

# Socrates and Suhrawardī: Historical Affinities?

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## ملخص

عاش سقراط في زمان يختلف عن زمان شهرآواردي حيث عاش سقراط من عام ٤٦٩-٣٩ قبل الميلاد في حين عاش شهرآواردي في حوالي عام ١١٩١ ميلادي.

والخلاف بينهما ليس في الوقت الذي عاشا فيه فقط وإنما يختلفان أيضا في المكان والثقافة والأفكار الأمر الذي أدى إلى الاختلاف في طريقة حياتهم وأفكارهم.

على الرغم من ذلك الاختلاف فإن بينهما تشابه حيث إن لكليهما محاولات للكشف عن حقيقة الأشياء. كما أن حياة كليهما انتهت نهاية مأساوية.

فسقراط الذي لم يكتب شيئا معروف بمناهجه الجدلي الذي يحاول به الاستعراض النقدي كما أنه الوسيلة التي يستخدمها للوصول إلى حقيقة الأشياء. والتي تختلف عن النظرة العامة في ذلك الوقت.

كما أن سقراط استخدم ذلك المنهج للحد من هيمنة رجال الدين والمجتمع الاثيني (اليوناني) الذي لم يكن يبالي بحقيقة الأشياء.

وبالتعريف عن الطريقة الاستقرائية يحاول سقراط الكشف عن الحقيقة عن الإله وعن العدالة وغيرها.

وأما شهر اواردی فقد كان لديه نفس هدف سقراط ولكن  
اختلف المنهج الذي استخدمه عن سقراط.  
ويحاول هذا المقال الكشف عن سر الاختلاف المنهج بينهما في  
الوصول إلى هدفهما المشترك.

## Abstrak

Socrates (469-399 SM) dan Suhrawardi (m. 1191 M) hidup di dua dunia yang sangat berbeda, baik secara waktu, tempat, budaya maupun kepercayaan yang ada disekitar mereka. Perbedaan itu juga mempunyai konsekuensi pada perbedaan hidup dan pemikiran mereka. Walaupun demikian, anehnya, mereka mempunyai kesamaan. Kesamaan mereka adalah pada upaya mereka untuk menyingkap hakekat sesuatu. Sedangkan kesamaan yang lain adalah bahwa hidup mereka sama-sama berakhir secara tragis. Socrates yang tidak pernah menulis apapun, terkenal dengan metode dialektikanya. Dialektika Socrates, sebagai upaya investigasi kritis, adalah sarana untuk menjangkau hakekat sesuatu di luar kepercayaan umum saat itu. Dengan dialektika, Socrates berusaha untuk melawan hegemoni kaum agamawan dan masyarakat Athena saat itu yang acuh dengan kebenaran. Dengan mengenalkan penalaran induktif, Socrates mencoba menyingkap hakekat universal tentang Tuhan, tentang keadilan dll. Suhrawardi, di pihak lain, mempunyai tujuan yang sama dengan Socrates, tapi dengan metode yang berbeda. Misteri tentang perbedaan dalam kesamaan inilah yang akan disingkap dalam artikel ini.

## 1

**S**ocrates (b. ca. 469-d.399 BCE) and Suhrawardî (d. 587 / 1191) belong to two different worlds, separated by time, place, culture, and beliefs. It is difficult to believe that men whose personalities, lives and thoughts were so different can share something in common.

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Athens certainly provided an "agora" for Socrates, while Suhrawardī resorted to the patronage of local rulers in Rûm and Shâm. Socrates, who never wrote anything, was a man of the "dialogue" – the founder of the "art" of dialectical cross-examination, what has come to be known as the Socratic "maieutic."<sup>2</sup> Suhrawardī's "art" – if one may call it so – was, on the one hand, discursive (*baḥthiyya*) and, on the other hand, the result of mystical intuition (*dhawqiyya*).<sup>3</sup> But Suhrawardī proposes no similar Socratic maieutic, unless one is willing to take into consideration some of Suhrawardī's short mystical and allegorical treatises, such as his *Rûzī bâ Jamâ'at-i Sûfiyân*,

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<sup>2</sup>The man and his thought are known through the works of others, cf. primary sources: Plato, *Apology of Socrates* in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. by Benjamin Jawett, with *The Seventh Letter*, trans. J. Harward (1952), vol. 6 of *The Great Books of the Western World*, ed. in chief Robert McHenry (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica Inc., 1996), as well as the *Criton*, *Phedon*, *Protagoras*, *Hippias*, *Phedre*, and *The Banquet*; cf. Aristophanes, *Clouds*; cf. Xenophon, *Apology of Socrates* and *The Banquet*; cf. Diogene Laerce, *Life, Doctrines and Sentences of Illustrious Philosophers*, II; cf. studies: Olof Gigon, *Sokrates, sein Bild in dichtung und Geschichte* (Bern: Francke, 1947); cf. N. Gulley, *The Philosophy of Socrates* (London: MacMillan; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1968); cf. V. de Magalhães-Vilhena, *Le Problème de Socrate: le Socrate historique et le Socrate de Platon* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1952); cf. W. K. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*. Vol. III, *The Fifth Century Enlightenment* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 325-507, and 417-507 for Socrates' philosophical significance.

<sup>3</sup>Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-Ishrâq*, in Idem, *Oeuvres philosophiques et mystiques*, vol. 2, ed. and intro. by Henry Corbin (reprint of 1952; Téhéran: Académie Impériale Iranienne de Philosophie / Paris: Librairie Adrien Maisonneuve, 1397 / 1977), 9-260, esp. 3-4, 10.4-11.11 [Hereafter, OPM, II]; cf. *Sohrawardī, Le livre de la sagesse orientale. Kitâb Hikmat al-Ishrâq (with) Commentaires de Qotboddîn Shîrâzî et Mollâ Šadrâ*, trans. and notes Henry Corbin, ed. and intro. Christian Jambet (Paris: Verdier, 1986), 85-90 [Hereafter, *Sagesse*]. For a recent English translation, cf. Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination. A New Critical Edition of the Text of Hikmat al-Ishrâq*, with English trans., notes, comm. and intro. by John Walbridge and Hossein Ziai (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1999); cf. Roxanne Marcotte, "Philosophical Reason Versus Mystical Intuition – Shihâb al-Dîn Suhrawardî (d. 1191)," *Anaquel de estudios árabes* 7(1996): 109-126; cf. Idem, "Métaphysique néoplatonicienne orientale et anthropologie philosophique (Avicenne et Suhrawardî)," in *Actes du XXVIIe Congrès de l'Association des Sociétés de Philosophie de Langue Française: la métaphysique, son histoire, critique, enjeux* (Québec, 18-22 août, 1998) (Québec: Les presses de l'Université Laval / Paris: Librairie philosophique J. Vrin, 2000), 79-86.



as types of "dialogical" investigation into the essence of reality.<sup>4</sup>

Socrates' mission was one of critical investigation, a means to uncover, beyond common beliefs, the essence of things. Reacting against the subterfuges of Sophists unconcerned with the truth, Socrates, according to Aristotle, introduced inductive reasoning to uncover universal essences of God, of Justice, etc., by opposing particular examples and questioning common opinion.<sup>5</sup> Suhrawardî's mission may present some parallel with Socrates' aim to uncover universal essences, but the means to achieve this goal were completely different, since the discursive is at the service of the intuitive. In spite of these differences, both remained enigmas: Socrates for Athenians and Suhrawardî for Aleppans.

So why are they so easily associated with one another? This may be because they both faced a tragic end. This has been the general interpretation of the rapprochement that is often made between Socrates and Suhrawardî.<sup>6</sup> A closer look at the events that surrounded their accusations and trials is necessary to highlight some similarities: introduction of new ideas, conflict with the religions of Athens and Aleppo, and non-adherence to the officially recognized orthodoxy. They are perhaps brought together because Suhrawardî mentions Socrates by name and he gives him an important role to play in the history of the transmission of wisdom (*hikmah*). More importantly, it must be emphasized that Suhrawardî's understanding of Socrates' place and role in the history of philosophy actually represents another chapter in the history of the interpretation of Greek thought, just

<sup>4</sup>Suhrawardî, *Rûzî bâ Jamâ'at-i Sûfiyân*, in Idem, *Oeuvre philosophique et mystique*, vol. 3, ed. and intro. in Persian Seyyed Hossein Nasr, with French intro. Henry Corbin (reprint of 1970; Téhéran: Académie Impériale Iranienne de Philosophie / Paris: Librairie Adrien Maisonneuve, 1396 / 1977), 242-50 [hereafter, OPM, III]; cf. Idem, *L'Archange empourpré. Quinze traités et récits mystiques*, trad. du persan et de l'arabe par Henry Corbin (Paris: Fayard, 1976), 267-77]; cf. Idem, *The Philosophical Allegories and Mystical Treatises. A Parallel Persian-English Text*, ed. and trans. with an intro. by W. M. Thackston (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Pub., 1999), 33-42 [a reprint of Suhrawardî. *The Mystical and Visionary Treatises of Shihabuddin Yahya Suhrawardi*, trans. W. M. Thackston (London: Octagon Press, 1982)]; cf. Hermann Landolt, "Suhrawardî's 'Tales of Initiation,' Review Article," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 107 (1987): 475-86].

<sup>5</sup>Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, I, 6 and XIII, 4 and *Nicomachean Ethics*, VI, 3; T. Deman, *Le Témoignage d'Aristote sur Socrate* (Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1942).

<sup>6</sup>Christian Jambet in his introduction to Suhrawardî, *Sagesse*, 53; cf. John Walbridge, *The Leaven of the Ancients. Suhrawardî and the Heritage of the Greeks* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000), 201.



as interesting and important as Nietzsche's or Heidegger's interpretations of Socrates.

### The Sociopolitical Context of the Accusations and the Trials

The drama of Socrates' trial (in 399 BCE) comes to life in Plato's *Apology*.<sup>7</sup> A recent study sheds new light on the legal, cultural, and historical contexts of Socrates' trial, refusing to view Socrates as merely ironical (and thus insolent towards the jurors) and inviting his own condemnation (thus indifferent to the legal outcome of the trial), since there were no supplication and no fearful humility that might have earned him the jurors' mercy.<sup>8</sup>

The sociopolitical context of Athens at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BCE certainly provides the stage on which Socrates' execution was played: the end of the Peloponnesian war, the bloody episode of the Thirty Tyrants, and the reestablishment of democracy. Although Socrates had served the city by participating in its numerous campaigns and as one of the Presidents of the Assembly at the time of the trial of the generals of the Arginusae Isles and courageously refused to put the illegal motion to the vote in spite of the fury of the multitude, he was still associated with Critias and Alcibiades, who had belonged to his circle of friends, but who also personified the misfortunes of Athens. It did not matter that he had defied the orders of the Thirty Tyrants when they tried to implicate him in their misdeeds.<sup>9</sup> Was Socrates merely a scapegoat for these recent events, or was it his refusal to accept the common opinion and his desire to view everything under a critical light, even Athenian democracy, its egalitarianism and its electoral process based on lot, that brought upon him the wrath of prominent Athenians?

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<sup>7</sup>For Socrates defense, cf. Plato, *Apology*, 17a-24b2, 24b3-30c1, 30c1-35d8; and for his peroration, 38c1-39d9; 39e1-40c3; 40c4-42a5. Plato's *Apology* (an early dialogue) was written before his trip to Syracuse (ca. 387) and during the first decade following Socrates' trial to which Plato was a witness (while Xenophon and Aristophanes were not), cf. W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy, vol. IV, Plato. The Man and His Dialogues: Earlier Period* (1975; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 53-4.

<sup>8</sup>Thomas C. Bridgkhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, *Socrates on Trial* (1989; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), vii.

<sup>9</sup>Léon Robin, *La pensée grecque et les origines de l'esprit scientifique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1948), 178-93; cf. N.G.L. Hammond and H.H. Scullard, *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (1970; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 997-8 s.v. "Socrates."

Similar observations about the sociopolitical context of Aleppo between 1183 and 1191 offer some insight into Suhrawardî's tragic end. Aleppo had always resisted Ṣalâḥ al-Dîn (d. 589 / 1193) more strongly than any other city. Conquered in 579 / 1183, the same year Suhrawardî arrived,<sup>10</sup> the city was still living under threat of further political unrest, at the hands of Nizârî Ismâ'îlîs whose stronghold was Jabal Anṣâriyya (between Antioch and Hamâh), the region West of Aleppo. Although they were vassals of al-Malik al-Zâhir, Ismâ'îlîs were not entirely submitted. Some attributed the fire that damaged Aleppo's Great Mosque in 563 / 1167-8 to the Ismâ'îlîs.<sup>11</sup> Ṣalâḥ al-Dîn had also been the object of two assassination attempts (570 / 1174 and 572 / 1176) at their hands.<sup>12</sup> In 572 / 1176-7, they mounted a military expedition in the southwest of Aleppo; and in 575 / 1179-80, three years before Suhrawardî's arrival, Nizârî agents were sent to Aleppo where they set fire to several locations in the city's market place.<sup>13</sup>

The Shî'î community of Aleppo constituted another cause for concern. The large Shî'î population had strongly resisted the opening of the first Sunnî schools at the beginning of the century. Although Shî'îs were tolerated by Nûr al-Dîn Zangî (who ruled from 541 / 1146 to 572 / 1176), in an attempt to counter unorthodox beliefs, the latter greatly encouraged the revival of Sunnism by establishing at least three Shâfi'î *madrasas*, a Hanbalîte and a Malikîte hospices (*zâwiya*) and a number of convents (*khânqâh* or *ribât*).<sup>14</sup> Less than nine years before Suhrawardî's arrival, Aleppo was the scene of sectarian riots between Sunnis and Shî'îs. By the time of Suhrawardî's stay in Aleppo, animosity between the two communities had apparently

<sup>10</sup> M. C. Lyons and D. E. P. Jackson, *Saladin. The Politics of the Holy War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 173-200; R. Stephen Humphreys, *From Saladin to the Mongols. The Ayyubids of Damascus, 1193-1250* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 1977), 25.

<sup>11</sup> Nikita Elisséeff, "Les monuments de Nûr al-Dîn. Inventaire, notes archéologiques et bibliographiques," *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 13 (1949-51): 5-43, esp. 14.

<sup>12</sup> Farhad Daftari, *The Ismâ'îlîs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 399.

<sup>13</sup> Anne-Marie Eddé, "Une grande famille de shafiites alépins, Les Banû al-'Agamî aux XIIe-XIIIe siècles," *Revue du Monde Musulman et de la Méditerranée* 62 (1991): 61-71, esp. 64.

<sup>14</sup> Elisséeff, "Le monuments de Nûr al-Dîn," 5-6, 9-11, 13, 15; cf. H. A. R. Gibb, "The Career of Nûr al-Dîn," in *A History of the Crusades*, ed. K. M. Setton and M. W. Baldwin, 6 vols. (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), vol. 1 [entitled the *First Hundred Years*], 513-27.



decreased. Al-Malik al-Zâhir's reign (after 582 / 1186) was marked by the distribution of patronage among all schools of jurisprudence, including the Imâmî Shî'î,<sup>15</sup> the establishment of a religious endowment on the newly completed Shî'î Mashhad al-Husayn and his intercession with the ruler of Âmid for the release of a Shî'î genealogist.<sup>16</sup> Seemingly Shî'î connotations would not, therefore, have constituted a political or a social threat, since al-Malik al-Zâhir adopted a conciliatory attitude towards the Shî'îs, a now tolerated minority.

Aleppo also possessed its own indigenous aristocracy. Predominantly Shâfi'î and Ḥanafî, the ulemas of Aleppo held important political positions: they were judges, teachers, and Imams. This indigenous aristocracy was still negotiating its religious authority with the new Ayyûbid rulers who required their legitimizing acquiescence.<sup>17</sup> In this case, the interests of the ruler and those of the leading Sunnî families merged.<sup>18</sup> Ṣalâḥ al-Dîn's policy, however, favored Shâfi'îs through the removal from office of people who belonged to other schools of law. From then on, the grand *qâḍî* becomes a Shâfi'î. Feeling threatened by these new Shâfi'î nominations, the local Ḥanafî jurists' animosity may have increased against Suhrawardî who, at least officially, belonged to the Shâfi'î school of jurisprudence and who may have benefited from this Ayyûbid policy.

Some have argued that Sufis – like Ḥallâj, 'Ayn al-Qud'ât al-Hamdânî or Suhrawardî – were always put to death for political reasons, rather than religious ones.<sup>19</sup> Biographers do report Suhrawardî's mystical inclination,

<sup>15</sup> David Morray, *An Ayyubid Notable and His Work. Ibn al-'Adîm and Aleppo as Portrayed in his Biographical Dictionary of People Associated with the City* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1994), 131, 132, 148; cf. Sauvaget, "Ḥalab," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 3 (1970), 85a-90a, esp. 87a-b.

<sup>16</sup> According to Ibn 'Adîm, cf. Morray, *An Ayyubid Notable*, 132.

<sup>17</sup> Roxanne D. Marcotte, "Suhrawardî al-Maqtûl, The Martyr of Aleppo," *al-Qantara* 22.2 (2001): 395-419; cf. Anne-Marie Eddé, "Hérésie et pouvoir politique en Syrie au XIIe siècle: l'exécution d'al-Suhrawardî en 1191," in *La Religion civique à l'époque médiévale et moderne (chrétienté et islam). Actes du colloque organisé par le Centre de recherche « Histoire sociale et culturelle de l'Occident. XIIe-XIIIe siècle » de l'Université de Paris X-Nanterre et l'Institut universitaire de France (Nanterre, 21-23 juin 1993), Extrait* (Rome: A. Vauchez, 1995), 235-44.

<sup>18</sup> Morray, *An Ayyubid Notable*, 123-4, 130.

<sup>19</sup> Marshal G. S. Hodgson, *The Order of the Assassins. The Struggle of the Early Nizârî Ismâ'îlîs Against the Islamic World* (The Hague: Mouton, 1955); cf. Carl Ernst, *Words of Extasy in Sufism* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1985).

his harsh ascetic practices, even his execution of wondrous deeds, and his association with mystics.<sup>20</sup> For Suhrawardī, spiritual exercises (*riyāḍa*) are means to access divine knowledge, even describing Sufi practices (audition and remembrance of God's names) in such works as *Safīr-i Sīmurgh* and *Ḥālat al-Ṭufūliyya*.<sup>21</sup>

Socrates did not share Suhrawardī's asceticism and Sufi inclinations, unless one is willing to consider Socrates' refusal to seek wealth and his refusal to receive money in return for his teaching (as was customary at the time) as indications of some sort of mystical inclination or detachment of worldly affairs. But, Socrates' detachment of worldly matter was probably more philosophical and intellectual than religious.<sup>22</sup> Socrates' care of the soul should be viewed in this light.<sup>23</sup>

### Suhrawardī's Alleged Political Doctrine

Some have suggested that Suhrawardī's tragic end is not alien to his attempts to implement a "political doctrine" out of his "Illuminative" (*ishrāqī*) philosophy which he would "have taught" to many leaders of the region.<sup>24</sup>

<sup>20</sup>Shahrazūrī, *Nuzhat al-Arwāḥ wa Rawḍat al-Afrāḥ fi Tārīkh al-Ḥukamā' wa al-Falāsifah*, 2 vol., ed. Khūrshīd Ahmad (Haydarābād, 1976), vol. 2, 125; cf. *Ibid.*, ed. Muḥammad 'Alī Abū Rayyān (Alexandria: Dār al-Ma'rifa al-Jāmi'a, 1414 / 1993), 605. Qutb al-Dīn al-Shīrāzī, son of a physician of Shīrāz who had been a disciple of Suhrawardī, later followed the teachings of two Sufi masters, one of them, Najīb al-Dīn Buzghush al-Shīrāzī had also been one of Suhrawardī's disciples, cf. the introduction of Sayyid M. Mishkāt in Qutb al-Dīn Shīrāzī, *Durrat al-Tāj li-Ghurra al-Dabbāj* (Tehran, 1317s. / 1939 – 1320 / 1942), vol. 1, J (jīm)-G (qāf) (21 pp.). At the time, Suhrawardī would have been merely in his mid-twenties; cf. John Walbridge, *The Science of Mystical Light, Qutb al-Dīn Shīrāzī and the Illuminationist Tradition in Islamic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 1992).

<sup>21</sup>Suhrawardī, *Safīr-i Sīmurgh*, in OPM, III, 314-32, cf. *Idem*, *L'Archange empourpré*, 449-62; cf. *Idem*, *The Philosophical Allegories and Mystical Treatises*, 91-105; cf. Suhrawardī, *Ḥālat al-Ṭufūliyya*, in OPM, III, 252-66; cf. *Idem*, *L'Archange empourpré*, 392-406; cf. *Idem*, *The Philosophical Allegories and Mystical Treatises*, 91-105.

<sup>22</sup>Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 3, 467; cf. *Ibid.*, 467-73.

<sup>23</sup>Plato, *Apology*, 29d and 30a; cf. the asceticism associated with the life of the soul found in Plato's *Phaedo*.

<sup>24</sup>Hossein Ziai, "The Source and Nature of Authority: A Study of al-Suhrawardī's Illuminationist Political Doctrine," in *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy: Essays in Honor of Muḥsin S. Mahdī*, ed. Charles E. Butterworth (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 294-334, 322 n.48; cf. *Idem*, "Al-Suhrawardī," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 9 (1997): 782a-784b, esp. 782a; cf. John Walbridge, "Politics, Plato's *Seventh Epistle*, and the Failure of Suhrawardī's Political Ambitions," in *Idem*, *The Leaven of the Ancients*, 201-10.



History does not provide much clues, let alone proofs to support the claim that Suhrawardî was an "advisor" to a number of local leaders and to al-Malik al-Zâhir.<sup>25</sup> Suhrawardî did gravitate around the powerful. Seeking the favors of a patron or of his entourage was a common practice for scholars of the time. This often led to the dedication of works to local rulers. Suhrawardî was indeed requested to write a summary of the thoughts of the true sages for someone "deserving," most probably 'Imâd al-Dîn Artuqid, the son of Qarâ Arslân.<sup>26</sup> The Partû-nâma may have been written for Rukn al-Dîn Sulaymân Shah (who ruled between 592 / 1195 to 600 / 1203), the son of Qelej Arslân.<sup>27</sup> This certainly further incriminated Suhrawardî, since Şalâh al-Dîn had recently fought against the Artuqids before their submission into vassaldom. Although this fact is far from a proof that Suhrawardî had any overt political activities, the question may certainly be raised as to why did someone who readily traveled to seek knowledge and live the life of a poor mystic persist in attending the various local courts and that of al-Malik al-Zâhir?<sup>28</sup>

One must, however, concede that Suhrawardî's works do contain elements that can easily have political implications. Suhrawardî establishes an ideal hierarchy of leadership (*riyâsa* and *khalîfa*) of which the earth is never devoid. An Imam fills the position of leadership, both spiritual and political, and he possesses divine knowledge. Walbridge notes that Suhrawardî's project should not be viewed in light of Plato's idealistic politics of the Republic, but rather in terms of the Pythagorean and Neoplatonic notion of "divine men," that is, Suhrawardî's "divinized" (*muta'allih*) sage.<sup>29</sup> This sage receives divine guidance and ultimately becomes the leader of, or the "pole" (*qutb*) for the community, whether he is present or absent.<sup>30</sup>

The notion of pole alludes to the spiritual brotherhood of Sufi leaders who are said to secretly rule the world. This notion of pole is also

<sup>25</sup> Ziai, "The Source and Nature of Authority," 338; cf. Walbridge, *The Leaven of the Ancients*, 208; cf. Marcotte, "Suhrawardî al-Maqtûl," 395-419; cf. Naşr Allâh Pûrjavâdî, "Shaykh-i Ishrâq va Ta'lîf-i «Alwâh-i 'Imâdî»," in *Nâmah-yi Iqbâl*, ed. 'Alî Dâvâd (Tehran: Intishârât-i Hirmand, 1377 / 1998), 1-11; cf. Idem, "Partû-nâmah va Tarjuma-yi Inglîsî-yi Ân," *Nashr-i Dânish*, 16.1 (1378 / 1999), 55-63.

<sup>26</sup> Suhrawardî, *Alwâh-i 'Imâdî*, in Idem, OPM, III, 1, 110.12-111.1.

<sup>27</sup> Naşr Allâh Pûrjavâdî, "Partû-nâma va Tarjuma-yi Inglîsî-yi Ân," in *Nashr-i Dânish* 16.1 (1379 / 1999): 50-63.

<sup>28</sup> Walbridge, *The Leaven of the Ancients*, 204-6.

<sup>29</sup> Walbridge, *The Leaven of the Ancients*, 209.

<sup>30</sup> Suhrawardî, *Hikmat al-Ishrâq*, 5, 11.12-12.13; cf. Idem, *Sagesse*, 90-1.

often identified with the hidden Imam of the Shî'î tradition and refers to his divine guardianship (*wilâya*).<sup>31</sup> Moreover, Suhrawardî alludes to a "maintainer of the book" (*qâ'im*), an idea that, again, refers to the Shî'î Imams who are the maintainers of the revelation as the interpreters of the Qur'ân (as mentioned in many Shî'î hadiths).<sup>32</sup> Suhrawardî's divinely inspired Imam shares some aspects with Plato's idea of the philosopher-king and is reminiscent of Plato's attempt to reform Syracuse by instructing its tyrants rather than of Socrates' attempts at moral reformation of Athenians. The central aspect is here the divine and the connection the Imam is able to establish with the hidden world of light.

The story reported by Ibn Khallikân (d. 681 / 1282) should, perhaps, be interpreted in this light. Shaykh Sayf al-Dîn al-Âmidî (d. 631 / 1233) reported that Suhrawardî, who at the time was in Aleppo, mentioned that "without doubt I will rule the earth" based on a dream in which he was drinking the water of the sea. Told that it might merely mean that he would attain fame through his knowledge, Suhrawardî rejected al-Âmidî's interpretation.<sup>33</sup> Did Suhrawardî really believe in his interpretation of the dream and attempt to counsel rulers in order to achieve his end and become the counselor of philosopher-kings? Or should one question the authenticity of this particular story written more than three quarters of a century later and of which there is no earlier report?

Moreover, the Ismâ'îlî "Great Resurrection" that was to bring a truly pure spiritual Islam had recently been proclaimed at Alamut (560 / 1164).

<sup>31</sup> Muḥammad 'Alī Abū Rayyān, *Uṣūl al-Falsafa al-Ishrāqiyya 'inda Shihāb al-Suhrawardī* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Anjilū al-Miṣriyya, 1959), 89-91. [Also to the Qarmatiyya, cf. *Ibid.*, 91].

<sup>32</sup> For instance, in Kulaynī's *Uṣūl: Kitāb al-Hujjat*, identified by Henry Corbin, *En islam iranien*, 4 vols., – vol. 2 – *Sohrawardī et les platoniciens de Perse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971), 23 n.22.

<sup>33</sup> Ibn Khallikân (d. 681 / 1282), *Wafâyât al-A'yân wa Anbâ' Abnâ' al-Zamân*, ed. Iḥsân 'Abbas (Beirut: Dār al-Thaqāfa, 1968), vol. 6, 272; cf. *Ibn Khallikan's Biographical Dictionary (Wafayât al-A'iyân)*, 4 vols., trans. Bn Mac Guckin de Slane (Paris: Oriental Translation Fund of Great Britain and Ireland, 1843), vol. 4, 156; quoted in Walbridge, *The Leaven of the Ancients*, 205. Sayf al-Dîn al-Âmidî was himself dismissed from the chair he held at the madrasa al-'Azîziyya by al-Malik al-Ashraf, the Ayyubid ruler of Damascus, for having taught philosophy and theology, having even been suspected of political treason, cf. Carl Brockelmann and Dominique Sourdel, "al-Âmidî," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (1960): 434b; cf. Louis Pouzet, *Damas au VIIe / XIIIe siècle. Vie et structures religieuses dans une métropole islamique* (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq, 1988), 56



The ulamas of Aleppo and the Ayyûbid rulers may have suspected Suhrawardî of affiliation with these groups. In his *al-Mashârî' wa al-Muṭârahât*, Suhrawardî alludes to a secret key, a sort of secret writing of which he only provides a sample and which, according to Corbin, strongly resembles the secret alphabet of the Ismâ'îlîs.<sup>34</sup> Oddly enough, the ulamas of Aleppo did not, however, use this particular work against Suhrawardî during his trial. In addition, despite Suhrawardî's overt rejection of any transmigration of the soul, some of his statements on bodies (*barzakh*) are ambiguous and could support the opposite conclusion and thus echo an Ismâ'îlî stance (e.g., *al-Sijistânî*).<sup>35</sup>

Possible Ismâ'îlî affinities must be counterbalanced by both the fact that no biographical work mention any association between Suhrawardî and the Bâtînîs or Ismâ'îlîs and, more important, the fact that Suhrawardî adopts stances that are in opposition to Ismâ'îlî doctrines. Suhrawardî's appeal for independent judgment (*ijtihād*) is clearly in opposition to any Ismâ'îlî doctrine of exclusive direct spiritual instruction (*ta'lim*) as proclaimed by Ḥasan-i Šabbâh. Suhrawardî's identification of the Necessary Being with the Light of lights is incompatible with Ismâ'îlî negative (apophatic) theology. And finally, in his *Maqâmât al-Sûfiyya*, Suhrawardî rejects beliefs he explicitly attributes to the Assassins.<sup>36</sup> The Assassins (*ḥashîshiyya*), the local Syrian epithet given to the followers of Nizârî branch of the Ismâ'îlî,<sup>37</sup> still presented a political threat for Šalâḥ al-Dîn. Any suspicion of secret leanings towards Shî'ism (interpreted as a Crypto-Shî'ism) raised the specter of conversion to Nizârî Ismâ'îlism or Bâtîniyya (Crypto-Ismâ'îlism) during this period of social, political and religious unrest.<sup>38</sup> This threat may have weighed heavily in Šalâḥ al-Dîn's decision to have

<sup>34</sup> Suhrawardî, *al-Mashârî' wa al-Muṭârahât*, in Suhrawardî, *Oeuvre philosophique et mystique*, vol. 1, ed. and intro. Henry Corbin (reprint of 1945; Téhéran: Académie Impériale Iranienne de Philosophie / Paris: Librairie Adrien Maisonneuve, 1396 / 1976), 193-506, esp. 194.12-195.2 [Hereafter, OPM, I]; cf. *Ibid.*, ¶ 225, 505.12-6; cf. Corbin, *En islam iranien*, v. 2, 21-2, 22 n.20; cf. Corbin's intro. to Suhrawardî, OPM, II, , 27 n.58.

<sup>35</sup> Landolt, "Suhrawardî's "Tales of Initiation," Review Article," 482b-485a. Orphics and Pythagoreans, it should be noted, also believed in transmigration of the soul.

<sup>36</sup> Suhrawardî, *Kalimat al-Tašawwuf* [or *Maqâmât al-Sûfiyya*], ed., intro., and notes Emile Maalouf (Beirut: Dâr al-Mashriq, 1993), 60.1.

<sup>37</sup> The term was used in a polemical tract (*al-Hidâyat al-Âmiriyya*) issued by the Fâtimid Caliph al-Âmir against his Nizârî opponents, cf. Bernard Lewis, "Ḥashîshiyya," *Encyclopædia of Islam*, 2nd ed., vol. 3 (1971), 267b-268b, esp. 267b and 268.

<sup>38</sup> Morray, *An Ayyubid Notable and His Work*, 149.

Suhrawardī executed.<sup>39</sup>

## The Religious Context – Orthodoxy, Official Religion, and Heresy (*zandaqa*)

### Accusations against Socrates

The religious context provides further insight into similarities between Socrates' and Suhrawardī's tragic ends. Three good citizens denounced Socrates as an impious Athenian, an accusation that led to the belief that he was "areligious," perhaps on account of Aristophanes' portrayal of an atheist Socrates, and for which they demanded his death.<sup>40</sup> Three formal charges were laid against Socrates.<sup>41</sup> The first charge was that he did not recognize the gods that the state recognized. Implicit in this accusation were charges of atheism (although no law against atheism appears to have existed), not for his orthopraxy but for his orthodoxy, having applied some of his critical method to conventional religious beliefs of the time. For instance, Socrates defines the standard of righteousness or justice as a moral standard that does not depend on the Gods and the accomplishment of what might please the Gods (in the sense of piety), since justice and righteousness are more general concepts than piety.<sup>42</sup> It may be that Socrates believed that law and God (or Gods) could not come into conflict, he states that "I have been commanded to do this [i.e., practice philosophy] by the Gods, both by oracles, by dreams, and in every way in which divinity had ever commanded a man to do anything."<sup>43</sup> The first charge was thus construed as a violation of the law against impiety whose extension was vague.<sup>44</sup>

The second charge was that Socrates introduced new deities. It too consisted in a vague accusation that has often been associated with his views regarding either the powers of nature (nature philosopher) or the *daimonion*

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<sup>39</sup> Farīdah Mu'takif, "Dawlat-i Mustā'jal-i Shaykh-i Maqtūl," *Kayhān-I Farhangī* vol. 18, no. 178 (Aug. 2000), 9-11, esp. 11 [special issue on Suhrawardī].

<sup>40</sup> Plato accuses Aristophanes of being responsible for Socrates' death, cf. Plato, *Apology*, 18a-20e; cf. Plato, *Laws*, X, 888a-905d.

<sup>41</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 24b9-c1. The charge was studied by the King-Archon at the preliminary hearing, charges that are also mentioned by Diogene Laertius and Xenophon.

<sup>42</sup> Plato's *Euthyphro*, 12c-d.

<sup>43</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 31a8 and *Ibid.*, 33c4-7. Socrates highlights the moral significance of his mission following his own idea of justice, cf. Plato, *Apology*, 29d4-5.

<sup>44</sup> Bridkhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 30-4; cf. Plato, *Euthydemus*, 12e2-3.



(according to Plato) to which he often alludes.<sup>45</sup> But no names are provided for the divinities (not gods) that Socrates is alleged to have introduced. In fact, the second charge depends on the first. For the prosecutor, Maletus (later executed for his role in the trial of Socrates), the only recognized Gods were those decreed by the state.<sup>46</sup> In fact, these two charges were never clearly formulated or pressed very hard.

The third charge was that he corrupted the youth, again, a vague charge for which Socrates even requested clarification from the prosecutor, Maletus who had no choice but to concede that it was related to Socrates teachings regarding the first two charges.<sup>47</sup> He was thus accused of having a subversive influence on the minds of young men, in spite of the fact that no witnesses were ever brought forth to substantiate this last accusation. His obedience to the Gods was, however, steadfast for they had sent him to the city for its good.<sup>48</sup> He was not doing it for personal reasons and denied that he was a teacher or that he was remunerated, but to no avail.

Perhaps, his association with men who had been most prominent in attacks on democracy in Athens could not be forgiven. Or, perhaps, the potential danger that critical thinking represented for the class of the rhetorician, the sophists, and the jurists could not be tolerated. In any case, it remains an open issue. This, however, would be where the religious and the political converge.

### Accusations against Suhrawardî

The jurists of Aleppo succeed in bringing against Suhrawardî similar charges of irreligiosity which were to find their way into Ibn Shaddâd's (d. 684 / 1285) biography of Ṣalâḥ al-Dîn as being the real cause of Suhrawardî's execution, namely, of "not recognizing the ordinances of Islamic laws, and of paying no regard to the doctrines of the faith."<sup>49</sup> No details are provided

<sup>45</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 31c7-d5

<sup>46</sup> Bridkhous and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 34-6. Maletus' (a poet) accusation was countersigned by Anytus (a politician) and Lycon (a rhetorician).

<sup>47</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 26b2-6; cf. Bridkhous and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 36-7.

<sup>48</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 29c.

<sup>49</sup> Ibn Shaddâd (Bahâ' al-Dîn Yûsuf Ibn Râfi'), *Nawâdir al-Sultâniyya wa al-Mahâsin al-Yûsufiyya* (Cairo: al-Dâr al-Miṣriyya lil-Ta'lif wal-Tarjuman, 1964), 10; cf. Idem, *Ṣalâḥ; or, What Befell Sultan Yûsuf* (Ṣalâḥ ed-Dîn). (1137-1193 A.D.), trans. Sir Charles W. Wilson, compared with the original Arabic and annotated by Conder (London: Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund, 1897), 10-1; cf. Ibn Jawzî (d. 654 / 1256), *al-Muntazim fi Târikh al-Mulûk wa al-Umam*.

of the true nature of the accusations laid against Suhrawardî, and there is no mention of any political activities or political reasons. The *Bustân al-Jâmi'* of 'Imâd al-Dîn al-Işfahânî, a work known to Shams al-Dîn al-Shahrazûrî and written only a few years after the tragic event, is the only work that contains, in some details, an account of the probable course of the trial:

And all the jurists gathered and had an assembly convened for him. Amongst all of his works, there was an exegetical work of the Qur'ân based on his own opinion (*ra'y*), a book which he entitled *al-Raḡm al-Qudsî*, and another book which was said to belong to him, the *al-Alwâḥ al-'Imâdiyya* that were used against him in the dispute. They did not know, however, what to say to him regarding jurisprudence (*'ilm al-uşûl*). They said to him, 'You said in your works that God is able to create a Prophet, whereas this is impossible.' Then, he said to them, 'There is no limit to His divine foreordainment. Isn't He the All-mighty? If He wills something, it cannot be impossible.' They said, 'Indeed.' He said, 'So, God is capable of all things.' They said, 'Except the creation of a Prophet, since it is impossible.' He said, 'So, is it impossible absolutely or not?' They said, 'You have indeed become an infidel (*kaffartā*).' They then construed grounds [for his condemnation], because, on the whole, he was lacking in reason – though not in knowledge – and amongst [all the signs of his lack of reason] was that he called his [own] soul 'inspired by the world of Malakût (*rûḥ al-mu'ayyad bîl-malakût*).'<sup>50</sup>

In this passage, 'Imâd al-Dîn al-Işfahânî mentions four important elements. First, he notes that jurisprudence (*'ilm al-uşûl*) was not used against Suhrawardî. Those who were accusing him were the ones whom he had surpassed in disputation upon his arrival in Aleppo (at the al-Ḥalâwiyya madrasa). Having had wind of Suhrawardî's intellectual abilities, al-Malik al-Zâhir is said to have convened a gathering of jurists and theologians of all schools of jurisprudence in the citadel where, again, Suhrawardî gained the upper hand over the religious leaders of Aleppo with his proofs and logical demonstrations and for which al-Malik al-Zâhir took a liking to him.<sup>51</sup> The ulamas knew very well that they were no match for him in this field.

Second, al-Işfahânî notes that three of Suhrawardî's works were used against him: a Qur'anic exegesis, a work entitled *al-Raḡm al-Qudsî*, and his

<sup>50</sup> 'Imâd al-Dîn al-Işfahânî, *Bustân al-Jâmi' li-Jamâ' Tawârikh al-Zamân*, ed. Claude Cahen, "Une chronique syrienne du VIe/XIIe siècle: le *Bustân al-Jâmi'*," *Bulletin d'Études Orientales* 7-8 (1937-38): 113-58, esp. 150-1.

<sup>51</sup> Yâqût (Ibn 'Abd Allah al-Hamawî), *Muḡam al-Uḍabâ' li-Yâqût*, 20 vols., ed. Aḥmad Farîd Rifâ'î Bak (Cairo: Dâr al-Ma'mûn, 1936-8), vol. 19, 314-20, esp. 315 [the Arabic translation is by Yahyâ Ibn Khâlid Ibn Barmak]; cf. Ibn Abî Uşaybi'a, *Uyûn al-Anbâ' fi Ṭabaqât al-Atibbâ'*, ed. Nizâr Riḍâ (Beirut: Dâr Maktabat al-Ḥayâh, 1965), 644.



*al-Alwâḥ al-ʿImâdiyya*. The Qurʾanic exegesis, mentioned in Shams al-Dīn al-Shahrazûrî's (fl. 680 / 1282) bibliography of Suhrawardî's works, is now lost. The two other works used against him do indeed carry the hallmark of highly suspicious non-Islamic traditions that could easily bring on charges of heretical beliefs (*zandaqa*). The accusation of holding heretical beliefs (and of heresy (*ilhād*) in some sources)<sup>52</sup> is most revealing. A vague term, *zandaqa* could encompass any type of irreligiosity, but especially teachings associated with ancient pre-Islamic Iranian religions and teachings that minimized revelation and the prophetic role of Muḥammad.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, Suhrawardî is unconcerned with the "orthodoxy" of the source of divine knowledge. In his *Safīr-i Sîmurgh*, he has no qualms in reporting side-by-side sayings attributed to ʿUmar and to ʿAlī, regarding the possibility of vision of the divine. From ʿUmar, he reports, "My heart has seen my Lord," and from ʿAlī, he reports, "If the veil had been lifted, my certitude would not have been greater,"<sup>54</sup> although his biographers have all reported that he was a Shāfiʿī and, therefore, a Sunnī.<sup>55</sup>

More incriminating, however, is his appeal to the teachings of Ancient Iran. *al-Raḡm* (or *al-Raḡīm*) *al-Qudsī* used against Suhrawardî may actually correspond to *al-Wâridât wa al-Taḡdīsât*. Although *al-Wâridât wa al-Taḡdīsât* includes numerous Qurʾanic verses and explicitly professes unicity, this work does include numerous Zoroastrian (Gnostic and Neoplatonic) elements.<sup>56</sup> In these *al-Wâridât*, one finds the God of gods

<sup>52</sup> Ibn Khallikân, *Wafayât al-Aʿyân wa Abnâʾ al-Zamân*, 8 vols., ed. Iḥsân ʿAbbâs (Beirut: Dâr Sâdir, 1977), vol. 6, 272 and 273; ; cf. Idem, *Ibn Khallikan's Biographical*, vol. 4, 156 and 158.

<sup>53</sup> Pouzet, *Damas au VIIe / XIIIe siècle*, 255-60.

<sup>54</sup> Suhrawardî, *Safīr-i Sîmurgh*, 4, 317.5-14.; cf. Idem, *L'Archange empourpré*, 452.

<sup>55</sup> Yâqût, *Muʿjam al-Udabâʾ lil-Yâqût*, vol. 19, 314.; cf. Ibn Khallikân, *Wafayât al-Aʿyân*, vol. 6, 272; cf. Idem, *Ibn Khallikan's Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 4, 156.

<sup>56</sup> Landolt, "Suhrawardî's "Tales of Initiation," 481a-482b. Corbin, reading *al-Raḡīm al-Qudsī*, also believes that this work may correspond to *al-Wâridât*, cf. Corbin, "Prolégomènes," in Suhrawardî, OPM, I, VI n.9. Regarding what Corbin has called Suhrawardî's *Book of Hours*, cf. Suhrawardî, "Strophes liturgiques et offices divins (*Wâridât wa Taḡdīsât*). Extraits traduits de l'arabe," chap. in Idem, *L'Archange empourpré*, 473-512 (the translation, 48-98; cf. Corbin, *En islam iranien*, vol. 2, 126-40) which Thackston believes is still unpublished (!), cf. Suhrawardî, *The Philosophical Allegories and Mystical Treatises. A Parallel Persian-English Text*, ed. and trans. with into. by W. M. Thackston (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Pub., 1999), xiv; cf. the fragment entitled *Wajhah-yi ʿUlîyâ-yi Ilâhî*, ed. M. Moʿin in *Majallah-yi Âmuzish va Parvarish* (Tehran, 1924); reprinted in Suhrawardî, *Sih Risâlah az Shaykh-i Ishraq. al-Alwâḥ al-ʿImâdiyya. Kalimat al-Taṣawwuf*.

assimilated to Ohrmaz (Ahura Mazda of the Avesta), and the "divine spirit," i.e., Gabriel, assimilated to the Zoroastrian angel Serosh-light (Sraoshad of the Avesta). In addition, Suhrawardî includes a number of Zoroastrian arch-angels such as Bahman-light (Vohu-Mana of the Avesta) and Shahrivar (Xshathra Vairiya of the Avesta), the third of the Amahraspands.<sup>57</sup> The Zoroastrian stamp of these *al-Wâridât* is further attested by the fact that they have become part of the liturgy of the Zoroastrians under the leadership of their grand priest Azar Kayvân who emigrated (from Shîrâz or its surroundings) to Moghul India in the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> or the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>58</sup>

Chapters 10 and 11 of *al-Alwâh al-Imâdiyya*, another work cited against Suhrawardî, appeal once more to ancient Iranian traditions. Suhrawardî describes Hurakhsh, the conqueror of darkness, the "face" of God on whose order he provides light and creates days. He is the "Light of light" in the world of bodies, parallel to the first being who is the "Light of light" in the world of intelligences and souls.<sup>59</sup> In addition, *al-Alwâh al-Imâdiyya* incorporates numerous themes from Firdawsî's *Shâh-nâma* and a number of pre-Islamic figures such as Goshtasp, Feredin, Afrâsiâb and the royal light of glory (*kayân khurra*)?.<sup>60</sup>

It should be noted that a century after Suhrawardî's death, the theme of a return to ancient Iran was taken up by one of his followers. A telling example is the symbolic return of the Mongol Ýl-Khân Abâqâ to Ancient Iran and the use of esoteric themes (taken from Firdawsî's *Shâh-nâma*) for the construction of his summer palace at what is today known as Takht-i Sulaymân. Ýl-Khân Abâqâ wanted to rebuild the palace of Kay Khusruw on the ancient Sassanid site of the sanctuary of Shîz in Âzarbâyjân (South of Marâgha) where newly crowned kings made their pilgrimage. This project

*al-Lamahât*, ed. with Persian intro. Najaf-Ghulî Habîbî, Engl. preface Seyyed Hossein Nasr (Tehran: Intishârât-i Anjuman-i Shâhanshâhî-yi Falsafah-yi Irân, 1397 / 1977), 18 n.1 (of the introduction).

<sup>57</sup> Suhrawardî, *al-Wâridât wa al-Taqdîsât*, in Idem, *L'Archange empourpré*, 487, 490.

<sup>58</sup> Corbin, *En islam iranien*, vol. 2, 355-7, 258; cf. Sayyid Muḥammad Kâzîm Imâmî, *Falsafah dar Irân-i Bâstân va Mabâdî' Hikmat al-Isrâq va Afkâr va Âthâr va Târikhchah-yi Zindigânî-yi Suhrawardî* (Tehran: Sikkah, 1353 / 1974).

<sup>59</sup> Suhrawardî, *Alwâh-i Imâdiyya*, in Idem, OPM, III, 90-2, 182.2-184.11; cf. Idem, *L'Archange empourpré*, 108-10.

<sup>60</sup> Suhrawardî, *Alwâh-i Imâdiyya*, in Idem, OPM, III, 93-5, 184.12-188.4; cf. Idem, *L'Archange empourpré*, 110-3.



was instigated by none other than Quṭb al-Dīn (Maḥmūd Ibn Mas'ūd) al-Shīrāzī, a commentor of Suhrawardī's *Hikmat al-Ishrāq* (the commentary was finished in 694 / 1295).<sup>61</sup>

Appealing to traditions of ancient Iran, Suhrawardī's works exhibited dualistic tendencies. The whole idea of light, important in Gnostic circles, is central to Suhrawardī's light ontology. Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728 / 1328) noted that Suhrawardī's light ontology shared much with Zoroastrianism and that it was responsible for the charges of *zandaqa* that were brought against him.<sup>62</sup> In his *Āwāz-i Par-i Gībrā'il*, Suhrawardī's two-winged angel may be interpreted as an allusion to "Gnostic dualism." Moreover, the two-winged angel may be associated with the two-faceted nature of the second emanation found in al-Sijistānī's (Ismā'īlī) universal soul, an idea that may have originated in Gnosticism.<sup>63</sup> Gnosticism may certainly be traced to parallel developments originating in Ancient Persia's religious traditions,<sup>64</sup> or to Hermetic (Egyptian) traditions that were introduced into the Islamic world.<sup>65</sup> Further Gnostic elements are found in Suhrawardī's conception of the human soul as the "guiding light" (*nūr mudabbir*), as opposed to the "tenebrous substance" (*jawhar ghāsiq*) of sublunary matter.<sup>66</sup> Human souls are to return to their place of origin: the realm of pure light. As such, Suhrawardī also shares much with someone like the Sufi Najm al-Dīn Kubrā (d. 717 / 1221).<sup>67</sup>

<sup>61</sup> A. S. Melikian-Chirvani, "Le *Shāh-nāme*, la gnose soufie et le pouvoir mongol," *Journal Asiatique* 272.3-4 (1984), 249-337.

<sup>62</sup> Henri Laoust, *Les schismes dans l'islam. Introduction à une étude de la religion musulmane* (Paris: Payot, 1965), 231.

<sup>63</sup> Landolt, "Suhrawardī's 'Tales of Initiation,' Review Article," 482b, 483a; cf. Rudolf Macuch, "Greek and Oriental Sources of Avicenna's and Suhrawardī's Theosophies," *Graeco-Arabica* 2 (1983): 9-22.

<sup>64</sup> Henry Corbin, *Les motifs zoroastriens dans la philosophie de Suhrawardī, shaykh al-Ishrāq* (ob. 587 / 1191), foreward M. Pouré-Davoud (Téhéran: Éditions du Courrier, 1325 / 1946).

<sup>65</sup> Corbin, *En islam iranien*, v. 2, 24-6; cf. A. E. Affifi, "The Influence of Hermetic Literature on Moslem Thought," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African School* 13.4 (1951): 840-55.

<sup>66</sup> Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, 109-11, 107.9-109.16 and *Ibid*, 129, 121.8-122.11 [Hereafter, OPM, II]; cf. Suhrawardī, *Sagesse*, 99-101 and 112-3.

<sup>67</sup> Landolt, "Suhrawardī's 'Tales of Initiation,' Review Article," 481a; cf. Henry Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, trans. N. Pierson (Boulder - London: Shambhala, 1978).

Third, al-Iṣfahânî reports the more incriminating accusation of claiming that prophecy was still possible, if it was something willed by God. Suhrawardî argued rationally about the orthodox claim that Muḥammad is the Seal of Prophecy. On the doctrinal level, however, the consequence of his answer was a rejection of the absolute character of Muḥammad's prophetic revelation. One should not forget that Suhrawardî believed that divine lights, to which all prophets had an access, remain accessible to those who truly engage in the pursuit of wisdom (intuitive knowledge).

The fourth and final accusation brought against Suhrawardî was that he described his soul as "inspired by the World of Malakût." In a sense, he was accused of claiming to receive spiritual assistance (*ta'yîd*). This could easily have been, again, interpreted as an Ismâ'îlî position that can be traced back to the works of such thinkers as Ḥamîd al-Dîn Kirmânî (d. 417 / 1021) or Nâṣir Khrusraw (d. ca. 470 / 1077), the latter frequently referring to the *ahl-i ta'yîd*, a term by which the *da'wah* referred itself.<sup>68</sup>

Of all these accusations, the second and the fourth appear to allude to Suhrawardî's conception of the universality of wisdom (*ḥikmah*) and to the possibility of accessing this divine knowledge through various means – whether prophetic or mystical. This would certainly have qualified Suhrawardî as a holder of heretical beliefs. Similarly, the third charge would place Suhrawardî outside the realm of strict orthodoxy. In short, Suhrawardî and Socrates thus share in common their unorthodox views with respect to the prevalent views of Athens and of Aleppo and the potential danger they represented for Athenians and Aleppans.

## Two Tragic Ends

Once Socrates' death sentence was handed down, its execution was delayed on account of the religious calendar. During this period, Socrates refused to flee (following Criton's advice) and continued to hold gatherings with his friends.<sup>69</sup> Socrates' *daimonion*, as he himself states,<sup>70</sup> did not sound an "alarm" at the prospect of the tragic outcome of the trial. He resiliently concluded that his own death would not be an evil.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, he believed that "it would be wrong to disobey God's commands through

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<sup>68</sup> Landolt, "Suhrawardî's "Tales of Initiation," Review Article," 482b.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Plato, *Phaedo*.

<sup>70</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 40a3-c3.

<sup>71</sup> Bridkhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 237-57, esp. 238-41.



fear of death,"<sup>72</sup> obeying willingly God, rather than the Athenians.<sup>73</sup> He continued to hold gatherings with his disciples and friends and, thirty days later, he drank the deadly hemlock.

It was similarly argued that Suhrawardî did not flee and seek refuge in a safer place, in spite of threats upon his life.<sup>74</sup> But was he in a position to flee? According to some accounts, he was sent to prison, after being accused of impiety by the ulamas, and before having his death sentence issued.<sup>75</sup> If this was the case, he would not have been able to escape the execution. Biographical accounts do not allude to any similar Socratic drama, where Suhrawardî would have willingly accepted his fate as a just end. In addition, reports on the events surrounding the exact nature of his death are highly contradictory. Shahrâzûrî notes that the real cause of his death is uncertain. Some sources report that he died deprived of food, that he starved himself to death, still others, that he was strangled, and others that he was killed with a sword or, more tragically, that he was thrown off the walls of the citadel and set on fire, even crucified, like Ḥallâj.<sup>76</sup>

### Socratic Prototype of the Sage

Throughout history, the most pervasive image of Socrates has been that of the prototype of the sage (*ḥakîm*).<sup>77</sup> This is certainly true of the

<sup>72</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 28e.

<sup>73</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 29d.

<sup>74</sup> Christian Jambet in his introduction to Sohravardî, *Sagesse*, 53.

<sup>75</sup> Ibn Shaddâd, *al-Nawâdir al-Sultânîyya*, 10; cf. Idem, *'Saladin'; or, What Befell Sultan Yûsuf*, 10-1; cf. Ibn Abî Usaybi'a, *Uyûn*, 642.

<sup>76</sup> Marcotte, "Suhrawardî al-Maqtûl," 395-419; cf. Shams al-Dîn al-Shahrâzûrî, *Nuzhat al-Arwâḥ wa Rawḍat al-Afrâḥ*, eds. by Otto Spies and S. K. Khatad, in *Three Treatises on Mysticism by Shihabuddin Suhrawardi Maqtul* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1935), vol. 1, 90-121, esp. 98; cf. Idem, *Târikh al-Ḥukamâ'* "Nuzhat al-Arwâḥ wa Rawḍat al-Afrâḥ", ed. Abû Shuwârab (no place: Jam'iyyat al-Da'wa al-Islâmiyya, 1397 / 1988), 375-96, esp. 380; cf. the Persian trans. of Maqṣûd 'Alî Tabrizî, intro. Muḥammad Taqî Dânish-Pazhûh and Muḥammad Surûr Mawlâ'î (Tehran: Intishârât-i 'Ilmî va Farhangî, 1366 / 1987) 484-74, esp. 461. Another Persian translation, made by Diyâ' al-Dîn Durî (Tehran, 1317 / 1938), is reported by Nasr, who used the latter for his study, cf. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages. Avicenna - Suhrawardî - Ibn 'Arabi* (Delmar, NY: Caravan Books, 1969), 56; cf. Yâqût, *Mu'jam*, vol 19, 316; cf. Ibn Shaddâd, *Nawâdir*, 10; cf. Idem, *'Saladin'; or, What Befell Sultan Yûsuf*, 11; cf. Ibn Khallikân, *Wafayât al-A'yân*, vol. 6, 273; cf. *Ibn Khallikan's, Biographical Dictionary*, vol. 4, 157-8.

<sup>77</sup> This image found its way into Stoicism, Skepticism, and the humanism of Cicero, before its introduction into Christendom (Ficin).

Arabo-Persian world whose knowledge of Socrates' thought was very fragmentary and mostly indirect.<sup>78</sup> There does not appear to have been any kind of familiarity with Plato's dialogues. As a consequence, Socratic maieutic is almost completely absent in Arabic and Persian sources. By the same token, Socrates' death was known only via quotations, perhaps mainly from treatises with Socrates' name that consisted of wise sayings, biographical stories, and excerpts from Plato's *Apology*. In the same fashion, Suhrawardî's knowledge of Socrates, as well as of Plato was, therefore, fragmentary and indirect.<sup>79</sup> Nonetheless, the place and the role attributed to Socrates provide a glimpse into Suhrawardî's conception of the history of philosophy or, more accurately, of the history of illumination of divine lights. Although Plato appears more prominently in Suhrawardî's works (for which he even provides a quote<sup>80</sup>) than Socrates, Suhrawardî's two-fold origin of the sources and transmitters of divine knowledge does include Socrates.

For Suhrawardî, individuals have, of all time, been inspired by the metaphysical world of light. The common denominator between all true sages is their ability to have direct vision (*mushâhada*) of divine lights. Suhrawardî mentions that these are the lights that Hermes and Plato contemplated,<sup>81</sup> the "source of the light of glory" (*khurra*) which instructed Zarathoustra and Kay Khusraw, and to which even Empedocles alluded.<sup>82</sup> Suhrawardî and his disciples, in fact, conceived of Greek and Persian sages in a distinctively Neoplatonic manner, such that Plato, Socrates and their predecessors were capable, like prophets, to access the divine world.<sup>83</sup> Mystical intuition is at the heart of their noble philosophy of light, resembling the Greek Pythagorean and Platonist traditions. Shahrazûrî notes that only a few sages contemplated these divine lights, among whom were those who preceded Aristotle (*Imâm al-baḥṭh*) – including Socrates and Plato – and who pursued intuitive as well as discursive knowledge, a characteris-

<sup>78</sup> Ilai Alon, *Socrates in Medieval Arabic Literature* (Leiden-Jerusalem: E. J. Brill, 1991); cf. Yves Marquet, "Socrate et les Ikhwân as-Safa," *Journal Asiatique* 286.2 (1998): 409-49.

<sup>79</sup> Walbridge, *The Leaven of the Ancients*, 88-90 and 96.

<sup>80</sup> Suhrawardî, *al-Talwîḥât*, 86, 112.6-10.

<sup>81</sup> Suhrawardî, *Hikmat al-Ishrâq*, 165, 156.3-6; cf. Idem, *Sagesse*, 150.

<sup>82</sup> Suhrawardî, *Hikmat al-Ishrâq*, 166, 156.11-157.3; cf. Idem, *Sagesse*, 151; cf. Idem, *Alwâh-i 'Imâdiyya*, in OPM, III, 93, 185.14-187.9; cf. Idem, *L'Archange empourpré*, 111-2.

<sup>83</sup> Corbin notes that Illuminationists (*ishrâqiyyûn*) were the best instructors of what he identifies as an "Islamic Hellenism," cf. *Sohrawardî, L'Archange empourpré*, 95.



tic that sets them apart from prophets and mystics.<sup>84</sup>

Socrates, therefore, partakes in this spiritual lineage of sages that have, throughout history, accessed this world of light. Sages, like prophets, belong to all nations and all epochs, whether from the West (Greece, Mesopotamia, or Egypt) or the East (Persia or even Hind), or from the three prophetic traditions.<sup>85</sup> Suhrawardî can then bring together, side by side, Plato, Zarathoustra (Zoroaster), mystics and prophets. Moreover, Suhrawardî adduces a Qur'anic verse (Q., 7:159) to corroborate the fact that there exists "a community guided by the Truth" and which he associates with all ancient Persian rulers and sages (not the *majûs*) that were guided by these divine lights.<sup>86</sup> They were all capable of visions, similar to Plotinus' and Zarathoustra's ecstasy, Hermes' vision, or the Prophet's *mi'râj*,<sup>87</sup> and similar to Suhrawardî's own vision of a Plotinian Aristotle that instructed him about the essence of knowledge.<sup>88</sup> Suhrawardî writes:

Most indications of prophets, and of the pillars of wisdom refer to these [lights]. Plato and those before him, like Socrates, and those who have preceded them like Hermes, Agathadaemon and Empedocles, have all had this vision. Most of them have explicitly declared that they have contemplated (*shâhada*) them in the world of light.<sup>89</sup>

Suhrawardî's Socrates clearly partakes in this spiritual genealogy of prophets, sages, and mystics capable of contemplating the world of light. Illuminationists (*ishrâqiyyûn*) such as Quṭb al-Dîn al-Shîrâzî, Shams al-Dîn al-Shahrazûrî (who even provides a quote from Socrates<sup>90</sup>), or Wadûd al-

<sup>84</sup> Shahrazûrî, *Sharḥ Hikmat al-Ishrâq*, in OPM, II, 2-8; cf. "Préface" in Suhrawardî, *Sagesse*, 77-84, esp. 80. Extracts are edited in Otto Spies, ed., *Three Treatises on Mysticism by Shihabuddin Suhrawardi Maqtul*, 90-121; cf. Suhrawardî, *The philosophical Allegories and Mystical Treatises. A Parallel Persian-English Text*, ed., trans. and intro. W.M. Thackston (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Pub., 1999), ix-xiii.

<sup>85</sup> Suhrawardî, *Hikmat al-Ishrâq*, 165, 156.3-6; cf. Idem, *Sagesse*, 150.

<sup>86</sup> Suhrawardî, *Kalimat al-Şûfiyya*, 55, 117.12-5; cf. Idem, *L'Archange empourpré*, 170.

<sup>87</sup> Suhrawardî, *al-Talwihât*, 86-7, 113.2-9; cf. Shahrazûrî's preface to his *Sharḥ-i Hikmat al-Ishrâq*, in Suhrawardî, *Sagesse*, 241 n.28 and 242 n.29.

<sup>88</sup> For a translation of the account found in Suhrawardî's *al-Talwihât*, cf. "Appendix II. Suhrawardî's Dream of Aristotle," in Walbridge, *The Leaven of the Ancients*, 225-9; cf. the Plotinian vision found in the *Enneads*, IV, 8, 1.

<sup>89</sup> Suhrawardî, *Hikmat al-Ishrâq*, 165, 156.3-5; cf. Idem, *Sagesse*, 150.

<sup>90</sup> Shahrazûrî, *Sharḥ Hikmat al-Ishrâq*, in Suhrawardî, *Sagesse*, 238 n.9; cf. *Ibid.*, 242 n.31, 243 n.32, 253 n.48.

Tabrizī<sup>91</sup> have all included Socrates among the sages who were inspired by the world of divine lights and, in a sense, have made him divine (*muta'allih*).

### Philosophy of History – Transmission of “wisdom”

Suhrawardī's conception of history consists of the history of direct personal experiences of the world of divine lights.<sup>92</sup> Revelational and mystical experiences of exceptional individuals in their quest for knowledge – wisdom (*ḥikmat*) – become the yardsticks of humanity's progress. In the Islamic world, transmission of knowledge generally occurs genealogically, for instance, the model of mystical genealogies (master-disciple relationship), or orally, on the model of hadith literature. Suhrawardī appears to allude to a similar process in his understanding of the transmission of this divine knowledge for which mystical genealogies certainly provided a model, hence, the importance of mystics who are equally able to access the world of light such as Ḥallāj, described as one of the spiritual leaders or poles,<sup>93</sup> or Abū Yazīd Baṣṭāmī and Sahl Tustarī (disciple of Dhū al-Nūn al-Miṣrī)<sup>94</sup> and Junayd and Shiblī.<sup>95</sup> In a similar fashion, Shahrāzūrī alludes to an oral transmission of knowledge that, again, does not differ significantly from the disciple-master relationship: Plato – the seal of sages (*khātim al-ḥikmat al-dhawqiyya*) – received this knowledge from Socrates, Socrates from Pythagoras, Pythagoras from Empedocles, and so on until Agathadaemon (i.e., Seth, the son of Adam) and Hermes (or the prophet

<sup>91</sup>Wadūd (Ibn Muḥammad) Tabrizī's commentary (finished in 930 / 1524) on Suhrawardī's *al-Alwāḥ al-ʿImādiyya* brings together Ḥallāj, Socrates, Plato, al-Jawharī (in his *Ṣaḥḥāḥ*) and ʿAbd al-Qādir Gīlī's (account of Ḥallāj), cf. Corbin, *L'Archange empourpré*, 118-9 n.13 (ms. Rāgib, 853); cf. Suhrawardī, *Alwāḥ-i ʿImādiyya*, in OPM, III, 26, 128.10-4; Idem, *L'Archange empourpré*, 102 and 118 n.13.

<sup>92</sup>For Suhrawardī's account of Greek philosophy, cf. Walbridge, *The Leaven of the Ancients*, 27-35, esp. 30-1.

<sup>93</sup>Suhrawardī, *Lughat-i Mūrān*, in OPM, III, 294-311, esp. 5, 297.1-3 and 18, 302, 1-4; cf. Idem, *Safir-i Šimurgh*, in OPM, III, 13, 328.6-9.

<sup>94</sup>Suhrawardī, *Talwīḥāt* in OPM, I, 55, 70.1-74.8; Idem, *I'tiqād* in OPM, II, 7, 267.1-2; Idem, *Ḥālat al-Ṭufūliyya*, in OPM, III, 9, 259.8-10; cf. Idem, *L'Archange empourpré*, 399; cf. Idem, *The Philosophical Allegories and Mystical Treatises*, 50.; cf. Idem, *Risālat al-Abrāj*, in OPM, III, 461-71, esp., 16, 465.17-8. A work attributed to Suhrawardī also contains references to these mystics, cf. Idem, *Bustān al-Qulūb*, 52, 370.9-12 and 60, 377.1-2.

<sup>95</sup>Suhrawardī, *Partū-nāma*, in OPM, III, 2-81, esp. 87, 75.15-76.4; cf. Idem, *The Book of Radiance. A Parallel English-Persian Text*, ed. and trans. with an intro. by Hossein Ziai (Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Pub., 1998), 79-80.



Idrīs).<sup>96</sup>

History, however, is not unidirectional. Transmission of this knowledge was interrupted, such that only those who have access to the world of light can revive this divine knowledge. Suhrawardī writes: "It is their noble and illuminated wisdom, to which the spiritual experiences of Plato and his predecessors among the sages are also witness, and which we have brought to life again in our book called *Hʿikmat al-Ishrāq*."<sup>97</sup> Among the predecessors of Plato, Socrates figures preeminently. Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī's (d. 547 / 1152) similar concept of history, found in his *al-Mu'tabar fī al-Hʿikma*, presents the history of philosophy in terms of its oral transmission.<sup>98</sup> With the appearance of the written text, in order to save this perennial and divine knowledge from extinction, these truths and realities were veiled behind obscure symbols. The teachings of these philosophers became distorted, corrupted, and their true meaning was eventually lost.<sup>99</sup>

At about the time of al-Fārābī (d. 339 / 950), Abū al-Ḥasan al-ʿĀmīrī (d. 381 / 992) presented a similar concept of history as an oral transmission of knowledge characterized by its use of symbols. Al-ʿĀmīrī portrayed a

<sup>96</sup>Shahrazūri, *Sharḥ Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, in Suhrawardī, *Sagesse*, 242-3 n.31 and 253 n.46 and n.48. For an attempt at classification of the western and eastern traditions, cf. Seyyid Hossein Nasr, "Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī," in Idem, *The Islamic Intellectual Tradition in Persia*, ed. Mehdi Amin Razavi (Richmond, UK: Curzon, Press, 1996), 125-153; cf. Suhrawardī's more complex intellectual genealogy in Walbridge, *The Leaven of the Ancients*, 29-31; cf. Shahrazūri's commentary in OPM, II, 301.18-20; cf. Suhrawardī, *al-Mu'tarahāt*, in OPM, I, 223, 502.13-503. 6, where he mentions Plato.

<sup>97</sup>Suhrawardī, *Kalimat al-Ṣūfiyya*, 55, 117.12-5; cf. Idem, *L'Archange empourpré*, 170; cf. Corbin, *Les Motifs zoroastriens dans la philosophie de Suhrawardī*, 24; cf. Shahrazūri, *Sharḥ Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, in Suhrawardī, *Sagesse*, 81-2; cf. Corbin, *En Islam iranien*, vol. 2, 29.

<sup>98</sup>Plato's use of symbols is reported in Shahrazūri's *Nuzhat al-Arwāḥ*, ed. Aḥmad, vol. 1, 170; cf. Ibid., ed. Abū Rayyān, 90; cf. Walbridge, *The Leaven of the Ancients*, 90. Regarding Plato's unwritten doctrines, cf. J.N. Findlay, *Plato: The Written and Unwritten Doctrines* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974) and Hans J. Kraemer, *Plato and the Foundations of Metaphysics: A Work on the Theory of the Principles and Unwritten Doctrines of Plato*, ed. and trans. John R. Catan (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1990).

<sup>99</sup>Abū al-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, *Kitāb al-Mu'tabar fī al-Hikma*, ed. Yalṭkaya Şerefeddin, 3 vols. (Haydarābād: Jam'iyyat Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif al-'Uthmāniyya, 1357 / 1938-9), vol. 1, 2.7-2.17; cf. Shlomo Pines, "Nouvelles études sur Awhād al-Zamān Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī," in Idem, *Studies in Abū'l-Barakāt al-Baghdādī, Physics and Metaphysics*—vol. 1 of *The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines* (5 vols.) (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University; Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1979), 96-108.

succession of philosophers that went back to the legendary Luqmân, who was succeeded by Empedocles (a student of Luqmân and / or David), then by Pythagoras (a student of Empedocles and Solomon, or Solomon's students in Egypt), then by Socrates (a student of Pythagoras) and, finally, by Plato who was influenced by both Socrates and Pythagoras.<sup>100</sup> The importance of the use of symbols in the history of the transmission of knowledge is equally important for Suhrawardî who writes that:

This science is the very intuition of the inspired and illuminated Plato, the guide and master of philosophy, and of those who came before him, up to Plato's time, including such mighty pillars of philosophy as Empedocles, Pythagoras, and others. The words of the Ancients are symbolic and not open to refutation.<sup>101</sup>

For Suhrawardî, intuitive knowledge – in part, inspirational and, at times, revelational – was only expressed symbolically, a position that could only be the cause of further suspicion for the ulemas of Aleppo.<sup>102</sup>

Suhrawardî's account of the place and the role of Socrates in the history of "illumination" is not an accurate understanding of the history of Greek thought. It corresponds to a later Islamic reconstruction. Moreover, Suhrawardî's portrayal of Socrates appears to be at odds with Socrates' own claims. This may be illustrated by taking into consideration two aspects of Socrates' life: the Delphic oracle and Socrates' *daimonion*. At the Delphic sanctuary, the Pythia (priestess) informed Chaerephon that Socrates is the wisest of mortals.<sup>103</sup> Socrates interpreted the Delphic oracle as the sign of a divine mission for his life, deciding to pursue a life of virtue and

<sup>100</sup> For example, al-Âmirî's mention of Plato's use of symbols, cf. Abû al-Hasan al-Âmirî, *Kitâb al-Amad 'alâ al-Abad* in Everett K. Rowson, *A Muslim Philosopher on the Soul and Its Fate* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1988), 70; cf. Walbridge, *The Leaven of the Ancients*, 33-4.; cf. Ibn Juljul (d. 987), *Ṭabaqât al-Aṭibbâ' wa al-Ḥukamâ'*, ed. Fu'âd Sayyid (Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale, 1955), 42-3. A similar account found its way into Ibn Khaldûn's work, cf. Ibn Khaldûn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958), vol. 3, 114-5; cf. Idem, *Muqaddimat al-'Allama Ibn Khaldûn*, 4th ed. (Beirut: Dâr al-Kitâb al-'Ilmiyya, 1978), 480.

<sup>101</sup> Suhrawardî, *Hikmat al-Ishrâq*, 4, 10.11-15; cf. Idem, *Sagesse*, 88; cf. Idem, *al-Talwihât*, 86, 112.2-3.

<sup>102</sup> Not only prophets, but also sages, cf. Shahrazûrî's preface to his *Sharḥ Hikmat al-Ishrâq*, in Suhrawardî, *Sagesse*, 243 n.32.

<sup>103</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 21a; cf. Xenophon, *Apology*, 14.



to seek "to know thyself."<sup>104</sup> But what was the nature of the Delphic oracle? The oracle was certainly not an inspiration coming from the world of light that revealed the essence of true knowledge to Socrates in a fashion similar to Suhrawardî's Plotinian Aristotle. The oracle was communicated to his friend. As for the care of the self (of the soul), as an embodiment of the "know thyself" that became the focal point of Socrates teachings, it constituted the prerequisite for a good life and belonged, first and foremost, to the ethical, rather than the mystical, or even the religious realm.<sup>105</sup>

The second aspect of Socrates' life is his *daimonion*, described as a sign that always acted as a divine monitor, a "voice from God" (most probably Apollo)<sup>106</sup> that consisted in an alarm that warned him against doing anything wrong. Although Socrates believed in different forms of divination, such as oracles and dreams,<sup>107</sup> some even requiring interpretations,<sup>108</sup> his *daimonion* was characterized by its "uninformativeness."<sup>109</sup> It did not instruct Socrates regarding the nature of knowledge and, once more, appears to be distinct from Suhrawardî's understanding of divine illumination. Suhrawardî's horizon was primarily metaphysical, while Socrates' metaphysical horizon appears to be characterized by an absence of illumination in the Suhrawardian sense. Socrates' metaphysical horizon is best understood in light of its ethical finality.

Suhrawardî's concept of history has repercussions on the doctrinal level. True knowledge about reality is achieved through either discursive (*baḥṭhiyya*) means (the approach of al-Fârâbî (d. 339 / 950) and Avicenna (d. 429 / 1037) ) or through intuitive means, what Suhrawardî regards as the "experiential" (*dhawqiyya*) and the "presential" (*ḥudûrî*), the latter having priority over discursive means. Suhrawardî does not, however, limit

<sup>104</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 21b and *Ibid.*, 23 b.

<sup>105</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 23b-29e; cf. *Ibid.*, 30d-e and 30a; cf. Plato, *First Alcibiades*.

<sup>106</sup> Socrates refers, at times, to Apollo, cf. Plato, *Apology*, 29d; sometimes, he appeal to gods, in the plural, cf. *Ibid.*, 41d; but he appears to have a bias for a supreme governor of the universe, perhaps a supreme spirit, cf. Bridkhous and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 475-6. Guthrie prefers to consider Socrates as "guided by a simple religious faith," cf. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol. 3, 483.

<sup>107</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 33c4-7.

<sup>108</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 21b3-7. And his respect of the Gods is translated into his own quest for the "fortunes of the good are not neglected by the Gods," cf. Plato, *Apology*, 41d.

<sup>109</sup> Plato, *Apology*, 21d5-6 and 22e1-5; Bridkhous and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 237-57, esp. 245-56.

intuitive (inspirational) knowledge to prophets alone. The uneasiness of the ulamas' of Aleppo with some of Suhrawardî's statements found in *al-Wâridât* and *al-Alwâh al-Imâdiyya* is, therefore, quite understandable. In reviving the ancient wisdom of Illuminationists, both eastern and western, Suhrawardî distinguishes between a historical world and an ahistorical reality. This dual conception of history locates truth at the level of a trans-historical reality accessed by sages, mystics, and prophets of all times.<sup>110</sup> Consequently, prophets who receive revelation are informed about realities that belong to the same world of light from which sages and mystics are informed. The difference between sages and mystics lies in the fact that sages, as opposed to Sufis, are able to apply discursive reason to their experiences, and to explain them.

One may add that Suhrawardî's conception of history is not entirely at odds with the prophetic tradition. Sages, mystics and prophets all have an access to the same source of light, such that sages, mystics and prophets cannot disagree about this divine reality. Only their language differs and, in a sense, conceals the truth. Shahrâzûrî notes that sages use symbols to convey their teachings in a fashion similar to prophets whose revelations are written in symbols (something to which even Avicenna alludes in a number of his works); likewise, the sages of Persia have established their teachings upon the symbols of light and darkness.<sup>111</sup> Shahrâzûrî explains that all sages, in fact, professed unicity (*tawhîd*) of God,<sup>112</sup> echoing Suhrawardî's claim. In his *al-Alwâh al-Imâdiyya*, Suhrawardî notes that ancient sages, such as Hurakhsh, professed unicity.<sup>113</sup> The monotheism of Plato appears to have been a popular view. This view found its way into Shahrastânî's work. The latter even admitted not having had access to Plato's

<sup>110</sup> Jambet's introduction to Sohravardî, *Sagesse*, 59-60; cf. Henry Corbin, *En islam iranien*, vol. 2, 346; Corbin developed similar ideas of "ahistory" and denounced historicism (method and philosophy), cf. Roxanne Marcotte, "Phenomenology through the Eyes of an Iranologist: Henry Corbin (1903-1978)," *The Bulletin. The Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies* 14 (1995): 55-70, esp. 57-9.

<sup>111</sup> Shahrâzûrî, *Sharh Hikmat al-Ishrâq*, in Suhrawardî, *Sagesse*, 243 n.32 and 245 n.34.

<sup>112</sup> Shahrâzûrî, *Sharh Hikmat al-Ishrâq*, in Suhrawardî, *Sagesse*, 251 n.43.

<sup>113</sup> He writes: "[Hurakhsh] is the sign of unicity (*tawhîd*), because he is alone in his rank and he testifies of the unique. He is the supreme face of God in the language of the *ishrâq*," cf. Suhrawardî, *Alwâh-i Imâdiyya*, in OPM, III, 92, 184.1-3; cf. Idem, *L'Archange empourpré*, 109.



works.<sup>114</sup>

On the whole, the real tragedy is that Athens and Aleppo were unable to welcome the "other" – the one who is and who thinks differently from the majority.<sup>115</sup> The sociopolitical context, necessary to fully understand the events that led to their respective deaths, raises the issue of possible political reasons for Socrates' and Suhrawardī's condemnations and executions. But the religious aspect cannot be simply ignored. Both Socrates and Suhrawardī were accused of not conforming to the "official" religion or beliefs of the city. Athens and Aleppo were thus unable to absorb what they both considered foreign bodies. They rejected them in the most tragic fashion. Socrates, although obedient to the laws of the city, was rejected for his skeptical attitude toward common Athenian beliefs, accused of being a threat to Athens' official religion.<sup>116</sup> Suhrawardī, although highly competent in Islamic jurisprudence, was accused of introducing unorthodox elements (Gnosticism, Zoroastrianism, Ismā'īlism, etc.) into his highly misunderstood philosophy of light.

One may perhaps view Socrates and Suhrawardī as martyrs of a more meaningful quest, that of a greater universality. Socrates sought to go beyond sophistry and common beliefs, where reason became the criterion. Suhrawardī sought to access the source of perennial wisdom, where intuitive knowledge became the criterion. Both, therefore, sought universality in the transcendental, but with different means. Socrates sought universality of our concepts (pure good, virtue, or happiness) with reason. Suhrawardī sought true (perennial) knowledge with direct mystical (intuitive) experience of the world of light – whether inspirational or revelational. The means may have differed, but the goal was identical, and so were the consequences. Both were judged as having threaded the path of unorthodoxy. The real questions that remain to be answered are the following: "How can the city truly accept the other once it defines itself in terms of its official beliefs? How can the city instate a real dialogue among all of its inhabitants?"

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<sup>114</sup> Walbridge, *The Leaven of the Ancients*, 96.

<sup>115</sup> Frank Griffel, "Toleration and Exclusion: al-Shāfi'ī and al-Ghazālī on the Treatment of Apostates," *Bulletin of the Society of Oriental and Asiatic Society*, 64.3 (2001): 339-54.

<sup>116</sup> Robin, *La pensée grecque*, 191.

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