Studia Orientalia 114

TRAVELLING THROUGH TIME

Essays in honour of Kaj Öhrnberg

Edited by

Sylvia Akar, Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila
& Inka Nokso-Koivisto

Helsinki 2013

Travelling through Time: Essays in honour of Kaj Öhrnberg
Edited by Sylvia Akar, Jaakko Hämeen-Anttila & Inka Nokso-Koivisto
Studia Orientalia, vol. 114, 2013

Societas Orientalis Fennica
c/o Department of World Cultures
P.O. Box 59 (Unioninkatu 38 B)
FI-00014 University of Helsinki
FINLAND

Typesetting
Lotta Aunio

ISSN 0039-3282
ISBN 978-951-9380-84-1

Picaset Oy
Helsinki 2013

CONTENTS

SUHRAWARDĪ'S KNOWLEDGE AS PRESENCE IN CONTEXT

Jari Kaukua
University of Jyväskylä

INTRODUCTION

Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī (d. 1191 CE) is famous – or notorious, depending on whose opinion we cite – for having coined the notion of presential knowledge (*al-ʿilm al-ḥuḍūrī*), knowledge through presence (*ʿilm bi-l-ḥuḍūr*), or slightly more liberally, knowledge as presence. This notion was to provide an alternative to the Peripatetic cognitive psychology of Avicenna, which was founded on the idea of increasing abstraction of cognitive forms from matter that Suhrawardī perceived to be fundamentally problematic.[1] Perhaps the prevalent occidental interpretation of the resulting "illuminationist" or "oriental" (*ishrāqī*) epistemology, taking its cue from Henry Corbin's pioneering studies, has considered it an intuition-based theory, the main aim of which is to account for and culminate in a mystical type of knowledge that transcends the realm of what is commonly called philosophical.[2] The past couple decades have witnessed a corrective move to emphasize the philosophical motives and maneuvers in Suhrawardī's thought,[3] as well as the importance of studying his work in its generative context – that is, in the framework of the twelfth century CE reception of Avicennian philosophy.[4]

Yet in spite of undeniable progress in our *philosophical* understanding of Suhrawardī, we still lack a solid and historically founded grasp of what exactly

1 For an extended analysis of Suhrawardī's epistemology as a critical departure from Avicennian Peripateticism, see Ziai 1990.
2 See, for instance, Corbin 1971: 47–67; Nasr 1963; 1964: 66–77; Amin Razavi 1997: 98–120.
3 Ziai 1990; Walbridge 1992; 1999; Marcotte 2004; forthcoming; Kaukua 2011.
4 For an excellent example, see Eichner 2011.

Studia Orientalia 114 (2013), pp. 309–324

the idea of knowledge as presence amounts to.[5] The present article is an attempt at one possible interpretation. We will proceed in two steps, taking into consideration the two most extensive discussions of knowledge as presence in the metaphysical sections of *al-Talwīḥāt* and *al-Mashāriʿ wa-l-muṭāraḥāt*.[6] In the first part of the paper, I will argue that the notion of knowledge as presence is introduced in the context of explaining God's knowledge of particulars. My argument is that the approach Suhrawardī takes here has an important precedent in Avicenna, for the insight, according to which God's knowledge of particulars can be elucidated by means of a certain peculiar feature of human experience, is Avicennian through and through. In the second part of the paper, I will show how the notion of knowledge as presence, left in a somewhat skeletal shape in the *Talwīḥāt*, is fleshed out in a corresponding section of *al-Mashāriʿ wa-l-muṭāraḥāt*.

PRESENCE IN THE *TALWĪḤĀT*

Interestingly, although the *Talwīḥāt* follows the traditional Peripatetic order of procedure, Suhrawardī introduces the notion of presence neither in the sections devoted to theory of science nor in those discussing cognitive psychology. Rather, it is only towards the end of the third, metaphysical part of the work, when tackling the problem of God's knowledge of the particular entities of His creation, that he employs the term and the idea behind it. The term itself figures only in the enigmatic passage where Suhrawardī recounts how Aristotle, as an emphatically mythical figure, appeared to him in a dreamlike vision after he had exhausted himself laboring with "the question of knowledge".[7]

Plenty has been written about this passage, but few writers have paid sufficient attention to the context. Two context-related observations in particular are quite crucial for a full comprehension of why and in what sense Suhrawardī introduces the concept of presence here. First of all, the passage is embedded in a metaphys-

5 The only extended systematic study of the concept is Ha'iri Yazdi 1992. In spite of its undeniable merits, Ha'iri Yazdi's book is not a historically rigorous study. This is not surprising, since his pronounced aim is to present the theory of knowledge as presence as an epistemological alternative endogenous to Islam, which is capable of making sense of mystical knowledge better than any of the available theories in contemporary analytic philosophy. While I believe that the following interpretation is compatible with Ha'iri Yazdi's in broad terms, I will not address either the connections or the possible differences in detail here.

6 I have consulted two editions, Corbin 2009a and Habibi 2009, for the *Talwīḥāt*. References to these editions will be made by the abbreviation *T*, followed by section, chapter, and page numbers, with "C" for Corbin and "H" for Habibi. For *al-Mashāriʿ wa-l-muṭāraḥāt*, I use Corbin 1952 and will refer to the text by the abbreviation *MM*, followed by section, chapter, and page numbers.

7 *T* III.3.1: 70 C; 238–239 H.

ical discussion of God, and the particular *explanandum* here is *God's* knowledge of particular things.[8] The second observation concerns similarities between the *Talwīḥāt* and certain texts by Avicenna in their discussion of God's knowledge.

Before introducing the appearance of Aristotle, Suhrawardī briefly reviews the problems of some of the available alternatives in their attempts to make sense of knowledge in general and God's knowledge in particular. He first argues against the theory of knowledge as a strict unity or identity between the subject and the object of knowledge in a manner that is entirely derivative of Avicenna.[9] But he also has qualms with Avicenna's own theory, according to which cognitive forms inhere in the knowing subject, universal forms in an intellectual subject, and particular forms in a subject of perception.[10] According to the standard Avicennian phrase, God knows particular things "in a universal manner", which is often qualified by saying that He knows His creation by knowing Himself as its cause.[11] The universality of God's knowledge is due to His immateriality, which entails that He is a subject of intellection, and that therefore the proper objects of His knowledge are universal.[12] The equivalence of immateriality and intellectuality is explicitly borne out in Avicenna's discussion of human access to particulars in the *Shifāʾ: al-Madkhal* I.12.[13] Given that the human soul is intellectual, the manner of cognition proper to it is apprehension of universals, and so – as an intellect, like God – it only has access to particular entities in a universal manner. For instance, I can know my friend Zayd as a human being with such and such complexion, build, gait, humorous character and so forth – with as many other universal attributes as I may like to add. But the problem is, the Zayd that I thereby grasp is not really a particular person but a bundle of universal properties, which could in principle be shared by individuals other than Zayd. Yet I feel it intuitively plausible that my friend is a unique person whose individuality cannot be reduced to the accidental fact that there happen to be no other human beings with the exact same bundle of properties. The problem that Suhrawardī seems to perceive here is that I am somehow certain that I apprehend an individual in this strong sense, and that our theory of knowledge should be able to maintain this intuition.[14]

---

8 This observation is somewhat controversial; I will discuss Heidrun Eichner's alternative interpretation at the end of the first section of this paper.

9 *T* III.3.1: 68–69 C; 237–238 H; cf. Avicenna, *Shifāʾ: Fī al-nafs* V.6: 239–240.

10 Eichner 2011: 119–127, ably shows that the problems Suhrawardī raises were commonplace in the 12th century critical reception of Avicennian epistemology.

11 For relevant texts and discussion, see Marmura 1962; Adamson 2005.

12 For this traditional tenet in Avicenna, see Adamson 2011a.

13 Avicenna, *Shifāʾ: al-Madkhal* I.12, 70.

14 *T* III.3.1: 69 C; 237–238 H; for discussion, see Eichner 2011: 129.

But Avicenna did propose a solution to the dilemma: Human beings are not merely intellects but also souls that function in and engage with the material world by means of corporeal instruments proper to them. Thus, their faculties of sense-perception allow them an ostensive reference to unique spatio-temporal co-ordinates, which are the foundation of the individuality of material entities. The person I am conversing with can be none other than my friend Zayd because I perceive him as *this* individual *here* right *now*.[15] Suhrawardī is perfectly aware of this attempt at a solution.[16] Why does he find the solution unsatisfactory?

Heidrun Eichner has recently suggested that this is because of problems related to Avicenna's substance dualism, or more precisely, his inability to make lucid sense of the relationship between the immaterial human substance and its body.[17] Since the focus is exclusively epistemological here, the relevant aspect of the mind-body relationship is of course how a material process in the organs of perception can cause the immaterial appearance of a particular object in a cognitive subject that is designed to apprehend universal objects. Merely stating that the organs are causally related to particular things does not explain how those things can be given as appearances to the soul.

Although the problem Eichner reconstructs is a real one for any substance dualist, it is difficult to see how Suhrawardī's proposed solution could meet with any greater success. I will come back to this at the end of the section, once we have a preliminary idea of what the concept of knowledge as presence is about. But let it be said here that I believe that the real motive for Suhrawardī's dissatisfaction arises from the context of the discussion. In this sense, two conditions are relevant. First of all, since God is absolutely one, His knowledge of Himself and the world of His creation cannot be two pieces of knowledge *in* Him. Secondly, since God is the supreme knower, He has to know the world somehow, lest there be any deficiency in His knowledge.[18] As a result, Suhrawardī needs a concept of knowledge that is capable of making sense of a subject's simultaneous knowledge both of itself and other objects, and allows for both particular and universal objects to be apprehended the same subject. Avicenna's theory of knowledge, based on the inherence of cognitive forms in the knowing subject and on making the apprehension of particular objects conditional on a relationship with matter, fails on both counts as an explanation of God's knowledge, and *this* is why

15 Avicenna, *Shifāʾ: al-Madkhal* I.12: 70; cf. Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, nahj 1: 5–6. For a discussion, see Black 2012; Eichner 2011: 130.

16 *T* I.1.4: 8 H; for a brief discussion, see Eichner 2011: 129.

17 Eichner 2011: 135–136.

18 See the discussion immediately following the story of Aristotle's appearance, especially *T* III.3.1: 75–76 C; 244–245 H.

Suhrawardī attempts to carve the conceptual map anew by means of the notion of knowledge as presence.

In fact, it is precisely in the problem of how to account for the possibility of an immaterial subject apprehending particular objects that Aristotle comes to help Suhrawardī:

> So he said to me: Return to yourself, and it will be solved for you.
>
> I said: How?
>
> And he said: You apprehend yourself, and your apprehension of your self is either by your self or by means of another, but then you would have another faculty or self that apprehends yourself, and the discussion would revert, and so its absurdity is evident. Since you apprehend your self by your self, is that by considering a trace of your self in your self?
>
> I said: Of course.
>
> He said: Then if the trace does not correspond to your self, it will not be its form, and you do not apprehend [your self].
>
> So I said: Thus, the trace is the form of my self.
>
> He said: Is your form of an absolute soul or one individuated by other attributes?
>
> And I opted for the second.
>
> So he said: Every form in the soul is universal – even if it were composed of many universals – and it does not prevent participation in itself; if it is supposed to be prevented, that is due to another preventing [factor]. You apprehend your self, and it prevents participation in itself, and so this apprehension is not of form.
>
> So I said: I apprehend the concept "I".
>
> And he said: The concept "I" as the concept of I does not prevent participation from occurring in it, and you know that the particular, insofar as it is nothing but a particular, is universal; and "this", "I", "we" and "it" have universal intelligible meanings with respect to their separate concepts without particular reference.
>
> So I said: How then?
>
> He said: Since your knowledge of your self is not by means of a faculty other than your self, knowing that you are nothing but the one apprehending your self, neither by a trace that does not correspond nor by one that does, therefore your self is an intellect, what understands and what is understood.[19]

19 *T* III.3.1: 70–71 C; 239–240 H. All translations are my own.

Suhrawardī here proceeds in the order that Avicenna has laid out in his discussion of the human soul in the third *namaṭ* of the *Ishārāt*.[20] Under Peripatetic tutelage, Suhrawardī takes self-awareness to be the basis of all knowledge. Right after the suggestion to return to one's self and one's awareness of oneself, the dialogue rules out the possibility of explaining self-awareness by means of more basic epistemological or psychological concepts: self-awareness is not based on any form or trace impressed in the self, nor is it due to grasping any specific concept, such as the concept "I". Thus, the arguments specifically address the concerns extrapolated above, for self-awareness here provides a paradigmatic example of knowledge that cannot be explained as inherence of what is known in the knower. Moreover, it forces us to attribute knowledge of at least one particular thing, its self, to every intellectual subject.[21]

Suhrawardī's Aristotle then goes on to argue that our awareness of our bodies and the faculties operative in them is given to us in exactly the same manner and as immediately as our awareness of ourselves. This is already an extension of the ground laid by Avicenna, and it is followed by another innovation – that is, the claim that the two cases of immediate givenness amount to a *presence* of what is known to the knower.

> He said: When you are aware that you apprehend neither by means of a corresponding trace nor by means of a form, know that intellection is presence of something to a self separate from matter, or if you like, say: non-existence of [the thing's] absence from [the self]. This is more complete because it includes apprehension of something of both itself and another, for the thing is not present to itself, but it is not absent from [itself] either. As regards the soul, it is separate and not absent from its self, and in accordance with its separation it apprehends its self and what is absent from it, which when it is not made present to [the soul] in concrete, such as heaven, earth and their kind, [the soul] makes present its form. As regards particulars, they are in faculties that are present to [the soul], and as regards universals, they are in its self, for among all that is apprehended the universal is not impressed in bodies, and what is apprehended is the very form that is present, nothing external to conception. If it is said of the external that it is apprehended, that is in a secondary sense. [The soul's] self is not absent from its self, nor is its body [absent from the soul] in any regard whatsoever, nor are any faculties apprehending its body [absent from the soul] in any regard whatsoever.[22]

---

20 Avicenna, *Ishārāt*; this structural similarity is also pointed out by Eichner 2011: 132.

21 These are standard arguments in Suhrawardī. For other instances, see Suhrawardī A, II.1.5: §§ 115–116, 111–113; Suhrawardī B: 80–81; Suhrawardī C, III.28; V.43. I have discussed the arguments and their Avicennian precedents at greater length in Kaukua 2011.

22 *T* III.3.1: 71–72 C; 240–241 H.

Self-awareness is presented as the paradigmatic example of presence, and the presence of other cognitive content is founded upon it. Universals are present in the self that is present to itself, whereas particular objects are present by means of the presence of the self's faculties to the self. The crucial turn here is that Suhrawardī takes a term that is mainly used of self-awareness in twelfth-century philosophical Arabic, and extends its usage to other types of cognition.[23]

Thus, in order to come to grips with what Suhrawardī has in mind with presence here, we must briefly recapitulate his understanding of self-awareness. As I have argued elsewhere, Suhrawardī relies on Avicenna's description of the most basic type of human self-awareness.[24] Self-awareness as presence of the self to itself alludes to the fact that whatever acts or apprehensions a human being is subject to, they will all be given to her in the first person and always characterized for her as *mine*. Or to use a technical term that Suhrawardī coins in the *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, self-awareness amounts to an "I-ness" (*anā'iyya*) at the very core of each human being.[25] Following Avicenna, Suhrawardī insists that self-awareness in this narrow sense is a *primitive* fact that cannot be analyzed by means of more basic psychological or epistemological concepts.

But how can this be reconciled with the broad use of presence, not only of self-awareness but also of universal objects of knowledge, as well as the body, its cognitive acts and their respective objects? First of all, it is important to note that the various cases of presence are hierarchically ordered. The subject's presence to itself is the foundation for the presence of its faculties, and it is only by means of the faculties that objects of the subject's operations by means of them are present to it.[26] One way of interpreting this is to say that the body and objects of knowledge become present to the subject by entering the field of presence constituted by the subject's awareness of itself. If this interpretation is correct, the concept of presence, instead of introducing a new type of knowledge, signals a shift of approach from a psychological account of the genesis of knowledge to a consideration of knowledge as a matter of experience. In other words, presence only means being

23 Cf. Rāzī, *Mabāḥith* II.1.2.3.1.3; I.444; and see Eichner 2011: 126–127.

24 See Kaukua 2011.

25 Suhrawardī A, II.1.5: §§ 115–116, 111–113, Suhrawardī B: 80–81; see Kaukua 2011: 146–147.

26 Cf. *MM* III.7.1: 487 C. A parallel hierarchy is put forth in the ensuing account of God's knowledge: God is primarily present to Himself, but this entails the simultaneous presence of His concomitants in a descending order from the celestial intellects to the celestial souls, and subsequently to whatever takes place under their guidance below (*T* III.3.2: 75–76 C; 244–245 H).

first-personally given, or appearing to a subject that exists in the first person.[27] That Suhrawardī makes a shift in approach is corroborated by the fact that he does give a genetic account of human cognition in his theory of psychology.[28] However, that is not relevant in this context, because here he wants to focus on a similarity between our knowledge and God's knowledge in order to make sense of the latter, and this he finds in the form of givenness (that is, presence).

Moreover, Suhrawardī's criticism of Avicenna is difficult to grasp unless we assume a shift of the suggested sort. As Eichner has suggested, there is a conflict of theoretical interests between logic and psychology in Avicenna's account of intellection and universals.[29] If intellects are limited to cognizing universals, then Avicenna will indeed run into problems when accounting for the grasp of particulars by human subjects, who due to their immateriality are by definition intellects. But that incoherence is not Suhrawardī's target here, for were that the case, it would be hard to avoid a rather grim assessment of his philosophical acumen. Why should Suhrawardī's solution – that particulars are present to the immaterial self by means of the presence of its corporeal faculties of cognition – be any less obscure or problematic than Avicenna's? In fact, is not his alleged solution little more than a paraphrase of the Avicennian constituents of the problem? Corporeal faculties will still be required for *human* awareness of particulars. But if the point is to make conceptual room for knowledge of particulars, absolutely speaking – that is, including the special case of God and departing from the connections between immateriality, intellection, and universality on one hand and materiality, perception, and particularity on the other – Suhrawardī's move appears much sounder. The concept of knowledge as presence does this by focusing on the givenness, or appearance, of what is cognized, and by setting aside questions about the way in which appearance is brought about. This shared basis of givenness, appearance, or presence allows Suhrawardī to use ordinary human knowledge, as well as its simultaneous presence of the knowing self and its known objects, as a point of departure to discuss God's knowledge.

---

27 Suhrawardī's assumption of the concept of appearance (*ẓuhūr*) as the basis of metaphysics in Suhrawardī (A, II.1–7: 106–120; B: 76–85) seems to me a correlate move. I thus disagree with Eichner (2011: 128), according to whom the *Talwīḥāt* represents a middle stage in Suhrawardī's career, at which point he is attempting to depart from Avicennian philosophy but has not yet arrived at a fully fledged illuminationist alternative. For a general argument against distinct stages in Suhrawardī's brief career, see Ziai 1990: 14–19. The *Talwīḥāt* is a summary of Peripatetic philosophy interspersed by points and comments that are fully coherent with the allegedly more mature thought of the *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*. A case in point is the discussion of self-awareness in the two works. This is also supported by the statement in *MM* III.71: 483–484 C.

28 *T* II.4.2: 151–154 H; II.4.3; 1–2, 157–166 H.

29 Eichner 2011: 130–131.

Interestingly, there is an Avicennian precedent for this very move, for Avicenna gives his most extensive single account of self-awareness in a similar context – in order to dispel our difficulties in grasping how God can understand both Himself and His creation in an absolutely single act of intellection.[30]

PRESENCE IN *AL-MASHĀRIʿ WA AL-MUṬĀRAḤĀT*

The present interpretation of the *Talwīḥāt* is corroborated by the parallel chapter in *al-Mashārīʿ wa-l-muṭāraḥāt*, which also discusses knowledge as presence in the context of the problem of God's knowledge. Again, Suhrawardī first presents the familiar arguments against an identity theory of cognition. He then refutes in passing the theory according to which knowledge amounts to unification with the active intellect,[31] and he proceeds to discuss an interesting argument that he attributes enigmatically to "people [...] who are stronger in investigation" than those proposing unification with the active intellect. This section is tacitly derived from Avicenna, who argues in the *Ishārāt* that all entities separate from matter are capable of self-intellection because matter is not there to prevent this.[32] Suhrawardī refutes the argument in a manner reminiscent of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's critical claims in his commentary to the text,[33] the main qualm being that Avicenna is not capable of making sense of God's understanding of Himself.[34] Thus, we stand on solid ground, which is familiar from the *Talwiḥāt*.

Having dealt with the faults of the alternatives, Suhrawardī presents an account of God's self-intellection that he deems sound. This is where we first encounter a term that is synonymous with "presence" in the *Talwīḥāt*, that is, "absence of hiddenness". Suhrawardī says that God is not hidden from Himself, and because of this presence to Himself, He immediately understands Himself. Thus, God is the act of understanding, that which understands and what is understood, in an absolute unity.[35] Moreover, Suhrawardī goes on to base God's knowledge of His creation on His presence to Himself: God knows His creation as a concomitant of His self, which is present through His presence.[36]

Having thus laid out his cards on the question of God's knowledge, Suhrawardī opts to elucidate the notion of presence, or absence of hiddenness, by means

30 Avicenna, *Taʿlīqāt*: 160–161.
31 *MM* III.7.1: 474–475 C.
32 Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, namaṭ 3, 132.
33 Cf. Rāzī, in *Ishārāt*, I: 169–173.
34 *MM* III.7.1: 475–477 C.
35 *MM* III.7.1: 477 C.
36 *MM* III.7.1: 478–483 C.

of human knowledge, which he quite obviously takes to be more familiar to us. Accordingly, he mentions that the next best approach to that of the *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* is the one offered by Aristotle in the vision recounted in the *Talwīḥāt*, that is, "that the human being first investigates his knowledge of himself (*fī ʿilmihi bi-dhātihi*) and then ascends to what is higher".[37] This suggests, first, that we need not assume any fundamental breach between the three works considered here, and second, that drawing an intimate connection between the concept of knowledge as presence and the problem of God's knowledge is not entirely unwarranted.[38]

The discussion of presence commences by ruling out, in the manner of the *Talwīḥāt* and the *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, the possibility that self-awareness should take place by means of any special object – or any object, for that matter. Suhrawardī's distinction here between self-awareness (awareness of oneself as an I) and object-awareness (awareness of whatever apprehended as an it) is made in exactly the same terms as in the *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*.[39] He also mentions an argument against Avicenna's idea, familiar from the *Talwīḥāt*, that if the immaterial human soul's proper mode of cognition is intellection of universals, it cannot be aware of itself as a particular entity.[40] This provides an incentive for extrapolating on a number of points that are illuminative from the point of view of our present task, for they corroborate my claim that the introduction of the concept of knowledge as presence amounts to a paradigm shift of approaches to knowledge, precisely because they emphasize in explicit terms the close connection between presence and first-personal givenness. First of all, Suhrawardī emphasizes that the body is always present as one's *own* body:

> Furthermore, the soul apprehends its body, and it apprehends its estimation and imagery, and if it apprehended these things by means of a form in itself – that form being universal – the soul would move a universal body and operate universal faculties, and it would have neither apprehension of its body nor apprehension of the faculties of its body. This is not correct, how could it be when estimation ignores itself, ignoring also the internal faculties! In that case it would not reject their traces. Thus, since estimation does not apprehend these faculties, since none of the corporeal faculties apprehends itself, and

37 *MM* III.7.1: 484 C.

38 Moreover, given that the discussion of metaphysical fundaments in the *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* is naturally described as a paradigm shift in the basic concepts of metaphysics, one from "substance" to "appearance", Suhrawardī's statement here can also be read in support of the possibility of a parallel paradigm shift in the concept of knowledge. However, a detailed treatment of the relationship between Suhrawardī's epistemology and metaphysics is beyond the scope of this paper.

39 *MM* III.7.1: 484 C. Cf. Suhrawardī A: §§ 115–116, 111–113, Suhrawardī B: 80–81; for discussion, see Kaukua 2011.

40 *MM* III.7.1: 484 C.

> since the soul apprehends nothing but universals, the human being must not apprehend his body, his estimation and his imagery which are exclusive to him as a particular. That is not the case, for he is not a human being who does not apprehend *his particular present body* and *his particular present faculties*, and operate *his particular faculties*, thus the human being does not apprehend himself by means of a form, nor his faculties as a whole by means of a form, nor his body as a whole by means of a form.[41]

This point is not new,[42] but for our concerns the emphasis on the ownness of the present body is all-important, for it serves to elucidate the sense in which Suhrawardī took self-awareness to be the epistemological basis on which the body and its faculties, and their actions and respective objects in turn, appear to the self-aware subject. Other things can be present to such a subject because the subject is a field of presence that is always present to itself.

Another related point is dwelt upon in the subsequent paragraphs, where Suhrawardī first takes up the phenomenon of pain. According to him, when we feel pain, we feel the thing itself. Pain is not a representation of a wound, a lesion, or anything like that, but rather the very wound itself as it is present through the faculty of touch. Of course, we can later on see the wound and even infer that *it* is causing the pain, but we should not thereby draw the conclusion that what is seen is in any sense prior to or more real than the pain itself. The two appearances can be identified with each other because both are present to the same subject, not because the wound that is seen *causes* the pain.[43] Importantly, Suhrawardī does not consider pain to be an anomaly in perception. Rather, due to its pronounced immediacy pain provides a brilliant example of a fact of all perception: perception is not constituted by the occurrence of forms that represent extramental objects of perception, but is rather to be conceived as the entrance of the very things perceived, through the soul's faculties of perception, into the field of presence that the soul is in and of itself. This is summarized in Suhrawardī's conclusion:

> On the basis of that the party of Peripatetics has to admit this: that they allow that although the form has occurred in the instrument of sight, the human being may not be aware of it – when he is immersed in his thought or in what another sense is bringing forth – and so there is no doubt about the soul's attention to that form, and *apprehension is only by means of the soul's attention to what it sees as being looked at*, and what is being looked at is not by means of a

41 *MM* III.7.1: 484–485 C; emphasis added.
42 The argument is there *in nuce* in the *Talwīḥāt* vision, and it seems to go back to Avicenna's influential argument against reflection-based models of self-awareness (see Avicenna, *Ishārāt*, namaṭ 3: 120; for a discussion, see Kaukua 2007: 110–111).
43 *MM* III.7.1: 485 C.

> universal form, rather what is being looked at is by means of a particular form, and so there is no doubt that if the soul has presential illuminational knowledge, it is not by means of a form.[44]

It is not sufficient for perception that a physical process takes place in the organ of perception. The process has to be attended by the soul, or it has to be present to the soul. In other words, what goes on in the organ of perception has to enter the field of presence constituted by the soul – that is, its experience – in the manner proper to the particular faculty in whose organ the process takes place. In itself, the soul is nothing but this field of presence, this first-personal experience, which is entered by various contents that are thereby made present.[45]

Finally, Suhrawardī's move to elucidate God's knowledge by means of these observations on human experience shows that the present analysis of knowledge is not psychological. This is not intended as a natural philosopher's account of how knowledge comes to be. Rather, it is an attempt to spell out what knowledge is when it is understood in experiential terms as presence. It is in this precise sense that Suhrawardī uses human knowledge as a means to elucidate his theological subject. Here self-awareness is foundational precisely because it provides the basis by means of which other cognitive content can become present. God's knowledge is defined as "illuminational knowledge without a form or a trace but merely by means of an individual relation which is the illuminational presence of the thing, *like for the soul*, but in the Necessarily Existing it is more primary and more complete".[46] Because of this greater completeness, God "knows Himself not by anything additional to Himself – as has come up in the case of soul – and He knows things by presential illuminational knowledge".[47] Thus, the only difference between knowledge as presence found in God and in human beings depends on how the presence of other things is brought about; human subjects passively receive their content from what is genuinely other through their faculties, but God will have His as His own concomitants, just as is proper for a supreme agent. But this difference is all but irrelevant here, for the reason why the kind of presence we find in ourselves can assist in elucidating the presence of God is that it is *similar* to it in some fundamental respect.

Moreover, in spite of the differences in the causal accounts of how cognitive content becomes present to the divine and the human subject, human experi-

---

44 *MM* III.7.1: 485 C; emphasis added.

45 This is not as striking a claim as it may sound, for Avicenna has already straightforwardly identified human existence with self-awareness in this precise sense. See Avicenna, *Ta'līqāt*: 160–161; Kaukua 2007: 78–82.

46 *MM* III.7.1: 487 C; emphasis added.

47 *MM* III.7.1: 487 C.

ence is used here – as in the *Talwīḥāt*, but unlike anywhere in Avicenna – to make sense of God's knowledge not only of Himself but also of His creation. The human case can be cast in this explanatory role only if we disregard the psychological approach and focus on knowledge as a given matter of experience – that is, as presence. As the paradigmatic case of knowledge as presence, human self-awareness gives us an idea, as imperfect as it may be, of what immediate knowledge is like at its most intense. But it also enables Suhrawardī to explain in what sense it can be both one or simultaneous with and distinct from the presence of other cognitive content. By being present as the first-personal field of presence in which other things can become present, the self is there in immediate relation to but also independent of its other. At the same time, the other owes its presence to the self-aware subject for which it appears, because were it not for the subject as a field of presence, no object would be present in the first place. Furthermore, considered merely as the field of presence, the subject is not altered by the content that enters and leaves the field.

In this sense Suhrawardī can claim that God knows particular things *as particulars* – without such qualifications as in a universal way – because, being the same sort of field of presence that human subjects are, He is not changed by the entrance of particular things into His knowledge. He has absolute illumination and dominion and nothing escapes from Him, and past and future things – the forms of which are established by the celestial directors – are present to Him because He encompasses and illuminates the substrate of those forms, and the same holds of intellectual origins.[48] God is aware of the universe in a hierarchical continuity, mediated by the celestial intellects and souls that are the causes of the sublunary realm. But this need not confine Him to cognition in universal terms, for the mediation of the celestial intellects and souls can be conceived in the same manner as the mediation of the soul's faculties in its knowledge of objects external to it. In spite of mediation, individual things are brought into the field of presence of God's knowledge. By the same token, God retains His absolute unity as pure presence, because the qualifications due to the attribute of knowledge do not affect that presence in any way. God remains Himself because His apprehension of Himself is His inner life as the light in which created things come to be.[49]

48 *MM* III.7.1: 488 C.
49 *MM* III.7.1: 489 C.

CONCLUSION

By paying attention to the context in which Suhrawardī introduces the concept of knowledge as presence, I hope to have made plausible the claim that the concept signals a shift of approach from psychological explanation of cognition as a natural process to a consistent consideration of knowledge as a first-personal experiential phenomenon. Thus, the concept does not introduce a new type of knowledge. But the shift it signals is important in another regard, for it can be argued that Suhrawardī thereby provided both the impetus and conceptual means for later development of the concept of mental existence by such thinkers as Mullā Ṣadrā. This development, however, can only be explored once we have a clearer concept of what exactly knowledge as presence means, and it is towards this more modest goal that the present study is hoped to have contributed.[50]

REFERENCES

Adamson, Peter 2005. On Knowledge of Particulars. *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 105: 257–278.

Adamson, Peter 2011a. Avicenna and His Commentators on Human and Divine Self-Intellection. In: Dag Nikolaus Hasse & Amos Bertolacci (eds), *The Arabic, Hebrew and Latin Reception of Avicenna's Metaphysics*: 97–122. Berlin: de Gruyter.

Adamson, Peter (ed.) 2011b. *In the Age of Averroes: Arabic philosophy in the sixth/twelfth century*. London: Warburg Institute.

Amin Razavi, Mehdi 1997. *Suhrawardi and the School of Illumination*. Richmond: Curzon.

Avicenna, Ishārāt: *Ibn Sīnā: Le livre des théorèmes et des avertissements*. Ed. J. Forget, 1892. Leiden: Brill.

Avicenna, *Shifā': Fī al-nafs*: *Avicenna's De anima (Arabic Text): Being the psychological part of Kitāb al-Shifā'*. Ed. Fazlur Rahman, 1959. London: OUP.

Avicenna, Shifā': al-Madkhal: *Ibn Sīnā: Al-Shifā': La Logique I – L'Isagoge (al-madkhal)*. Eds Ibrahim Madkour, M. El-Khodeiri, G. Anawati & F. El-Ahwani, 1952. Cairo: Imprimerie Nationale.

Avicenna, *Ta'līqāt*: *Ibn Sīnā: al-Ta'līqāt*. Ed. 'Abd al-Rahmān Badawī, 1973. Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-'Āmma li al-Kitāb.

Black, Deborah L. 2012. Avicenna on Individuation, Self-Awareness, and God's Knowledge of Particulars. In: Richard Taylor & Irfan A. Omar (eds), *The Judeo-Christian-Islamic Heritage: Philosophical and theological perspectives*: 255–281. Milwaukee: MU Press.

Corbin, Henry 1971. *En Islam iranien: Aspects spirituels et philosophiques, 2: Sohrawardî et les Platoniciens de Perse*. Paris: Gallimard.

50 The research herein was conducted as part of the project "Subjectivity and Selfhood in the Arabic and Latin Traditions" funded by the European Research Council.

Corbin, Henry (ed.) 2009a. *Œuvres philosophiques et mystiques (Shihābuddīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī)* I: *La Métaphysique:* 1. *Kitāb al-Talwīḥāt*, 2. *Kitāb al-muqāwamāt*, 3. *Kitāb al-Mashāriʿ wa-l-muṭāraḥāt*. Tehran: Institute d'Etudes et des Recherches Culturelles.

Corbin, Henry (ed.) 2009b. *Œuvres philosophiques et mystiques (Shihābuddīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī)* II: 1. *Le Livre de la Théosophie Orientale*, 2. *Le Symbol de foi des Philosophes*, 3. *Le Récit de l'Exil Occidental*. Tehran: Institute d'Etudes et des Recherches Culturelles.

Eichner, Heidrun 2011. "Knowledge by Presence", Apperception and the Mind-Body Relationship: Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and al-Suhrawardī as representatives and precursors of a thirteenth-century discussion. In: Peter Adamson (ed.): 117–140.

Habībī, Najafqulī (ed.) 2009. *Sohrawardī: Al-Talwīḥāt al-Lawḥiyyah Va al-ʿAršyyah*. Tehran: Iranian Institute of Philosophy.

Haʾiri Yazdi, Mehdi 1992. *The Principles of Epistemology in Islamic Philosophy: Knowledge by presence*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Ishārāt: *Kitāb al-Ishārāt wa-Sharḥayhi li al-khwājah Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī wa-l-imām Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī ʿalayhimā raḥmat al-Bārī*. Ed. Anonymous, AH 1325. Cairo: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Khayriyya.

Kaukua, Jari 2007. *Avicenna on Subjectivity: A Philosophical study*. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä.

Kaukua, Jari 2011. I in the Light of God: Selfhood and self-awareness in Suhrawardī's *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*. In: Peter Adamson (ed.): 141–157.

Marcotte, Roxanne 2004. Irjaʿ ilā nafsika: Suhrawardī's apperception of the self in light of Avicenna. *Transcendent Philosophy* 5: 1–22.

Marcotte, Roxanne. Suhrawardi. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2012 edn). Ed. Edward N. Zalta. <plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2012/entries/suhrawardi/>

Marmura, Michael E. 1962. Some Aspects of Avicenna's Theory of God's Knowledge of Particulars. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 82: 299–312.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein 1963. Sḥihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardi Maqtūl. In: M.M. Sharif (ed.), *A History of Muslim Philosophy with Short Accounts of Other Disciplines and the Modern Renaissance in Muslim Lands*: 372–398. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein 1964. *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna – Suhrawardī – Ibn ʿArabī*. Cambridge: HUP.

Rāzī, *Mabāḥith*: *Al-Mabāḥith al-mashriqiyya fī ʿilm al-ilāhiyyāt wa-l-ṭabīʿiyyāt li-l-imām Fakhr al-Dīn ibn ʿAmr al-Rāzī*, I–II. Ed. Muḥammad al-Muʿtaṣim bi-l-Lāh al-Baghdādī, 1990. Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿArabī.

Suhrawardī A. Cf. Corbin (ed.) 2009b.

Suhrawardī B. *Suhrawardī: The Philosophy of illumination: A New critical edition of the text of Ḥikmat al-ishrāq with English translation, notes, commentary, and introduction*. Eds John Walbridge & Hossein Ziai, 1999. Provo: Brigham Young University Press.

Suhrawardī C. *Sohravardi: The Book of radiance / Partaw nāma*. Ed. Hossein Ziai, 1998. Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers.

Walbridge, John 1992. *The Science of Mystic Lights: Quṭb al-Dīn Shīrāzī and the illuminationist tradition in Islamic philosophy*. Cambridge: HUP.

Walbridge, John 1999. *The Leaven of the Ancients: Suhrawardī and the heritage of the Greeks*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Ziai, Hossein 1990. *Knowledge and Illumination: A Study of Suhrawardī's Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. Atlanta: Scholars Press.