



Seminar

JARI KAUKUA

Erik Allardt Fellow, SCAS.
Lecturer in Philosophy, University of Jyväskylä

Self-Awareness in Islamic Philosophy

Tuesday, 18 March, 11:00 a.m.

In the Thunberg Lecture Hall
SCAS, Linneanum, Thunbergsvägen 2, Uppsala
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S W E D I S H
C O L L E G I U M
for ADVANCED STUDY



ABOUT JARI KAUKUA

Jari Kaukua studied philosophy at the University of Jyväskylä, where he received his doctorate in 2007 with the thesis “Avicenna on Subjectivity: A Philosophical Study”. At an early phase of his post-doctoral research career, he was a Research Fellow in the Riksbankens Jubileumsfond (RJ) project *Understanding Agency*, located at the Department of Philosophy at Uppsala University. This was followed by a post-doctoral project on self-awareness in Islamic philosophy funded by the Academy of Finland. Kaukua has also participated in several larger high-profile research units funded by the Academy of Finland and the European Research Council.

Kaukua’s research is centered on the Arabic philosophical tradition, with particular focus on questions related to epistemology and the philosophy of mind. His most important recent publications include: “Suhrawardī’s Knowledge as Presence in Context” in *Studia Orientalia* (forthcoming); “Avicenna on the Soul’s Activity in Perception” in *Active Perception* (eds. Silva, J. F. & Yrjönsuuri, M; forthcoming, Springer); “I in the Light of God: Selfhood and Self-Awareness in Suhrawardī’s Hikmat al-ishrâq” in *In the Age of Averroes: Arabic Philosophy in the Sixth/Twelfth Century* (ed. P. Adamson, Warburg Institute Colloquia, 2011); and “Subjectivity as a Non-Textual Standard of Interpretation in the History of Philosophical Psychology” in *History and Theory* (with Vili Lähteenmäki, 2010).

In addition, Kaukua has recently finished a monograph on self-awareness in Islamic philosophy, and is launching a new research project on the transformations of the concept of knowledge in post-Avicennian philosophical currents. This, as well as ongoing systematic work on the philosophy of Shihâb al-Dîn Suhrawardî (d. 1191) and his followers, will occupy him during his period at SCAS.

ABSTRACT

According to a commonplace belief, the emergence of self-awareness and selfhood to the focus of philosophical attention is particularly, or even exclusively, constitutive to modernity. On the other hand, the elusive nature of the phenomenon and the strikingly various ways in which it can be addressed have lead some contemporary thinkers to judge the self as little more than a conceptual fiction.

The present paper undermines the first of these claims by presenting an extended discussion of self-awareness in medieval Islamic philosophy. I will first reconstruct the relevant concept of self-awareness (Ar. *shu’ūr bi al-dhāt*) by looking at a set of related arguments in Avicenna (d. 1037 CE). In a second stage, I move on to investigate the variations in application and redefinition of this concept by means of the two examples of Shihâb al-Dîn al-Suhrawardî (d. 1191 CE) and Mullâ Sadrâ Shîrâzî (d. 1635/6 CE).

Towards the end, I will briefly consider whether – and if, how – the study of intellectual history can throw light on the second question of the self’s reality.