

Suhrawardi was born in 1154 in Iran and was executed in 1191 on the orders of Salah al-Din, on charges of corrupting the religion. Despite his early death at the tender age of 38, Suhrawardi's output and influence were prodigious as he is known as the founder of the Ishraqi (or Illuminationist) school of philosophy, which still has living branches today in Iran. Suhrawardi's great Arabic work, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, or *hikmat al ishraq*, purports to be an exposition of what he calls, the science of lights ('ilm al anwar), based on the intuition of the teacher and master of philosophy (the *dhawq imam al hokma wa rais*) Plato. In his Introduction to the treatise, Suhrawardi traces the lineage of Plato's philosophy back to Empedocles and Pythagoras, and ultimately to Hermes, and mentions the Eastern doctrine of light and darkness (*qa'adatu al sharq fi al nur wa al thalam*)—taught by the Persian philosophers, Jamasp, Frashostar, and Bozorgmehr—all semi-legendary sages associated with early Zoroastrians. In the author's introduction, we are told, “who ever wishes to learn only discursive philosophy, let him follow the method of the Peripatetics” (Suhrawardi 2004:4). Thus Suhrawardi will be discussing the meaning of Platonic intuitive wisdom, or Dhawq, which he contrasts with peripatetic philosophy, and specifically with the Aristotelian idea of essential definition. In this paper I examine Suhrawardi's understanding of the human soul's essence as that which knows itself, together with his understanding that as such, the human soul cannot be characterized by any other attributes, and is fundamentally identical with the light of knowledge. I attempt to show that Suhrawardi finds that it is characteristic of the Platonist tradition to define the self as that which is primarily and solely characterized by the light of knowledge, and hence, that self-knowledge is non-representational. Suhrawardi conceives of true knowledge as knowledge based on presence (Arabic, *huduri*), the entry point, or foundation of which, is self-knowledge. Suhrawardi founds his philosophical project on the nature of self as pure awareness, and only from that point constructs an epistemology and metaphysics. For Suhrawardi, the independent light, that which is not dependent on another for its being or its self awareness, is the controlling light, the light of lights. In this sense, it reigns supreme or is the commander. This metaphor for kingship, for the divine *xwarrah*, or royal light of consecration, comes from within, from the true East.