

# Suhrawardi's Illuminationist Rescue Plan

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**Eric Twose (as Etienne de L'Amour)**

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**ishrāqī institute**

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## About the Author

Eric Twose has been studying the Sufi mystical tradition, and especially the works of Idries Shah, since around 1985, and more recently he has studied Illuminationism, Western philosophy and tradition, and modern depth psychology.

Running online groups since around 1999, he also acts as a janitor for the groups *The Caravanserai* and the *ishraqi institute*, where he has met many wonderful friends and kindred spirits from around the world.

He writes mystical adventure as Etienne de L'Amour, and soft sci-fi and psi-fi as H.M. Forester. You can find his works, available for free download, at the web site: <https://sherpoint.uk> and at the Internet Archive's library: <https://archive.org/details/@esowteric?tab=uploads> .

## About the ishrāqī institute

The ishrāqī institute is an independent, multicultural and multidisciplinary, virtual, non-profit think-do-and-be tank.

The institute operates a Facebook group for folk interested in the work and “invisible college” of Iain McGilchrist (*The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World*), Henry Corbin (imaginal world), Tom Cheetham (*The World Turned Inside Out; Green Man, Earth Angel; All the World an Icon; Imaginal Love*), James Hillman (*Re-visioning Psychology*), Peter Kingsley (*Reality; Catafalque: Carl Jung and the End of Humanity*), Gary Lachman (*Lost Knowledge of the Imagination; The Secret Teachers of the Western World*), Carl Jung (active imagination; individuation), et al.

Of particular, core interest to the ishrāqī institute is traditional wisdom, not only of the East but especially the lost knowledge and traditions of the West, such as the pre-Socratic philosophers, Neoplatonism, the Renaissance, Romanticism, and a return to the depths of soul.

By multidisciplinary, we include not only the obvious arts and sciences, but a wide range of orientations, vocations and callings, including: mythology; creativity; art and poetry; crafts; alternative and appropriate technology and environmentalism; education; traditional and modern psychology and sociology; minority interests and the “off-beat”; cross-cultural study and traditional wisdom; equality and humanitarianism; spirituality and non-dogmatic religion; philosophy; cultural creatives; polymathy; altruism and love; and not least humour – because you never know from where a solution may arise.

You can find the ishrāqī institute's Facebook group here:

Eric Twose

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## Plato's Allegory of the Cave



In Plato's allegory of the cave, a number of prisoners have been imprisoned since childhood in a cave, chained so they cannot move, nor turn their heads, so that all they can see before them are shadows on a wall, and all they can hear are echoes around the cave's walls, that they take to be coming from the shadows. These shadows and echoes they take to be real, for they have known only these.

Let us say that one prisoner manages to break free from his shackles and looks around. He sees now that behind the prisoners is a raised walkway with a low wall, and that behind that is a bright fire. He notices that people walk behind the wall so that they do not cast shadows from the light of the fire, and that they hold aloft objects or puppets of men and other living things. It is these that cast shadows against the cave wall in front of the prisoners, and which the prisoners have taken to be real, just as they have mistaken the echoing voices of the puppeteers to be emanating from the shadow puppets.

This first escaped prisoner, then, tries to show the others the error of their ways, something which the academic researcher and writer Tianyi Zhang refers to as a *philosophy inside the cave*. He may try to convey this knowledge to those still held captive, though perhaps few will believe him and many will take him to be mistaken or even deranged.

Let us suggest, further, that a second prisoner breaks free of her chains, and discovers the reality of the immediate source of the shadows. However, she is not content with this, but looks beyond the wall and raised walkway. She spots a dimly-lit tunnel further back in the cave, and wanders through the cave to investigate. This, and the

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first prisoner's investigation Tianyi Zhang refers to as the formal knowledge of the peripatetic philosophers.

Following the dimly-lit tunnel as it leads steeply upward, this second escaped prisoner approaches the entrance to the cave, and is at first blinded by the light coming from outside the cave, but gradually her eyes become accustomed to the light and she begins to perceive more and more of what lays beyond the confines of the cave. At first she can see reflections of people and other living things in water, and as her eyes and perception become more accustomed to the light, she sees the people and objects themselves. Eventually she can see stars, the moon, and the sun itself; and now she sees the true source of the light, the sun itself.

Returning to the cave, this second escaped prisoner's eyes have difficulty in adjusting to the dim light inside the cave. When she tries to explain the reality of the prisoners' confinement and the true reality beyond even the cave, again, few of the prisoners can even understand what she is telling them, let alone believing her; some note the apparent harm done to this second escapee's vision; some that she is mistaken; and some that she may even be deranged.

This second emancipated prisoner's philosophy, then, Tianyi Zhang refers to as a fundamentally superior *wisdom outside the cave*; that of Suhrawardi and Illuminationism. Like Suhrawardi, she can only hope that a few of those few who follow the foundational, investigative Peripatetic philosophy will notice and pay attention to her hints and “twig” that there is a yet more transcendent way of being, the Illuminationist, and that the philosophy behind it may be worthy of

further, advanced study and practice, which has been termed deification.

Tianyi Zhang writes:

“[C]onsider the Cave Story as a way to interpret Suhrawardī’s Illuminationist project. Suhrawardī is the prisoner who has returned to the cave to rescue his fellow prisoners. To achieve this goal, he composes four Peripatetic-style works and only one important avowedly Illuminationist work *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq*. The nature of the four Peripatetic-style works, which vary in both length and depth, is that they expound an entry-level Illuminationism that is reached only through the Peripatetic rational approach and presented in Peripatetic terminology and style. The intelligentsia of his time can understand them and learn some true Illuminationist wisdom. Those who also understand the Illuminationist hints that Suhrawardī deliberately leaves in these Peripatetic-style works [investigation] will follow his instructions, study the final Illuminationist work *Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq* and escape from the cave [deification].

“Suhrawardī looks to three audiences: ordinary people who merely see “shadows” (material particulars); Peripatetics who investigate “idols” (sensible species forms from which various sorts of universals can be generated in the mind); and potential Illuminationists, some of whom have the capability of escaping from the cave and witnessing the living Platonic Forms, the things in the sky, and even the Sun (immaterial particulars).”

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~ Tianyi Zhang, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Nature of Suhrawardi's Illuminationism: Light in the Cave.*

### Ranking

“Based on their proficiency in deification and investigation, philosophers (and would-be philosophers) are ranked as follows:

- [1] Divine philosophers proficient in both deification and investigation
- [2] Divine philosophers proficient in deification but average or weak in investigation
- [3] Divine philosophers proficient in deification but lacking investigation (the Sufis, though perhaps the author is not familiar with Idries Shah's Sufi projection in the West and the preliminary work of unlearning, and learning how to learn?)
- [4] Philosophers proficient in investigation but average or weak in deification
- [5] Philosophers proficient in investigation but lacking deification (the Peripatetics)
- [6] Seekers of both deification and investigation
- [7] Seekers of deification only
- [8] Seekers of investigation only.”

~ *ibid.*

## Notes

- Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq (Arabic) may be translated as the “Wisdom of the Rising Light or Dawn” or “The Wisdom of Illumination”.

## Image

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