

## The Essence of Ugliness in Suhrawardī's Philosophical Discourse

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### Abstract

In this exploration, we delve into the profound concept of beauty and its antithesis—ugliness—through the lens of the philosopher Suhrawardī. Renowned for his emphasis on Illuminationism and the boundless realm of imagination, Suhrawardī's discourse extends beyond the luminous to encompass the very essence of ugliness. Our purpose is to unravel the enigma of what Shaikh-i-Ishraq truly meant by ugliness and how he articulated it within the framework of his philosophical tenets. Through meticulous analysis, we discern various facets of ugliness: the palpable, the perceptible, and the ethereal, all interwoven within Suhrawardī's literary tapestry. Ultimately, we witness how ugliness, akin to darkness, stands in stark contrast to the radiant light—a symbol of beauty and virtue—pervading Suhrawardī's profound philosophy.

**Keywords:** Ugliness, Beauty, Dark and Illuminated Suspended Images (Suwar Mu'allaq Zulmaniyya), Suhrawardī, Illuminationism (Hikmat al-Ishraq).

### Introduction

Ugliness, often regarded as the antithesis of beauty, shares intriguing parallels with the history of its more celebrated counterpart. Among the ancient Greeks, the pinnacle of "perfection" found expression in the concept of "Kalokagathia", a fusion of "kalos" (meaning "beautiful") and "Agathos" (representing virtuous qualities). This harmonious blend encapsulated both aesthetic allure and moral excellence. When we explore aesthetic attributes, we frequently invoke terms like harmony, beauty, and pleasure. Consequently, it becomes plausible to define ugliness as encompassing all that is unattractive, disproportionate, and evokes suffering and discontent. Beyond the realm of visual and tangible beauty, we encounter a parallel universe—the domain of moral beauty. Curiously, this duality extends to ugliness as well. For the layperson, a decomposing corpse evokes both ugliness and an olfactory assault, while the chilling sight of a laughing executioner reveling in tormenting their victim elicits a similar visceral response. Yet, these manifestations of ugliness diverge in nature. Curiously, despite the plethora of treatises on beauty, scant attention has been devoted to its shadowy counterpart—ugliness. Historians and thinkers, when expounding on beauty, inevitably cast their gaze upon its antithesis, weaving references to ugliness into their narratives. Within the tapestry of Iranian-Islamic thought, however, ugliness remains a veiled concept, its contours hinted at rather than explicitly delineated. Among Muslim thinkers, Sheikh Shahabuddin Suhrawardi (549-587 AH) intertwines the concept of beauty with that of love, while his ontological framework



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encompasses the existence of four distinct worlds. His primary focus lies in unraveling the essence of beauty. Yet, can we, within his philosophical framework, unearth an alternative—a counterpart to beauty? Perhaps by redefining beauty itself through the works of Sheikh Ishraq, we can illuminate the concept of ugliness. Suhrawardi's perspective paints existence as a symphony of light emanating from light. The gradations of light—intensity, weakness, proximity, and distance—compose the celestial score. And where light wanes, darkness prevails. If beauty embodies light, can we posit that ugliness mirrors darkness? This essay embarks on a quest to elucidate the concept of ugliness within Suhrawardi's oeuvre. In pursuit of this goal, we shall grapple with fundamental questions:

How does Suhrawardi expound upon and interpret ugliness in his works?

What are the characteristics and types of ugliness in Suhrwardi's view?

This research endeavor seeks to delve into the insights of one of Iran's eminent scholars regarding the concept of ugliness—an enduring topic akin to its counterpart, beauty. By unraveling the manifestations of ugliness and grasping its cognitive nuances, we aspire to illuminate a more precise understanding of beauty itself.

## Research Findings

According to Suhrwardi's definition, ugliness can be categorized into three distinct types: perceptible ugliness, reasonable ugliness, and imaginary ugliness. These categories are based on the occurrences and manifestations that Suhrwardi has described in relation to the concept of ugliness. From Suhrwardi's perspective, ugliness is akin to darkness. It embodies qualities such as evil, weakness, and defect. Furthermore, it represents the absence of perfection.

## Conclusion

In Suhrwardi's philosophical system, light and darkness serve as crucial symbols representing good and evil. While Suhrwardi is often hailed as the sage of light philosophy, it is essential to recognize that darkness, existing alongside light, fundamentally shapes his worldview. Beyond the philosophical exploration of light and darkness, Sheikh Ishraq's elucidation of the world of imagination further enriches Suhrwardi's works. Notably, the concept of ugliness in Suhrwardi's writings finds its philosophical underpinning in the symbolism of darkness. This darkness is associated with unconsciousness and neglect, while its counterpart, light, symbolizes awareness and insight. In this intricate interplay of light and darkness, Suhrwardi's legacy endures, inviting contemplation and deeper understanding. According to Suhrwardi, darkness paves the way to ugliness, and fear serves as one of its companions. Just as souls become more luminous when close to the source of light and benefit from it, the darkness and ugliness of souls are also determined by their proximity to darkness. The closer they are to darkness, the uglier and more evil they are perceived. In Sheikh's works, ugliness is categorized into three distinct types: Perceptible ugliness: This includes ugliness resulting from defects or imperfections in the body or natural features. Sensible ugliness: Encompassing qualities such as ignorance, wickedness, cruelty, and a lack of goodness. Imaginary ugliness: Represented by images of darkness and the appearance of monsters and demons in the world of imagination. Suhrwardi's

concept of ugliness can be summarized through these defining terms: ugliness, darkness, absence, evil, and cruelty. In Suhrawardi's philosophical framework, the concept of the "ugly triangle" is constructed from three fundamental sides: fear, grief, and darkness. These elements stand in stark contrast to the "triangle of beauty", as perceived by Suhrawardi. The latter is composed of the sides of beauty, love, and sadness. Fear and dread, arising from encounters with darkness and ugliness, inflict a pain that, according to Suhrawardi, surpasses any other suffering. This anguish is both greater and more formidable, casting a terrifying shadow upon the human experience.

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