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Core 202 - HIKMA

1<sup>st</sup> April 2023

## Essay 2

The notion of light is extremely important in the Islamic religion. Two very significant works that address the nature of light and the impediments that hinder us from properly understanding it are Suhrawardi's "Hikmat ul Ishraq" and Ghazali's "Mishkat ul Anwar." These works are especially important now, since our modern society is marked by several issues, such as social media, consumer culture, and environmental crises. The objective of this paper is to examine the concept of light according to Suhrawardi and Ghazali, and how their insights might aid us in understanding the complexity of our modern world.

Suhrawardi, also known as Shaikh al-Ishraq, was a 12th-century Iranian philosopher. His perspective of light is deeply spiritual and mystical, and he contends that light is more than a physical phenomenon; it is also a sign of heavenly knowledge and consciousness. He claims that everything derives its existence from the Light of Lights, which he claims is the ultimate source of all reality. "Light is the substance by which things become known, and by which they are known to be good and beautiful," writes Suhrawardi (Hikmat ul Ishraq, p. 24). The Light of Lights, according to Suhrawardi, is the purest and most perfect form of light, beyond our usual sensory awareness.

Ghazali, also known as Imam al-Ghazali, was a prominent 11th-century Islamic theologian and philosopher. He, on the other hand, approaches light from a more empirical standpoint. He examines the anatomy of the eye as well as the physics of light, concluding that light perception is a complicated process involving both the eye and the mind. He claims that light is not just a physical phenomenon, but also a spiritual phenomenon that is observable with the intellect. Ghazali regards the human intellect as a source of light that allows us to comprehend our surroundings. He claims that without the intellect, we would be in the dark and unable to comprehend the universe. "Light is God's gift that He bestows on those whom He wills," writes Ghazali (*Mishkat ul Anwar*, p. 33). Light, he claims, is not something that can be recognized with the physical senses, but rather an inward experience that people who desire it can have. He also explores the nature of darkness and how it influences how we see light.

However, both Suhrawardi and Ghazali identify a variety of impediments to truly seeing the Light of Lights. These barriers are referred to as "dusky substances" by Suhrawardi, and "veils" that hide the soul by Ghazali. These obstacles can be overcome by spiritual practice and soul cultivation.

According to Suhrawardi, these include ignorance, materialism, and egoism, and they can be overcome via spiritual activities and introspection. Many substances, according to Suhrawardi, obstruct our vision of the Light of Lights. These substances are known as "dusky substances," and they are distinguished by their capacity to obscure light. These substances, according to Suhrawardi, are ignorance, materialism, egoism, forgetfulness, and distraction. Ignorance keeps us from learning the truth, forgetfulness keeps us from recognizing it, and distraction keeps us from focusing on it. Materiality, darkness, opacity, and colour are the four

dusky substances identified by Suhrawardi (Hikmat ul Ishraq, p. 31). Materiality, according to Suhrawardi, is the most fundamental barrier because it is the substance of the physical world that hinders our vision of divine light. He has an intriguing perspective on the world around us. Darkness, he says, is the absence of light, whereas opacity is the lack of transparency that prevents us from seeing through material objects. Color is a barrier because it diverts our attention away from the true nature of things, causing us to concentrate on their appearance rather than their essence. "These dusky substances are like veils that prevent us from seeing the true nature of things," says Suhrawardi (Hikmat ul Ishraq, p. 43).

Ghazali identifies several impediments to human vision of light that operate as spiritual barriers, such as sin and ignorance, as well as physical impediments, such as cataracts and other eye diseases. He claims that the main impediment is connection to material things, which he refers to as "worldly love." Our attachment to worldly things causes us to become preoccupied with the physical world, impairing our ability to discern the spiritual reality that lies underneath it. Ghazali views pride, envy, and rage as obstacles to our ability to sense light. Ghazali also identifies seven veils that cover the soul: the veil of animal nature, the veil of self, the veil of ignorance, the veil of forgetfulness, the veil of desire, the veil of grief, and the veil of hypocrisy (Mishkat ul Anwar, p. 35). These veils are caused by the soul's attachment to the physical world and its forgetfulness of its heavenly origin. The process of spiritual purification involves gradually removing these layers until the soul fully comprehends the divine light. Ghazali says "These veils are like clouds that obscure the light of the soul," (Mishkat ul Anwar, p. 45).

While both Suhrawardi and Ghazali's philosophical works highlight the value of spiritual enlightenment and soul development as means of improving one's comprehension of the

divine, their ideologies differ significantly. One notable distinction is their approaches to knowledge. Suhrawardi's "Hikmat ul Ishraq" emphasizes the value of intuition and direct experience in acquiring divine wisdom. He claims that the human soul has an innate ability for "ishraq," or illumination, allowing it to discern the divine light that animates all of creation. As he writes, "The Ishraqi holds that there is no knowledge except through 'ishraq,' and that there is no perception except through illumination" (Hikmat ul Ishraq, p.30). In contrast, Ghazali's "Mishkat ul Anwar" emphasizes the value of reason and logic in gaining divine knowledge. He contends that via reason and rational exploration, the human brain may perceive the existence of God and the underlying truths of religion. As he writes, "Know that the true seeker after knowledge must start with rational proofs" (Mishkat ul Anwar, p. 37).

Another notable distinction between their philosophies is how they view the physical world. The value of the material universe as a reflection of divine light is emphasized in Suhrawardi's "Hikmat ul Ishraq." He contends that the physical world is imbued with divine significance and that the seeker's mission is to uncover the hidden spiritual realities that lie underneath the material universe. As he writes, "The seeker after truth should know that the world of creation is a sign pointing to the Real and that it is only through the Real that it exists" (Hikmat ul Ishraq, p. 23).

Ghazali's "Mishkat ul Anwar," on the other hand, emphasizes the transience of the physical world and the significance of detachment from material desires as a method of obtaining spiritual illumination. He contends that the material world is ultimately illusory, and that in order to achieve a higher level of spiritual realization, the seeker must forsake

attachment to earthly desires. As he writes, "The heart should be so pure that it is free from all stains of passion and desire" (Mishkat ul Anwar, p. 17).

Medieval philosophical books such as "Hikmat ul-Ishraq" and "Mishkat ul Anwar" may provide us with insights and viewpoints that are not readily available in modern media and discourse. We are overloaded with information and stimuli in today's society, which is marked by social media, consumer culture, and environmental crises, making it impossible to focus on deep and meaningful questions like the nature of light. Social media, for example, can be a source of distraction and superficiality, preventing us from gaining the deep spiritual understanding and enlightenment advocated for by Suhrawardi and Ghazali. Similarly, consumer society can entice us into a never-ending cycle of materialism and want, keeping us focused on the physical world rather than the spiritual realm. Climate change, for example, might emphasize the need for a more holistic and spiritual approach to our relationship with the natural world. Suhrawardi writes, "The pursuit of knowledge should not be limited to the acquisition of information but should also involve the cultivation of the soul" (Hikmat ul Ishraq, p. 46). We can learn to slow down, ponder, and interact with these concerns in a more serious and contemplative manner by studying this literature. He also says, "The ultimate goal of human life is to attain union with the divine light" (Hikmat ul Ishraq, p. 85), which he discusses throughout his work. Ghazali writes, "The path of spiritual purification is the path of true knowledge" (Mishkat ul Anwar, p. 47). He also says, "The light of the heart is the means by which we can overcome the veils that cover our soul" (p. 41). Both of them take light and knowledge into heavy consideration in all walks of life and their preaching.

Furthermore, mediaeval philosophical books can provide us with new perspectives on the world and our place in it. They can help us see the connectivity of all things and the relevance of spiritual and ethical principles in our life by challenging our assumptions and expanding our worldview. In an increasingly fragmented and polarized world, these books can provide us with a sense of togetherness and harmony that transcends cultural, religious, and political divisions. These writings provide practical advice on cultivating the soul and achieving spiritual realization. Ghazali, for example, emphasizes the need of cultivating a profound and real love for God, which can assist us in overcoming our attachment to materialism and achieving a state of spiritual illumination. Suhrawardi, on the other hand, provides a complete system of spiritual exercises and meditations that might assist us in purifying our hearts and minds and achieving a direct experience of divine light.

Economic growth, technical innovation, and social justice are examples of immediate, tangible, and quantifiable topics that dominate contemporary media and discourse. While these are unquestionably important topics, they do not necessarily encompass the full range of human experience, nor do they provide a comprehensive understanding of the world around us. Medieval philosophical texts, on the other hand, such as those of Suhrawardi and Ghazali, provide a more holistic and metaphysical perspective on life, acknowledging the interconnectedness of all things and the importance of cultivating the soul as a means of attaining spiritual illumination and enlightenment. Furthermore, these books provide insights into the human condition that are frequently disregarded and marginalized in contemporary discourse. They emphasize the need of humility, self-discipline, and moral integrity, for example, as vital traits for spiritual enlightenment, qualities that are frequently undervalued or

ignored in contemporary Western culture. They also provide a perspective on understanding that is not solely rational or empirical, but rather emphasizes the value of intuition, direct experience, and spiritual insight as means of discovering deeper truths about the universe and us.

In conclusion, Suhrawardi's "Hikmat ul Ishraq" and Ghazali's "Mishkat ul Anwar" offer important insights into the nature of light and the barriers that keep us from properly understanding it. These works inspire us to deepen our understanding of the nature of consciousness, existence, and the Divine by exploring the concept of the Divine Light as the source of all existence. They also remind us of the value of spirituality and the pursuit of knowledge in navigating the complexity of modern life with more clarity and insight.

#### **Works Cited:**

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