

# The Survey of the Proofs Presented by Sohrehvardi in Revoking Plato's Theory of Transmigration

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**Abstract:** *The correspondence studying in this lecture is attentive to two impressive view points in the area of connection of body and soul and prosecution and following of destiny of soul before and after annihilation of body. A view point believes in eternity of soul and emergence of that before creation of body and in contrast, there is a view point that while denying pre-eternity of non- corporeal dimension of human being, knows the soul as a being affair. Believers of the first view point, appraise the death as the annihilate of body that causes the entrance of soul in other bodies and in this way, soul is wandering in life and death from one body to another. But the second view point knows the returning of soul to material world after separation and freedom from body abstaining and challenging the preliminaries and categories of transmigration of souls. This lecture studies opinion of two prominent philosophers that each of them is the mental agent of one of the viewpoints. Plato believing in transmigration of souls is criticized in outlook and theory of sheikh Eshragh and this criticism is while sheikh Eshragh was severely attracted in plato in other mental areas but this interest did not hinder criticizing mental basics of plato by him.*

**Keywords:** *transmigration, soul, body, eternity, immortality*

## INTRODUCTION

### Transmigration

Transmigration has remained as an unsolved and challenging issue among the theoretical and subjective issues of interest to the mankind. The proponents of the issue are seeking to find ways to justify the life and death cycles, living and departure, and they believe that the essential imperishable quintessence of the human beings which is so called as the soul once again returns to the world of matter in a process called transmigration after the collapse and disintegration of the body and it is reincarnated in the other bodies and there is for sure stages and steps. On the contrary, there are a great number of the opponents who deny the existence of such a cycle from its root. This latter spectrum can be broadly divided into two groups. The first group holds a perspective implying the denial of the existence of a single and abstract essence called "the soul" and they disbelieve the transmigration and the second group includes to a perspective which while accepting the existence of the soul as a real and a single quintessence and essence, denies its return to the material world after being set free from the corporeal and body texture. The opponents and proponents positioning and taking stances in respect to the issue of "transmigration" are implicitly indicative of the emergence of a massive volume of ideas and notions accompanied with the claims and inferences and reasoning and intellectual requirements in handling and dealing which requires an extensive time period and great deal of effort. This study is a brief summary regarding scrutinizing the opinions proposed by two philosopher theoreticians about the transmigration topic (Dinani et al, 2010).

### Plato, Sheikh Shahab Al-Din Sohrevardi

Plato (927-1006), the Greek philosopher, believes in transmigration according to the ideas and opinions implied explicitly and implicitly by him in "Phaedo dialogue" and he is among those who are of the belief in returning of the soul to the material life after being separated and isolated from the corporeal body and he has made a lot of utterances and discussions in this regard. On the other hand, the mastermind of the illuminati philosophy is Sheikh Shahab Al-Din Sohrevardi (1129-1160) who, declaring the imperishability of the soul and the persistence and perseverance of the ego after the decay of the body points to

transmigration as something improbable, and evaluates the returning of the soul to the world of matter as refuted. Referring to the previously mentioned classification, the current article is the battlefield representing the disputes and contention between one of the representatives of the philosophy claiming transmigration (Plato) and another representative from among those who believe in the revocation of transmigration while being affirmative of the soul existence as the quintessential part which is also single and abstract (Sheikh Sohrevardi). The magnificent apex of such a dispute is where Sheikh Sohrevardi has been deeply influenced and affected by Plato's opinions and ideas in compiling his collection of intellectuality and mindset and in founding his school named "Eshragh" or "Illuminati" and in the comparison between Plato and Aristotle enthrone Plato and values him more and considers him as being more superior and excellent. But, regarding his standpoint for the transmigration issue, he withdraws from his familiar method and claims the opposite in contrast and in opposition to the proofs posited by his master and tries reasoning quite inversely and strongly stays disavowing of his thoughts and proofs (Sohrevardi et al, 1988).

In the present article, it has been tried to firstly explicate in great detail the ideas and theories provided based upon the proofs by Plato in *Phaedo* Dialogue regarding the justification of the life and death cycle and then applying the same method we deal with the survey of the ideas and perspectives stated by Sohrevardi in revoking Plato's ideas. This is done in two steps. Firstly, we scrutinize Sohrevardi's proofs in proving the existence of ego and then we deal with the investigation and validation of the reasons why such Muslim philosophers deny and disavow transmigration. In the end, a summation and general overview of the topics will be presented in an appropriate and proportionate manner to the themes and gist of the ideas in the context (Sohrevardi et al, 1986).

### **Phaedo Dialogue**

*Phaedo* Dialogue handles the issue of transmigration and the life and death cycle and it is authored based on a disputing and conversational method known to Plato in the majority of the dialogues and dialogues. What is observable among the questions and answers is the dualism as an optional subject matter adopted by Plato regarding the relationship between body and the soul, in such a manner that he holds that these two are two different realities, the soul and the body, and he considers the soul as the master and sultan of the body. He describes the relationship between the body and soul as productive and generative and believes that one has been yielded from the other and this is the cycle which is constantly reiterating. His preparations and introductions for proving such an idea and claim are as stated below:

- First introduction: every antagonist is the generator of itself. Plato quotes Socrates in the aforementioned dialogue that "because two antagonists are two things so two productions and two embellishment take place between them. That is to say this one is born of that one and that is produced of this" (Plato, 2001).
- Second introduction: the soul and the body are two singular antagonists. In Plato's point of view, these two essence are distinct from one another and they are opposite in their constituent elements and their unique functions.
- Third introduction: the soul is undying and it has been preexisting before the bodies have emerged. The introduction's foundation is laid upon the premises of this axiom that in Plato's thought system and mindset the soul had been preexisting before the formation of the body, thus it is of an eternal nature. His proof and evidence for such a claim is the subject of learning under the shade of which Plato believes that learning does not mean acquiring new knowledge and cognition rather it is merely reminding of the set of the material which had been learnt by the soul and accompanied with a body in its life before the present one and now it is only remembering.
- Fourth introduction: the soul is eternal. Among the other fundamental features of a soul according to the theory proposed by Plato is the soul eternity. To prove such a claim, Plato deals with the elaboration of the objects existence and he distinguishes between two types of things or objects: visible objects and invisible things. The things which are exposed to the sight undergo changes and evolutions and this alteration can be understood through the faculty of eyesight and the other sensory faculties. But, the invisible things remain unchanged and they will never found to have deficiency or defect and change and alteration. These invisible things possess two attributes. First of all, they are only understood through the thinking faculty and secondly such things are simple and expanded. Quite contrarily, visible things are combined and made up of parts and they are casted into understanding through the use of sensory powers. Plato realizes the features of the visible things combined of elements and elements as

being corresponding to the body and he classifies the soul as invisible and due to the traits defined for the invisible classes deduces that these things are eternal.

In transiting from the above-mentioned introductions, the results which are yielded from juxtaposing the aforementioned presupposition can be configured as below:

Because life and death are two generative antagonists, in such a manner that one is produced of the other, thus the emergence of one should regulate the other. Transmigration is a response to this life-death cycle during which the soul as a singular and abstract essence reincarnates inside another body or context after the degradation of the body and once again returns to the life and death cycle within a new delegation. From what was just said another conclusion strikes the minds of the readers and that is the soul as being an infinite quintessence since it is only in case of accepting this feature that the subject of transmigration can be justified.

In the area of transmigration Plato divides the human beings into two classes: philosophers and non-philosophers. Regarding the philosophers he is of the idea that the soul of such class of people in case that they can keep themselves independent and in an standalone and away from the body will be kept accompany of and collocating with the Gods but in case of the non-philosophers he believes in the return of their souls to the world and reincarnating in the other bodies to seek repentance of the things they have done in the past and it is in this form that the transmigration philosophical theory was framed (Qutb al-Din, 1902).

### **Sheikh Shahab Al-Din Sohrevardi**

Sheikh Shahab Al-Din Sohrevardi known as the Illuminati Sheikh is the founder of the illumination philosophical methodology and he is among the few individuals theorizing regarding the issue of “transmigration” and he has surveyed and investigated the subject corresponding to his philosophical perspectives. He is one of those who criticize the Plato’s transmigration theory and he shapes his reasons and proofs of proving his claim that the soul does not return to the world of matters after being separated from the body in several steps. The first step in achieving such a goal is to prove the existence of the “ego” for the human deprived of the material and corporeal body parts and organs which has been reasoned in Sohrevardi’s words within the paradigm of five different methodologies and these are (Sohrevardi, 1986):

First: the proof of the part and the whole: in writing about this proof which has been handled by him in his book “forms of light”, Sohrevardi is seeking to prove the existence of “ego” through an empirical possibility. He believes that it has happened many times in one’s daily life that we have stood forgetful of a part of the body organs and even more than that there has been occasions in our lives that we have forgotten and forsaken the whole body as an animate quasi-figure. But, simultaneously, we have never forgotten an independent subject of these parts and the whole, a subject which has always been deemed as an undeniable reality and that is “ego”. Sohrevardi writes “inside you there is neither this body and nor are you made up of your body parts; rather there is something more to and beyond it”.

Second, the proof of change and transformation: this proof has also been stated in his book “the forms of light” and like the previous proof it is of some empirical introductory ideas. Sheikh is intended to mean here that the human body as an animate quasi-figure is constantly growing and developing. The natural intrinsic features of the growth and development impose that one should be moving beyond the prior moods and achieve new and novel characteristics. This characteristic causes the pointed quasi-figure not to remain in one form at any time and according to Sheikh “last year you were not what you are now”, but in all of these changes and alterations and despite the physical quasi-figure growth, it is the “me” or “I” part which has always remained the same and it is this “me” that has been kept immune of the changes and variations during the course of time. Childhood turns into youth and the youth gets older to the eldership but the idea of “me” always remains the same.

Third: the proof of the ego’s quest for discretion: this proof has been brought in his book of “Radiance treatise”, and it is similar to the first proof except that it differs in the allegorical features it has taken advantage of and due to its being similar to the proof of part and the whole we refrain from explaining it any further to save time and space and avoid prolixity.

Fourth: the proof of the absolute unity: this proof which unlike the proofs described earlier are free of the empirical and experimental introductions and it is therefore based on the logical proofs beginning with offering a definition of the absolute unity. In Radiance treatise Sheikh describes “I” as the absolute and concrete unity and this word or pronoun to be exact implies the thing which is not dividable of any sort. If “I” or the “absolute unity” should be taken to mean body then it has to follow the features therein and so dividable in such a manner that we could not be able to comprehend it as an absolute unity. While we found ourselves as absolute unities so there is a gap and distance between this “I” and that “body”.

Fifth: the proof of suspending example: the purports and the summary of the proof is that what can cause an ego to be emerged and become a demonstration and representative of it is sometimes the body and sometimes it is a pending example. Where the body becomes the manifestation showcase of the ego, the pertained and dependent egos related to the human bodies should be recounted. But, where the pending example is the manifestation container of the ego it is considered as an incorporeal and abstract ego, like the egos appearing in dreams including those which are the emerging containers of the objects or the pending example, what is clear is that the ego never forgets itself in two states. Therefore, it can be claimed that the reality of the ego is not the body, nor the pending example; rather what forms the ego's reality is something contradictory to both of them. This proof has been introduced in the "illumination epistemology".

## METHODOLOGY

Passing this stage and proving that the ego does exist we found ourselves surveying the various methods of comprehending the existence of this incorporeal ego from the Sohrevardi's outlook. The sum of the Muslim philosophers' opinions and ideas regarding the various methods of intuition and perceptions can be classified as below which are pertaining to the human comprehension and they can be categorized based on three methods:

- a) Knowledge by presence
- b) Knowledge by Acquisition
- c) Knowledge by God

Without quarreling that the knowledge by God can be enumerated among the knowledge by presence or do they differ, it has been said in the definition of every guild it has been stated that the knowledge by presence includes the existence of the knowledge by the knowledge-owner's side without any intermediary filling the gap between the knowledge and the owner of the knowledge. Acquisitive knowledge includes the emergence of a form of an object by the reason's side and the knowledge by God includes the knowing of the things for the understanding and receiving of which there is no intermediation between the soul and its creator. The third state is that in which of the above knowledge ranks should we insert "our perception of the ego"? The illuminati Sheikh believes that if one found himself as possessor of the knowledge by acquisition he has perceived himself via his essence example (form). The form of the ego which has been conceived in this stage in respect to the ego itself can be referred to by the demonstrative "He". That means the yielded and produced form is something other than the ego. In other words, if we are to be made aware of the form to our "selves" I either know that this is my form or I do not know. If I know that this form is the same as "I" I should have known it before it being perceived by me and if I do not know a question is posed as to how have I gained knowledge regarding it. Thus, my knowledge is an antecedent to anything generated that can be imagined. After perceiving the ego, there is another knowledge which is the knowledge by presence and it can be comprehended without any intermediary by the human being. One finds oneself present before him or herself and this happens immediately and non-intermediated by any form of any sort. After accomplishing to prove the existence of something incorporeal named "ego" we deal, in Sheikh Eshragh thoughts and notions, with the great details and subtleties of the nature and the activities performed by such an immaterial existence according to the beliefs proposed by Sohrevardi. Illuminati Sheikh has opined for the perfect and absolute separation of the soul from the body and the ego and self from the material body and he states that the speaking self which is reminded by him as "the wise light" as being favored by the material corpus and matter and he names this material body as "Barzakh" or "purgatory". To put it differently, the reason for the spirit and the body meeting is the innate poverty in purgatory (the corporeal body) and its desire and willfulness for the "wise light" (the speaking ego), since in this presupposition it is assumed that the low existence (body) is seeking and willing to find and amalgamate with a sublimate or higher existence (spirit). In Sheikh's ideas, those believing in transmigration think that this wise light after being segregated from the body is seeking to find other corpses which are in similarities and resemblances with the previous body and they take refuge inside them. "Therefore, whenever the human body or corpus is wasted and decayed and in the meantime its warlord light was beloved with the darkness and it comes not knowing its right standpoint and stance incumbently, will be attracted to the lowest of the lowers due to its aspirations for it" (Sohrevardi, 1988). Sheikh has criticized such a belief and responds to two doubtful dilemmas regarding the issue. The first doubt is that the ego has been preexisting before the body was produced. In this case, the ego should be either single or plural. If it is plural, it should have substantiation and objectifications to be able to separate each one from the other and this is impossible. Since the factors bringing about the distinction and separation between the individuals' selves is their bodies and if we claim that the ego has been

preexisting in plural form before the body was emerged and this plurality requires distinction and the distinction can be done through bodies and corpuses this is a continuum and the continuum revocation is among the necessities and the musts in the logics and reasoning. But if the ego had been previously preexisted before the emergence of the body in a singular form the prerequisite for such an utterance is that everyone should have common theosophical feature and shared epistemologies due to enjoying the same and common and shared singular ego, while it is clear that this does not hold in the realities' world (Souzanchi, 1908).

But the second doubtfulness is the returning of the soul to the material world and reincarnation in corporeal bodies. In the above accolade, we found out that the Sheikh has verdicts in favor of the ego being created and in his idea the possibility of its preexistence before the body does not make any sense and is therefore rejected. The second misgiving is in refuting the transmigration possibility and the returning of the soul to the material world and reincarnation in the bodily corpuses and through such a theorization by Sheikh the theory of transmigration is generally rejected and refuted in the realm of the illumination thought and school. To reply to such a doubt, firstly, Sohrehvardi declares this fact that the soul does not vanish and fade after the death and disintegration of the body and it remains eternal since the ego is the same very wise light that is unending. The decline of the wise light requires the variation and metamorphism in the mighty light and this is while in Sohrevardi's school of thoughts, the never changing nature of the mighty light has been proved. What can be helpful in understanding and conceiving the idea is that in Illuminati Sheikh's mind, the mighty light is the complete prerequisite reason for the creation of the wise light and in order for it to exist is the lack of change and revolution in its essence (Qutb al-Din, 1902).

But the proof claimed by illuminati Sheikh in proving the non-reincarnation of the soul after the death and perish of the body into the other bodies and its returning back to the material world is that due to the finiteness effect of the matters and bodies, it cannot be accepted that the ego or the wise light as an infinite subject can be got busy dealing with the finite issues such as body. Rather it intensively seeks adsorption into the mighty light. "So, whenever the wise lights dominate the mighty lights quintessence their love and desire for the world of light or wisdom gets stronger. Due to their perfect intensity of their love and their extensive and vast adsorption into the life source, they will not be attracted towards the other bodies rather they are more willing to join the reason world and source of lights (Sohrevardi, 1988).

### **Discussion and conclusion**

The expression made by Sohrevardi is intended to mean that transmigration cannot be existed. Since due to the intensity and the strength of the adsorption of the mighty lights of the world of wisdom the wise lights after being separated from the body and its corporeal context and due to its attraction and preoccupation with the sublimate light flows towards the life source that is towards the reason world and calms down therein, thus transmigration is in itself improbable and rejected. Regarding the question as what happens in the world after death, there are three substantial and principal answers. The first answer is based on "refutation" which denies any sort of life after death and considers the life as being finished and coming to its end at the death time. The survey of the proofs and the evidences proposed by this group is outside the domain of the current article. But the second group includes those who believe in "transmigration" in the reincarnation of the soul to the corporeal and material body after the original body is perished and decayed and they base such a belief on some reasons. For instance, they think of the soul as an eternal and undying which has been preexisting before the emergence of the body and after it, will keep living after the disintegration and the death of the original body. In this presupposition, soul is an example of a singular and independent essence aside from the body the eternal feature of which causes the issue of transmigration to grow stronger. Since it is the acceptance of this eternity that brings about exigencies regarding the soul continuation of life after the destruction of the body. Thus, in the process of transmigration, the soul which is undying will return once again to the world of matters and reincarnates in the bodies of the others and this cycle consecutively repeats itself.

The third answer is the theory of "arousal". This answer although in its introductions announces acceptance of the existence of the ego and the soul, but unlike the previous group does not realize the existence of the soul as being antecedent to the emergence of the body and the destruction of the body is considered as the outset of a new stage of soul's life which takes a place in purgatory and remains there until the day it is resurrected and aroused and when the Qiama or the judgment day is held, it again returns to its mundane corpse and will be held liable for what it has sown in the world. Plato is among the group who defend the second answer and Sheikh Eshragh is among the ones defending the third answer. These two perspectives have discrepancies and commonalities. Their commonalities have been gathered around the point that firstly both of these perspectives declare believing in the existence of an incorporeal

existence in the evolution and in the making of the human beings which is the soul and secondly they consider the soul's persistence and life after death as being a rule of thumb and incontrovertible. But the discrepancies gather around the pivot of the idea that those believing in transmigration claim for the evolutionism and eternity of the soul while the proponents of the theory of arousal realize the soul as being created and its very beginning of the life has been the very time the body is created (creationism). Another point of difference between these two perspectives is in the destiny of such an incorporeal aspect after the destruction of the body for which those who believe in transmigration state that after death which results in the perish of the physical body the soul again returns back to the world and it is reincarnated in the other bodies and of course this process has been divided into steps, but those who believe in the theory of arousal do not accept the return of the soul to the world of matters after the death and the destruction of the corpse and consider it as being refuted. Instead, believing in the raising from the dead again on a promise date have faith in an interval in which the soul after leaving the body takes refuge and resides in it and this interval has been termed as Barzakh or purgatory.

In the current article, we investigated and contrasted the ideas and perspectives of transmigration and raising from the dead or resurrection according to what had been proposed by two of the believers in each of the aforementioned perspectives and as it was observed, both of the philosophers at the beginning try to prove the existence of the human immaterial and incorporeal being and then they attempt to lay their subjects and discussions based on this foundation. Plato, thinks of the soul as something eternal and undying which is constantly fluctuating between death and life and it reincarnates from one body to the other and in contrast Sheikh Eshragh meanwhile approving and affirming that the humans have been essentially constituted of some immaterial quintessence firstly deals with challenging the soul evolutionism and through making sue of the reason and intellectual preparations and introductions recognizes it as something unlikely. In the second step, sheikh Eshragh believing in the idea that the death only brings about a destruction in the body recognizes soul as undying due to being possessor of immaterial characteristics and that due to the intensity of its love towards the mighty world of the lights which is the world of reason and it has been agreed generally to be the source of the life it finally joins this world and such an intensity in its love and adsorption into it causes it to be ceased from returning back to life and be reincarnated in the purgatory of the bodies. Therefore, in Sheikh Eshrag's mindset which is influenced and impressed by the Islamic religious teachings transmigration is refuted and rejected.

### Resources

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