

Jari Kaukua. *Suhrawardī's Illuminationism: A Philosophical Study*. Leiden: Brill, 2022. xii+252 pages. ISBN: 9789004514102.

*L. W. Cornelis van Lit**

Jari Kaukua shows the great worth that remains in dedicating an entire monograph to the writings of Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191). As is known, Suhrawardī was one of the first major Islamic philosophers to appear after the Latin translation movement, and as such did not directly impact the trajectory of philosophy in Europe. He remained unnoticed among Western audiences until around 100 years ago. Realizing just how much of a bright mind he was and how important he is for the history of philosophy in the Islamic world, academicians have progressively paid more and more attention to him, with the last 30 years in particular showing a steady stream of publications. I must confess, I myself thought the time had come to spend energy placing Suhrawardī in a historical context, such as with my own attempt to trace his influence up until the present,¹ or Frank Griffel's study on Suhrawardī's place within the emergence of *ḥikma* in the 12th century.² However, Kaukua sticks to Suhrawardī's corpus, with only very infrequent detours to Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037), and this does not disappoint. Kaukua takes us to new depths and carefully assembles passages that were not brought in conjunction before.

Essentially, Kaukua's book is a commentary on Suhrawardī's magnum opus, *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*. Readers interested in understanding this book will find reading

1 L. W. C. van Lit, *The World of Image in Islamic Philosophy: Ibn Sīnā, Suhrawardī, Shahrāzūrī and Beyond* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017).

2 Frank Griffel, *The Formation of Post-Classical Philosophy in Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021).

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Kaukua's book in tandem with the translation and edition by Walbridge and Ziai³ to be really helpful. Similar books have been written,⁴ which Kaukua only very sparsely references. He instead prefers to engage with the string of articles written by Fedor Benevich on certain core topics or to simply leave out the secondary literature.

Chapters 1 and 2 are somewhat of an acquired taste, as they touch on issues in logic. Kaukua does try to show the relevance for later discussions, but I myself had the impression I could have skipped it without a loss of comprehension regarding the other chapters. Chapters 3, 5, and 6 cover familiar ground, with Chapter 3 focusing on *i'tibārāt*, which Kaukua leaves untranslated. Without claiming to be fully correct, I would explain *i'tibārāt* to concern the mental existence of second order concepts. Kaukua gives a lucid and convincing account on why Suhrawardī's insistence on *i'tibārāt* is borne out of his rejection of a realist interpretation of Avicenna's essence-existence distinction. In particular, §3.4 is interesting, with Kaukua using many passages from another of Suhrawardī's books, *al-Mashāri' wal-muṭārahāt*, to formulate a positive account of what these *i'tibārāt* are.

Chapters 5 and 6 discuss how light as an "Avicennan metaphor for existence" (118) underpins the relationship between God and creation, or rather how everything emanates from the Light of Lights. Plenty has already been written on this, such as John Walbridge's *The Science of Mystic Lights*⁵ and Roxanne Marcotte's article on Suhrawardī in the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*.⁶ To read about this emanation in Kaukua's signature philosophical analysis is still alright, especially for those new to the topic. However, seeing Kaukua include section §5.2 is odd, as it argues against ancient or mystical sources for Suhrawardī. These had been much hoped for by Henry Corbin (d. 1978) in the previous century, probably because of his personal interest in esotericism. I would hope that no serious reader of Suhrawardī would still need to be convinced that this is a fruitless approach.

To me, the most important contribution this book makes is contained in Chapters 4, 7, and 8, where Kaukua points out and analyzes how Suhrawardī was of the opinion that things are not shaped by a substantial form but through a bundling of universal Forms. My understanding of Suhrawardī has sometimes been influenced too greatly by a distinction which insists that Suhrawardī had

3 Suhrawardī, *The Philosophy of Illumination*, trans. J. Walbridge and H. Ziai (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1999).

4 H. Ziai, *Knowledge and Illumination* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1990).

5 J. Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

6 Roxanne Marcotte, "Suhrawardī", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2019 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/suhrawardi/> (Accessed 07.09.2022).

regarded essence as primary (*aṣālat al-māhiyya*), contrary to Mullā Ṣadrā's (d. 1050/1641) primacy of existence (*aṣālat al-wujūd*). Kaukua argues that, for Suhrawardī, both notions as well as their distinction are *i'tibārāt*. Chapter 4 begins with a discussion of Suhrawardī's argumentation against prime matter in favor of three-dimensionally extended corporeality. Following the order of topics in *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*, this is then made into a more general discussion on what constitutes an existing thing. Because accidents are what uniquely identify a thing, they must be made constitutive. As Kaukua puts it, Suhrawardī brought everything back to "simple, perceptible properties" (106). In Chapter 7, Kaukua unfolds how Forms are part of the emanative chain of causation and how individual things are instantiated through a combination of Forms. In the sense of being a similar cause to different individuals, Forms are universal, akin to the Avicennian concept of quiddity considered in itself. However, this does mean that Forms can be radically different from their instantiations. As Kaukua puts it (184), "Forms are essences without the baggage of metaphysical constitution that was discarded together with the *i'tibārāt*." In Chapter 8, Kaukua continues with this discussion, answering the question of how anything could be identified as one unique and persistent thing. For Suhrawardī, individual bodies are only the external activity of the Forms. There is no underlying substrate, simply the bunching up of Forms. The coincidence of the external activities of more than one Form is what makes one entity appear. Place and time fulfill an important role in this, as they become two of the most fundamental individuating factors. Kaukua's analysis is new and perceptive. Several times he alludes to the analysis being a reading of Suhrawardī that is quite close to Ibn Sīnā. With the insistence of a monist, emanative metaphysics, one could read it also as being quite close to Ibn 'Arabī's (d. 638/1240) metaphysics. This is unexplored by Kaukua but could be an interesting avenue of research.

Note that §4.3 is on the discussion of vision from the first part of *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq*. This does not function well in Chapter 4 but instead could have occurred in Chapter 9, which is more properly about epistemology. Kaukua explains Suhrawardī's thinking as a near collapse between epistemology and ontology. This is an interesting angle the chapter quite aptly explores; however, I was left wanting a lot more. Just like the first two chapters, readers could skip this last one without losing comprehension of the core of the book.

All in all, Kaukua delivers a book that will be very interesting for new students of Suhrawardī's *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* as well as a mandatory read for those interested in Suhrawardī's metaphysics, specifically his bundle theory. Hopefully, others will emulate the way Kaukua brings *Ḥikmat al-ishrāq* in conversation with *al-Mashāri' wa-l-muṭārahāt*.