

## The Philosophical Interpretations of Purifying Agents by Sabzavari (A Case Study of Water)

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**A**bstract: Mulla Hadi Sabzavari was an influential philosopher of the Qajar period. His philosophical method, which contributed to his interpretative method, is his reconciliation of transcendent wisdom and Illuminationist philosophy. With an esoteric and methodic inner interpretation of the principles of these two Islamic philosophical schools, Sabzavari formulates the ultimate idea held by the founders of these schools (Suhrawardi and Mulla Sadra) without any inconsistency or contradiction, and indeed, in a fully harmonious way. Therefore, one of the important features of his philosophical interpretations is a methodical combination of the principles of transcendent wisdom and Illuminationist philosophy. This research reviews Sabzavari's comprehensive (ontological and epistemological) interpretations in terms of consistent illuminative and existential principles of "water" as the first purifying agent, and similar interpretations of other purifying agents (the sun and fire), presenting concrete examples of the approach of reconciling and integrating Islamic sciences with Sabzavari. Sabzavari's interpretations of "water" reconcile Illuminationist and transcendent accounts, as they are concerned with the inner dimension of jurisprudential rulings, and provides a reconciliation of practical and theoretical philosophies. Moreover, the capacity of (Islamic) philosophy or wisdom, in its general sense, as a bridge between contemporary Islamic and human sciences is implicitly considered.

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**Introduction:** As an inheritor of the history of Islamic philosophy or wisdom in the late period (Qajar period) and as a Sadraean philosopher and a commentator of Mulla Šadra's transcendent philosophy (*al-ḥikmat al-muta'aliya*), Mulla Hadi Sabzavari offered particular methodological innovations in the history of philosophy, which render his philosophical system a renaissance in the Islamic philosophy. A major characteristic of Sabzavari's method is his reconciliation of Illuminationist (*Ishraq*) and transcendent philosophy, as well that of theoretical and practical philosophies. To do so, Sabzavari adopted a speculative method, through which he reconciled two major speculative (or philosophical) and traditional (or transmitted) trends (*al-ma'qūl wa-l-manqūl*) and Islamic mysticism, which appeared contradictory. In this way, he particularly revived practical wisdom as well. For this

purpose, he divided his significant work, *Asrar al-ḥikam* (literally: Secrets of Wisdoms), into a section on theoretical wisdom and a section on practical wisdom. He subsumes theoretical and practical wisdoms under "epistemic wisdom," treating Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and juridical rituals as belonging to practical wisdom. In this section, Sabzavari presents philosophical principles and proofs and pure mystical interpretations of jurisprudential rulings and rituals. He emphasizes that Muslim jurists have occasionally dealt with some "causes of religious legislations" (*'ilal al-shara'i*) in their books and essays, but his method is to present philosophical proofs and mystical interpretations of juridical rulings and laws. Sabzavari's philosophical method, which contributed to his interpretative method, is his reconciliation of transcendent wisdom and Illuminationist philosophy. In

this way, Sabzavari's philosophical interpretations are characterized by a methodological combination of transcendent and Illuminationist philosophical principles.

**Methodology:** The method of this research is investigation of chains of transmissions, description, and analysis.

**Findings:** Sabzavari's reconciliation of Illuminationist and transcendent philosophies is exemplified in his comprehensive (ontological and epistemological) interpretations in terms of consistent illuminative and existential principles of "water" as the first purifying agent, and similar interpretations of other purifying agents (the sun and fire). While Sabzavari's interpretations of "water" reconcile Illuminationist and transcendent accounts, they are concerned with the inner

dimension of jurisprudential rulings. He deploys interpretations in his articulation of the inner truth of jurisprudential rulings as well, trying to prepare the ground for reconciling Islamic jurisprudence with philosophy and mystics. In his *Asrar al-ḥikam*, practical wisdom is presented alongside theoretical wisdom, and section on practical wisdom is devoted to philosophical and mystical interpretations of jurisprudential rulings. In this way, it paves the path for a philosophical, rational approach to juridical rulings (which are reduced today to imitative rules), and provides a reconciliation of practical and theoretical philosophies, and at the same time, it encapsulates Islamic sciences within a single coherent system. Moreover, the capacity of (Islamic) philosophy or wisdom, in its general sense, as a bridge between contemporary Islamic and

human sciences is also implicitly considered.

### **D**iscussion and Conclusion:

*Ta'wil* (interpretation) in Arabic is derived from the root *awwal* (that is, first or primary), which means to return a word or statement to its primary or genuine meaning. Thus, the literal meaning of *ta'wil* involves a primary origin. Wisdom or philosophy (*hikmat*) was initially a general field of study, which included all theoretical and practical sciences. Sabzavari's philosophical or sagacious (*hikmi*) interpretations are accordingly a referral or reduction of all (Islamic) sciences to wisdom or philosophy in its general primary sense.

A remarkable characteristic of Sabzavari's interpretation, which makes it unique and has not been given due attention, is his reconciliation of apparently contradictory views: two philosophies, one of which rests on the concept of light and takes "existence"

(*wujūd*) as a constructed (*i'tibari*) entity, while the other believes in the primacy of existence. With an esoteric and methodic inner interpretation of the principles of these two Islamic philosophical schools, Sabzavari formulates the ultimate idea held by the founders of these schools (Suhrawardi and Mulla Ṣadra) without any inconsistency or contradiction, and indeed, in a fully harmonious way. Sabzavari's construal of existence is a combination of Sadraean transcendent and Illuminationist accounts, and his interpretation of light is as a combination of light and existence. As for practical wisdom, when it comes to his interpretation of purifying agents (*muṭahhirat*), Sabzavari follows the same existential-illuminative method, interpreting water was an "expanded existence" (*al-wujūd al-munbasit*), as well as "knowledge" (the present illuminative existence), and as an instance of the truth. At the

third stage, he interprets water as the “soul” because of its vital or life-giving forces. Accordingly, he interprets the two kinds of water in jurisprudence—that is, flowing (*jari*) water and stationary (*rakid*) water—respectively as an illuminative heart that is genuinely connected to God and a heart that has minimal knowledge of God, without having a manipulative power. In the graded hierarchy, Sabzavari also provides an existential-illuminative interpretation of the sun and fire as the “diluted” (*raqiqa*) existence and the form and substitute of the “reality” (*haqiqa*). He begins with an interpretation of the fire as the soul: the soul is alive and life is a purifying agent, and so is fire. He then construes fire with two intermediaries as God’s caliphate or successor. On this account, the truth – God – has a successor in each world: the first intellect (*al-‘aql al-awwal*) is the successor in the

world of intellect, the soul in heavenly souls, the sun is the successor in bodies, and the moon is the successor of the successor’s successor. In the elemental world, human souls have the position of caliphate. Accordingly, the succession of the perfect man is the major succession (*al-khilafat al-kubra*), and the succession of fire is the minor succession (*al-khilafat al-ṣughra*).

In his interpretations of water, the sun, and fire in terms of the principle of gradation (*tashkik*), Sabzavari refers to graded stages from the absolute existence and its successors. In any case, Sabzavari’s analytic and causal analysis is an epistemic, consciousness-based approach. Light indicates consciousness and life, whether it is in the “light of lights” (*nūr al-anwar*), or in the soul, or in the sun and fire.

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