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**SUHRAWARDĪ'S CRITICISM OF AVICENNA'S  
EPISTEMOLOGY WITH A SPECIAL EMPHASIS  
ON THE THEORY OF ESSENTIAL DEFINITION**

**Introduction**

Critical thought plays an important role in the emergence and shaping of intellectual works. Many such in various areas of human civilization that come to be considered as masterpieces result from a threefold process: The intellectual first understands the present heritage of his topic, then criticizes it, and finally reproduces, or synthesizes, a result. Though we designate the phase of criticism as distinct from those of understanding and reproduction, it in fact lies at the heart of the two phases, for criticism itself is a special kind of understanding and production.

Thinking and philosophizing that one may take as the most human of man's acts bearing in mind the philosopher's definition of the human being is no exception to this general rule. On the contrary, if we take criticism as a meaning that is applied to different subjects in different degrees, this meaning is no doubt predicated of philosophical criticism at the most perfect level. For example, Aristotle (d. 322 B.C.), considered in the Medieval Christian and Islamic worlds to be the climax of that pure speculative reason deprived and independent of divine aid, is a critic. One may discern that his philosophy in final analysis is, above all else, a philosophical criticism.

It is interesting that the phrase "divine aid" is a key term in the criticisms of both philosophy and philosophical criticisms, a detailed analysis of the latter this study aims at providing. For instance, Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ash'arī (d. 936), the founder of one of the two major theological schools in Sunni Islam together with Abū Maṣṣūr al-Māturīdī (d. 944), the founder of the other major school, destroyed and forsook the edifice of Mutazilism, known as the rationalists of Islam,

whose head architect he viewed to be reason, erecting in its place Ash'arism, in which he thought reason's position was held by revelation. With the same motive, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), who has been regarded as one of the most important *doctors* of Islam in all times and as the earliest systematic critical of Greek philosophy in the Muslim world, resided in the home of philosophy as a guest, never as a native, and only long enough to destroy it. Therefore, I, like many others, tend to view al-Ghazālī's intellectual endeavor as a criticism of philosophy, rather than a philosophical criticism at first glance.

As compared to the two theologians above, Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī's (d. 1191) important engagement with philosophy, – who is the founder of the *Ishrāqī* or Illuminative School as the second most important school of philosophy only after the *Mashshā'īyyah*, i.e., Muslim Neo-Platonist Peripateticism or Aristotelianism represented by such luminaries Alfarabi (d. 950), Avicenna (d. 1037), and Averroes (d. 1198)–, is philosophical in the fullest sense of the term, not only in style but also in goal and result. His criticism of Avicenna was the most essential part of his philosophical project and was a philosophical criticism.

This is because Suhrawardī was born, intellectually if not spiritually, into a Peripatetic family, acquiring the larger part of his intellectual formation therein. However, having come to seriously doubt and then question the truth of the family in a certain point of his career, he set out in search of a new truth. Nevertheless, Suhrawardī made no breakaway from his family members even after he had found his own truth, that which he called the “Philosophy of Illumination (*Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*).” Quite the contrary, he engaged himself in a zealous intellectual struggle to convert them to his own truth. Yet for various reasons, he pitted himself not against Aristotle, the supreme patriarch of the Peripatetic family, but against Avicenna, who was, after all, something of a big brother in the overall philosophical lineage. Hence, this study is intended to provide a critical, objective, and detailed analysis of the debate that Suhrawardī conducted vicariously with Avicenna over the true nature of things.

In what follows, I shall try to expose Avicenna's views first and then Suhrawardī's critique of them. By doing so, I aim to help the reader better understand the philosophical criticisms and make certain whether Suhrawardī had both an accurate understanding of and gave a fair exposition to Avicenna's views.

## 1. Avicenna's Theory of Essential Definition

The subject-matter of epistemology in the literature of classical Islamic philosophy has been dealt with under the rubric of logic. As a result, definition as

one of the ways of acquiring knowledge has been discussed as a subject-matter of logic. Hence, prior to the exposition of Avicenna's theory of definitions, I want to outline his epistemology as well as his views on the discipline of logic.

### 1.1. The Place of Definition in Logic and Epistemology

Avicenna describes philosophy as "knowing the true nature of things as far as one can do", dividing it into theoretical and practical. While he defines the theoretical as the knowledge of things that exist independently of our will and actions, he defines the practical as the knowledge of things that result from our will and actions<sup>1</sup>.

While he identifies the aim of the theoretical as cultivating the soul through merely knowing and learning, he identifies that of the practical as perfecting the soul by learning the knowledge of virtues to act upon it<sup>2</sup>. He also designates the goal of the theoretical as the knowledge of truth and that of the practical as the knowledge of good. He subdivides practical philosophy into politics, administration of household, and ethics on the basis of knowing and practicing the principles that are prerequisite for regulating and conducting a virtuous life on social, family, and individual levels<sup>3</sup>. He subdivides theoretical philosophy into physics, mathematics, and metaphysics. This division relies on the relation of beings to motion and matter in reality or in the mind. Accordingly, existents are of three groups:

- (1) Those which neither can exist in the outside world nor can be conceived to exist by the mind as independent from motion and matter; on the contrary, but can only exist with matter and motion in both modes of existence.
- (2) Those which can be conceived to exist in separation from matter and motion, but cannot exist in reality in separation from matter and motion.
- (3) Those which are free from matter and motion both in reality and in the mind, impossible to be connected with matter and motion in either mode of existence.

Thus, physics inquires about the existents of the first category, mathematics those of the second, and metaphysics those of the third<sup>4</sup>.

What is then the place of logic in this classification of philosophical sciences? Avicenna answers this question as the following: Entities have three aspects

<sup>1</sup> Avicenna, *al-Shifā, al-Manṭiq*, edited by Sa'īd Zāyid, Maktabatu Āyatillāh al-Mar'ashī, Qum 1404, *al-Madkhal*, p. 12.

<sup>2</sup> Avicenna, *Shifā, al-Manṭiq, al-Madkhal*, p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Avicenna, *Shifā, al-Manṭiq, al-Madkhal*, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> Avicenna, *Shifā, al-Manṭiq, al-Madkhal*, p. 12–14.

(*i'tibār*) with regard to their existence in reality or in the mind: (1) Their aspect as being absolute essence, regardless of existing in reality or in the mind. (2) Their aspect in regard of existing in reality. (3) Their aspect in regard of existing in the mind. Thus, things have certain attributes in respect of these three modes of existence. For example, things have attributes such as universality or individuality and substantiality or accidentality in regard of their existence in the mind while they do not have such attributes in respect of existing in reality<sup>5</sup>.

On the other hand, thinking is a process that takes place in the mind, implying that mental entities as such have some attributes and one needs to investigate them as well as their number and nature. This inquiry is different from the inquiry of things themselves as they are real or mental entities. So, the aim of logic, Avicenna says, is to investigate the attributes of things in that they are mental entities<sup>6</sup>.

In this context, Avicenna raises the following question: Is this inquiry included in theoretical philosophy or considered just a tool for theoretical philosophy? The philosopher notes that the answer depends on the way one defines theoretical philosophy: If philosophy is taken exclusively to be the investigation of things in the respect that they are existent and divided into the three modes of being above, logic is not a part of theoretical philosophy, but an auxiliary tool for doing theoretical inquiry. Yet, if theoretical philosophy is taken to be including any type of theoretical inquiry from any perspective, logic is both part of theoretical philosophy and serves as an instrument for other branches of philosophy. Discarding both approaches to logic, Avicenna finds unnecessary and meaningless any debate over preferring one of the approaches to the other because there are two different conceptions and definitions of philosophy<sup>7</sup>.

As for the function of the science of logic, Avicenna addresses this matter in the chapter of the *Shifā* he devotes to the discussion of the benefit of logic: Man as a rational being attains his perfection by knowing truth for its own sake and by knowing good in order to practice it. Man, however, is not born knowing everything, nor does he find knowledge ready in his life. On the contrary, he acquires a greater extent of his knowledge by means of study and labor<sup>8</sup>.

So, one should raise the question: How does man acquire knowledge? In other words, what is the true nature of what we call "learning"? Avicenna embarks upon analysis of this question by dividing things into two: those that are known and those that are not known. This is because there must be a thing unknown that

<sup>5</sup> Avicenna, *Shifā*, *al-Manṭiq*, *al-Madkhal*, p. 15.

<sup>6</sup> Avicenna, *Shifā*, *al-Manṭiq*, *al-Madkhal*, p. 15.

<sup>7</sup> Avicenna, *Shifā*, *al-Manṭiq*, *al-Madkhal*, p. 15–16.

<sup>8</sup> Avicenna, *Shifā*, *al-Manṭiq*, *al-Madkhal*, p. 16–17.

the act of coming to know it take place. But the unknown alone is not enough for the act of knowing to take place because knowing and learning is a movement of the mind from the known to the unknown. And this is not a haphazard motion, but gradual and hierarchical. Thus, intellection and knowing is the attainment of knowledge that is not present in the mind by placing the present knowledge in a certain order. It is logic that lays down the right formal rules of this mental process, thereby protecting the mind from erring in this motion<sup>9</sup>.

Thus, thinking that Avicenna defines as the motion of the mind from the known to the unknown consists of three elements: the known, the unknown, the coming to know. There appears, however, a problem in this point: If each knowledge comes from an earlier knowledge, each knowledge shall require a prior knowledge, leading to a process that will continue ad infinitum – a result known as infinite recession in philosophical terminology. As regards this issue, Avicenna acknowledges that the knowledge of an unknown thing is acquired through a prior knowledge<sup>10</sup>, but he adds that not all knowledge depends on prior knowledge. Knowledge in both forms of conception and assent has first its principles, which do not refer back to any other principles<sup>11</sup>.

Yet now the following questions arise one after another: How does man get these primary principles? Does mankind have these principles inherently or acquire them later on? If man possesses them inborn, why do they become active only upon reaching a certain level of physical and intellectual maturity? Provided that he has them inborn, if he forgets or becomes negligent of them and recollects them later on, how is it possible for him to obtain them without having other principles necessary for obtaining them? The problem that has revealed itself as an infinite recession above now appears in the form of a vicious circle. Asking all these questions, Avicenna does not fail to note that they are difficult questions to answer<sup>12</sup>.

We can describe the way Avicenna handles this puzzling issue as the following: Man is possessed of some cognitive powers capable of knowing things directly without any process of learning. These powers are the outer senses and the inner faculties which exist in all or most of the animals<sup>13</sup>. Animals perceive of two kinds of things by their cognitive faculties. The first are the particular sensible forms. These are perceived by the outer senses and preserved in the inner power

<sup>9</sup> Avicenna, *Manṭiq al-Mashriqiyyīn*, Maktabatu Āyatillāh al-Mar'ashī, Qum 1405, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Avicenna, *Shifā, al-Manṭiq, al-Burhān*, p. 57.

<sup>11</sup> Avicenna, *al-Najāt fī al-Manṭiq wa al-Ilāhiyyāt*, edited by 'Abdurrahmān 'Umayra, Dār al-Jīl, Beirut 1992, vol. 1, p. 76; *Shifā, al-Manṭiq, al-Burhān*, p. 77.

<sup>12</sup> Avicenna, *Shifā, al-Manṭiq, al-Burhān*, p. 330.

<sup>13</sup> Avicenna, *Shifā, al-Manṭiq, al-Burhān*, p. 330.

of fantasy located in the frontal cerebral cavity. The second are the abstract meanings that are known by the estimative faculty and preserved in memory located in the rear cerebral cavity. The estimative faculty serves for the animals the function that intellect serves for men. Of these inner powers, the estimative faculty and memory in particular are more powerful in men. The outer senses and the estimative faculty consolidate their percepts in their respective places of storage, i.e., fantasy and memory, through their repeated perceptions, securing them to be firmly rooted<sup>14</sup>.

Afterwards, the rational faculty classifies the abstract particular meanings preserved in memory, the storage of the estimative faculty, according to their similarity and difference, removing the accidental attributes of the sensible forms stored in fantasy and keeping their essential attributes. Following this classification and abstraction, the elementary units and building stones of conscious conception arise. With the aid of “cogitative faculty (*mufakkirah*)”, the rational faculty combines these elementary things, and thus the first compound concepts appear. From these compounds, the rational faculty knows those that can be known directly without the process of learning. That the whole is bigger than any of its parts is of this type of knowledge. The sensual experience plays a great role in these immediate acts of combination and distinction<sup>15</sup>. For instance, through his repeated experiences, one comes to know that ingestion of scammony causes diarrhea<sup>16</sup>.

Hence, the elements of knowledge and primary conceptions appear as a result of the rational faculty’s classification, abstraction, and combination of perceptions that are acquired through sensation, imagination, and estimation. So, these elements appear later on, Avicenna argues, because the powers of sensation, imagination and estimation grow later on<sup>17</sup>.

Avicenna illustrates the appearance of universal intelligible forms in the mind through an allegory he borrows from Aristotle: If a fighter from a dissolving army stands up in his line, another fighter joins him, both to be followed by a third and a fourth. So, the broken-up lines come to form again. Knowledge and universal intelligible forms, i.e., conceptions, too, form in the same gradual way. The rational soul picks the universal form out of the particular sensible forms that are perceived by the outer senses and discards the rest, for the particular sensible forms are

<sup>14</sup> Avicenna, *Shifā, al-Manṭiq, al-Burhān*, p. 331.

<sup>15</sup> Avicenna, *Shifā, al-Manṭiq, al-Burhān*, p. 331.

<sup>16</sup> The example we have given of experience Avicenna does not mention it in this context, contenting himself with saying that he addressed the subject of experience earlier. For the places in which he treats this topic, see *Shifā, al-Manṭiq, al-Burhān*, p. 95; *Najāt*, vol. 1, p. 77–78.

<sup>17</sup> Avicenna, *Shifā, al-Manṭiq, al-Burhān*, p. 333.

at the same time universal in one respect. For example, the outer sense also perceives a human being when it perceives Socrates. Again the common sense and its storage fantasy convey to the rational faculty two percepts, one being Socrates and the other the human being. Yet this human being is surrounded by extraneous attachments and concomitants. Once the rational faculty eliminates them, there remains the abstract man, i.e., the concept of human being with respect to which Socrates and Plato are the same. Thus, were the outer sense not to perceive the sensible particulars in a way that allows the rational faculty to render them intelligible universals, neither the estimative faculty nor the rational faculty could distinguish between the particulars of two different species<sup>18</sup>.

## 1.2. Conception and Assent

Avicenna divides knowledge into conception and assent. Conception, literally meaning the presence of a thing's image in the mind<sup>19</sup>, is the coming to the mind of a thing's meaning when its name is mentioned. For example, it is a conception that the image of man or a triangle occurs in the mind when the word "man" or "triangle" is uttered. In short, conception means understanding the words when they are uttered. Assent is the accompaniment of conception by a judgment. The statement, for example, "All whites are accident" is an assent because the person who hears this statement not only understands "white" and "accident" discretely, but also that white is an accident. Thus, every assent requires a conception, but not vice versa<sup>20</sup>.

Just as knowledge is of two kinds as conception and assent, lack of knowledge is also of two kinds. For example, just as one fails to know the concept of white, he may fail to know that white is an accident. Thus, there must be two different methods that lead to the knowledge of these two different kinds of things unknown. In other words, the mind has two different manners of ordered movement from the known to the unknown. Of these modes, Avicenna terms the one that is related to assent "proof (*ḥujjat*)", noting that he is employing it as a generic term referring to the whole series of syllogism, induction, allegory, and the likes<sup>21</sup>.

As to that which leads to the conceptual knowledge, the philosopher enunciates two different views. While in his *Shifā* he says that there has been coined or

<sup>18</sup> Avicenna, *Shifā, al-Manṭiq, al-Burhān*, p. 332.

<sup>19</sup> Muḥammad bin Abī Bakr bin 'Abdīlqādir al-Rāzī, *Mukhtār al-Ṣiḥāh*, edited by Maḥmūd Khāṭir, Maktabatu Lubnān, Beirut 1995, p. 375; Muḥammad bin Mukrim Ibn Manzūr al-Ifrīqī, *Lisān al-'Arab*, Dāru Ṣādir, Beirut no date, vol. 4, p. 471.

<sup>20</sup> Avicenna, *Shifā, al-Manṭiq, al-Madkhal*, p. 17.

<sup>21</sup> Avicenna, *Shifā, al-Manṭiq, al-Madkhal*, p. 18.

come down to us no comprehensive term that would encompass all such meanings as definition, description, likeness, sign, and name that yield conceptual knowledge of a thing in different ways and degrees, Avicenna refers to this term as “explanatory statement (*al-qawl al-shāriḥ*)” in his *Ishārāt* and *Najāt*<sup>22</sup>.

This inconsistency in the words of Avicenna about the presence or absence of a comprehensive term that would designate both definition and description go back to the nature of difference between these two concepts. In order to be able to talk of explanatory statement, there must be a thing that is conceptually known by one person and not known by another. In addition, this thing should not be one of the above principles, viz., it should be a compound concept, not simple. Accordingly, the attributes of a thing that the former person employs to explain the thing for the latter as well as the way he orders them make the explanatory statement either a definition or a description. Thus, if the explanatory statement is intended to simply indicate a thing, definition, description and the others can be grouped into the same category and referred to by a common name. Yet if the explanatory statement is meant to indicate the essence and reality of the defined, definition, description and the others cannot be placed within the same category, nor can they be termed with a common name.

### 1.3. Essential and Accidental Predicates

Avicenna refers as predicate to the five universal concepts that are used in forming the explanatory statement, which are genus, differentia, species, general accident, and property<sup>23</sup>. As we shall analyze in more detail in the following pages, while genus, species, and differentia are essential predicates, general accident and property are accidental. The philosopher identifies three points of difference between the essential and the accidental:

(1) Essential predicates constitute the quiddity of an entity, of which they are predicated. In other words, they are the parts of the subject’s quiddity or essence. Contrasted with the essential, the accidental predicates do not constitute the quiddity of the subject, being extraneous to it. The quiddity of a thing is its reality by which it is itself<sup>24</sup>.

In this context, Avicenna draws a clear distinction between quiddity and existence with regard to the contingent things, viewing existence to be neither a constituent and nor an essential attribute of quiddity. Hence, it is not a constituent of the quiddity of man that he is begotten or created or comes into being

<sup>22</sup> Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, p. 3; *Najāt*, vol. 1, p. 109.

<sup>23</sup> Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, p. 15.

<sup>24</sup> Avicenna, *Shifā*, *al-Manṭiq*, *al-Madkhal*, p. 23.



after being nonexistent. Nor is it a constituent of the quiddity of a triangle that the triangle exists in the external reality. However, corporeality is the constituent and essential part of the human being and being a shape is that of triangle<sup>25</sup>.

We can formulate in the following way the argumentation Avicenna furnishes to demonstrate that the existence of a thing is not a constituent of its quiddity, rather extraneous to it: Not two things are one and the same about one of which we have knowledge and certainty while we have no knowledge and certainty about the other. While there is knowledge about the quiddity of a thing, there is uncertainty about whether it exists or not. Hence, the quiddity and existence of a thing are not the same, either<sup>26</sup>. Since the distinction between existence and quiddity is one of the major issues concerning which Suhrawardī criticizes Avicenna severely, I will give a detailed discussion of it in the chapter on Ontological Debates.

(2) While the essential predicates are in the mind prior to the quiddity, the accidental predicates are posterior to it. In other words, the accidental predicates attach to the essential predicates after the quiddity comes about. For example, it is impossible for the quiddity of the human being to be conceived of until its constitutive essentials, i.e., animality and rationality, are conceived of<sup>27</sup>. Of this, Avicenna says as follows: "Essential predicates include the attributes that point to quiddity or the parts of quiddity while accidental predicates refer to the things that are attached to quiddity once the quiddity comes about."<sup>28</sup> Thus the case with the accidentals is the very opposite of the essentials for it is only after the rise in the mind of the quiddity of an entity that the accidental attributes attach to the quiddity. Take for example the accidental attribute of happiness. Happiness cannot attach to the concept of human being until the latter comes about in the mind<sup>29</sup>.

(3) The quiddity of an entity disappears when its essential predicates disappear, but the disappearance of accidental predicates does not require the disappearance of the quiddity<sup>30</sup>. As regards this point of difference, Avicenna says:

<sup>25</sup> Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Avicenna formulates this argument as the following, as well: "Were the mental or concrete existence of man a constituent of the truth and meaning of humanity, it would be impossible for that truth and meaning to appear in the mind as separate from its constituent. As a result, it would be impossible that the concept of humanity exist in the mind and at the same time one may doubt about whether it exists in the concrete. As for the fact that there is no doubt about the existence of man in the concrete, this is because the human individuals are perceived by the senses, not because the concept of humanity itself eliminates this doubt." Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, p. 7.

<sup>27</sup> Avicenna, *Najāt*, vol. 1, p. 13.

<sup>28</sup> Avicenna, *Shifā, al-Manṭiq, al-Madkhal*, p. 23.

<sup>29</sup> Ḥassan Malikshāhī, *Tarjuma wa Sharḥ-i Ishārāt wa Tanbīhāt-i Avicenna*, Sorūsh, Tehran 2006, vol. 2, p. 219.

<sup>30</sup> Avicenna, *Najāt*, vol. 1, p. 13.

“Let’s consider the concepts that are predicated of the individual entities. If their disappearing requires the disappearing of the individual, we call them “essential.” If not, we call them “accidental.”<sup>31</sup>

When discussing this point of difference between the essential and the accidental in the context of the distinction between existence and quiddity, Avicenna states: “While negating existence from the human being does not make it impossible for the quiddity of the human being to be conceived of, negating corporeality from the human being makes it impossible for the quiddity of the human being to be conceived of. In the same manner, whereas negating existence from triangle does not make it impossible for the quiddity of triangle to be conceived of, negating being a shape from triangle makes it impossible for the quiddity of triangle to be conceived of.”<sup>32</sup>

The example Avicenna cited regarding the existence-quiddity distinction may imply that there might be a fourth point of difference between the essential and the accidental: While it is impossible for the accident to separate from the quiddity, the accidental can separate from it. Yet Avicenna promptly negates this idea by saying that a quiddity might have attributes that cannot separate from it though are not constitutive of it, either. Avicenna terms this sort of attributes “inseparable accidentals.”<sup>33</sup>

Although both essentials and inseparable accidentals are impossible to separate from quiddity, Avicenna stresses the existence of a number of substantial differences between the two<sup>34</sup>. First, though inseparable accidentals are too associated with quiddity, they are not part of it unlike essentials. Second, inseparable accidentals can attach to quiddity only after quiddity comes to be. As the third point of difference, while the essentials are limited in number, inseparable accidentals can be infinite<sup>35</sup>. Avicenna mentions the following example to clarify the difference between the essentials and the inseparable accidentals: “That the totality of the internal angles of a triangle is equivalent to that of its two right angles is an inseparable accidental for it. This attribute and the likes are necessarily and inseparably attached to the quiddity of a triangle. But this attachment occurs only after the quiddity of triangle comes to be through the three sides. If the attributes of this sort were constituents of a triangle, it would be composed of infinite constituents.”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Avicenna, *Shifā, al-Manṭiq, al-Madkhal*, p. 25.

<sup>32</sup> Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, p. 6.

<sup>33</sup> Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, p. 7.

<sup>34</sup> Avicenna, *Najāt*, vol. 1, p. 13.

<sup>35</sup> Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, p. 7–8.

<sup>36</sup> Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, p. 8.

Beside the essential predicates and the inseparable accidental predicates, there are some other predicates that neither constitute quiddity nor is inseparable from it. Avicenna gives them the name "separable accidentals." It does not matter whether these separate from their subject quickly or slowly, easily or with difficulty. He mentions for example the fact that one is young or old, or in the standing or in the sitting position<sup>37</sup>.

While discussing the essential and the accidental predicates, Avicenna finds it useful to allude to the terminological confusion about the terms "accident (*'arad*)" and "accidental (*'aridā*)", noting that accidental is sometimes referred to as accident, too<sup>38</sup>. In attempt to elucidate the difference between these two terms, he says that while accident is the nine categories that are contrary to the category of substance, accidental is the predicates that occur in the discussion of the five universals and that are not essential. He adds that these non-essential attributes are called accident only metaphorically. Another way for distinguishing the two terms is this: An accidental can be predicated of its subject in a way that it would become equal and identical with it, but an accident cannot be. For example, the accidental of risibility can be predicated of man as his identical and it can be said that "Man is risible." Yet the accident of whiteness cannot be predicated of man in the same manner, nor can it be said that "Man is white."<sup>39</sup> As a third point of difference, whereas an accidental predicate might be substance as the case with the example of "white man", an accidental predicate cannot be substance as the case with the example of "whiteness"<sup>40</sup>.

#### 1.4. Questions About Quiddity and The Five Universals

At the beginning of this chapter, we have pointed out that definitions are intended to impart the conceptual knowledge of a thing. In the context of definitions in logic, two basic questions are asked to acquire the conceptual knowledge of a thing: "What is it?" and "Which thing is it?" These questions and their answers lead us to the five universal concepts that are employed in forming definitions. The first question is asked to know of the quiddity of a thing, which means that the answer to be given is an essential of the quiddity of that thing. Avicenna notes that the things that are said in response to the question about quiddity are three: genus (*jins*), species (*naw'*), and essential definition (*ḥadd*).

<sup>37</sup> Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, p. 8.

<sup>38</sup> Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, p. 9.

<sup>39</sup> Avicenna, *Shifā, al-Manṭiq, al-Madkhal*, p. 77–78.

<sup>40</sup> Avicenna, *Najāṭ*, vol. 1, p. 14.

Genus and species differ in two fundamental points though they are both said in answer to the question about quiddity:

- (1) While species includes the whole of the quiddity of its individuals and all the essentials, genus includes some part of the quiddity of its individuals and the whole of those that are common amongst different species.
- (2) Individuals of a species, though they are different individually and accidentally, partake of the same quiddity, while the individuals are different individually and accidentally on one hand and differentiated by differentiae on the other. Genus, therefore, is said to different realities in response to the question “What is it?”, species is said to one single reality<sup>41</sup>.

As to the question “Which one is it?”, the second fundamental question in logic, it is meant to distinguish an entity from the others that are common with it in existence or in genus<sup>42</sup>. The answer to this question can be both an essential and an accidental alike<sup>43</sup>.

To sum up, an essential universal that is said in response to the question about quiddity, if it includes the whole of the quiddity of the individuals, it is species. If it includes some part of the quiddity and the whole of what is common among individuals, it is genus. If an essential universal is said in response to the question “Which one is it in essence and substance?” instead of in response to the question “What is it?” then it is differentia. If a differentia is special to a single species, it is the “proximate differentia”, and if it is common among several species, it is the “distant differentia.”<sup>44</sup>

To illustrate the meanings of genus, species, and definition, we may cite the following examples: Since the question “What is the human being?” is meant to know the whole of the quiddity of man, the answer to this question is definition, viz., “It is a rational animal”, which indicates the whole of the quiddity of man. Since the question “What is the quiddity of Zaid, Bakr, and Khālid?” or “What is the quiddity of Zaid?” is intended to inquire about the whole of the quiddity of what is inquired about, the answer to both of the questions is species, i.e., the human being, which indicates the whole of the quiddity of its individuals. This answer applies to those which are single or multiple in number and individuals. Yet as to those which are multiple in quiddity, we can give the following example: Since the question “What is the quiddity of horse, cattle, and the human being?” is meant to know the whole of the quiddity that is common amongst these quiddities of different sorts, the answer to this question is the proximate

<sup>41</sup> Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, p. 13.

<sup>42</sup> Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, p. 14.

<sup>43</sup> Avicenna, *Najāṭ*, vol. 1, p. 15.

<sup>44</sup> Malikshāhī, *Tarjuma wa Sharḥ*, vol. 2, p. 265.

genus, i.e., animal, which indicates the whole of their common quiddity. Thus, one cannot say "body" in answer to this question, for body indicates some part of the common quiddity, not the whole thereof<sup>45</sup>.

Unlike genus, species and differentia, general accidents and properties are accidental and not essential predicates. Though both types of accidents are accidental predicates, the latter are special to a single species while the former might exist in different species. Avicenna notes that the properties which are most fitting for forming description are those which exist in all the individuals of a species, never separating from the species and being conspicuous<sup>46</sup>.

Taking account of all these questions and their answers, we can recapitulate the five universals as the following: While genus is an essential universal that is said to the subjects with different quiddities in answer to the question "What is it?", species is an essential universal that is said to the subjects with the same quiddity in answer to this question. Differentia is a universal that is said in response to the question "What is it in essence and substance?" while the property is a universal that is predicated as a nonessential of the subjects with the same quiddity, the general accident is a universal that is predicated as a nonessential of the subjects with different quiddities<sup>47</sup>.

### 1.5. Definition and Description

Avicenna defines the term "definition" as follows: "Definition is a phrase that indicates the quiddity of a thing and includes all of its essentials."<sup>48</sup> This formulation points out three elements of definition: (1) Definition is a phrase; (2) Definition indicates quiddity; (3) Definition includes all the essentials of a quiddity.

Definition is designed to acquire the conceptual knowledge of a thing, which should be a compound concept, and not simple. So the phrase that explains a compound concept should also be a compound statement, not a single word<sup>49</sup>. The Arabic word "qawl" that we have rendered above as phrase means a statement that is composed of two or more words.

According to Avicenna's notion of definition, indicating a thing's quiddity is the same as enumerating its essentials, for, in the answer "Man is a rational animal" given to the question "What is man?", for example, indicating man's quiddity goes back to identifying the essentials that constitute the quiddity of

<sup>45</sup> Malikshāhī, *Tarjuma wa Sharḥ*, vol. 2, p. 242.

<sup>46</sup> Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, p. 15.

<sup>47</sup> Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, p. 15–16.

<sup>48</sup> Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, p. 16.

<sup>49</sup> Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, p. 16.

man. One should then ask what the essentials constituting the quiddity are. For Avicenna a thing's definition, i.e., its mental concept, is by necessity composed of "its genus and differentia, for its general constituents are genus and special constituents differentia. Thus, the compound quiddity of a thing does not become complete until its general and special essentials are combined."<sup>50</sup>

Avicenna tries to corroborate his argument that definitions indicate the quiddities of definienda by means of the function of definitions, too. This is such that definitions, for him, are not meant to distinguish the definiendum from other things in a random manner. On the contrary, the purpose is to make the concept of the definiendum present to the mind in the same way that it exists in reality. So, given that a definiendum possesses as definiens two differentiae in addition to the genus, if one of the two differentiae is included in the definition to the omission of the other, this is enough for the function of distinguishing the definiendum from the others. But this does not suffice in the definitions designed to indicate the quiddity of a thing. For Avicenna, if definitions were meant to distinguish a certain thing from the others in a random manner, the formulae "Man is a body rational and mortal" would be accepted to be a definition<sup>51</sup>.

As another way of demonstrating his claim that definitions indicate quiddities, Avicenna invokes the principle that a thing can have one single definition. This is because the definiens are limited in number and constitute the quiddity of definiendum, and thus the definition can be formed in one single manner. In other words, definitions cannot be made shorter and longer than they should be. For example, it is needless to enumerate the general essentials of definiendum one by one after the proximate genus is included, for the concept of proximate genus indicates all these essentials by way of inclusion. Besides, if they are two or more, cutting out or omitting any of the differentiae impairs the definition, for a definition is meant to make the concept of a thing present to the mind in the same way that it exists in reality. Once this is realized, the purpose of discriminating the object of definition from other things follows. Therefore, once the essentials that should be included in the definition of a thing have taken place in the definition in the proper order, neither shortening the definition is something desirable, nor lengthening it can be made the point of criticism<sup>52</sup>.

Having defined the concept of definition as a statement that indicates a thing through its essential and constitutive attributes, Avicenna engages himself in defining the concept of description as a statement that indicates a thing through its

<sup>50</sup> Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, p. 16.

<sup>51</sup> Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, p. 16.

<sup>52</sup> Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, p. 17.

peculiar and general attributes. Yet he does not fail to clarify that the attributes that make up the description of a thing are peculiar to the thing when combined, not separately<sup>53</sup>. Thus the underlying point of difference between the essentialist definition and description is this: While the attributes, namely, genus and differentia, being used in forming a essentialist definition are the essentials that constitute the quiddity of definiendum, the attributes used in forming description, i.e., general accidents and properties are accidental to the definiendum. For the property has been defined as accidental attributes peculiar to one single species and the general accident as accidental attributes found in more than one species.

### 1.6. The Difficulties Inherent to the Task of Forming Definitions

At the point of acknowledging the difficulty of reaching essential definitions, Avicenna remarks in his introduction to his *Risālah al-Ḥudūd* as the following: "My friends requested of me to dictate to them the definitions of some things. Yet I asked to be excused from this task because I did know that this task is too difficult for a human being. Whether the definition is essentialist or descriptive makes no much difference in the degree of this inherent hardship... But let us point to the difficulty of this art [forming definitions] first."<sup>54</sup>

These remarks of Avicenna reveal the difficulty of forming a true definition. Depending on the following expositions of the philosopher, one can reduce this difficulty to two main reasons: (1) The difficulty of determining which attributes are essential and of including the essentials in definition only; (2) The difficulty of making sure that definition includes all the essentials without excluding any of them.

As we have already pointed out, indicating the quiddity of a thing amounts to identifying the attributes that constitute the quiddity. The first difficulty inherent in forming a true definition, therefore, is that of determining which attributes are essential and which ones are not. Avicenna points to this difficulty as the following: "How then can one be sure in constructing definition that one has not mistaken an inseparable accidental which does not separate from the definiendum even in the estimative faculty for an essential as well as a distant genus for a proximate one."<sup>55</sup>

Avicenna discusses the second difficulty inherent in the forming of definition in the context of what is aimed at by definition. A definition is meant to form the mental image of a thing that corresponds completely with its image in reality,

<sup>53</sup> Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, p. 17.

<sup>54</sup> Avicenna, *Risālat al-Ḥudūd*, edited by A.-M. Goichon, Publications de l'Institut Français d'Archeologie Orientale Du Caire, Cairo 1963, p. 1-2.

<sup>55</sup> Avicenna, *Risālat al-Ḥudūd*, p. 5.

which entails complete congruence between the definition and the definiendum. To underscore this congruence, the philosopher compares the defining of a thing and the distinguishing of it from the others. Thus, while it suffices with the task of distinguishing a thing to mention as many attributes of it as to differentiate it from others, this is not enough with the goal of defining. On the contrary, one should mention all the essential attributes of the definiendum, be they actual or potential. This technically means that definition should be made of the most proximate genus and include all the differentiae<sup>56</sup>. Avicenna alludes to this difficulty and re-emphasizes the hardship inherent in reaching a true definition: “Let’s assume that one has reached and included in definition all the essentials unknown, excluding any non-essential inseparable accidentals. In shorter terms, one has mentioned proximate genus in the definition. But how can a human being reach all the differentiae in a way that corresponds to the definiendum thoroughly without excluding any part of it... For this reason and the likes, it does not seem possible to achieve true definitions except a very few.”<sup>57</sup> In conclusion, Avicenna states that making the essentialist definition of a thing requires a comprehensive and profound knowledge thereof, which is most of the times difficult for man to possess.

## 2. Suhrawardī’s Criticism of Avicenna’s Theory of Essentialist Definition

Suhrawardī deals rather briefly with the five universals in the third and fourth rule of the first chapter in the first section of his *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. In the third rule titled “Quiddities”, he divides realities into the simple and the non-simple. Thus, if a reality is composed of parts in the mind, it is non-simple, and if not, it is simple. As an example of the non-simple, he mentions the animal, for the mind conceives of the animal as being composed of body and a thing that accounts for its aliveness. Second, while the mind views the concept of the body to be more general than that of the animal, it conceives of the thing that accounts for the aliveness as something particular to the animal. He, therefore, calls the body of the animal “general part” and the thing that underlies aliveness “particular part.” Hence, Suhrawardī completes his treatment of genus, differentia, and species from the five universals through the example of the animal. In this context, one should

<sup>56</sup> Avicenna, *Risālat al-Ḥudūd*, p. 5–6.

<sup>57</sup> Avicenna, *Risālat al-Ḥudūd*, p. 5–6.



note that Suhrawardī avoids using the Peripatetic terminology of semantic logic, replacing “essential” with “part”, “genus” with “general part”, and “differentia” with “special part.”<sup>58</sup>

As to the general and particular accidentals, Suhrawardī calls them all incidentals (*‘arīḍ*), yet dividing into the “necessary incidentals” and the “separable incidentals.” If an incidental cannot be thought to separate from the reality to which it belongs and is implied by it, not being attached to it by anyone other than itself, it is a necessary incidental. To illustrate the incidental of this sort, Suhrawardī cites for triangle to have three angles, for a triangle cannot be thought to be without three angles or no triangle can be thought without three angles. Second, no triangle has three angles because it is made to be such by an extraneous agent. Otherwise, the relation of having three angles to triangle would be contingent, and not necessary. As for the inseparable incidentals, Suhrawardī contents himself with mentioning risibility for man, for example<sup>59</sup>.

Suhrawardī's division of part and the incidental is the same as Avicenna's distinction of the accidental and the essential because the conception of part is prior to that of the whole and part plays a role in the coming into existence of the whole. The part of animality, for example, is as such with respect to the concept of human being. In contrast to this, the necessary and the separable incidentals are conceived to be posterior to the reality to which they belong and the reality plays a role in their coming into existence. To summarize, for Suhrawardī while part makes up the quiddity, the incidental's existence is entailed by the quiddity<sup>60</sup>. This means that Suhrawardī's division of part and the incidental overlaps with Avicenna's distinction of the accidental and the essential. That said, one should note that Suhrawardī's use of part instead of the essential, as we shall see, is not just a terminological disparity. On the contrary, by this he gives the first signs of his disagreement with Avicenna over his theory of definition.

Having briefly discussed the five universals from his own point of view by his own terminology, Suhrawardī goes on to elaborate upon the kinds of human knowledge. For him, man's knowledge is either innate or non-innate. The former is obtained through sense perception, teaching, and spiritual vision, the last of which being peculiar to the great sages. If one fails to know something by any of these ways, one tries to know it by placing other things known to him in a certain

<sup>58</sup> Shihābuddīn Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* (in *Majmū'āt-i Mušannafāt-i Shaykh-i Ishrāq*, edited by Henry Corbin, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Najafqulī Ḥabībī, Muassasa-i Muṭāla'āt ve Taḥqīqāt-i Farhangī, Tehran 1375 Hijri Solar (1996)); *İşrak Felsefesi: Hikmetü'l-İşrâk*, Turkish translation by Tahir Uluç, İz Yayıncılık, Istanbul 2009, p. 34–35.

<sup>59</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 16; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 35.

<sup>60</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 16; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 35–36.

order. Yet the knowledge of these things should go back eventually to the innate knowledge. Otherwise, to know a single thing, one shall need to know infinity of things, regressing ad infinitum<sup>61</sup>. These accounts of Suhrawardī are the same as those of Avicenna's except the fact that the former counts spiritual vision as one of the valid ways of acquiring knowledge.

In the seventh rule titled "Definition and Its Conditions" in the *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, Suhrawardī neither offers a definition of definition nor distinguishes between "definition" and "description." On the contrary, he immediately begins the exposition of the conditions of definition<sup>62</sup>. As we shall see in the following pages, his avoidance to draw a distinction between definition and description is due to his rejection of the distinction between the essential and the accidental which underlies the former distinction. Now we can proceed to Suhrawardī's précis of the conditions of definition.

- (1) Definition should be formed from the attributes peculiar to the definiendum. And these attributes, either each of them or some of them, should be peculiar to the definiendum either when they are combined or discretely. Suhrawardī builds his criticism of Avicenna's theory of definition and the validity of his own on the argumentation that the attributes cited in the definition are only peculiar to the definiendum when they are united, and not separate.
- (2) Definition should be more obvious than the definiendum. It is not acceptable that the definition be equally or less obvious than the definiendum, nor is it acceptable that the definition only come to be known after the definiendum is known. Thus, it is not valid to define father as "one having a child." This is because father and child are equally known or unknown. If one knows one of them, one knows the other. Nor is it correct to say, "Fire is a thing similar to the soul", for the soul is less obvious than fire.
- (3) The quality used in definition should be known prior to the definiendum, not at the same time. Thus, the statement, "The sun is a star that rises at daytime" is not a valid definition since daytime is known through the rise of the sun.
- (4) The definition of a reality is not simply replacing a word with another, for this makes sense in the context that one knows the reality but is confused about the meaning of the word that expresses it.

<sup>61</sup> Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 18; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 37; Shihābuddīn Suhrawardī, *al-Mashāri' wa al-Muṭārahāt*, MS Leiden: Or. 365, *al-Manṭiq*, fol. 97 (cited by Hossein Ziai, *Ma'rifaat wa Ishraq dar Andisha-i Suhrawardi (Knowledge and Illumination: A Study of Suhrawardi's Hikmat al-Ishrāq)*, Scholars Press, Atlanta 1990), Persian translation by Sīmā Nurbakhsh, Farzān, Tehran 2005, p. 112).

<sup>62</sup> Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 18; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 37.

- (5) In defining the relative meanings, the cause of the relation should be mentioned. In defining the derivative meanings, the source of derivation should be cited along with another thing in accordance with the context of derivation<sup>63</sup>.

Having listed the conditions of definition that are the same as those occurring in Avicenna's theory of definition, Suhrawardī proceeds to critique Avicenna's theory of definition. Yet first he quotes Avicenna's formulation of essential definition and description: "Some people call the statement that indicates the quiddity of a thing essential definition. This statement indicates a thing's essential attributes and the entities that are included in its reality. They call the statement description that explains a thing through its incidentals and attributes that are not included in its reality."<sup>64</sup>

In this context, one should raise the critical question: What are the essential attributes and constituents of the definiendum? Are they objectively identifiable or do they vary from one person to another according to the philosophical and doctrinal tendencies? Suhrawardī seems to think that there cannot be reached an agreement as to which attributes should be taken as essential, trying to prove this point by mentioning the so-called essential definition of body. As we will discuss in detail in the chapter on physics, Avicenna argues that body is a substance that is composed of matter and form, a theory of physics known as hylomorphism in Aristotelian nomenclature. Thus, he defines body as the "matter having form." Suhrawardī, however, rejects, as we shall also see in physics, the Stagirite's hylomorphist theory, arguing that body is simply magnitude, which is impossible to undergo change. Hence, the parts of matter and form have no room in his definition of body<sup>65</sup>.

Second, Suhrawardī has laid down some conditions about definition. The knowledge that underlies definition should rely eventually upon innate knowledge that is attained through one of the ways of sense perception, teaching, or spiritual vision, and the definiens should be more obvious than the definiendum, not equally or less obvious than it. Accordingly, Avicenna's definition of body "matter having the form" is false. Since the knowledge of matter and form is not accessible through any of the aforementioned innate ways of knowing, the definiens fail to fulfill the condition of depending on innate knowledge. Second, the rule that the definiens

<sup>63</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 18–19; *Íşrak Felsefesi*, p. 37–38.

<sup>64</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 19; *Íşrak Felsefesi*, p. 38. See also Shihābuddīn Suhrawardī, *Manṭiq al-Talwīḥāt*, edited by 'Alī Akbar Fayyād, Dānīshgāh-i Tehrān 1336 Hijri Solar (1957), p. 14–15 (cited by Ziai, *Ma'rīfat wa Ishrāq*, p. 100–102); *al-Mashāri'*, *al-Manṭiq*, fol. 14 (cited by Ziai, *Ma'rīfat wa Ishrāq*, p. 104).

<sup>65</sup> See Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 20; *Íşrak Felsefesi*, p. 38.

should be more obvious than the definiendum is also violated, for matter and form are more obscure than the body itself<sup>66</sup>.

Suhrawardī argues that the latter rule is violated in the Peripatetic definition of man, i.e., “Man is a rational animal” because man is more obvious to the public than the rational soul<sup>67</sup>, whose reality is obscure even to the prominent Peripatetic philosophers<sup>68</sup>.

The third criticism Suhrawardī levels at the Peripatetic theory of essential definition is this: The constituents of definition are in the mind prior to the quiddity of the definiendum, making up the quiddity. Rationality, however, is both accidental and posterior to the reality of man. It follows that rationality is neither a part of the quiddity of man nor prior to it<sup>69</sup>. Hence, the Peripatetic definition of man is proven to be false from this point of view, too, for Suhrawardī.

Suhrawardī constructs his fourth criticism of the Peripatetic theory of definition on the notion of differentia or the particular part. He points out that the Peripatetics accept that the general and the particular parts of a thing’s quiddity should be included in its definition, citing Avicenna’s definition of genus and differentia in his own terminology: While the general part that constitutes a thing’s quiddity is genus, the part that is particular to the quiddity is differentia. He then quotes Avicenna’s formulation of the way for obtaining knowledge: The knowledge of an unknown thing is only acquired by means of those that are known. He then arrives at the conclusion: “If one knows neither the thing nor its particular essential from other places, he continues to not know the thing. But if he happens to know the essential from other places, it shall not be particular to the thing. Thus, if the essential is not particular to the thing, nor is it a quality that is perceptible by the senses, it continues to be not known. Thus, the thing itself also continues to be not known.”<sup>70</sup>

We can explain this argumentation through the example of the definition of man: Let’s assume that man is composed of the genus of animality and the differentia of rationality. Hence, to one who does not know man and therefore asks, “What is man?” we say, “Man is a rational animal.” In this definition, the concept of animality is the general part because it is common to both man and other animals. In comparison to this, rationality is the particular part since it

<sup>66</sup> See Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 20; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 38; Suhrawardī, *Kitāb al-Talwihāt*, vol. 1, p. 8. See also Yörükan, *Şihabeddin Sühreverdî ve Nur Heykelleri*, p. 73; Toktaş, *İslâm Düşüncesinde Felsefe Eleştirileri*, p. 40–41.

<sup>67</sup> Suhrawardī, *Kitāb al-Talwihāt*, vol. 1, p. 8.

<sup>68</sup> See Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 20; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 38–39.

<sup>69</sup> See Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 20; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 39; *al-Mashāriʿ, al-Mantiq*, v. 16 (cited by Ziaî, *Maʿrifat wa Ishrāq*, p. 111).

<sup>70</sup> See Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 20–21; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 39.

only exists with man. In this case, one who does not know what man is shall know man's part of animality even without knowing man because it also exists with other animals. He, however, will not know the part of rationality from the animals other than man since it only exists with man. Neither will he know the part at issue from man since he does not know what man is either. Thus, given that the knowledge of man depends on the knowledge of man, which in turn depends on the knowledge of rationality, one who fails to know man shall fail to know rationality, too, and thus shall continue to not know man. On the other hand, if the knowledge of the part of rationality is assumed to be possible from the animals other than man, that part will not be proper to man; on the contrary, it will be common to both man and other animals, resulting the contradictory result that what is assumed to be a particular part is not so. Nevertheless, it is not necessary, one may argue, that rationality should be either acquired from another place or continue to be unknown. On the contrary, rationality can be defined by means of a more primary general part, i.e., genus, and a more primary particular part, i.e., differentia. Afterwards, one combines the definition of rationality and animality and thereby arrives at the definition of man. This is similar to making the result of a syllogism a premise for another syllogism or to proving the premise of a syllogism by means of another syllogism.

Yet Suhrawardī, having calculated the probability that one might raise such objection, clarifies that, if we continue our discussion with the example of the definition of man, the problem that arises with respect to the quiddity of man holds true of the quiddity of rationality. Given that rationality is to be defined by means of a presumed more primary general part and a presumed more primary particular part, the particular part will not be known until rationality itself is known since it is proper to rationality, even though the general part can be known through other qualities that are common. Nevertheless, rationality is not known and therefore an attempt is made to define it. Hence, since the knowledge of the particular part of rationality depends on rationality itself, which is not known, the particular part of rationality will continue to be unknown. On the other hand, if this particular is known from a context other than rationality, it will not be proper to rationality. It would follow that what is claimed to be particular part will not be such, which is a clear contradiction<sup>71</sup>.

To put briefly, if an attempt is made to define an unknown thing by means of its particular attributes, that is, differentia, one of the two results arises: Either these attributes are possible to be known from another context or not possible. In the former case, the attributes prove to be neither particular to the thing, nor do

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<sup>71</sup> See Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 21; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 39.

they differentiate it from the similars. In the latter, since the thing is unknown, its particular attributes, too, are unknown, resulting that the thing continues to be unknown.

Suhrawardī bases the validity of this argument on the condition that the part proper to the definiendum, i.e., differentia, should not be something perceptible to the senses. Considering the definition of body, for example, its particular part-no matter if we take matter or form as the particular part-is not for Suhrawardī something perceptible. Thus, the statement “Body is matter having form” will make no sense for one who does not know the body via sense perception. The same holds true of the particular constituent of man’s quiddity since Suhrawardī claims that even the prominent Peripatetics do not know what it is<sup>72</sup>.

In his fifth criticism of the Peripatetic theory of essential definition, Suhrawardī argues that one cannot be sure that all the essential attributes of the definiendum are included in the definition, concluding that definition fails to yield a certain knowledge. To this argument, however, one may raise the objection that we can cast in an exceptional syllogism: Were all the essential attributes not included in the definition, we would not know the definiendum. But we do know the definiendum. Thus, all the essential attributes are included in the definition<sup>73</sup>.

As is obvious, the middle term that leads to the result, “Thus, all the essential attributes are included in the definition” is the claim for having the knowledge of the quiddity of the definiendum. Suhrawardī, however, thinks this syllogism to be circular and thus invalid. This is because the conceptual knowledge of a thing depends on the knowledge of all its essentials. Thus, if it is impossible for one to know the quiddity of a thing without knowing all its essentials for sure, it is all the more impossible for one to depend the claim for knowing all the essentials on the claim for the knowledge of the quiddity<sup>74</sup>.

Suhrawardī’s sixth criticism of the Peripatetic theory of definition rests on the necessity of a full correspondance between the definiendum and the definition<sup>75</sup>. On these grounds, he refuses Avicenna’s following statement in the *Ishārāt*: “Definition is necessarily composed of genus and differentia.”<sup>76</sup> Suhrawardī disapproves of this statement because it declares in absolute terms that definitions of all existents are made of genus and differentia. Yet for Suhrawardī only the things that have genus and differentia in reality are to be defined through genus and dif-

<sup>72</sup> Bkz. Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 20; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 38, 39.

<sup>73</sup> See Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 20; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 38, 39.

<sup>74</sup> See Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 21; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 40; *al-Mashāri’*, *al-Manṭiq*, v. 98 (cited by Ziai, *Ma’rifat wa Ishrāq*, p. 112).

<sup>75</sup> Suhrawardī, *al-Mashāri’*, *al-Manṭiq*, v. 15 (cited by Ziai, *Ma’rifat wa Ishrāq*, p. 107).

<sup>76</sup> Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, p. 16.

ferentia<sup>77</sup>. Afterwards, he engages himself in proving that the things that are considered by the Peripatetics to be genus and differentia have no correspondence in reality. For example, he goes on to argue, the Peripatetics claim that black is composed of the genus of color and the differentia of blackness. Black, however, is seen in concrete reality one single entity, not two distinct entities as color and blackness. In the same manner, the Peripatetics consider the dimension of surface to be composed of the genus of magnitude and the differentia of surfaceness. Yet it is seen a single entity, not two distinct entities as magnitude and surfaceness<sup>78</sup>. Again man is seen in concrete reality one single entity, not two distinct entities as animality and humanness<sup>79</sup>. In brief, all the existents are seen one single whole, not divided into genus and differentia. Provided the necessity of complete congruity between definition and the defined, when genus and differentia are not seen, they should not occur in the definition either. In result, in contrary to the claim of Avicenna, no definition can be formed from genus and differentia that indicates quiddity.

That all said, it is time to ask the question: If Avicenna's theory of definition fails to lead to conceptual knowledge, what method can do that? In other words, what does Suhrawardī have to suggest as a theory of definition? We can reduce Suhrawardī's theory of definition to two conditions: (1) Only the attributes that are perceptible to the senses should be used in definition. (2) These attributes should be particular to the thing defined when they are united together, not separately<sup>80</sup>.

In the *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, Suhrawardī offers no definition that is constructed in accordance with these two conditions. Yet he alludes to its existence by his words, "Genus and differentia are employed in another way, which we have explained elsewhere in our books."<sup>81</sup> The definition alluded to is found in the chapter on logic of his *Kitāb al-Mashāri' wa al-Muṭārahāt*. Suhrawardī makes it clear that it does not suffice to list the attributes as discrete parts because they are one single entity in reality, and not discrete parts<sup>82</sup>.

How then is it possible for a definition to contain many attributes and be a single entity at the same time? Suhrawardī's solution to this puzzle is as follows: The knowledge of a thing as it is in reality is only possible through a direct vision of it. It follows that it is not possible to reveal in words the reality of a thing to

<sup>77</sup> Suhrawardī, *al-Mashāri'*, *al-Mantiq*, v. 17 (cited by Ziai, *Ma'rifat wa Ishrāq*, p. 110).

<sup>78</sup> Suhrawardī, *al-Mashāri'*, *al-Mantiq*, v. 15 (cited by Ziai, *Ma'rifat wa Ishrāq*, p. 107).

<sup>79</sup> See Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 66–67; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 84.

<sup>80</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 21, 86; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 39–40, 98.

<sup>81</sup> See Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 20; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 39.

<sup>82</sup> Suhrawardī, *al-Mashāri'*, *al-Mantiq*, v. 15 (cited by Ziai, *Ma'rifat wa Ishrāq*, p. 107).

someone who has not seen it<sup>83</sup>. Given that any definition, regardless of its kind, is composed of words in final analysis, it is not possible to convey with definition the knowledge of the reality of a thing to someone who has not seen it. Thus, both Mehmet and Ahmet should initially see an elephant so that one of them be able to define its reality for the other. Then and only then, let say, Ahmet defines the elephant for Mehmet saying that, “Elephant is the thing that you see with all its qualities together.”<sup>84</sup> Suhrawardī calls this definition “name”, claiming to be the truest kind of definition, since it depends on its direct vision and includes all its attributes in combination<sup>85</sup>. Thus, we can say that definition of a thing for Suhrawardī is no more than pointing to it by hand.

The result Suhrawardī is trying to arrive at through all the discussions and arguments above is this: If one fails to know a thing through physical vision or through the spiritual vision proper to the true sages, it is impossible to convey the knowledge of its reality to one through a statement that is alleged to indicate it. In short, it is impossible to form an essentialist definition. Suhrawardī claims that “Their master (*ṣāhib*) also admitted this fact.”<sup>86</sup> Bearing in mind the points I have called attention to in the introduction of this study, I think that Suhrawardī might have meant by the phrase “their master” either Aristotle or Avicenna or both.

Suhrawardī asserts that conceptual knowledge can be acquired through either physical or spiritual vision. So far we have tried to analyze his theory of definition that relies on physical vision. But what does the author mean by the spiritual vision (*mushāhadah*) proper to the true sages? We can suppose that there is no difference between us as ordinary people and the true sages in perceiving of the material things with the bodily eyes. So, the objects of the vision specific to the true sages must be beyond and above the physical world. To get some insight into what these objects are, we need to be familiar with Suhrawardī’s cosmological system.

Suhrawardī asserts that all existents emanated from one single principle which he names the Light of Lights (*Nūr al-Anwār*)<sup>87</sup>. Since this principle is one in all respects, the existents can only emanate from It hierarchically and gradually, not at once and all together<sup>88</sup>. In the beginning, only one thing emanates from the Light of Lights, which he calls the Most Proximate Light (*al-Nūr al-Aqrab*). This

<sup>83</sup> Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 54–55; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 73; *al-Mashāri’*, *al-Mantiq*, v. 14 (cited by Ziai, *Ma’rifat wa Ishrāq*, p. 106).

<sup>84</sup> Bu örnek bize aittir.

<sup>85</sup> Suhrawardī, *al-Mashāri’*, *al-Mantiq*, v. 15 (cited by Ziai, *Ma’rifat wa Ishrāq*, p. 109).

<sup>86</sup> See Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 21; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 38.

<sup>87</sup> Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 121; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 130.

<sup>88</sup> Suhrawardī, *Hikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 125; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 133.



light is poor in itself and rich thanks to the Light of Lights<sup>89</sup>. From the Most Proximate Light do emanate the second light and the all-encompassing sphere (*al-barzakh al-muḥīt*)<sup>90</sup>, from the second the third light, from the third the fourth, and from the fourth the fifth<sup>91</sup>, this process continuing until the last light emanates, from which no other light emanates<sup>92</sup>. Suhrawardī refers to these lights as the “sublime principal dominant lights” (*al-qawāḥir al-uṣūl al-a‘lawān*)<sup>93</sup>, the “dominant lights” (*al-anwār al-qāhiraḥ*)<sup>94</sup>, the “vertically-ordered lights” (*al-anwār al-mutarattibah al-ṭūliyyah*)<sup>95</sup>, and the “principal intellects” (*al-‘uqūl al-uṣūl*)<sup>96</sup>. These are counterpart to the immaterial intellects in Avicenna’s cosmology except the fact though these lights are not infinite in number, they are not limited to ten or fifty and odds; on the contrary, they are over hundreds<sup>97</sup>.

There is a network of interactions between the vertically-ordered lights themselves, between the lights and their own rays, between the lights and the rays of one another, and between the rays themselves. Besides, there is a combination of interactions among the aspects of the lights such as those of poverty, richness, love, and domination. From all this combination of interactions, there appear the altitudinal dominant lights or the equal dominant lights<sup>98</sup>. Suhrawardī also calls them the “dominant lights as the Forms” (*al-anwār al-qāhiraḥ al-ṣuwariyyah*)<sup>99</sup>. These kind of lights are the ontological principles of all existents in both the celestial spheres and the elemental sublunar world. In this context, he terms these lights the “masters of icons” or “the masters of idols” (*ṣāḥib al-haykal or ṣāḥib al-ṭilsim*) or the “lords of species” (*arbāb al-anwā‘*) and the “lords of icons”<sup>100</sup>. For example, the sun’s master of icon is *Shahrūr*<sup>101</sup>, the water’s is *Khordād*, the

<sup>89</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 128; *Íşrak Felsefesi*, p. 136; Shihābuddīn Suhrawardī, *Hayākil al-Nūr* (in *Majmū‘āt-i Muṣannafāt-i Shaykh-i Ishrāq*, edited by Henry Corbin, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Najafqulī Ḥabībī, Muassasa-i Muṭāla‘āt ve Taḥqīqāt-i Farhangī, Tehran 1375 Hijri Solar (1996)), vol. 3, p. 95.

<sup>90</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 133; *Íşrak Felsefesi*, p. 140.

<sup>91</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 140; *Íşrak Felsefesi*, p. 145.

<sup>92</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 147; *Íşrak Felsefesi*, p. 149.

<sup>93</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 142; *Íşrak Felsefesi*, p. 146.

<sup>94</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 145; *Íşrak Felsefesi*, p. 148.

<sup>95</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 144; *Íşrak Felsefesi*, p. 148.

<sup>96</sup> See Suhrawardī, *al-Mashārī‘*, vol. 1, p. 463.

<sup>97</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 140, 155; *Íşrak Felsefesi*, p. 145, 155; *Hayākil al-Nūr*, vol. 3, p. 148–49.

<sup>98</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 142–43; *Íşrak Felsefesi*, p. 146–47.

<sup>99</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 145; *Íşrak Felsefesi*, p. 148.

<sup>100</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 143; *Íşrak Felsefesi*, p. 147.

<sup>101</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 149; *Íşrak Felsefesi*, p. 151.

plant's is *Mordād*, the fire's is *Urdūbihisht*<sup>102</sup>, the soil's is *Asfandārmodh*, man's is *Jabrāil* (Gabriel), who is also called *Rawān-bakhsh* (Soul-Provider) and *Rūh al-Quds* (Holy Spirit), too<sup>103</sup>.

In fact, one may tend to understand the masters/lords as the species forms and the icons as the particulars of the species forms. Yet there are substantial differences between the Illuminationist masters/lords and the Peripatetic species forms. First, the former are the ontological principles of their icons and prior to them in the thought. Again, they are substances that really are in the world of lights independently from their icons<sup>104</sup>. In contradistinction to this, the species forms depend in their existence on their particulars, let alone being their ontological principles. Second, the species forms are intellectual images or concepts that the mind forms by abstracting the particulars, having no reality whatsoever outside of the mind. Therefore, the universal species are posterior to the particulars in the thought. Thus, while the lords are immaterial substances that are not only ontologically independent of their icons but also their ontological principles, the species forms have no existence outside of the mind independently from their particulars.

Second, the species is a mental entity that is composed of genus and differentia while the masters/lords, for Suhrawardī, are simple essences although their icons are conceived of as compound<sup>105</sup>. Accordingly, man's master of icon is not compounded from animality and his being bipedal. On the contrary, it is a latitudinal dominant light when whose shadow falls upon the corporeal world, its icon appears as a perfect man with organs and limbs<sup>106</sup>.

To further clarify the difference between the Illuminationist masters/lords of icons and the Peripatetic notion of the universals, Suhrawardī says as follows: "There are metaphors in the words of the Ancients. Hence, they do admit that the predicates are mental beings and that the universals exist only in the mind. Yet what they mean by their words "There is a universal man in the intelligible world" is that there is a dominant light having many rays interacting with one another and that it is man in the magnitudes [i.e., in the corporeal world]. It is a universal, but not in the sense that it is predicated of many things, rather in the sense that it is equally related to many individuals by overflowing onto

<sup>102</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 156; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 157.

<sup>103</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 201; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 186; *Hayākül al-Nūr*, vol. 3, 97.

<sup>104</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 160; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 158; *Kitāb al-Talwīḥāt*, vol. 1, p. 68.

<sup>105</sup> Suhrawardī, *al-Mashāri'*, vol. 1, p. 461.

<sup>106</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 159; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 157–58.

all of them. With respect to these individuals, it is like a whole, and is their principle and source. This universal is not the concept of the universal [in logic] whose meaning does not prevent the occurrence of commonness, for the Ancients confirm that this universal [unlike the one in logic] has a specified essence and is self-conscious. Thus, how can it be a universal [in the sense used in logic]?"<sup>107</sup>

In conclusion, we can say that Suhrawardī's masters/lords of icons are entirely different from the species forms of Aristotle and Avicenna as composite entities of the thought, corresponding instead to the simple substantial Forms of Plato. Hence, it is time to ask the question: Given that the origin and the real nature of things are the masters/lords and that they are not embedded in their icons or idols but distinct from them and exist in the world of lights lying beyond and above the material world, how then can we attain the knowledge of the true nature of things? Suhrawardī claims that the human soul, also an immaterial substantial light, can behold those masters/lords of icons by detaching itself from the body. He goes on to argue that such ancient philosophers and sages as Socrates, Plato, as well as Hermes, Agathademon, and Empedocles before them professed that the Creator of everything is a light, that there are dominant lights, the masters/lords of icons emerged from them, and that Indian and Persian sages are agreed upon this truth<sup>108</sup>. He also claims that Zoroaster spoke of these lights and that Hermes, Plato, and the King Kaikhosrow had vision of them<sup>109</sup>, narrating such experiences of Plato<sup>110</sup> and Kaykhosrow<sup>111</sup>. To his mind, the words the pillars of wisdom and prophecy said of the things they experienced in their spiritual visions should be given credence<sup>112</sup>. He goes on to argue that any objection to these pillars on the part of those who did not live this mystical experience is not only erroneous but also a clear indication of their imperfection and ignorance, and that everyone may live this experience if he worships God in devotion and frees himself from the bodily attachments<sup>113</sup>. Besides, he describes the beginning of

<sup>107</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 160; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 158.

<sup>108</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 156; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 155.

<sup>109</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 156–57; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 156; *Kitāb al-Talwīḥāt*, vol. 1, p. 112–13.

<sup>110</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 162; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 159; *Kitāb al-Talwīḥāt*, vol. 1, p. 112.

<sup>111</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 157; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 156; Shihābuddīn Suhrawardī, *al-Alwāḥ al-ʿImādiyya* (in *Majmūʿāt-i Muṣannafāt-i Shaykh-i Ishrāq*, edited by Henry Corbin, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Najafqulī Ḥabībī, Muassasa-i Muṭālaʿāt ve Taḥqīqāt-i Farhangī, Tehran 1375 Hijri Solar (1996)), vol. 4, p. 92.

<sup>112</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 156; *İşrak Felsefesi*, 155–56; *al-Mashārīʿ*, vol. 1, p. 460.

<sup>113</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 255; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 219; *al-Muqāwamāt*, vol. 1, p. 190.

wisdom as detachment from the world and its middle as the ability of beholding the divine lights, telling that there is no end to wisdom<sup>114</sup>.

Trying to corroborate his metaphysics of lights with the Qur'anic verse "God is the light of the heavens and the earth"<sup>115</sup>, Suhrawardī claims that the Prophet Muḥammad spoke of his own vision of these lights, quoting the following words as prophetic traditions: "God has seventy-seven veils of light. Were they to be removed from His Face, the burning lights (*subuḥāt*) of His Face would burn everything that would behold the Face." "O Light of Light! You veiled Yourself from the creatures. Therefore, no light can perceive of Your Light. O Light of Light! By Your light are lightened the residents of the heavens and are illuminated the residents of the earth. All lights are extinguished because of Your light." "I seek You by the light of Your Face that fills the pillars of Your Throne."<sup>116</sup>

Suhrawardī claims that he himself also experienced vision of the world of lights and that he had had been a zealous follower of the Peripatetics in denying the world of lights<sup>117</sup> until he lived his experience by which he attained the knowledge thereof<sup>118</sup>. In conclusion, given that the epistemology of Suhrawardī depends on vision in both physical and spiritual sense<sup>119</sup> and that Avicenna's epistemology in general and his theory of essential definition in particular are essentially rationalistic and intellectualistic, Suhrawardī discards Avicenna's theory of essential definition as inadequate because for him definition fails to impart the knowledge of a thing's reality and definition is not needed when the thing is seen.

Before closing this chapter, one should say that Suhrawardī is not completely right in his description of Avicenna's epistemology as sheerly and exclusively rationalistic. For Avicenna not only composed works of mystical content and language and initiatic character, but also approved explicitly of the existence and validity of mystical knowledge in his *Ishārāt*, one of his most mature and most important philosophical writings<sup>120</sup>. Though Avicenna's remarks therein are not wild enough to demonstrate that he is an ideal Sufi-at least to the standards of Suhrawardī-, they are certainly clear enough to prove that he is hardly a rationalist<sup>121</sup>.

<sup>114</sup> Suhrawardī, *al-Mashāri'*, vol. 1, p. 195.

<sup>115</sup> The Surah Nūr, 24: 35.

<sup>116</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 162–64; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 159–160.

<sup>117</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 156; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 156.

<sup>118</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 232; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 206.

<sup>119</sup> Suhrawardī, *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*, vol. 2, p. 10; *İşrak Felsefesi*, p. 26.

<sup>120</sup> Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, p. 182 and on.

<sup>121</sup> See Shams Inati, *Avicenna and Mysticism*, Kegan Paul International, London and New York 1986, p. 4; Dilaver Güner, "Süfi" İbn Sînâ ve *Makâmâtü'l-Ârifîn'i*", *Tasavvuf İlmî ve Akademik Araştırma Dergisi*, year: 2001, no.: 6, p. 135 and on.

## Conclusion

Suhrawardī holds that the philosophical system, known as the *Mashshā'iyyah* or Peripateticism, founded by Aristotles in the Antiquity and reformulated by Alfarabi and Avicenna in the Islamic Medieval Age, is unable to yield the knowledge of truth because it is purely discursive, and discourse alone for him does not impart the knowledge of truth. Meaning by discursive philosophy (*al-ḥikmah al-baḥṭhiyyah*) the epistemological system built exclusively upon reason and its different usages in different realms, Suhrawardī insists that resort should be taken to intuition and mystical, spiritual vision as a way of obtaining knowledge.

Avicenna's conception of essentialist definition depends on the notion that a thing can be known though it is not seen. For he thinks that it is possible to form the quiddity of a thing in the mind as it really is in the concrete. This is accomplished through mentioning in definition the parts that compose the quiddity of the thing. Yet Suhrawardī holds that one cannot know the truth of a thing without seeing it. In attempt to establish this argument and, in other words, to refute Avicenna's theory of definition, he presents several arguments. But they all reduce to the notion that it is impossible for the definition of a thing to represent its quiddity as it is in reality.

First, Avicenna argues the definition of a thing to consist of genus and differentia. Yet that thing, counters Suhrawardī, is one in the concrete, not two things as genus and differentia, for we see it one single whole, not two parts. It follows that this bipartite concept of definition does not reveal the definiendum as it is in reality, failing to yield the true knowledge of it.

Second, even if the genus of the definiendum is known from other contexts because it is the general part, the differentia is impossible to be known from other things as it is peculiar to the definiendum. In order to know a thing, one therefore must certainly see it, as opposed to Avicenna who claims the definition of a thing to fulfill the epistemological function of the vision of it.

Once he completes his critique of Avicenna's conception of definition, he sets forth his own. For him, a thing is only known through seeing it and then a name is assigned to signify it. Suhrawardī calls this act of assignment and signification "definition by name" and holds it to be the most perfect definition.

## Summary

This paper is intended to compare the epistemologies of two major schools of classical Islamic philosophy, namely, the *Mashāshā'iyya* and the *Ishrā'iyya*. The term *Mashāshā'iyya* is the literal Arabic translation of Peripateticism that refers to the Islamic philosophical school that is largely characterized by Ari-

stotelianism and Neoplatonism and is represented by Alfarabi, Avicenna, and Averroes. As for the Arabic term *Ishrāqīyya*, meaning literally illuminationism, designates the philosophical school, founded by Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī, which is composed of such a broad range of elements as Platonism, Neoplatonism, Pythagoreanism as well as Islamic mysticism, pre-Islamic Persian angelology and symbolism. One, however, can reduce Suhrawardī's illuminationism to a twofold structure: theoretical and philosophical on one hand and intuitional and mystical on the other. The latter consists largely of Suhrawardī's extensive critique of Avicenna's views in the fields of epistemology, physics, and metaphysics. The present study aims at elaborating on his critique of Avicenna's epistemology with a special emphasis on the latter's theory of definition.

**Key Words:** Islamic philosophy, philosophical criticism, Avicenna, Suhrawardī, Islamic Peripateticism.

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