intellect in actuality. The relationship of our souls to them is like the relationship of a tablet to a pen.

Thus, our souls are immaterial tablets, and it (the Active Intellect/Pen) is a pen that engraves our souls with true sciences and divine knowledge. Another verse stated: «كَتَبَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمُ الْإِيمَانَ وَأَيَّدَهُم بِرُوحٍ مِنْهُ» ("He has inscribed faith in their hearts and strengthened them with a spirit from Him") And what bears witness to the fact that teaching is from the Holy (Realm) and what it said concerning the Prophet (peace be upon him): «عَلَّمَهُ شَدِيدُ الْقُوَى» ("Taught him by one powerful in strength") It refers to the Active Intellect, which the Exalted Truth assists with infinite power. And another verse stated: «نَزَلَ بِهِ الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ عَلَى قَلْبِكَ» ("The Trustworthy Spirit has descended with it upon your heart") And it said: «ذُو مِرَّةٍ فَاسْتَوَى» ("Possessor of strength, and he stood straight") Another verse stated: «ذِي قُوَّةٍ عِنْدَ ذِي الْعَرْشِ مَكِينٍ» ("Possessor of power, secure with the Lord of the Throne") And in one verse, it said: «الرُّوحُ الْأَمِينُ» ("The Trustworthy Spirit") Another verse: «ثُمَّ أَمِينٍ» ("Then trustworthy") And another verse: «قُلْ نَزَّلَهُ رُوحُ الْقُدُسِ مِنْ رَبِّكَ بِالْحَقِّ» ("Say, the Holy Spirit has brought it down from your Lord in truth") Another verse: «وَإِنَّكَ لَتَلْقَى الْقُرْآنَ مِنْ لَدُنْ حَكِيمٍ عَلِيمٍ» ("And indeed, you receive the Quran from one Wise and Knowing") And it said: «عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ» ("He taught human being what it did not know") which is a reference to (things) coming out of potentiality into actuality. Another verse: «خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ عَلَّمَهُ الْبَيَانَ» ("He created human being, He taught him articulation") (Sheikh al-Ishraq, 1380, Vol. 3, p. 179).

Suhrawardi believes that Platonic Forms (Muthul) give rise to souls (nufus). If the "Lord of the Species" (Rabb al-Naw') is strong, it requires an intermediary, namely the soul, to connect with the body. This Lord of the Species creates both the soul and the body through two aspects: a "poor" (faqiri) aspect and a "luminous" (nuri) aspect. From the poor aspect, it brings forth the body, and from the lofty, luminous aspect, it creates the soul. (Suhrawardi, 1380, Vol. 2, pp. 146 & 165). In his seminal work, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, Suhrawardi

states: "تحصل من كل صاحب صنم في ظلّه البرزخيّ باعتبار جهة عالية نوريّة، و البرزخ" (Suhrawardi, 1380, Vol. 2, pp. 146 & 165). "Rational souls are obtained from every "possessor of an idol" in its "intermediary shadow" by virtue of a lofty, luminous aspect. And the "intermediary" (barzakh), which signifies a dark emanation, is obtained from a poor aspect if it is receptive to the action of the managing light.

He also writes in "Alwah-e Emadi," when describing the creation of humans in the best of forms: "And observe how plants, as the most humble possessors of a soul, were created upside down, and their origin is in the earth. When they are cut, all their faculties become nullified; And animals, which are not rational, since they are nobler than plants, are consequently not inverted; rather, they are intermediate, with their heads upright. And humans, because they are superior to all by virtue of their rational soul, their head faces straight towards the sky, and their stature became upright, as it was said, «لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ» "We have certainly created human being in the best of stature," due to the nobility of his soul, the moderation of his body, and the harmony of his forms, and another verse, «وَصَوَّرَكُمُ فَأَحْسَنَ صُورَكُمْ» "And He shaped you, and made good your shapes." And another verse, «وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ» "And We have certainly honored the children of Adam," meaning by the rational soul, whose essence is eternal and safe from corruption, and which is capable of acquiring knowledge and virtues. «وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ» "And We carried them on the land and in the sea"; the "land" refers to their sense perceptions and the "sea" to their intellectual perceptions. «وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ» "And We provided them with good things," meaning certain knowledge and true understanding. «وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ» "And We preferred them over many of those We



created with a marked preference," meaning what We increased them with in terms of the suitability of their outward forms and the adornment of their inner selves with a balanced temperament, and the inner depths of their being, consisting of motive and perceptive faculties, with which they surpassed earthly animals in the advantages of states of desire, anger, imagination, and thought. And the innermost depths of their being, consisting of their soul, and theoretical and practical intellect. And it is for this reason that the children of Adam were singled out over some of what We created, for they do not have preference over the separate intelligences in all aspects, nor over those noble celestial bodies. And another verse, «وَأَسْبَغَ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعَمَهُ ظَاهِرَةً وَبَاطِنَةً» "And He has showered upon you His favors, both apparent and hidden." The apparent refers to sense perceptions, and the inward to intellectual perceptions." (Sheikh Ishraq, 1380, Vol. 3, p. 158).

#### 4. The Status and Excellence of Humankind

In "The Tale of Occidental Exile" (Qissat al-Ghurba al-Gharbiyya), Suhrawardi, through a symbolic and allegorical narrative, asserts his belief that humanity's original abode is the divine realm (Malakut), situated beyond the River Oxus, in the East of the World of Existence. He believes that by journeying into the "Matter of the West of the world of existence," the human soul becomes ensnared in the occidental exile of the world of bodies and elements. This descent from the divine realms to the corporeal world (alam-e nasuti) leads to its imprisonment in the dark realm of material attachments, where it becomes preoccupied with worldly concerns and distractions. In essence, the human soul, described as a "Spahbadi" or "Isfahbadi light," serves as an intermediary between the East and West of the world of existence (Suhrawardi, 1380, Vol. 2, p. 274).



## 5. Origination and Eternity of the Human Soul

Plato and followers of his school of thought, including some commentators on The Philosophy of Illumination like Shams al-Din Shahrazuri and Qutb al-Din Shirazi, believed in the eternity of the soul (Shahrazuri, 1383, p. 475; Qutb al-Din Shirazi, 1383, p. 424). However, in The philosophy of illumination and his other works, Sheikh al-Ishraq, following the Peripatetics, provides proofs for Immateriality of the soul. In The philosophy of illumination, he mentions four arguments, which will be briefly presented here:

- A. "This light, meaning the rational soul (nafs-i natiqa), does not exist before the body. This is because every individual possesses an essence that is aware of itself and its own hidden states, which are concealed from others. Therefore, the managing human lights are not unified after becoming attached to the body. Otherwise, if one of them became aware of something, the others would also have to be aware of it, which is not the case. Thus, if these lights and souls existed before the body, their unity is inconceivable. This is because these lights are not divided after the body comes into existence, as they are not quantifiable, material, corporeal (barzakhi), or measurable in a way that would allow for division. Similarly, their multiplicity is also not possible. This is because these abstract lights, before bodies, cannot be distinguished from each other by degrees of intensity or weakness (since countless souls could exist at any given level of intensity or weakness, they would not be distinguished from each other to become multiple). Nor can they be distinguished by an accidental quality, for in that case, souls would not be in the world of motions and matter, which is what specializes, to accept an accidental quality.

Since neither the multiplicity nor the unity of the soul is possible before its attachment to and action within the body, the existence of souls before bodies will also not be possible." (Suhrawardi, 1380, Vol. 2, pp. 201 & 202; Ebrahimi Dinani, 1388, pp. 513 & 514).

«وليس هذا النور موجودا قبل البدن، فإن لكل شخص ذاتا تعلم نفسها و احوالها الخفية على غيرها، فليست الانوار المدبرة الانسية واحدة، و الا ما علم واحد كان معلوما للجميع، وليس كذا. فقبل البدن ان كانت هذه الانوار موجودة، لا يتصور وحدتها، فإنها لا تنقسم بعد ذلك، اذ هي غير متقدرة و لا برزخية حتى يمكن عليها الانقسام؛ و لا تكثرها، فإن هذه الانوار المجردة قبل الصياصي لا تمتاز بشدة و ضعف اذ كل رتبة من الشدة و الضعف ما لا يحصى و لا عارض غريب، فإنها ليست في عالم الحركات المخصصة حينئذ فلما لم يمكن كثرتها و لا وحدتها قبل تصرف الصياصي، فلا يمكن وجودها». (Shaykh Ishraq, 1380, Vol. 2, pp. 201 and 202).

- B. "If the soul existed before the body, due to its immateriality and the absence of any bodily obstruction or preoccupation, no veil or distraction would prevent it from the world of pure light. Furthermore, since there are no occurrences or changes in that realm, the rational soul would be perfect and would have no need to enter this plane of existence to achieve completion. Thus, its interaction with and attachment to the body would be futile." (Suhrawardi, 1380, Vol. 2, p. 202).

«ان كانت موجودة قبل الصياصي، فلم يمنعها حجاب و لا شاغل عن عالم النور المحض و لا اتفاق و لا تغير فيه فتكون كاملة، فتصرفها في الصببية يقع ضائعا ثم لا أولوية بحسب الماهية لتخصص بعضها بصببية، و الاتفاقات أعني الوجوب بالحركات انما هو في عالم الصياصي، فيستعد الصببية لنور ما بالحركات، و ليس في عالم النور المحض اتفاق تخصص ذلك الطرف. وما يقال ان المتصرفات يسنح لها حال موجب لسقوطها عن مراتبها كلام باطل، اذ لا تجدد في ما ليس في عالم الحركات و التغيرات على ما علمت» (Shaykh Ishraq, 1380, Vol. 2, p. 202).

- C. "If souls were to exist before bodies and never engage in management or interaction with them, they would remain idle in eternity. However, nothing in the universe is idle. This is because divine actions, which emanate through

intellectual lights and celestial movements, come into existence for actual intellectual ends. This necessitates that every possessor of perfection attains intellectual and physical perfections. The ultimate purpose of creating souls is to achieve perfections, meaning reaching pure immateriality through the management of bodies. Since souls never engage in management before the body, their existence would therefore be futile." (Suhrawardi, 1380, Vol. 2, p. 202; Shahrazuri, 1372, p. 484).

«هي أنّ الانوار المدبّرة ان كانت قبل البدن، فنقول: ان كان منها ما لا يتصرّف أصلاً، فليس بمدبّر، و وجوده معطل؛ و ان لم يكن منها ما لا يتصرّف، كان ضروريّاً وقوع وقت وقع فيه الكلّ و ما بقي نور مدبّر؛ و كان الوقت قد وقع في الآزال فكان ما بقي في العالم نور مدبّر، و هو محال» (Shaykh Ishraq, 1380 SH, Vol. 2, p. 202; and Shahrazuri, 1372 SH, p. 484).

- D. "Since you have understood the infinity of events and the impossibility of transmigration (tanasukh) to the human realm (nasut), you must know that if souls were non-temporal and eternal, it would necessitate that souls be infinite, which would entail the realization of infinite aspects in the separate intelligences and immaterial beings." (Sheikh al-Ishraq, 1380, Vol. 2, p. 203).

«وإذا علمت لا نهاية الحوادث واستحالة النقل الى الناسوت، فلو كانت النفوس غير حادثه، لكانت غير متناهية؛ فاستدعت جهات غير متناهية في المفارقات، و هو محال» (Shaykh Ishraq, 1380 SH, Vol. 2, p. 203).

Also, in "Al-Alwah al-Imadiyyah" and some of his other works, after presenting rational proofs, he endeavors to reconcile reason and revelation, writing:

«و اعلم أنّ النفس لا يتصور وجودها قبل البدن، لأنّها لو كانت قبل البدن موجودة، فإنّما أن تكون متكثّرة، التكتّث دون مميّز محال، و لا مميّز قبل البدن من الأفعال و الانفعالات و الإدراكات؛ و اما أن تكون متّحدة، فإن بقيت واحدة تتصرّف في جميع الأبدان كانت للجميع نفس واحدة و كان يجب أن يدرك جميع الناس ما أدركه واحد، و ليس كذا. و إن انقسمت بعد

الوحدة فهي جسم، وقد برهن على امتناع جرميتها؛ فالتفلس حادث مع البدن. و يدل عليها  
 مشان «التفخ» المذكورة، و مثني آخر قوله: «فَأَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهَا رُوحَنَا» إلى قوله: «لَأَهَبَ لَكَ  
 غُلَامًا زَكِيًّا»، يثنيه قوله: «ثُمَّ أَنْشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا آخَرَ» بعد ذكر التركيب الجسدي و حد النفس  
 الناطقة أنها جوهر، غير جسم، من شأنها أن تدرك المعقولات، و تتصرف في الأجسام. و هي  
 نور من أنوار الله تعالى، القائمة لا في أين. فسبحان، فاعل العجائب، مبدع الهويات،  
 و مظهر الآيات، إله العوالم، واهب الحياة، له الأمر، و إليه الإياب، «فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ»  
 .(Shaykh Ishraq, 1380 SH, Vol. 4, pp. 53, 54, and 207)

"Know that the soul (nafs) is inconceivable before the body, because before the body, souls would either be numerous or a single entity. If they were numerous, multiplicity without a distinguishing factor is inconceivable. And before the body, a distinguishing factor that arises through the body—such as actions, movements, and perceptions—is also inconceivable. A characteristic inherent to the species cannot provide distinction, as it would be uniform across all. Alternatively, if there were a single soul before the body, then once bodies come into existence, either that single soul would belong to all, or it would be divided. If that single soul belonged to all, then whatever one person knew, everyone else would have to share in that knowledge, which is not the case. If it were to become multiple after being a single entity, then it would be a body, not a soul, and indeed, proof has been established that the soul is not a body. Therefore, the soul comes into existence (is originated) with the origination of the body. The aforementioned verses about "breathing in" (nafkh) and other narrations bear witness to the truth of this claim, as it was stated that...": «فَأَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْهَا رُوحَنَا» 'So We sent to him Our Spirit' (Quran 19:17) until it said: «لَأَهَبَ لَكَ غُلَامًا زَكِيًّا» 'That I may give you a pure boy' (Quran 19:19). And another verse: «ثُمَّ أَنْشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا آخَرَ» after mentioning the composition of the body. And the definition of the rational soul (nafs-i natiqa) is that it is a substance that comprehends intelligibles and acts upon the body. It is a light from the lights of the Exalted God, subsisting

without being in a place. Glory be to God, the Creator of wonders, the Originator of existents, the Revealer of signs, and the Lord of all realms, the Giver of life. To Him belongs all command, and to Him shall all return: 'So blessed be Allah, the best of creators.' «فَتَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ أَحْسَنُ الْخَالِقِينَ» (Quran 23:14)." (Sheikh al-Ishraq, 1383, Vol. 3, pp. 25 & 133).

Shams al-Din Shahrāzuri and Qutb al-Din Shirāzi, in their commentaries on The Philosophy of Illumination, critiqued Suhrawardi's arguments regarding the soul's origination, finding them insufficient. However, Suhrawardi aligned with the Peripatetics on this issue, and Sadr al-Muta'allihin (Mulla Sadra) also agreed with him on the fundamental point of the soul's origination. (Shahrāzuri, 1372, p. 475; Qutb al-Din Shirāzi, 1383, p. 424).

## 6. The Soul and the Body

Suhrawardi believes that the Esfahbadi Light (Nūr-i Isfahbadī) does not act in the intermediary realm (barzakh) except through its connection with a subtle substance called the spirit (rūḥ), specifically the "vaporous spirit" (rūḥ-i bukhārī). This spirit is diffused and spread throughout the entire body, carrying luminous faculties. The Isfahbadi Light acts upon the body through this spirit, bestowing light upon it. (Suhrawardi, 1380, Vol. 2, pp. 206 & 207).

He considered the Esfahbadi Light (Nūr-i Isfahbadī) to be the governor and active agent within the bodily "ṣṣīyah" He writes: «فالنور الاسفهبدي و ان لم يكن مكانيا ولا ذا جهة، الا ان الظلمات التي في صيبيته مطيعة له» (Suhrawardi, 1380, Vol. 2, p. 207). The Esfahbadi Light, though it is neither spatial nor possesses direction, nonetheless, the darknesses within its ṣṣīyah are obedient to it, and it is repulsed by darkness and loves light.

In his Alwah-i 'Imadi (Tablets of 'Imad), Suhrawardi further

states: "Know that the soul's connection with the body is through a physical substance, which is the spirit (ruh). This spirit is luminous in the brain, such that if its light diminishes, its life becomes disturbed, leading to melancholy and other ailments. Thus, the soul's connection is with light, and the very first companion of life is light. You can observe animals' inclination towards light and the subsiding of senses and cessation of movements in the darkness of night. Therefore, the joy of souls with light is stronger than anything else" (Suhrawardi, 1383, Vol. 3, p. 182).

In Al-Lamahat, Suhrawardi writes:

«واعلم أنَّ علاقة النفس بالبدن ليست كعلاقة جرمين أو عرض و جرم بل علاقة شوقية، ولما رأيت حركة الحديد إلى المغناطيس لا تتعجب من تحرك البدن للنفس و هيئات النفس و البدن متنازلة متصاعدة متعدية من كل واحد إلى صاحبه ما يليق به.» (Ishraq, 1383 SH, Vol. 4, p. 208).

Know that the soul's connection and relationship with the body is not like the connection between two physical masses, or between an accident and a substance. Rather, it is a relationship of longing or desire (shauqiya). And when you observe the movement of iron towards a magnet, you should not be surprised by the body's movement towards the soul. The states of the soul and body, and the conditions of each relative to the other, involve descent, ascent, and transgression.

In his The Philosophy of Illumination, Suhrawardi posits that every attribute of the soul has a corresponding manifestation in the body. He argues that the Isfahbadi Light (Nūr-i Isfahbadī) is inherently overflowing (fayyāḍ bi-dhātīhi), possessing both love for its own kind and dominion or wrath over what is inferior to it. Consequently, through its dominion and wrath, the Isfahbadi Light necessitates the irascible faculty (quwwah ghaḍabiyyah) in the body—or, as he terms it, in the "darkened ṣiyāṣī." Similarly, through its love, it necessitates the concupiscible faculty (quwwah shahwāniyyah).

Thus, the faculties of wrath and desire are, in essence, manifestations of the soul's two aspects of dominion and love, appearing within the body. Furthermore, just as the soul (Isfahbadi Light) observes corporeal forms (i.e., particular material forms) and from them constructs universal, luminous forms suitable to itself—much like the universal concept of "human" is abstracted from observing Zayd and 'Amr—so too is a nutritive faculty (*quwwah ghādhīyyah*) necessary within the *ṣīṣiyah*. This faculty processes various foods, assimilating them into a substance similar to the nourished essence. Without such a faculty, the body would disintegrate without replacement and perish. Likewise, just as a perfect light is the source of another light of its kind, so too from the Isfahbadi Light it is necessary that a faculty exists in the *ṣīṣiyah* that engenders another *ṣīṣiyah* possessing the same Isfahbadi Light. This faculty is the generative faculty (*quwwah muwallidah*), which ensures the continuation of the human species. The same applies to all other bodily faculties in humans. In reality, these faculties are branches of the Isfahbadi Light within the human *ṣīṣiyah*, and the *ṣīṣiyah* is the "idol" of the Isfahbadi Light—or, in other words, they are the emanations and modes of the rational soul.

(Suhrawardi, 1380, Vol. 2, pp. 204 & 205)

## 7. The Immateriality of the Soul

Suhrawardi, in his works, places great emphasis on proving the immateriality (*tajarrud*) of the soul. For instance, in his *Alwah-i 'Imadi* (Tablets of 'Imad), he presents three arguments for the soul's immateriality:

- 1- The human skin undergoes change, yet the individual retains self-awareness. The human species persists even with the loss of many limbs, and a person remains conscious of their self and essence even when oblivious to all their bodily



parts. Therefore, the soul is distinct from all organs, for a person, even when forgetting all their limbs, perpetually remembers their own essence. Thus, none of the limbs are a part of the human soul. (Suhrawardi, 1380, Vol. 4, p. 50).

«اعلم أنَّ الإنسان يتبدل عليه جلده، و لا يتبدل المدرك لذاته منه و قد يبقى نوعه دون كثير من أعضائه و القلب و الدماغ و الأعضاء الباطنة يحتاج في معرفتها إلى تشريح، و أنت تشعر بذاتك مع غفلتك عن جميع الأعضاء، فهي مباينة عن الكلّ، لأنك دائم الذكر لها حين نسيت الكلّ، و كيف تعقل الشيء و تذكره دون أجزائه. فليس شيء من هذه جزء لك.»  
(Sheikh Ishraq, 1380, Vol. 4, p. 50)

Humans refer to their own essence with the word "I," and they distinguish their entire body and the world of physical objects from their own selfhood, referring to them with the words "he," "she," or "it." However, a human can never separate or isolate their own essence from itself. (Suhrawardi, 1380, Vol. 4, p. 50).

«نقول: أنت تشير إلى ذاتك بـ «أنا» و تفرز عن أنانيتك جميع ما في البدن و عالم الأجرام، وتشير إليه بأنه «هو»، و تتخيله مفرزا عنك، و لا يمكنك أن تفرز ذاتك عن ذاتك و تشير إلى نفسك بـ «هو»، فليست بشيء من عالم الأجرام.» (Sheikh Ishraq, 2001, Vol. 4, p. 50)

- 2- If the nutritive faculty were to supply the body with necessary materials without any part of the body undergoing decomposition, the body's size would increase excessively. Since this does not occur, the body inevitably undergoes decomposition. There is no part of the body whose heat is not diminished or which does not decompose and get replaced. The same applies to the temperament and the vaporous spirit. However, nothing of a person's "I-ness" (ananiyya) diminishes or changes. Therefore, my human self is not a corporeal temperament, nor is it an organ, and it is entirely not something from the world of physical bodies.

(Sheikh al-Ishraq, 1380, Vol. 4, p. 50).

«لو أنت الغذائية بما تأتي و لم يتحلل من بدنك شيء لأزداد مقدار بدنك على ما هو عليه كثيرا و

ليس كذا، فلا بدّ من التحلل. و ما من جزء من بدنك إلّا و تنقصه الحرارة، أو تحلّله بالكلية إلى بدل، و كذا المزاج و الروح، و أنايتك لم تنقص و لم تبدّل فليست هي بمزاج و لا عضو و لا بشيء من عالم الأجرام.» (Shaykh Ishraq, 1380 SH, Vol. 4, p. 50).

## 8. Faculties of the Soul

Suhrawardi posits that humans possess a vegetative soul (*nafs nabatiyyah*), an animal soul (*nafs haywaniyyah*), and a rational soul (*nafs natiqah*), and he proceeds to explain the faculties of each. He believes the vegetative soul requires a nutritive faculty (*quwwah ghādhīyyah*), which acts upon food matter to assimilate it into nourishing components, serving as a replacement for what deteriorates. Similarly, it needs a growth faculty (*quwwah nāmiyyah*), which causes proportionate increase in the dimensions of parts, leading to its quantitative perfection. It also requires a generative faculty (*quwwah muwallidah*), which separates a portion of matter for the formation of another individual, ensuring the continuation of the species. The generative faculty employs both the nutritive and growth faculties, just as the nutritive faculty serves both the growth and generative faculties. Furthermore, the nutritive faculty employs the attractive faculty to draw in food, the digestive faculty prepares the food for the nutritive faculty's action, the retentive faculty preserves the food for the completion of the action, and the expulsive faculty expels waste (Suhrawardi, 1380, Vol. 4, p. 201).

Then, in explaining the faculties of the animal soul, he divides the senses into ten parts: five external senses and five internal senses. The external senses are:

1. **Touch:** This is a faculty **diffused and spread throughout the body**. Through it, one perceives the four qualities of **hotness, coldness, wetness, and dryness**, as well as

lightness and heaviness, smoothness and roughness, and hardness and softness.

2. **Taste:** Located in the nerve spread over the substance of the tongue, this faculty perceives **flavors**.
3. **Smell:** This faculty perceives **odors** through affected air and vapor.
4. **Hearing:** Situated in the nerve spread over the inner surface of the tympanum, this faculty perceives **sounds through the medium of air**. Sound is the vibration of air resulting from impact and displacement, which causes intensified air pressure.
5. **Sight:** Located in the hollow nerve, this faculty perceives **forms** that are imprinted upon the crystalline humor. (Sheikh Ishraq, 2001, Vol. 4, pp. 201 & 202).

Similarly, the **internal senses** are:

1. **Common Sense:** This is where all **sense forms (sensibilia)** are gathered.
2. **Imagination:** This acts as the **storehouse and preserver of all common sense forms** after those forms are no longer present to the common sense.
3. **Estimative Faculty:** This faculty governs animals in their **judgment of particular circumstances and individual meanings**. For instance, it's through this faculty that a sheep perceives a quality in a wolf that causes aversion.
4. **Discursive Faculty:** Its function is **composition and analysis**. Among the faculties, its "mischief" is the most

intense. If **reason ('aql)** employs it, it's called the **reflective faculty (mufakkira)**; if **estimation (wahm)** employs it, it's called the **imaginative faculty (mutakhayyila)**.

5. **Memory:** This is the **preserver and storehouse of estimative judgments and particular meanings**. (Sheikh Ishraq, 2001, Vol. 4, pp. 51 & 109).

Suhrawardi, following other philosophers, also explains the rational soul's intellectual faculties (quwā idrākī 'aqlānī nafs nāṭiqah), dividing the soul into two powers: theoretical (naẓarī) and practical ('amalī). He defines the theoretical faculty as: "A faculty by which universals are perceived, and it is the rational aspect of the soul facing the holy realm." He then defines the practical faculty as: "A faculty by which matters related to the body are perceived concerning its interests and harms. It seeks assistance from the theoretical faculty and is the origin of human movement and the rational aspect of the soul facing the body." Subsequently, he discusses the levels or capacities of the theoretical faculty, identifying it as having four levels or four perfections:

- 1- Remote Potentiality (Intellectus Materialis / Hayulani Intellect): This is the furthest potentiality of a human, as seen in children, and is referred to as the Material Intellect (or Hylic Intellect).
- 2- The rational soul (nafs nāṭiqah) at the stage where it acquires primary intelligibles (or self-evident truths) and possesses the potential to grasp secondary intelligibles through thought and intuition, is called the Intellect in possession .
- 3- The rational soul (nafs nāṭiqah), when it has acquired the habit (malakah) of attaining intelligibles such that it can

access them at any time without needing new acquisition, is called the Actual Intellect (Aql bi'l-fi'l).

- 4- The stage where intelligible meanings (ma'qulāt) are actually present in the rational soul (nafs nāṭiqah) is called the Acquired Intellect (Aql Mustafad).

In explaining the stages and methods of the soul's perfection, Suhrawardi, at the end of his book *al-Talwihat*, offers what he calls a "good counsel" (ḥusn tawṣiyah), in which he alludes to the perfection of the human soul. He believes that all wise individuals, from antiquity to the Islamic era, have agreed on the singular knowledge of God, the intellects, the souls, and the ultimate destiny of the blessed. He then advises: "You must embrace spiritual discipline (riyāḍat) and detachment (inqiṭāʿ); perhaps you too will attain what they achieved." For, as the divine philosopher Plato recounts of himself: "At times, I withdraw into solitude with my soul and cast aside my body, divesting myself of it. I become as if I am without a body, immaterial and naked of natural garments, free from matter. I then enter into my own essence, becoming external to all other things. Then, within my soul, I behold such beauty, splendor, majesty, radiance, and wondrous perfections that I am utterly astonished, and I know that I am a part of the noble, supreme world." (Suhrawardi, 1380, Vol. 1, p. 112). According to Suhrawardi, the First Teacher (Aristotle) also narrated these magnificent illuminations from his own experience. All divine philosophers agree that whoever possesses the power to divest themselves of the body and abandon their senses can ascend to the higher realm. They also agree that Hermes and some other "masters of ascent" (aṣḥāb al-maʿārij) ascended to the higher realm with their souls. A human is not considered among the wise until they achieve the habit of shedding the body and making spiritual progress. (Suhrawardi, 1380, p. 113).

Suhrawardi considers the Sufis and those detached from worldly affairs among Muslims to be travelers on the path of ancient divine philosophers, who have reached the fount of light. He describes the path of detachment (inqiṭāʿ) as encompassing constant remembrance (dhikr), abandoning sensations and movements, continuous worship, fasting, waking in the early hours, engaging in subtle thoughts, and cultivating imaginations suitable for sacred matters, all for the refinement of the inner core (sirr). Following these introductions, and in a manner similar to Avicenna's Ninth Chapter of *al-Isharat wa al-Tanbihat* ("Stations of the Mystics"), Suhrawardi states: "The first state that befalls those on the spiritual path is the appearance of ravishing and delightful lights, which they have called 'Ṭawāli' (Dawns) and 'Lawā'ih' (Flashes). These are like a swiftly moving and illuminating lightning bolt. Then, with persistent spiritual discipline, the influx of these Dawns and Flashes becomes a firmly established habit (malakah mutamakkena), to the extent that their onslaught overwhelms the individual's control. Subsequently, this fleeting lightning becomes stable, and when it achieves stability, it is called 'Sakīnah' (Tranquility). After delving deeper into spiritual discipline, these states become habitual. Then, they gain the power of ascent to the Divine Presence (Janāb-i A'lā). However, the soul will not attain this union as long as it delights in pleasures for their own sake. If the soul becomes veiled from the awareness of itself and its own pleasures, this state is called 'Fanā' (Annihilation). And if it even perishes from awareness itself, it becomes 'Bāqī' (Enduring) by the endurance of the Exalted God. There is yet another station in annihilation, which is annihilation in 'Khalsah' (Ecstasy or Rapture), the state closest to death. Some Sufis have called this the 'Maqām al-Khullah' (Station of Intimate Friendship), and divine Plato alluded to it. This is distinct from the annihilation that can sometimes be accompanied by bodily stimulation." (Suhrawardi, 1380, pp).

Suhrawardi also alludes to this point at the end of his *The Philosophy of Illumination*: When divine illuminations (ishrāqāt 'ulawī) continuously descend upon souls, the matter of the world obeys those souls. Their prayers are heard in the higher realm, and it is decreed in the divine pre-ordination that a person's supplication becomes the cause for the fulfillment of a specific thing. The suffusing light (nūr sāniḥ) from the higher realm is the elixir of power and knowledge, so the world becomes obedient to it. In the immaterial souls, an instance of the divine light is established, and within that light resides creative power. (Suhrawardi, 1380, Vol. 2, p. 252).

«فاعلم أن النفوس اذا دامت عليها الاشراقات العلوية، يطيعها مادة العالم، و يسمع دعاءها في العالم الأعلى، و يكون في القضاء السابق مقدراً أن دعاء شخص يكون سبباً لاجابة في شيء كذا و النور السانح من العالم الأعلى هو اكسير القدرة و العلم، فيطيعه العالم و النفوس المجردة يتقرر فيها مثال من نور الله، و يتمكن فيها نور خلاق (Sheikh Ishraq, 1380, Vol. 2, p. 252).

He then describes the luminous journey (sīr-i nūrī) of the spiritual seeker, concluding that when Divine Lights (anwār-i ilāhiyyah) multiply upon an individual, they clothe him in a garment of glory and awe, and souls become submissive and obedient to him. (Suhrawardi, 1380, Vol. 2, p. 257).

«و اذا كثرت الانوار الالهية على انسان، كسته لباس العز و الهيبة، و تنقاد له النفوس.» (Sheikh Ishraq, 1380, Vol. 2, p. 257)

## 9. Death

in "Al-Mashari' wa al-Mutarahat," Suhrawardi argues for the immortality of the human soul after the body's demise. He states in his proof: "The soul is an un-imprinted substance distinct from the body, and its emanative cause also persists. The soul's relationship with the body is merely one of desirous attachment (alagheh-ye shouqi) and relativity, and relativity is the weakest of accidents (a'rad). Therefore, if the body perishes, that attachment is also severed. So, if the soul



were to perish with the perishing of this relativity, it would imply that a substance's existence is dependent on the weakest of accidents, namely relativity, while the dependence of a substance on an accident is impossible. Therefore, since the giver of the soul's existence remains, and it has no place or locus to have an opposing or conflicting entity that could negate it through opposition; and the perishing of one distinct substance (jauhar-e mubayen)—which is not the absolute efficient cause that emanates existence—does not necessitate the perishing of another substance; thus, the soul persists."

(Sheikh Ishraq, 1380, Vol. 1, p. 496, Seyyed Yadollah Yazdanpanah, 1389, Vol. 2, p. 453).

«و النفس باقية بعد البدن، و من اقرب ما يحتج به: انّ النفس جوهر غير منطبع مباين عن البدن، و علته الفياضة باقية، و ليس له مع البدن الا علاقة شوقية، و العلاقة اضافية، و من اضعف الاعراض الاضافة. فاذا بطل البدن ينقطع تلك العلاقة، فلو بطلت النفس بطلان الاضافة لكان الجوهر يتقوم وجوده باضعف الاعراض التي هي الاضافة، و هو محال. ثم النفس اذا كان المعطى لوجودها باقيا، و ليس لها مكان و محلّ ليكون لها مضادّ و مزاحم يبطلها بضرب من تضادّ، و الجوهر المباين - الذي ليس بعلة فاعلية مطلقة للشيء تفيض وجوده - لا يلزم من بطلانه بطلان جوهر آخر، (فالنفس باقية).» (Shaykh Ishraq, 1380 SH, Vol. 1, p. 496).

At the conclusion of "The philosophy of illumination," Sheikh Ishraq extols the faculty of death as the greatest of faculties. He believes that through death, the managing light becomes entirely disengaged from darkness. Although a slight connection with the body remains, it emerges into the world of light (alam-e-nour) and becomes dependent on the subduing lights. In this state, it perceives all luminous veils in relation to the majesty of the all-encompassing light (nour-e-muhit) and the Sustainer of the absolute of Light as if they were transparent. It's as though it's immersed in the encompassing light, and this is a highly cherished station (Sheikh Ishraq, 1380, Vol. 2, p. 255).

«و أعظم الملكات ملكة موت ينسلخ النور المدبّر عن الظلمات انسلاخا، و ان لم يخل عن بقية علاقة مع البدن، ألا أنّه يبرز الى عالم النور و يصير معلّقاً بالانوار القاهرة؛ و يرى الحجب النورية

كلها بالنسبة الى جلال النور المحيط القيوم نور الانوار كأنها شفافة، و يصير كأنه موضوع في النور المحيط.» (Sheikh Ishraq, 1380, Vol. 1, p. 496).

In his concluding testament in The philosophy of illumination, he also writes:

«واعلموا اخواني! ان تذكر الموت ابداً من المهمات» وَإِنَّ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ لِهِيَ الْحَيَوَانُ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ. «وَ اذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا»؛ «فَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ.» ( شيخ اشراق، ١٣٨٠، ج ٢، ص ٢٥٩)  
(Sheikh Ishraq, 2001, Vol. 2, p. 259)

My brothers! Know that the remembrance of death is always among the most important matters, and true life is indeed the abode of the hereafter; if only they knew. And remember God often, so, you must not die except as Muslims.

## Conclusion

In Suhrawardi's " The philosophy of illumination, human being is inherently a luminous being, with its existence nested within a hierarchy of lights. The rational soul, or "Eshpahbadi Light," governs the body through a providential management (wilayat-e takwini) while preserving its essential immateriality. This connection isn't one of union or incarnation; instead, it's rooted in luminous affinity and a longing attraction of light towards its origin.

Suhrawardi, through his robust arguments, simultaneously asserts both the origination and the immateriality of the soul. On one hand, he uses four strong proofs to refute the theory of the eternity of souls. On the other, he employs three novel arguments to deny the soul's susceptibility to materiality. This precise stance clearly demonstrates the distinction between the School of Illumination and both the Peripatetic (Mashsha'i) school and strict Platonism.

In this philosophical system, the path of human perfection is a journey from potentiality to actuality, and from darkness to light.

Intellectual contemplation combined with practical asceticism elevates the soul through stages, from the "material intellect (aql-e hayulani)" to the "acquired intellect (aql-e mustafad)." During this process, the spiritual seeker encounters luminous effulgences that both enhance knowledge and shape existence.

In this view, death isn't an end point; rather, it's considered the climax of the Ishpahbadi Light's perfection. The soul's detachment from material constraints and its return to the true "East" (the world of conquering lights) is the ultimate goal for the perfected human being. This perspective reveals a profound blend of philosophy, mysticism, and religious law, where theoretical and practical wisdom converge into a unified whole.



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## The Perfect Human being in Mulla Sadra's Thought

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Received: 2025/03/20

Accepted: 2025/04/ 23

### Abstract

The concept of human perfection is a universal concern that has occupied thinkers from various schools of thought, including Mulla Sadra. This study employs a descriptive-analytical and library-based methodology to examine Mulla Sadra's perspective on the perfect human being. The analysis reveals that humans are inherently driven towards perfection, and Mulla Sadra's philosophy emphasizes instructing how individuals can progress toward this ultimate state. From Mulla Sadra's perspective, human being is the pinnacle of existence, possessing inherent dignity. However, to realize this, humans must embark on a path of perfection. This perfection lies in the development of their rational faculty, which sets them apart from other beings. Human intellect has two aspects: theoretical and practical. The complete development of both these facets is essential for human perfection.

### Keywords

Human, perfection, theoretical reason, practical reason, perfect human, Mulla Sadra.

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\* Ahmadi Kazazi, F. & Mousazadeh, I. (2025). The Perfect Human being in Mulla Sadra's Thought. Bi-quarterly Journal of *Theosophia Islamica*, 3(6), pp. 33-63.

DOI: 10.22081/jti.2025.71777.1073

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