



Examining Ibn Sīnā's and Suhrawardī's Notion of the Soul: Reflections on Their Philosophical Contributions in the Modern Context

The intricate nature of contemporary human life has placed individuals in a paradoxical position, simultaneously serving as active agents shaping societal development and passive recipients of the outcomes of this evolution. The predominant emphasis on material and intellectual pursuits has, in some instances, resulted in the neglect of the soul as a bridge to the transcendent realm, often associated with the divine. Consequently, many modern individuals find themselves disconnected from their own existence and spiritual well-being. This research aims to address the real-world challenges faced by contemporary individuals by exploring the philosophical concepts of Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawadī, which hold significant relevance to the conditions of modern society. This study, utilizing a qualitative approach and a comparative synthesis analysis model, unveils a convergence in the conceptualization of the soul between Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī, particularly in their efforts to curb the influence of the animalistic soul (*an-nafs al-hayāwanīyah*). While their methodologies differ, reflecting their respective Aristotelian and illuminationist traditions, their shared objective remains unwavering. Ibn Sīnā emphasizes the rational soul (*an-nafs al-naṭīqah*) through acquired reason (*al-'aql al-mustafad*), striving to attain divine knowledge, a goal also pursued, albeit via a different path, by Suhrawardī through ascetic practices. The pursuit of maximal rationality and the adoption of ascetic practices offer modern individuals a potent means to combat the soul-crushing emptiness often associated with spiritual and existential crises. These complementary mechanisms hold the promise of guiding contemporary individuals towards a state of self-actualization, where they are bathed in the illuminating radiance of divine knowledge and understanding..

Keywords: The Reflective Reason; Soul; Peripatetic; Illuminative; Humanity

Kompleksitas kehidupan manusia modern telah menempatkan mereka dalam posisi peran ganda; sebagai aktor pengembang dan objek yang diatur produk pengembangan. Orientasi pada aktifitas fisik dan intelektual berdampak pada pengabaian eksistensi jiwa sebagai penyambung dengan eksisten yang mutlak (Tuhan). Akibatnya, manusia modern kehilangan eksistensi dan laku spiritualnya. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menjawab problem aktual manusia modern dengan menghadirkan konsep pemikiran Ibn Sīnā dan Suhrawadī yang relevan dengan keadaan masyarakat modern. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dengan model analisis komparatif sintesis. Penelitian ini menunjukkan pertemuan konsepsi jiwa antara Ibn Sīnā dengan Suhrawardī dalam bingkai pengekan terhadap aktivitas jiwa hewani (*an-nafs al-hayāwanīyah*). Meskipun mekanisme keduanya berbeda sebagai dampak dari peripatetic dan iluminasi, akan tetapi tujuan pencapaiannya sama. Ibn Sīnā menonjolkan jiwa rasional (*an-nafs al-naṭīqah*) melalui akal perolehan (*al-'aql al-mustafad*) untuk mencapai pengetahuan ilahi yang dilakukan berbeda oleh Suhrawardī melalui mekanisme asketik. Kecenderungan untuk memaksimalkan rasionalitas dalam mengisi jiwa dan perilaku asketik memberikan pilihan terhadap manusia modern dalam mengatasi kekosongan jiwa sebagai penyebab krisis spiritual dan eksistensial. Dua mekanisme ini dapat mengantarkan manusia modern pada pencapaian kesempurnaan sebagai manusia yang dipancari oleh cahaya dan pengetahuan ilahi.

Kata kunci: Nalar Reflektif; Jiwa; Peripatetik; Illuminatif; Kemanusiaan

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Dates:

Received 10 Jan 2023

Revised 12 Apr 2023

Accepted 30 Apr 2023

Published 1 Jun 2023

How to cite this article:

Taufik, Muhammad, Jaffary

Awang, Muhammad Zainal

Abidin, and Khairiyanto.

"Examining Ibn Sīnā and

Suhrawadī Notion of the Soul:

Reflections on Their

Philosophical Contributions in

the Modern

Context". *ESENSIA: Jurnal**Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 24 (1)2024. [https://](https://10.14421/esensia.v24i1.4330)

10.14421/esensia.v24i1.4330

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Introduction

Humans' dual role in the technologically and industrially driven world, as both the driving force and the object being propelled, has profound implications for their existential questioning about their identity and path to happiness (God).¹ The current existential and spiritual crisis stems from the neglect of the soul as a bridge to the ultimate source of happiness – the divine. Rational and contemplative tendencies that disregard the soul's role in perfecting the body (*kamāl auwal*) are employed as coping mechanisms by modern humans, leading to a dearth in the manifestation of divinity.² Leveraging the insights of Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī, one can harness the power of rationality and contemplation to cultivate happiness through maximizing the soul's potential. However, these concepts are often confined within rigid philosophical frameworks, relegating them to opposing extremes and obscuring their relevance to modern human existence.

Researchers have moved away from comparisons of figures from different sects, instead seeking to identify their unifying impact on the actual development of society. Prior research often presented a comparison of Ibn Sīnā's and Suhrawardī's conceptions of the soul based on similarities and differences in their concepts. The concept of active intellect, a

common thread between the two, serves to explain the soul's relationship with God as its source of origin.³ The divergence in their conceptions is more widely acknowledged by researchers. Ehsanfar et al. posited that the distinction in their understanding of the soul stems from the differing approaches employed by Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī in exploring the human experience of self-discovery.⁴ Tajer and Zekrgoo, on the other hand, delved into the discrepancies in the fundamental concepts employed by both thinkers, drawing distinctions between the Peripatetic and Illuminationist perspectives.⁵ They further differentiated between the two by examining the emphasis on the soul's relationship with the body in terms of reincarnation⁶ and its role in substance.⁷ However, the comparative mechanism employed overlooks its significance in managing contextual variation.

Integrating contextual synthesis through comparative analyses of Ibn Sīnā's and Suhrawardī's conceptions of the soul can alleviate the intricate complexities plaguing modern human existence. By controlling contextual variation in comparative models, we gain the ability to mitigate societal crises arising from shifting contexts. This refined version employs more precise and vivid language, enhancing the overall readability and impact of the text. It also emphasizes the potential of

¹ Dejan Azdajic, "Longing for the Transcendent: The Role of Love in Islamic Mysticism with Special Reference to Al-Ghazālī and Ibn Al-'Arabī," *Transformation: An International Journal of Holistic Mission Studies* 33, no. 2 (April 13, 2016): 99–109, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0265378815595237>.

² Geoff Colvin, *Contemplative Prayer at Work in Our Lives: Resting in God's Presence and Action* (Oregon: Resource Publications, 2021), 100.

³ Mohammad Ali Abbasian Chaleshtori, "The Origin of Soul and Its Relationship with God in Attar's Manteq Al-Tayr, with a Review on Bird Treatises of Ibn Sina and Al-Suhrawardi," *Religions and Mysticism* 54, no. 1 (2021): 193–171, <https://doi.org/10.22059/JRM.2021.325078.630205>.

⁴ Majid Ehsanfar, Hossein Falsafi, and Seyyed Hossein Vaezi, "Analysis of Self-Awareness Based on Suspended Man from the Perspective of Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi," *Journal of Philosophical Investigations* 14, no. 32

(621): 72–82, <https://doi.org/10.22034/JPIUT.2020.41090.2640>.

⁵ Leyla H Tajer and Amir H Zekrgoo, "Wisdom (Hikmah) as Perceived by Iranian Muslim Scholars: Reflections on Ibn Sina, Ghazali, and Suhrawardi," *Journal of Islamic and Middle Eastern Multidisciplinary Studies: Mathal* 6, no. 1 (2019): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.17077/2168-538X.1104>.

⁶ Shabnam Sepah, Seyed Mohammad Sajadi, and Alireza Ebrahim, "An Approach to Reincarnation from the Perspective of Sheikh Eshraq and Ibn Sina," *Journal of Critical Reviews* 7, no. 8 (2020): 3510–20, <https://doi.org/10.31838/jcr.07.08.557>.

⁷ Hossein Falsafi, "Explaining, Analyzing and Measuring a Typical Form in the Philosophy of Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi," *Journal of Philosophical Investigations* 15, no. 37 (2021): 880–902, <https://doi.org/10.22034/JPIUT.2021.48315.3004>.





contextual synthesis and comparative analysis in addressing the challenges of modern life.⁸ To accomplish this objective, this research presents four discussion models. The initial discourse examines the soul's role within Sufi thought. The second segment outlines the brief histories of Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī, laying the foundation for the reflective connection between the two in the third section. The culminating section presents a synthesis of concepts relevant to the spiritual crisis faced by modern humans. These four sections collectively support the identification of a synthesis of Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī's thoughts on the soul, which holds the potential to address the challenges of modern society.

This research challenges the notion that the spiritual and existential crisis plaguing modern humans stems from a disregard for the mental faculties that guide moral decision-making. Instead, it asserts that revitalizing religious perspectives to fully realize the soul's potential for reaching the divine dimension is the paramount requirement for modern humans to transcend the confusion caused by their own actions.⁹ Within every human soul lies an innate yearning for the mystical, a realm where inner tranquility transcends the pursuit of material possessions. When the fulfillment of worldly desires fails to satiate the spirit's thirst, the soul instinctively turns towards the divine, seeking solace and fulfillment in the presence of God. This divine connection becomes the ultimate source of sustenance, nourishing the soul's insatiable hunger for meaning and purpose.¹⁰ It is imperative to exert every effort to prevent the perpetuation of this crisis upon future generations, safeguarding the cosmos, social structures, and the very fabric of human existence. Consequently, the crux of this research

lies in unraveling the principles underpinning the moral crisis experienced by humanity.¹¹

This research explores the realm of qualitative methods, relying on literature studies as its primary data source, to uncover novel mechanisms for alleviating the spiritual and existential crisis gripping modern humans. Drawing upon the works of Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī as the central objects of study, the research examines how these ancient philosophies can guide modern society in navigating spiritual and existential challenges. By employing a comparative analysis model that emphasizes contextual variation, the research synthesizes the perspectives of these two prominent thinkers to provide a comprehensive understanding of the soul, one that breaks free from the complexities of reality and offers tangible solutions for addressing the spiritual and existential dilemmas of modern life. This research departs from the conventional interpretation of Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī's concepts of the soul as rigid philosophical constructs. Instead, it seeks to establish a meaningful connection between their ideas and the experiences of modern humans, recognizing the relevance of these ancient philosophies in addressing contemporary challenges. Employing a comparative analysis model that emphasizes contextual variation, the research utilizes the perspectives of two prominent thinkers to synthesize a comprehensive understanding of the soul. This approach breaks free from the complexities of reality and produces a synthesis of ideas that has direct bearing on the lives of modern individuals. By recognizing the dynamic nature of the soul and its adaptability to different contexts, this research offers a fresh perspective

⁸ Paul Pennings, Hans Keman, and Jan Kleinnijenhuis, *Doing Research in Political Science* (New York: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781849209038>.

⁹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islam and the Plight of Modern Man* (Chicago: ABC International Group, 2001).

¹⁰ Maria Massi Dakake, "The Soul as Barzakh: Substantial Motion and MullāṢadrā's Theory of Human Becoming," *The Muslim World* 94, no. 1 (2004): 107–30.

¹¹ S. H. Nasr, "The Islamic World View and Modern Science," *MAAS Journal of Islamic Science* 10, no. 2 (December 1994): 33–50.





on the soul's role in navigating the spiritual and existential challenges of modern life.¹²

Sufism Notion on Soul (*Nafs*)

In Islamic literature, the Arabic term "nafs" is employed to translate the Greek concept of "psyche," which refers to the individual essence or the "receptive pole of being." Unlike the Greek term "psyche," which denotes the soul in a more abstract sense, "nafs" acts as a reflexive pronoun in Arabic, similar to the English word "self." Ibn Manzūr, a renowned Arabic lexicographer, defined "nafs" as both the soul ("rūh") and the whole being, encompassing its entirety and essence.¹³ As a reflexive pronoun, "nafs" can be applied in various contexts, and across all Islamic schools of thought, it serves as a designation for the human self or soul. While the word carries diverse interpretations, it is often understood to encompass the totality of elements that compose a human being, extending beyond the physical body to include the totality of an individual's constituents, including their thoughts, emotions, and spiritual essence.¹⁴ The distinction between *nafs* and *rūh* is not always clear-cut. In some instances, *nafs* is differentiated from *rūh*, often translated as "spirit," while in others, such a distinction is absent. The term *rūh* (spirit) corresponds to the Latin term *spiritus* and the Greek term *pneuma*, denoting a non-individual essence that represents the active pole of being within a human being, also known as the intellect (*al-'aql*). This distinction reflects the complex and multifaceted nature of the human soul as conceived in Islamic thought.¹⁵

The Quran frequently employs the term "*nafs*" independently, encompassing a broad range of meanings that reflect the multifaceted nature of the human self. It is used to signify the universal human self, akin to soul, person, self or selves, life, heart, or mind. Additionally, the soul can be referred to using various terms, including *al-nafs*, *al-qalb*, *al-rūh*, *al-'aql*, *al-fu'ad*, and *al-lubāb*.¹⁶ To provide clarity regarding these terms, here is a brief explanation of each:

1. *Al-Nafs*

Al-Nafs refers to the soul or the essence of a person, representing the inner self and individuality. It can be translated as the soul, self, or individuality. There are several levels within the *nafs*. According to its fallen state, *nafs* is referred to *an-nafs al-ammārah* (the commanding self), which is the lowest stage of the human spiritual soul. Through entering upon the stage where individuals have awareness of their actions, can differentiate between right and wrong, and can feel remorse for their mistakes but may not have the ability to significantly change their lifestyle, it become the gretful soul (*an-nafs al-lawwāmah*). In the final stage of spiritual development, the human soul attains a state of tranquility, marked by the diminishing influence of worldly desires and a growing closeness to the divine. This stage is known as *an-nafs al-muṭmainnah*, the contented soul.¹⁷ Building upon the concept of the soul, Sufis introduce the notion of "*an-nafs mulhima*" (the inspired soul), positioned between *an-nafs al-lawwāmah* (the reproaching soul) and *an-nafs*

¹² Pennings, Keman, and Kleinnijenhuis, *Doing Research in Political Science*.

¹³ Jamāl ad-Dīn Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān Al-'Arab*, vol. 6 (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣādir, 1414), 233.

¹⁴ William C. Chittick, "The In-Between: Reflections on the Soul in The Teachings of Ibn 'Arabi," in *The Passions of the Soul in the Metamorphosis of Becoming*, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Berlin: Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht, 2003), 29.

¹⁵ Tariq Jaffer, "Fakhr Al-Dīn Al-Rāzī on the Soul (Al-Nafs) and Spirit (Al-Rūh): An Investigation into the Eclectic Ideas of Mafātīḥ Al-Ghayb," *Journal of Qur'anic*

Studies 16, no. 1 (February 2014): 93–119, <https://doi.org/10.3366/jqs.2014.0133>.

¹⁶ Azlisham Abdul Aziz et al., "Analysis Of Literature Review On Spiritual Concepts According To The Perspectives Of The Al-Quran, Hadith And Islamic Scholars," *Turkish Journal of Computer and Mathematics Education (TURCOMAT)* 12, no. 9 (2021): 3152–59, <https://doi.org/10.17762/TURCOMAT.V12I9.4790>.

¹⁷ William C. Chittick, "The Perfect Man as the Prototype of the Self in the Sufism of Jami," *Studia Islamica*, no. 49 (1979): 135–57, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1595320>.





al-muṭmainnah (the tranquil soul). In this stage, individuals experience a genuine authenticity and sincerity in their worship,¹⁸ marked by a deep connection with the divine. The elevated phase of *an-nafs al-muṭmainnah* is further delineated into increasingly refined states of spiritual development. These include *an-nafs raḍīyah* (the pleased self), *an-nafs al-marḍīyah* (the self pleasing to God), and *an-nafs aṣ-ṣafīyah* (the pure self). The latter represents the ultimate pinnacle of spiritual attainment, where individuals have transcended their lower selves and attained complete purity of being.¹⁹

2. *Al-Qalb*

The term "*al-qalb*" encompasses not only the physical heart but also the intricate realm of emotions, thoughts, and spiritual connection. It is defined as a subtle entity (*latīfah*) imbued with a divine nature (*rabbānīyah*) and spirituality, inextricably linked to the physical heart. According to al-Ghazālī, *al-qalb* carries two distinct meanings. Firstly, it refers to the fleshy organ situated in the left side of the chest, containing dark blood and serving as the source and abode of the soul. This physical manifestation of *al-qalb* is shared by animals and even inanimate objects. Secondly, *al-qalb* transcends the physical realm and encompasses the spiritual whisperings emanating from the divine. It is through these whisperings that individuals attain recognition of Allah (God) and gain an understanding of matters beyond the grasp of mere imagination or daydreaming. This spiritual essence of *al-qalb* represents the very

essence of humanity and is the faculty to which we are called upon.²⁰

3. *Al-Rūh*

Al-Rūh signifies the spirit, the divine breath of life bestowed upon human beings, representing the essence of life and consciousness. It can also be perceived as a subtle entity within humankind, possessing the capacity to know all things and comprehend all understanding. According to ar-Rāzī and Ibn Qayyim al-Jauzīyah, *rūh* is a luminous (light) entity, imbued with life and originating from the higher realm. Its nature differs from that of the physical body, which is perceivable through the senses. The *rūh* pervades the body, akin to water flowing through a rose, oil coursing through an olive, or fire traversing charcoal. It grants life to this material body as long as the body can receive it and no obstructions impede its passage. If something hinders its flow, death ensues. The second viewpoint, expounded by al-Ghazālī and Abu al-Qāsim ar-Rāqhib al-Isfahānī, posits that *rūh* is neither a physical entity nor does it possess a bodily nature. Rather, *rūh*'s reliance on the body stems from its role in managing and fulfilling all bodily needs.²¹

4. *Al-'Aql*

Al-'Aql represents the intellect or rational faculty, encompassing the powers of reasoning, understanding, and discernment. It is considered an innate knowledge (*al-'ulūm aq-darurīyah*) that naturally emerges within an individual at a certain age. This intellectual capacity allows humans to comprehend the possibilities (*jawas al-Jā'izah*) and impossibilities (*istihālāt al-mustahilah*) of the

¹⁸ Golam Dastagir, "Nafs," in *Encyclopedia of Indian Religions*, ed. Zayn R. Kassam, Yudit K. Greenberg, and Jehan Bagli (Berlin: Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht, 2018), 520.

¹⁹ Jumhur Jumhur and Wasilah Wasilah, "Constitute-Based Religious Moderation Education," *Al-Hayat: Journal of Islamic Education* 7, no. 2 (2023): 370–80, <https://doi.org/10.35723/AJIE.V7I2.365>.

²⁰ Muḥammad bin Muḥammad Al-Ghazālī, *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm Ad-Dīn*, Vol. 3 (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, n.d.), 4.

²¹ Achmad Ushuluddin et al., "Understanding Ruh as a Source of Human Intelligence in Islam," *The International Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Society* 11, no. 2 (2021): 103–17, <https://doi.org/10.18848/2154-8633/CGP/v11i02/103-117>.



world around them. Through the cultivation of their intellect, humans surpass the limitations of animals and are endowed with the ability to serve as Allah's (God's) counterparts, capable of receiving His commands and fulfilling their responsibilities. By harnessing their intellect, humans can attain the highest form of fulfillment in this world and the hereafter, namely the pursuit of knowledge and the embodiment of righteous deeds.²²

The Brief History of Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardi

This section embarks on an exploration of the historical context surrounding Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardi, illuminating their life experiences, intellectual contributions, and written works. By delving into the biographical details of these prominent figures, we can deepen our understanding of the multifaceted aspects of their lives and uncover the ways in which their experiences shaped their interpretations of the concept of the soul.

1. A Short Biography of Ibn Sīnā

Emerging from the vicinity of Bukhārā, specifically Afshana, in the month of Safar during the year 370 AH/980 CE, was Abu 'Ali al-Husain bin 'Abd Allah bin Sīnā, a figure who would later become renowned as Avicenna in the Western world. His father, a prominent figure in the Samanid government, instilled in him a love of knowledge that would fuel his remarkable intellectual journey. Fortunately, we possess a wealth of insights into his life thanks to his autobiography, meticulously compiled by his devoted follower and assistant, al-Juzjani. This invaluable document provides us with crucial details about Avicenna's

upbringing, education, and remarkable achievements.²³

Avicenna's final resting place is Hamedan, a city in northwest Iran. His intellectual prowess spanned a vast array of disciplines, including philosophy, medicine, logic, mathematics, astronomy, music, and poetry. He honed his skills in logic under Abdillah an-Natali, delved into the intricacies of medicine under Isa bin Yahya, and immersed himself in the study of Islamic jurisprudence and geometry. With a keen eye for observation, Avicenna conducted anatomical comparisons among various animals, birds, and fish, meticulously documenting his findings on muscles, digestion, circulation, reproduction, and respiration. His seminal work, "The Canon of Medicine," stands as a cornerstone of modern medicine, laying the foundation for healthcare systems and common medical practices. Despite the advancements of science and the advent of sophisticated research tools, many of the principles outlined in Avicenna's masterpiece remain relevant, a testament to his enduring legacy. His insights into health fundamentals, research methodologies, and the integration of monotheism with medical practice continue to hold significant value in the world of medicine.²⁴

Ibn Sīnā's philosophical framework can be divided into two distinct branches: theoretical philosophy and practical philosophy. Theoretical philosophy, the first branch, is dedicated to fostering a deep understanding of entities that are independent of human actions, such as the principles of theology and the nature of forms. Ibn Sīnā sought to establish that theoretical philosophy serves to uncover the

²² Sari Nuseibeh, "Al-'Aql Al-Qudsi: Avicenna's Subjective Theory of Knowledge," *Studia Islamica*, no. 69 (1989): 39–54, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1596066>.

²³ Henry Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy* (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 2014), 167.

²⁴ Hossein Hatami, Maryam Hatami, and Neda Hatami, "The Socio-Political Situation of A Vicenna's Time and His Spiritual Messages: On the Occasion of 1031st Birth Anniversary of A Vicenna (23 August 980)," *Journal of Religion and Health* 52, no. 2 (2013): 589–96.



truth about the world around us. Practical philosophy, the second branch, aims to illuminate the truth about matters directly relevant to human existence, with the goal of achieving a more desirable state of being. In this practical context, Ibn Sīnā endeavored to attain goodness.²⁵ As noted by Fazlur Rahman, Ibn Sīnā's efforts culminated in the construction of a comprehensive and intricate philosophical system, one that dominated the Muslim philosophical tradition for several centuries, despite facing criticism from prominent figures such as al-Ghazālī and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī.²⁶

Ibn Sīnā's prolific literary output resulted in a remarkable collection of approximately 450 treatises or references spanning a diverse range of subjects. Among these, an estimated 240 works have survived the ravages of time. Notably, 150 of these surviving treatises pertain to philosophy, while 40 are dedicated to medicine and healthcare. Ibn Sīnā's contributions to knowledge extended across 15 distinct fields, including General Philosophy, Logic, Literature, Poetry, Natural Sciences, Psychology, Medicine, Chemistry, Mathematics, Metaphysics, Interpretation of the Qur'an, Sufism, Ethics (household, politics, and prophethood), personal letters, and miscellaneous topics.²⁷

Ibn Sīnā's remarkable literary corpus includes several groundbreaking works that have left an indelible mark on various disciplines. His magnum opus, *Kitāb al-Shifā'* (The Book of Healing), explores a vast array

of philosophical subjects, encompassing metaphysics, logic, ethics, and theology. This comprehensive work further showcases Ibn Sīnā's profound knowledge of medicine,²⁸ meticulously examining various medical issues. His expertise in the field of medicine is also evident in another seminal work, *Kitāb al-Qānūn fī al-Ṭibb* (The Canon of Medicine), which stands as one of the most significant contributions to medical history. Comprising five volumes, this comprehensive treatise encapsulates medical knowledge gleaned from ancient sources, meticulously integrated with Ibn Sīnā's own groundbreaking discoveries and research. The Canon of Medicine became an indispensable reference for medical practice across the Islamic world and Europe for centuries, cementing its legacy as a cornerstone of medical literature.²⁹ Venturing into the depths of philosophical discourse, Ibn Sīnā's works *Kitāb al-Najāt* (The Book of Salvation) and *Kitāb al-Isyārāt wa al-Tanbihāt* (The Book of Directives and Remarks) stand as testaments to his intellectual prowess. *Kitāb al-Najāt* dips into the intricate realms of philosophy and ethics, exploring the nature of the soul and the path to salvation. Ibn Sīnā masterfully navigates complex philosophical arguments, examining the existence of God, the role of faith, and the concept of the afterlife.³⁰ Meanwhile, *Kitāb al-Isyārāt wa al-Tanbihāt* serves as a profound exploration of metaphysics, theology, logic, and other philosophical underpinnings. This intricate

²⁵Kara Richardson, "Avicenna and the Principle of Sufficient Reason," *The Review of Metaphysics* 67, no. 4 (2014): 743–68.

²⁶ Megan Brankley Abbas, "Between Western Academia and Pakistan: Fazlur Rahman and the Fight for Fusionism," *Modern Asian Studies* 51, no. 3 (May 2017): 736–68, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0026749X15000517>.

²⁷ Muhammad Utsman Najati, *Ad Dirasat an Nafsinnah 'Inda Ulama Muslimin* (Al Qahirah: Dar Syuruq, 1993), 113–15.

²⁸ Kara Richardson, "Two Arguments for Natural Teleology from Avicenna's 'Shifā'," *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 32, no. 2 (2015): 123–40.

²⁹ Gavin Koh, review of *Review of The Canon of Medicine (Al-Qanun fi'l-tibb), Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna)*, by Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna), *BMJ: British Medical Journal* 339, no. 7734 (2009): 1381–1381.

³⁰ Sebastian Günther, "Be Masters in That You Teach and Continue to Learn: Medieval Muslim Thinkers on Educational Theory," *Comparative Education Review* 50, no. 3 (2006): 367–88, <https://doi.org/10.1086/503881>.





work unveils Ibn Sīnā's profound reflections on the origins of the universe and its intricate relationship with God.³¹

Ibn Sīnā's intellectual contributions extended far beyond philosophy and medicine, as evidenced by his extensive writings on astronomy, mathematics, and music. His diverse body of work exerted a profound influence on the development of science and philosophy not only in the Islamic world but also in the West, where translations of his works into Latin during the Middle Ages played a pivotal role in shaping European intellectual thought.

2. A Short Biography of Suhrawardi

Syihāb ad-Dīn Yaḥyā bin Ḥabasy bin Amīrak bin Abū al-Futūḥ Suhrawardi, also known as *Syaikh al-Isyrāqī*, sometimes called *al-Maqtūl*, was born in a village named Suhraward, near Arbarjian, Persia, in 549 AH/1154 CE. There are some differences of opinion regarding his birth date: firstly, al-Shahrazuri suggests the year 545 AH/1166 CE or 550 AH/1170 CE.³² Secondly, Henry Corbin proposes the year 549 AH/1155 CE.³³ Thirdly, Nasr suggests the year 549 AH/1153 CE.³⁴

Suhrawardi immersed himself in the study of philosophy under the tutelage of Majd ad-Dīn Jīlī, further deepening his knowledge under Fakhr ad-Dīn al-Mardīnī in Isfahan. He also extensively studied the intricacies of al-Baṣā'ir al-Naṣīrīyah with Ḥāshim ad-Dīn al-Qārī al-Farsī. Suhrawardi's unwavering pursuit of knowledge was cut short at the age of 38 (587 AH/1191 CE) when he met his demise for disseminating teachings that challenged the prevailing orthodoxy. The exact circumstances surrounding his death remain shrouded in

mystery, but it is known that he was imprisoned by Sultan Malik az-Zāhir under the authority of Sultan Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn al-Ayyūbī (the father of Sultan Malik az-Zāhir). Suhrawardi's primary biographer, Syams ad-Dīn Muḥammad Syahrazūrī, records in his *Nuzhat al-arwāḥ* (Pleasure of Spirits) that the philosopher had completed another of his major philosophical works, *al-Masyārī' wa al-Muṭārahāt* (Paths and Havens) (completed c. 579/1183), at the mere age of thirty.³⁵

Suhrawardi's vast literary legacy can be broadly categorized into five distinct groups: firstly, the major doctrinal and didactic works include *Talwihāt* (The Book of Intimations), *Muqawwamāt* (The Book of Oppositions), *Musyahharāt* (The Book of Conversations), and *Ḥikmāt al-Isyrāq* (The Theosophy of the Orient of Light). Secondly, there are shorter treatises in Arabic and Persian, such as *Hayākil al-Nūr* (The Temples of Light), *al-Alwāḥ al-Imādiyah* (Tablets Dedicated to 'Imād ad-Dīn), *Patraw-nāmah* (Treatise on Illumination), *Fī I'tiqād al-Ḥukamā'* (Symbol of Faith of the Philosophers), *al-Lamaḥāt* (The Flashes of Light), *Yazdān Shinākht* (The Knowledge of God), and *Bustān al-Qulūb* (The Garden of the Heart). Thirdly, there are mystical and symbolic stories or novels that depict the journey of the soul through the cosmos towards illumination and its ultimate attainment, such as *'Aql-I surkh* (The Red Archangel), *Āwaz-i par-i jibra'il* (The Chant of the Wing of Gabriel), *al-Ghurbat al-Gharbiyah* (The Occidental Exile), *Lughat-i mūrān* (The Language of Termites), *Risālah fī Ḥālat at-Ṭufūliyah* (Treatise on the State of Childhood), *Rūzī bā jamā'at-i Ṣūfiyān* (A Day with the Community of Sufis), *Risālat al-*

³¹ Samir S. Amr and Abdelghani Tbakhi, "Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna): The Prince Of Physicians," *Annals of Saudi Medicine* 27, no. 2 (March 2007): 134–35, <https://doi.org/10.5144/0256-4947.2007.134>.

³² M. A. Razavi, *Suhrawardi and School of Illumination* (England: Curzon Pres, 1997), 1.

³³ Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 205.

³⁴ A. Khudori Soleh, "Filsafat Isyraqi Suhrawardi," *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 12, no. 1 (January 22, 2011): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.14421/esensia.v12i1.699>.

³⁵ Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, 777–78.





Abrāj (Treatise on the Nocturnal Journey), and *Ṣafīr-i sīmurgh* (The Song of the Griffin). Fourthly, there are translations, interpretations, and commentaries on earlier philosophical works, as well as sacred religious texts, such as Persian translations of *Risālat at-Ṭair* by Ibn Sīnā, *Isharat-i Ibn Sīnā*, adaptations of *Risālah fī al-Isyrāq* by Ibn Sīnā, and commentaries on specific verses of the Qur'an and hadiths. Fifthly, there are prayers and supplications in Arabic that resemble what was called the "book of hours" in the Middle Ages, known as *al-Wāridāt wa al-Taqdīsāt* according to Syahrazūrī.³⁶

The Reflective Relationship of Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī's Thought on The Soul

To unravel the intricate relationship between Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī regarding the concept of the soul, a nuanced exploration of their respective intellectual frameworks is indispensable. Broadly speaking, both scholars can be categorized within two distinct philosophical schools: the Peripatetic and the Illuminationist. The Peripatetic approach, typically associated with Ibn Sīnā, is hallmarked by a rigorous rationalist framework firmly anchored in established minor and major premises.³⁷ In contrast to the Peripatetic tradition, the Illuminationist approach, pioneered by Suhrawardī, emerged as a counterpoint, seeking to bridge philosophy and Sufism.³⁸ This perspective postulates that knowledge originates from the emanation of divine light. To fully comprehend the positions of Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī, a meticulous examination of both the similarities and

distinctions within their reflective relationship is essential.

Untangling the commonalities and distinctions within the framework of reflective relationships requires a deep dive into the fundamental ideas of Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī. These concepts are meticulously elucidated through their primary conceptions, as outlined below:

1. The soul according to Ibn Sīnā

Ibn Sīnā's concept of the soul is rooted in his notion of entelechy (*kamāl awwal*), which he defined as the inherent potential within a being to achieve its fullest realization or actualization. In Ibn Sīnā's view, the nafs, or soul, represents the primary entelechy of the body. Without the nafs, the body would be devoid of meaning, a mere assemblage of inanimate matter. The nafs, therefore, is the fundamental essence that infuses the body with life, enabling it to perform its diverse functions and fulfill its inherent purpose.³⁹ The nafs, or soul, is the fundamental essence that grants humans the ability to move, function, and experience consciousness. It arises from the harmonious fusion of the fundamental elements of life, guided by the celestial bodies. The soul's creation coincides with that of the body, and while it does not possess the quality of being without beginning, it is considered eternal, everlasting, and impervious to destruction. The soul's inherent nature aligns with the realm of eternal intellects, and its ultimate fulfillment lies in uniting with the active intellect, though not in a state of perfect

³⁶Amroeni Darajat, *Suhrawardī: Kritik Filsafat Peripatetik*, 178.

³⁷Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early Abbasid Society (2nd-4th/8th-10th Centuries)* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 104.

³⁸Muhammad Obaidullah, "Philosophical Sufism: An Analysis of Suhrawardī's Contribution with Special Reference to His School of Illumination (Ishraqi)," *Jurnal Akidah & Pemikiran Islam* 16, no. 1 (June 1, 2015): 135–58, <https://doi.org/10.22452/afkar.vol16no1.5>.

³⁹al-Ḥusain bin 'Abd Allah Ibn Sīnā, *Aḥwāl An-Nafs* (Paris: Dar Byblion, 2007), 52.





fusion. For those souls that fail to achieve this union, an eternity of misery awaits.⁴⁰

Broadly speaking, Ibn Sīnā divided the soul into two aspects. *Firstly*, the physical aspect discusses the three types of souls; vegetative soul (*an-nafs an-nabāṭiyah*), animal soul (*an-nafs al-hayawānīyah*), and rational soul (*an-nafs an-nāṭiqah*). The plants soul is the first entelechy for a natural mechanical body is in terms of its feeding, growth, and reproduction⁴¹ and represents the lowest level. This soul is divided into three parts: the nutritive faculty (*al-quwah al-ghāzīyah*); the faculty of growth (*al-quwah al-munmiyah*); the reproductive faculty (*al-quwah al-muwallidah*).⁴² The animal soul is divided into two parts: the motive faculty (*al-quwah al-muharrīkah*), encompassing *al-bā'isah* as the impelling faculty and *al-fā'ilah* as the operative faculty, and the perceptive faculty (*al-quwah al-mudrikah*).⁴³ The relationship between these two souls involves potential and actual faculties, but both are potential (desire) before reaching actualization. Although, the rational soul (*an-nafs an-nāṭiqah*) is divided into the practical faculty (*al-quwah al-āmilah*) and the theoretical faculty (*al-quwah al-ālimah*).⁴⁴

The practical faculty can govern and dominate the faculties or desires of the lower souls, leading to virtuous behavior and the development of ethics (*akhlāq*). The theoretical faculty can acquire knowledge dominated by abstract understanding, such as understanding the concept of human beings juxtaposed with the concept of justice through virtuous actions, resulting in knowledge (*ma'rifah/ulūm*). The theoretical faculty are four levels. *Firstly*, material intellect (*al-'aql al-hayūlānī*) which only

possesses the potential to think but is not yet trained, although to a limited extent. *Secondly*, habitual intellect (*al-'aql bi al-malakah*), which is at the stage of training for abstract thinking. Ibn Sina likened this intellect to the ability possessed by a child who recognizes a pen, ink, and simple letters based on written forms. *Thirdly*, actual intellect (*al-'aql bi al-fi'l*), which follows the trained intellect and is capable of perceiving rational matters and engaging in abstract thinking. *Fourthly*, acquired intellect (*al-'aql al-mustafād*), which is capable of thinking about abstract matters effortlessly. It is this intellect that can establish a connection and receive the overflow of knowledge from the active intellect.⁴⁵

Secondly, the metaphysical aspect discusses the existence and essence of the soul, its connection to the body, and the immortality of the soul.⁴⁶ This means that the soul is the initial perfection for the body. The body serves as a prerequisite for the existence of the soul, meaning that the soul actualizes its behavior within the body through appropriate actions.⁴⁷ The unity between the two is accidental, meaning the destruction of the body does not lead to the destruction of the soul (*an-nafs*). However, according to Ibn Sīnā, not everything associated with the soul necessitates a physical manifestation. This is because the rational faculty (*al-quwah an-nāṭiqah*) exists independently of the body and is not tied to the material body's substance. The rational faculty is an intellectual entity capable of

⁴⁰ Samir S. Amr and Abdelghani Tbakhi, "Ibn Sina (Avicenna): The Prince Of Physicians," *Annals of Saudi Medicine* 27, no. 2 (March 2007): 134–35, <https://doi.org/10.5144/0256-4947.2007.134>.

⁴¹ Ibn Sīnā, *Aḥwāl An-Nafs*, 57.

⁴² Ibn Sīnā, 57–58.

⁴³ Ibn Sīnā, 58–62.

⁴⁴ Ibn Sīnā, 63–65.

⁴⁵ Shams Inati, "Ibn Sīnā," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (New York: Routledge, 1996), 238–39.

⁴⁶ Ibn Sīnā, *An-Najāh Fī Al-Mantiq Wa Al-Ilahīyāt* (Libanon: Dār al-Jail, 1992), 292.

⁴⁷ Sīnā, *Aḥwāl An-Nafs*, 53.





existing without a physical body,⁴⁸ making it a spiritual entity as well, as it can comprehend rational concepts and achieve self-awareness without external aids. In contrast, the external and internal senses can only perceive things through the use of instruments and do not possess self-awareness. In another context, the soul possesses both theoretical and practical faculties.⁴⁹ The practical faculty of the soul relates to its responsibility in governing the body, through cooperation with the faculty of desire. The practical faculty drives human beings to engage in various specific behaviors related to it, such as feelings of shame, awe, laughter, and crying.⁵⁰

2. Soul according to Suhrawardī

According to Suhrawardī's perspective in the *Hayākil an-Nūr*, the soul is related to each individual's self-awareness of their true essence.⁵¹ There is a distinction and separation between the body and the soul, as the soul and the body are connected but distinct. While the body will perish, the soul does not experience destruction. The soul possesses external faculties of perception such as touch, taste, smell, hearing, and sight, as well as internal faculties of perception such as imagination, thinking, estimation, and memorization. Self-knowledge involves the identification of two directions made among various levels of consciousness, which are identified as essential components of the rational faculty.⁵²

In Seyyed H. Nasr's view, Suhrawardī follows the scheme of Ibn Sīnā

and the peripatetic school, dividing the soul into two parts: Firstly, the vegetative soul (*an-nafs an-nabāṭiyah*) has three faculties: the faculty of nutrition, the faculty of growth, and the faculty of reproduction. The faculty of nutrition consists of attracting, storing, digesting, and self-preservation. Secondly, the animal soul (*an-nafs al-hayawāniyah*) has an additional faculty, which is the faculty of motion, consisting of desires, anger, and lust, which are characteristics of animals. Human beings, as the most perfect animals, not only possess these faculties and the five external faculties shared with higher animals but also have five internal faculties that rely on impressions received from the external world towards the divine light within them (fantasy, apprehension, imagination, memory).⁵³

Categorizing the soul according to Ibn Sīnā's peripatetic philosophy structure does not align with the idea that knowledge, in Suhrawardī's perspective, arises solely from discursive observation. In *Hikmah al-Isyrāq*, Suhrawardī is mentioned that knowledge can be attained through spiritual behavior or mystical observation and practice. The ultimate condition of the soul is the state of *an-nafs al-kāmilah*, referred to as the soul purified by Allah, which is then called the perfect human, the true human, the microcosm of the entire universe, encompassing everything in the universe. The human soul cannot reach the sacred realm or receive illuminative lights except through spiritual exercises.⁵⁴ Suhrawardī not only developed abstract concepts as knowledge but also applicative methods

⁴⁸ al-Ḥusain bin 'Abd Allah Ibn Sīnā, *Asy-Syifā'* (Cairo: al-Hay'ah al-Miṣriyah al-'Ammah li al-Kitāb, 1975), 10.

⁴⁹ Ibn Sīnā, *An-Najāh Fī Al-Mantiq Wa Al-Ilahiyāt*, 308.

⁵⁰ Muḥammad 'Uṣmān Najātī, *Ad-Dirāsāt an-Nafsāniyah "inda Al-'Ulamā" Al-Muslimīn* (Cairo: Dār asy-Syurūq, 1993), 121.

⁵¹ Yaḥya bin Ḥabsy As-Sahrawardī, *Hayākil An-Nūr* (Egypt: Maṭba'ah as-Sa'ādah, 1335), 24.

⁵² As-Sahrawardī, 40–41.

⁵³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* (New York: Caravan, 1997), 75–76.

⁵⁴ Yaḥya bin Ḥabsy As-Sahrawardī, *Ḥikmah Al-Isyrāq* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'ārif al-Ḥikmīyah, 2010), 101.





that can be used to achieve spiritual attainment.⁵⁵ Every light desires to return to its source or origin. The lower light (creation) longs to unite with the higher light (creator). Suhrawardi's approach emphasizes the method of intuitive gnosis. This method plays a crucial role in reaching actual intellect (Jibril) or the direct source of divine light, which is God. To reach such a state, hard work is required through practices of asceticism and spiritual struggle.⁵⁶

As for asceticism and spiritual struggle, Suhrawardi offers solutions in the form of practices that individuals should engage in. First, fasting is an important part and considered the foundation in the ascetic stage. Second, staying awake at night to occasionally have a light meal in order to reduce the desire for sleep. Third, supplication and remembrance of Allah's names can bring about changes in human psychology and prepare one to receive divine emanation. Fourth, a spiritual guide (*mursyid*) is essential to provide guidance and prescribe certain *wird* (spiritual practices) that should be recited. Fifth, ethics play a vital role and cannot be separated from the stages of Sufism. One must possess noble character traits, humility, honesty, and avoid envy towards others' blessings.⁵⁷

The distinction in the concept of the soul between the philosophies of Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardi becomes apparent when we examine their respective philosophical frameworks. Ibn Sīnā, aligned with the Peripatetic tradition, favors a discursive approach, emphasizing rational analysis and empirical observation. In contrast, Suhrawardi demonstrates an intuitive inclination, emphasizing direct spiritual experience and enlightenment. This

divergence in approach has implications for the limitations of the deductive method within the Peripatetic sphere. Suhrawardi, as a representative of the Illuminationist tradition, complements these limitations by advocating for connection to divine wisdom, the path of the heart, asceticism, and the purification of the soul. These endeavors are essential for uncovering one's true essence. The Peripatetic school posits that true reality is existence (*aṣalah al-wujūd*), which is further categorized into necessary existence (*wājib al-wujūd*) and contingent existence (*mumkin al-wujūd*). Conversely, the Illuminationist school asserts that true reality lies in essence (*aṣalah al-māhiyah*). They envision light as a hierarchical structure, with varying levels of abstract light representing different degrees of perfection and imperfection (*kamāl wa naqṣ*). In their view, knowledge is akin to light, while ignorance is analogous to darkness (*maujūd ḡulmānī*).

To discern the distinctions between Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardi's conceptions of the soul, we must examine the underlying philosophical frameworks they adopted. Ibn Sīnā, a revered figure in Peripatetic philosophy, favored a discursive approach, emphasizing contemporary perspectives. This contrasts with Suhrawardi's intuitive inclination, which places greater weight on direct spiritual experience and enlightenment. This divergence in approach has implications for the limitations of deductive methods within Peripatetic thought. Suhrawardi, as an exponent of the Illuminationist tradition, addressed these limitations by advocating for a connection to divine wisdom, the path of the heart, asceticism, and the purification of the soul. These endeavors are essential for uncovering one's true essence. In the

⁵⁵ Ridhatullah Assya'bani and Ghulam Falach, "The Philosophy of Illumination: Esotericism in Shihāb Ad-Dīn Suhrawardī's Sufism," *ESENSIA: Jurnal Ilmu-Ilmu Ushuluddin* 23, no. 1 (August 10, 2022): 53–64, <https://doi.org/10.14421/esensia.v22i2.2398>.

⁵⁶ As-Sahrawardī, *Ḥikmah Al-Isyrāq*, 226.

⁵⁷ Mehdi Amin Razavi, *Suhrawardī and The School of Illumination* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 1997), 71–72.





Peripatetic school, the fundamental and original reality is existence (*aṣalah al-wujūd*), divided into necessary and contingent aspects (*wājib al-wujūd* and *mumkin al-wujūd*). Conversely, in the Illuminationist school, the primary and authentic reality is essence (*aṣalah al-māhiyah*).⁵⁸ Light is arranged hierarchically, with varying levels of abstract light signifying degrees of perfection and imperfection (*kamāl wa naqṣ*). Knowledge is equated with light, while ignorance corresponds to darkness (*maujūd zulmānī*).⁵⁹ However, the similarities between peripatetic school and illumination that both of these schools, argue that motion only occurs in accidents, not in substances.

The shared notion of the soul as an enhancer of human existence emphasizes the maximizing role of reason. This rational faculty enables individuals to assess both positive and negative aspects of life, ultimately guiding them toward a dignified and righteous path. For Ibn Sīnā, the cultivation of reason or rationality empowers humans to differentiate between good and evil, paving the way for a virtuous life. Through the rational soul (*nafs al-nāṭiqah*), individuals can achieve the perfection of the soul, resulting in positive and constructive behaviors. The realization of these virtuous actions hinges on attaining rational excellence, which is cultivated through the development of theoretical intellect and the pursuit of wisdom.⁶⁰ Humans, as beings endowed with intellect and reason, possess the potential to achieve goodness through rational thinking. Ibn Sīnā

sought to demonstrate that by harnessing reason, individuals can cultivate a fulfilling and meaningful life. This rational faculty also serves as the distinguishing feature that separates humans from the animal soul (*nafs hayawānīyah*), which can lead to animalistic behaviors. Ibn Sīnā's perspective advocates for a broader perspective, urging humans to moderate their material consumption, recognizing that while physical needs are essential, they should not take precedence over intellectual and spiritual pursuits. In essence, to fulfill their role as stewards of God, the rational soul (*nafs al-nāṭiqah*) must maintain supremacy over the vegetative soul (*nafs al-nabāṭiyah*) and the animal soul (*nafs al-hayawānīyah*).

Suhrawardī's vision of the ideal human being, as ordained by God as His vicegerent (*khalifah*), is shaped through the purification of the soul through ascetic disciplines and introspective struggles. Suhrawardī's assessment of the human qualities God expects to manifest in a perfect human (*al-insān al-kāmil*) involves awakening the intuitive heart. The process of purification through ascetic practices is essential for preserving human nature. A pure soul is more attuned to divine light and draws closer to it (*nūr al-aqrāb*). Aligning humanity with a purified soul can be achieved through fasting, night vigils, and other practices that positively influence human life. While Ibn Sīnā emphasizes rationality and Suhrawardī intuition, both philosophers share the common goal of improving human life. Therefore, both can

⁵⁸ İlker Kömbe, "Müneccimbaşı Ahmed Dede's Thoughts on Ethics: Synthesizing Peripatetic Philosophy and Sufi Thought in Ishrāqī Wisdom," *Nazariyat İslam Felsefe ve Bilim Tarihi Araştırmaları Dergisi (Journal for the History of Islamic Philosophy and Sciences)* 7, no. 2 (May 15, 2021): 159–86, <https://doi.org/10.12658/Nazariyat.7.1.M0118en>; Hossein Ziai, "Shihāb Al-Dīn Suhrawardī: Founder of the Illuminationist School," in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman (London: Routledge, 2020).

⁵⁹ Ebrahim Azadegan, "On the Incompatibility of God's Knowledge of Particulars and the Doctrine of Divine Immutability: Towards a Reform in Islamic Theology," *Religious Studies* 58, no. 2 (June 27, 2022): 327–44, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0034412520000414>.

⁶⁰ Reza Akbarian and Ali Mokhber, "A Critical Look at Ibn-e Sine's Theory of the Perfection of the Human Soul," *Avicennian Philosophy Journal* 21, no. 62 (2019): 19–43.





serve as valuable guides in navigating life's complexities. Their perspectives can act as a compass for modern human life amidst its advancements, ensuring that humanity remains in a better position to manage life on Earth.

The Reflective Reasoning of Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardi's Thought as an Open Faculty in Modern Humans

The impulsive actions of contemporary individuals, often resulting in negative behavior, can be traced back to a deep-seated spiritual crisis.⁶¹ The void within the soul, breeding spiritual confusion, profoundly influences aggressive and confrontational conduct, unleashing the primal, animalistic instincts inherent in every human being. This, in turn, leads to the prioritization of materialistic desires to appease these innate animalistic inclinations. The pursuit of materialism overshadows the search for God as the central existence.⁶² God is perceived as a human construct that offers little solace in addressing worldly challenges, prompting individuals to confront the world with courage and rationality alone. Consequently, this choice precipitates a modern human existential crisis marked by disorientation and disengagement from the external world.⁶³ Such individuals often find themselves trapped in a perpetual state of restlessness, boredom, apathy, and a loss of meaning in life.⁶⁴ The spiritual crisis plaguing contemporary humanity ultimately gives rise to a moral crisis, breeding rampant individualism and fostering psychological instability.

To prevent immoral actions stemming from a spiritual crisis, one can cultivate behavior

that mirrors the perfect human by actively engaging with the soul's intrinsic nature, which Ibn Sīnā defined as the first perfection of the body. This involves nurturing the acquired reason (*al-'aql al-mustafad*), which empowers individuals to establish connections, acquire knowledge, and recognize their true selves. By cultivating the soul's purity, individuals can develop a strong foundation for discerning between virtuous and immoral conduct, ultimately shaping the bedrock of their existence. Achieving a pure soul through the activation of acquired reason emphasizes the importance of managing the animalistic soul (*an-nafs al-hayawāniyah*), enabling individuals to gain control over their material attachments. This reason, furthermore, guides individuals towards embracing divine values, leading them to embody the characteristics of a perfect human being.

Suhrawardi maintained that achieving the perfect human state requires restraining worldly desires, which often fuel the relentless pursuit of material possessions under the sway of harmful passions. Human beings, as exalted entities comprising both physical and spiritual dimensions, possess the innate capacity for both virtuous and immoral actions. Unlocking this potential hinges on engaging in ascetic endeavors aimed at awakening the true intellect, the faculty capable of tapping into divine illumination. Those who can successfully subdue their physical urges will pave the way for fulfilling their spiritual needs. This access to spiritual fulfillment ultimately leads to the realization of the authentic intellect, which can directly draw energy from the highest sources of enlightenment.

⁶¹ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis in Modern Man* (London: Unwin Paperbacks, 1987).

⁶² Nur Hadi Ihsan, Amir Maliki Abitolkhah, and Indah Maulidia Rahma, "The Concept of Mahabbah of Abdus Shamad Al-Palimbani in Facing the Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man," *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Humaniora* 20, no. 1 (July 30, 2022): 67, <https://doi.org/10.18592/khazanah.v20i1.6328>.

⁶³ Maghfur Ahmad, "Agama Dan Psikoanalisa Sigmund Freud," *RELIGIA* 14, no. 2 (October 3, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.28918/religia.v14i2.92>.

⁶⁴ Husain Heriyanto, "Spiritualitas, Transendensi Faktisitas, Dan Integrasi Sosial," *Khazanah: Jurnal Studi Islam Dan Humaniora* 16, no. 2 (January 7, 2019): 145, <https://doi.org/10.18592/khazanah.v16i2.2384>.





Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi underscore the cultivation of the soul as the pivotal force driving the body. Their aim is to awaken the immense potential that lies dormant within the human mind and heart, recognizing them as God's most profound gift to humanity. This untapped reservoir of potential (*al-quwah*) empowers individuals to surpass even celestial beings, including angels. The journey to activate this potential begins by taming and subduing worldly desires, a process that liberates the soul from the shackles of material attachments and allows it to ascend towards spiritual enlightenment. Both Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi advocated a parallel approach to spiritual development, one deeply rooted in the purification of the soul. This process of purification, akin to meditation, entails the regulation of *an-nafs al-hayawāniya*, the lower, animalistic self, alongside the cultivation of intuitive gnosis. The conscious cleansing of the soul from worldly desires and distractions fosters a tranquil state of mind, offering a potent remedy to the psychological and moral dilemmas prevalent in modern society.⁶⁵ By embracing intuitive gnosis as a viable behavioral option, individuals can ignite their dormant spiritual potential, fulfilling the inherent covenant with the divine, a commitment eloquently articulated by Ibn Sina and Suhrawardi.

Amidst the turmoil engulfing modern society, the teachings of Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī offer a transformative path to spiritual refinement, a path with immense relevance for modern individuals. At the heart of their philosophy lies the concept of restraining material desires. This act of restraint serves as the key to unlocking the potential of the rational soul (*an-nafs an-nāṭiqah*), a higher faculty that enables

individuals to transcend the limitations of their lower, animalistic self (*an-nafs al-hayawāniya*). Through this process of self-mastery, individuals can cultivate the perfected soul (*an-nafs al-kāmilah*), a state of spiritual enlightenment characterized by profound wisdom, compassion, and resilience.

Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī's Sufi teachings remain remarkably relevant in the lives of modern individuals. Their emphasis on curbing material desires resonates deeply with the challenges faced by people today. By taming our worldly cravings, we can empower our rational soul and activate our acquired reason, enabling us to navigate the complexities of modern life with greater clarity and insight. Acknowledging the inherent limitations of constantly seeking gratification cultivates empathic understanding. This understanding emerges from the rational soul's ability to transcend material desires, recognizing them as tools rather than ultimate goals.⁶⁶ The act of restraining material desires awakens the true intellect, paving the way for the realization of the acquired soul. By carefully assessing desires and recognizing the need to curtail the influence of the animalistic soul, individuals embark on a journey to unlock the rational soul's ability to discern between virtue and vice.

Attaining the ideal human form, characterized by virtuous actions, can be achieved through ascetic practices that curtail desires that lead to harmful behaviors. By engaging in asceticism, individuals can train their bodies to resist the allure of sensual gratification, fostering an inner receptivity to divine knowledge. This practice of limiting physical engagement with the material world as a means to overcome spiritual crises finds support in the research of Sabry and Vohra.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Alberto Perez-De-Albeniz and Jeremy Holmes, "Meditation: Concepts, Effects and Uses in Therapy," *International Journal of Psychotherapy* 5, no. 1 (March 21, 2000): 49–58, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13569080050020263>.

⁶⁶ Doris Fuchs et al., *Consumption Corridors: Living a Good Life within Sustainable Limits* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 14.

⁶⁷ WalaaM Sabry and Adarsh Vohra, "Role of Islam in the Management of Psychiatric Disorders," *Indian Journal*





Suhrawardī's concept of asceticism, which emphasizes the restraint of physical urges, can be harmoniously integrated with Ibn Sīnā's idea of curbing the animalistic soul. This fusion of perspectives holds particular significance in modern society, providing a framework for engaging in ascetic practices without requiring complete withdrawal from social life. By aligning physical potential with divine values, individuals can maintain control over their physical urges while remaining active participants in society.⁶⁸

The convergence of Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī's ideas in shaping self-improvement through soul purification activities heralds the revitalization of Sufism as a concept to address the spiritual crisis experienced by contemporary individuals. In comparing the philosophies of these two figures, it is crucial to acknowledge both the commonalities and distinctions in their ideas while maintaining a focus on real-life issues. Analyzing Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī's works with a keen eye on their disparities can illuminate a comprehensive approach to self-improvement and spiritual enlightenment⁶⁹ unbalanced emphasis on the similarities and differences between Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī's philosophies can obscure the practical implications of their concepts of the soul, potentially hindering their application to the specific circumstances of modern individuals. As exemplified by Falsafi's research⁷⁰ which favors Suhrawardī's approach over Ibn Sīnā's, an excessive focus on distinctions can lead to biased conclusions and undermine the viability of both perspectives. Instead, a comprehensive understanding of both Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī's contributions can provide modern individuals

with a flexible framework for self-improvement and spiritual enlightenment.

Conclusion

This research challenges the traditional perception of Sufism as an outdated concept irrelevant to modern society. Instead, it emphasizes the significance of Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī's notion of the soul in addressing the prevalent existential and spiritual crises faced by contemporary individuals. These two distinct concepts, rooted in different philosophical perspectives, should not be viewed as opposing forces. Their true value lies in their complementary relationship, which holds immense relevance for the challenges of modern humanity. The prevailing culture of consumption in modern society can be countered through two diverging paths: the regulation of desires and the practice of asceticism adapted to contemporary contexts. Both rationality and asceticism serve as guiding principles for modern individuals seeking a fulfilling life. To effectively confront spiritual and existential crises, a synergistic model that integrates these two approaches is essential for navigating the complexities of modern life.

Unveiling the harmonious convergence between the concepts of two distinct philosophers was achieved through the implementation of a comparative approach model. This model transcends the mere identification of similarities and distinctions within a theory, concept, or ideology. It places a strong emphasis on navigating contextual variations that align with the situational requirements of the compared concepts. While this research has uncovered a novel significance in the synthesis of ideas within the philosophies

of *Psychiatry* 55, no. 6 (2013): 205, <https://doi.org/10.4103/0019-5545.105534>.

⁶⁸ Hoerul Umam and Iyad Suryadi, "Sufism as a Therapy in the Modern Life," *International Journal of Nusantara Islam* 7, no. 1 (June 15, 2019): 34–39, <https://doi.org/10.15575/ijni.v7i1.4883>.

⁶⁹ Ehsanfar, Falsafi, and Vaezi, "Analysis of Self-Awareness Based on Suspended Man from the Perspective

of Ibn Sina and Suhrawardī"; Tajer and Zekrgoo, "Wisdom (Hikmah) as Perceived by Iranian Muslim Scholars: Reflections on Ibn Sina, Ghazali, and Suhrawardī."

⁷⁰ Falsafi, "Explaining, Analyzing and Measuring a Typical Form in the Philosophy of Ibn Sina and Suhrawardī."





of Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī, it is crucial to acknowledge that the focus here is solely on the structural aspects of the soul concept, leaving aside the intricate evolution of the theories themselves. Examining the essence of the soul as explored in the philosophies of Ibn Sīnā and Suhrawardī holds promise for a more comprehensive theoretical synthesis, particularly in addressing psychological aspects and mental health concerns, which are crucial for the well-being of young individuals. Future researchers are encouraged to explore this dimension to expand upon or critically evaluate the findings presented in this study.

The authors are grateful to all informants and participants who shared their experiences and contributed to the research.

Competing Interests

This research is self-funded or does not receive any funding from religious organisations or interest groups that could have an impact on the findings.

Author's Contributions

This study was written in collaboration by the authors which All of them contributed to this paper.

Ethical Considerations

This article adheres to the publication norm of not contacting any human or animal subjects.

Funding Information

This paper did not receive financial support from individuals, religious social institutions, and interest groups.

Data Availability

Data exchange has been demonstrated in writing.

Disclaimer

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