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## SUHRAWARDI'S ONTOLOGY: FROM "ESSENCE-EXISTENCE" TO "LIGHT" (A Suhrawardian Reply to Sadrian Critiques)

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### ABSTRAK

Pemilahan antara esensi (*mahiyah*) dan eksistensi (*wujud*) telah menjadi persoalan yang cukup menyita perhatian para filsuf, paling tidak sejak al-Farabi dan ibn Sina. Pemilahan tersebut menjadi *starting point* dalam mereinterpretasi realitas hakiki, mana yang objektif dan yang hanya subjektif, serta masalah fundamentalitas antara eksistensi dan esensi dalam ranah ontologi dan epistemologi yang sebelumnya tidak tereksplorasi secara spesifik. Suhrawardi termasuk salah seorang filsuf Muslim yang mencoba memberikan interpretasi berbeda dan kritik terhadap filsuf sebelumnya (khususnya Ibn Sina) dalam masalah pemilahan tersebut. Walaupun ia mengamini ibn Sina dalam hal adanya pemilahan antara eksistensi dan esensi, namun ia memiliki pandangan sendiri dalam menyimpulkan bahwa realitas hakiki (objektif) melampaui eksistensi dan esensi. Ia merumuskan gagasannya tersebut dalam teori tentang cahaya. Tulisan ini mencoba untuk menengahkan pandangan Suhrawardi tentang realitas hakiki yang ia uraikan dalam teori cahaya. Selanjutnya dibahas pula disini kritik yang dilontarkan oleh filsafat Sadrian terhadapnya dan jawaban para penganut filsafat Suhrawardian terhadap kritik tersebut.

**Kata-kata Kunci:** *Esensi, Quiditas (mahiyah), Eksistensi (wujūd), Fundamentalitas/Primasi, Konsep Mental (respektivitas).*

### ABSTRACT

The distinction between essence (*mahiyah*) and existence (*wujūd*) has been a consuming problem among philosophers, at least since al-Farabi and ibn Sina. It has become the starting point in reinterpretation of reality, whether objective or merely subjective, the problem of fundamentality (principal) and respectivity (mental conception) in the realms of ontology and epistemology which never been discussed specifically before. Suhrawardi is one of philosophers who tries to provide different interpretation and even critiques toward previous philosophers (especially ibn Sina) in this regard. Even though he supports ibn Sina's point of view that there is distinction between essence and existence, but he also has his own conclusion in this case which is formulated in his theory of "light". This article tries to present the ideas of Suhrawardi on "essence and existence" and the theory of light. Here will be discussed also some critiques from Sadrian school and the answers to those critiques by Suhrawardian philosophers.

**Keywords:** *Essence, Quiddity (mahiyah), Existence (wujūd), Fundamentality/Primacy, Respectivity (mental concept)*

## Introduction

The most influential critique directed to Suhrawardi's ontological doctrine is provided by Mulla Sadra and his school (Transcendent Philosophy/*al-Hikmah Muta'āliyyahh*). Sadra attributes the idea of the primacy of quiddity to Suhrawardi and considers himself the proponent of the primacy of existence. (Rahman 1975, 31) Essence for Sadra is only a mental concept while the real one is existence. (al-Hasan 2009, 174)<sup>1</sup>

The interpreters of Suhrawardi seem not comfortable with Sadrian's interpretation of Suhrawardi. John Walbridge in his book, *The Leavens of the Ancients*, states that the term "primacy of quiddity" (*asālat al-māhiyyah*) is never used by Suhrawardi. (Walbridge 2000, 19) Hossein Ziai in his writing, *Knowledge and Illumination*, suspects that Mulla Sadra's reading of Suhrawardi is misleading. To him, Suhrawardi's concept of "light" is not "essence" as Mulla Sadra understood but it is "the being of things out there." (Ziai 1990, 170-171) Sajjad H. Rizvi says that the Sadrian critique on the issue of the primacy of quiddity is not supported by textual evidence. He furthermore attempts to prove that the conventional understanding of the primacy of quiddity attributed to Suhrawardi is not accurate because Suhrawardi basically regards both "existence" and "essence" as mental concepts. Further he insists that "He (Suhrawardi) clearly states that quiddity/ essence in itself is as conceptual and unreal notion as existence." (Rizvi 1999, 224) These scholars of Suhrawardian school, on the one hand, provide a clear hint of Sadra's inaccurate readings of Suhrawardi, on the other hand, they do not sufficiently elaborate their objection and clarification to the Sadrian readings. In other words, they do not comprehensively

answer the critiques of Mulla Sadra and his followers.

This paper in fact attempts to provide a relatively comprehensive account of the background of the ontological debate and of the Suhrawardian reply towards Sadrian criticism. First of all, this paper will describe the backgrounds of the debate, namely, Peripatetic's distinction of essence-existence, Suhrawardi's critiques on it, and Mulla Sadra criticism of Suhrawardi on the issue at stake. Then, it will argue for a non-dualist interpretation of Suhrawardi which evidently provides a good answer to Sadrian critiques.

## Peripatetic Ontological Doctrines

An ontological discussion concerning the relationship between essence and existence is initially introduced by Peripatetic philosophers, especially Ibn Sina. Although al-Farabi actually already distinguished the notion of *huwiyyah* (which can be interpreted as a synonym of *wujūd*/existence) from *māhiyyah* (essence/quiddity) in *Fuṣūṣ al-Hikmah*, a clear ontological distinction of both notions is made by Ibn Sina. He is the one who makes such distinction "the cornerstone of his ontology" (Nasr 2006, 64) which later becomes one of the major philosophical debates. The meaning of "existence" and the meaning of "thing" for Ibn Sina are conceived as two distinct meanings (Avicenna 2005, 24) and this distinction actually exists only in the mind. (Nasr 1964, 26) The meaning of "existence" can refer to an existence which belongs to a thing in itself, like the existence of human as human; or refer to an existence which belongs to it accidentally, like the existence of a person as white. (Avicenna 2005, 45) Meanwhile, the meaning of "quiddity" is actually the answer of the question "what it is (*ma huwa*)?" which leads us to the notion of "essence" (*dzat*). (Ibn

<sup>1</sup> He concludes Mulla Sadra's statement in *Al-Asfār al-Arba'ah* by saying that "*al-māhiyyah 'aqliyyah, amma al-wujūd fa 'ainiyy* (Essence is a mental concept whereas existence is a real one)."

Sina 1960, 220) Ibn Sina further explores that “essence” is “a reality proper to a thing” or “a reality by virtue of which it is what it is.” For example, the triangle has a reality in that it is a triangle, and whiteness has reality in that it is whiteness. (Avicenna 2005, 24)

The relationship between the two however is somewhat ambiguous. Robert Wisnovsky summarizes three different articulations of Ibn Sina in this matter: “(I) thing and existent, and by implication of essence and existence, are extensionally identical and intentionally distinct, with neither enjoying any kind of priority over the other; (II) essence and existence are extensionally identical and intentionally distinct, but essence enjoys a logical priority over existence; and (III) essence is extensionally broader than existence and each is intentionally distinct from each other.” (Winovsky 2005, 110)

However, the general understanding of Ibn Sina’s position in this matter is that essence (quiddity) has a logical priority over existence, but existence is the principal. The logical priority of essence occurs because every object in the Universe is perceived as having first of all a quiddity, then the notion of existence is added to it. In the mind, the quiddity is independent of existence in the sense that one can think of quiddity of an object without concerned with whether exists or not. (Nasr 1964, 26) After making this basic distinction, S.H. Nasr reports, Ibn Sina emphasizes that although the existence of a being added to its essence, it is the existence which gives each essence, or quiddity, its reality and is therefore principal (*aṣīl*). (Nasr 1964, 26) Quiddity can exist only by means of existence. Without existence, quiddity remains nonexistence. In this regard, the relationship between quiddity and existence becomes clearer; existence, not essence, is the principal and essence logically is prior to existence.

Nevertheless, it is still obscure how actually existence relates to quiddity and vice

versa; is existence a part of essence? Some say might claim that existence is a part of essence because it is something additional to quiddity. Ibn Sina’s ontological doctrine seems not supporting such claim. From Ibn Sina’s point of view, existence is more accurate to be regarded as an accident rather than a part or an element of essence. But, existence is not an accident in a regular sense, like that of color is an accident of the wood (i.e. substance). Since in such regular accidental relationship, the substance (wood) possesses a concrete reality while the accident (color) not has it. The accident can disappear without causing the disappearance of the substance. In other words, the wood remains wood regardless whatever color painted on it.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr perceives Ibn Sina’s notion of the “accidentality” of existence in a very specific sense. He cites a passage from *Ta’līqāt* to explain what Ibn Sina means by “existence as accident”: “The existence of all ‘accidents’ in themselves is their ‘existence for their substrata,’ except only one ‘accident,’ which is ‘existence.’ This difference is due to the fact that all other ‘accidents,’ in order to become existent, need each substratum (which is already existent by itself), while ‘existence’ does not require any ‘existence’ in order to become existent.” (Nasr 2006, 69-70) In other words, “existence as accident” does not need another “existence” to be existent and to be added to quiddity whereas other accidents like whiteness need “existence” to be existent and to be attached to quiddity.

In addition to the relation between quiddity and existence, Ibn Sina also makes another distinction with regard to the notion of being (existence/existent). There are three kind of beings; necessary being (*wājib al-wujūd*), possible being (*mumkin al-wujūd*), and impossible being (*mumtani‘ al-wujūd*). In the realm of Necessary Being (God), the distinction between essence and existence is void. Both are considered just the same.

Being (with capital B) is "His essence and His existence." (Nasr 1964, 27) In the context of possible being, the quiddity of a thing has equal possibility whether to exist or not to exist, like all creatures in the Universe whose quiddity could either take on existence or remain nonexistent. Whereas, in the context of impossible being, the quiddity of a thing is only in the mind and is impossible take on existence. (Nasr 1964, 27) Therefore, according to Ibn Sina's ontology, existence is added to essence occurs in the realm of possible being, not in the other two modes of being.

### **Suhrawardi's Critiques of the Peripatetic Doctrines**

The Peripatetic ontological doctrines are inspiring but not satisfying for Suhrawardi. On the one hand, Suhrawardi remains using the basic distinction between existence and essence (quiddity) in developing his ontological teaching although then he comes up with his own theory. On the other hand, he criticizes the doctrines of Peripatetics (i.e. Ibn Sina) with regard to the meaning of existence, the relationship between existence and quiddity, and the principality of existence. But, in the case of developing the theory of light, Suhrawardi seems to be inspired by Ibn Sina, especially with regard to Ibn Sina's theory of the Necessary Being and of possible beings (and the process of intellectual emanation in this realm).

The first Suhrawardi's criticism of Peripatetic's notion of existence is located in his exposition of logic. It is interesting because the relationship between the concepts of quiddity and existence is actually a logical 'second order notion,' (Rizvi 1999, 220) which means that the disputation between him and Ibn Sina occurs only in the realm of mental concepts. In part one of the *Philosophy of Illumination*, which is on logic, Suhrawardi argues that "existence" should be used in an univocal sense, referring to a single meaning

only, not in an equivocal sense which implies multiple meanings. In this line of argument, "existence" can be a predicate of various things. One may say "the necessary exists," "substance exists," "accident exists," "horse exists," or "human exists." Yet, the meaning of "existence" in those words is just the same. The "difference" between the necessary, substance, accident, horse, and human is not determined by their common predicate. They are distinguished one from another only through the essence of things. (Ziai 1990, 168-169) In addition, "existence" in one meaning is also a mental concept that depends for its existence on the individual essence of things. Suhrawardi writes, "Existence is used with a single meaning and as a single concept for blackness and substance, for man and horse. It is an intelligible meaning more general than anyone of these, as are the concepts of quiddity taken absolutely, thingness, and reality taken absolutely. We claim that all these predicates are purely intellectual. Consider: if "existence" were just an expression of blackness, it could not apply with the same meaning for blackness, to whiteness, and substance." (Suhrawardi 1999, 45)

In the context of logical reasoning, the use of "existence" in the univocal meaning clearly challenges the doctrine of Peripatetic which perceives it in the equivocal meaning. Suhrawardi does not recognize what so called "existence in itself" which does not require another "existence" to be an existent as Ibn Sina holds. "Existence" is understood only in terms of (in John Walbridge's term) a being of reason, an intellectual concept, which is attached to a thing as predicate. To be more precise, Suhrawardi would interpret the word, for example, "a black wood exists" as follows. The reality of wood is its essence, "woodness." It may need "existence" to be an existent, to be a wood, but this existent is a mental construction, not a reality. The function of this "existence" is not as "accident" as Ibn

Sina perceives, but as a predicate in a logical sense. In the same vein, the “blackness” also needs “existence” as a predicate to exist and to become an accident of the wood. So, the “existence” of the wood and of the black has the same meaning. This is different from Ibn Sina’s doctrine which perceives the existence of the woodness as both “a specific accident” and “existence” which no needs to another “existence” to exist; whereas the blackness becomes a merely regular accident attached to the wood and needs “existence” to be an existent. “Existence” of the wood is “existence in itself” whereas existence of the blackness is the “existence of the accident,” the accident of the white.

For Suhrawardi, the first notion of “existence” is not accepted because if the “existence” were actual whether by means of “existence” or not, it would be an existent and no longer “existence.” In his own word, Suhrawardi says, “If the existence were actual, it would be existent. If its “being existent” were taken to be an expression for the existence itself, then “existent” would not apply to both existence and other things with the same meaning. This is because the concept of existent with respect to the things is that an existent is that something having existence, while in the case of existence itself it would be that it is the existence. We ourselves do not say something of many things except with a single meaning.” (Suhrawardi 1999, 45)

Then, Suhrawardi’s argument goes, if every existent in the realm of possible beings, like blackness, needs “existence” to switch from nonexistent to an existent, how comes the “existence in itself” does not need “existence” to be an existent? A thing that does not need “existence” to exist is only possible to occur in the realm of Necessary Being. But, if “existence” needs another “existence” to be an existent, then there would be an infinite regress since there no limit of where and when the need to another existence will end. With

regard to this issue, Suhrawardi comments that “the actuality of the existence would not be the existence itself, and the existence would have existence. This same argument applies to the existence of the existence, and so on to infinity. But a simultaneous ordered infinity of attributes is absurd.” (Suhrawardi 1999, 45)

Suhrawardi’s trivialization of “existence” continues to occur in his exposition of the philosophy of light. Although some interpreters of his works equate Suhrawardi’s notion of light with Peripatetic’s concept of being, which in fact this equation seems to be plausible, the general accounts of Suhrawardi prove the other way around. Light is more frequently to be associated with “essence” instead of existence. Suhrawardi perceives that the thing possessed by the Light of the Lights and the thing emanated from the higher light to the lower light is essence. He writes in part two of the *Philosophy of Illumination*, “By its essence, it (light in its own reality) reveals itself to and emanates upon every receptive one. The True King is He who possesses the essence of everything but whose essence is possessed by none. He is the Light of the Lights.” (Suhrawardi 1999, 96) This kind of statement, among other things, makes an attribution of the primacy of essence to Suhrawardi seems to be grounded.

### **Mulla Sadra’s Criticism of Suhrawardi**

The primary objection of Mulla Sadra to the philosopher of illumination, among other things, is on the ontological doctrine. Sadra attributes the idea of the primacy of essence to Suhrawardi although Suhrawardi himself never uses either the term “primacy” or “principality.” Based on Sadra’s accounts, Suhrawardi believes that essence is real whereas existence is merely a mental abstraction, a secondary intelligible. This is ‘a grave sin’ of the illuminationists. Sadra strongly rejects such view and asserts that nothing is real except existence. Existence is not a

product of mental abstraction. The existence is the only reality and others, like essences and general notions are merely mental concepts. Since existence is the only reality and uniquely particular, human conceptual mind cannot capture it. The conceptual mind only captures those which are products of mind, especially essence. The notion of essence for Sadra is a mere mental conception and not real therefore can be known by the mind. The original status of essence is not existent because it can exist only by means of existence. Mulla Sadra says, "They (i.e. essences), so long as they remain unilluminated by the light of existence, are not something to which the mind can point by saying whether they exist or not...They eternally remain in their native concealment (of non-being) and their original state of non-existence...They cannot be said to be or not to be--neither do they create, nor are they objects of creation (the objects of creation being the contingent existences, not essences)..." (Sadra 1387 H, 37)

In this regard, the relationship between essence and existence in Mulla Sadra's view is considered totally different from that of Suhrawardi. Sadra challenges the illuminationist philosopher who regards existence as a mere attribute for essence. For Sadra, based on Fazlur Rahman's account, the truth is that existence is existence of an essence, not of something which is asserted to an essence, as in the case of black, white, round, etc. Existence is simply the status of being real, not an attribute of something which is in its own right already something real. (Rahman 1975, 29)

Another Sadra's criticism towards Suhrawardi is on two kinds of the possibility of infinite regress; first, when "existence" needs another "existence" to exist and to become an accident of essence which in turn leads to a vicious regress because there will be endless chain of existence; second, when relation between essence should have "existence" to

exist and this existence will once again be related to another relation (between essence and existence) which also will need "existence." Mulla Sadra's comment on this issue is simple. He refers back to his own doctrine saying that such possibility of infinite regression occurs only in the mind because the distinction and the relation between essence and existence are located in the mind too. This mental infinite regress therefore can be terminated also by the mind, that is, by ceasing its higher operation as is the case with all forms of mental regress. (Rahman 1975, 33)

Although Mulla Sadra criticizes severely the tendency of Suhrawardi to believe in the primacy of essence/quiddity over the primacy of existence, he is also influenced by Suhrawardi in developing his metaphysics and cosmology. He equates his conception of existence to Suhrawardi's theory of light along with some necessary adjustments. He replaces "light" with "existence" and takes over the doctrine of "more-less intense light" by applying it in the context of "more perfect and less perfect existence." Sadra moves further from Suhrawardi by introducing the notion of *tashkik*, a systematic ambiguity of existence. Existence in his mind is basically the same in all things but also creates differences among existents by means of which every existent becomes unique; and the less perfect forms of the existence are contained in and transcended by the more perfect forms of existence. (Rahman 1975, 36-37) The structure of existence for Sadra is not a static structure containing levels of being (like that of ten intellects of Peripatetic or lights of Suhrawardi). Instead, existence is perceived undergoing a perpetual movement. The driving force of this universal movement is *'ishq*, or cosmic love, which impels everything towards a more concrete form. (Rahman 1975, 36) The direction of movement is never downward/backward but always upwards/toward; from the less perfect to the more perfect, from the

lowest point towards the highest, from more general (*‘āmm*), the more indeterminate (*mubham*), and the more diffuse levels of being to the more concrete (*khāṣṣ*), determinate, and integrated or “simple” forms of existence. (Rahman 1975, 35-36)

### Suhrawardian Answers

Despite Suhrawardi’s tendency of holding the idea of the primacy of quiddity, there are also occasions in which Suhrawardi makes the distinction between essence and existence blurred, especially when he elaborates the theory of light. The light for him is self-evident; there is no need of definition of it. (Suhrawardi 1999, 76) It has two divisions; a light that is a state of something else (accidental light) and a light that is not a state of something else (incorporeal or pure light). (Suhrawardi 1999, 77) The later light, which is immaterial, is different from the former, which is physical one. The immaterial light according to Suhrawardi is able to make something else manifest whereas the physical one is not. John Walbridge puts it in an eloquent way, “Anything in the presence of a light becomes manifest.” (Walbridge 2000, 24) At this point, it seems to me that the ability of the light to render unmanifest things to be manifest is also similar to that of Ibn Sina’s and Mulla Sadra’s concept of existence which renders something to be an existent.

Furthermore, the existence of the lower light is described as generated from the essence of the higher light. It means that the higher incorporeal light, which contains an essence of the light, not only illuminates its essence but also gives existence to the lower incorporeal light. Suhrawardi says, “The existence of the Proximate Light is solely from the essence of the Light of the Lights, but the Light of the Lights shines Its light upon the Proximate Light simply by virtue of its suitability of the recipient, its love for the Light of the Lights, and the absence of any veil.” (Walbridge 2000,

96) In other words, the distinction between existence and essence seems to be blurred and even blended in the concept of light. Both are considered important and constitutive in the process of the illumination of the light. Therefore, interpreting Suhrawardi as the founder of the idea of the primacy of essence over the primacy of existence is one interpretation. Another interpretation which is not inferior to the previous one regards that light is a higher category, beyond the distinction essence-existence, in Suhrawardi’s system of philosophy. This can be called a non-dualistic approach towards Suhrawardi’s works.

Summarizing the complex idea in Suhrawardi’s *Philosophy of Illumination*, John Walbridge concludes that in general the characteristic of Suhrawardi’s system rejects binary compounds (existence-essence, matter-form, substance-accident, and genus-differentia) in favor of a unitary concrete reality. (Walbridge 2000, 22) This interpretation is supported by Suhrawardi’s own account which states that quiddity/essence in itself is as conceptual and unreal notion as existence. (Suhrawardi n.d., 175) It means that the reality for Suhrawardi is neither called essence nor existence, but light. The mainstream interpretation of Suhrawardi may claim that when the higher light along with its luminosity generates the lower light through a process of illumination, the former illuminates or brings quiddity/essence to the later. This is the foundation of those who regard Suhrawardi as holding the position of the primacy of essence. In the similar fashion, some other interpretations may claim that since the light is able to render the unmanifest to be manifest, it means that light provides “existence” to an object by means of which it becomes existent/being. These two interpretations seem to be plausible.

Nevertheless, Suhrawardi himself employs the word “light” to bridge the

dichotomy of essence and existence. The light, especially the pure light, functions both as existence and essence. When light is perceived to be able to bring something into existence, the role of light is equal to the role of existence which renders something to exist. Suhrawardi writes, "The Light of the Lights is the cause of the existence and the cause of the continuation of all existents, and so are the dominating lights." (Suhrawardi 1999, 123) But when the light is perceived as luminous and illuminating by means of essence and active by means of its quiddity, (Suhrawardi 1999, 129) the description of light seems to be more closed to the description of essence as the reality. He describes the highest reality of light as follows, "The True King is He who possesses the essence of everything but whose essence is possessed by none. He is the Light of the Lights." (Suhrawardi 1999, 96) This non-dualistic approach to Suhrawardi challenges and rejects the interpretation of Sadra who considers Suhrawardi as the founder of the primacy of essence/quiddity. The preference of Suhrawardi towards essence as the reality may have a solid ground in his elaboration of logic in which he criticized Peripatetic's logic and ontology. Nevertheless, when it comes to the discussion of light, the distinction between essence and existence is less relevant and overcome by the general notion of light as the self-subsistent and the provider of existence for existents.

In addition, Sadra's criticism on the possibility of infinite regress in the chain of existence of a thing and in the "existence" of the relation between essence and existence can be answered as follows. Mulla Sadra thinks that an infinite regression only potentially happens in the mind, not in an external reality, which then can be ceased in its higher mental operation. This argument seems to violate Sadra's own position with regard to the primacy of existence. As the doctrine of the primacy of existence shows, existence is the

sole reality, not a mere mental concept. In other words, the potential regress is not only in the mind but also in reality. Then how is it possible that Sadra tolerates the regress of "existence of existence" by saying that this regress can be easily ceased in the mind? Furthermore, even if the potential regress occurs only in the mind, it logically cannot be accepted by Suhrawardian approach. The main reason for denying the vicious regress is basically logical; it is illogical to stop the regress arbitrarily. Except that, something which has a potential infinite regress reaches to the point where it is self-evident and self-subsistent, no needs others to be (to exist). In Suhrawardian's scheme, the end of regress cannot be in the realm of the "existence of existence" because "existence" for Suhrawardi is not self-evident. Instead, the end of the regress will be in the realm of the Light of the Lights.

As for Sadra's innovation with regard to the movement of existence which perceives existence is in a perpetual motion to one direction, a direction of perfection, this doctrine is more a complementary explanation rather than criticism to Suhrawardi. If the downward motion of the light—from the more intense light to the less intense one—is for explaining the multiplicity of lights, the upward movement of existence—from the less perfect to the more perfect existence—is to explain the possibility of unity. In fact, such Sadrian-one directional movement of existence is actually grounded in Suhrawardi's theory of light too. In Suhrawardi's exposition, the ascendant relation to the higher can occur only through beholding. He writes, "The lower light cannot comprehend the higher light, for the higher light dominates it; but the lower light nevertheless beholds the higher. When the lights become many, the higher light possesses a dominance over the lower light, and the lower has a desire and passion for the higher." (Suhrawardi 1999, 97) Sadra in this regards moves further by introducing



the possibility of existential movement to the higher. Accordingly, Sadra perceives that the unity with the higher (the highest) existence is possible whereas Suhrawardi perceives that the only possibility relation with the higher (highest) light is through unity of vision (*waḥdat al-shuhūd*).

### Conclusion

After explaining the backgrounds of the debate on the distinction and the relationship between essence/quiddity and existence, ranging from Ibn Sina's position, Suhrawardi's response to him, to Mulla Sadra's critiques to Suhrawardi, we come to the conclusion that Suhrawardi's basic tenet is actually non-dualist ontological view. In this respect, the notion of light is beyond the binary category of essence and existence by means of which the accusation that he holds the idea of the primacy of quiddity is considered not fully accurate. The theory of light furthermore influences Mulla Sadra in developing the concept of the systemic ambiguity of existence/the gradation of existence (*tashkīk al-wujūd*) and of the existential/substantial motion (*al-ḥarakah al-jawhariyyah*). Sadra's innovation is in fact a complementary rather than criticism to Suhrawardi's system of light.

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