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## Elan Morin Tedronai's Philosophy

Submitted by [a dragonburned fool](#)

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This theory is a speculation about the philosophical ideas, theoretical style and role of Elan Morin Tedronai, before he turned to the Shadow and became Ishamael compared to after. There is very little information in the books about it: a short remark in The World of Robert Jordan's The Wheel of Time, and some indirect references about the true conceptions of Elan Morin and how they might show in the contemporary style and intellectual mannerisms of Ishamael and in the opinion of the Third Age about Ishamael and about philosophy.

Now the quote from The World of Robert Jordan's The Wheel of Time: "As Elan Morin Tedronai, he was one of the foremost philosophers of his time, possibly the foremost. His books (among them Analysis of Perceived Meaning, Reality and the Absence of Meaning, and the Disassembly of Reason), while too esoteric for wide popularity, were extremely influential in many areas beyond philosophy, especially in the arts. No copies survive, and perhaps the world is better off for it, considering the circumstances. Some particles that have survived of his writings from after he went over to the Shadow – probably letters – indicate that it was his belief that the war between the Shadow and the soul of Lews Therin Telamon had gone on since the creation using human surrogates. According to him, Lews Therin had succumbed to the Dark One during other turnings of the Wheel and become the Great Lord's champion. During the war, he fought as hard to turn Lews Therin to the side of the Shadow as he did to defeat him."

### Quote of the Moment

Blood and bloody ashes!

-Lews Therin Telamon

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First, it is to be mentioned that no copies from his pre-turn writings survived, while some post-turning did. That indicates that Ishamael was not very interested in propagating his pre-turning ideas to the wide world. During the Breaking, and before that, during the War of Shadow, there was good reason for people to burn all his books - he was hated and people would fear being accused of having sympathy for the Shadow because of having his book. But if Ishamael wanted his books to remain he would do it. After all, a few of his post-turning letters remained, so it was quite possible. Also in the series, Ishamael never mentions his pre-turning philosophy. He never speaks of "meaning", "reason", "reality" etc, (compare to Asmodean with his nostalgic speeches about his music, and about the art of music in general), or of being a philosopher, or even anything about "Philosophy" or "Logic". Ishamael doesn't do anything that would be expected from an authoritative philosopher and founder of an influential school as he was



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as Elan Morin. He could have Darkfriends taught in the fundamentals of the 'true' philosophy, at least those who have academic skills (such as Alviarin for example, whom Ishamael raised to the head of the black Ajah). But no, uncommon for a self-confident author, Ishamael manifests total indifference about the intellectual heritage of Elan Morin Tedronai. This is an indication that Ishamael doesn't think that Elan Morin Tedronai's writings have something important or useful in them. When he turned to the Shadow, he most likely declared his pre-turning philosophy obsolete. Maybe he even considered Elan Morin Tedronai's writings were wrong. Turning to the Shadow, perhaps he changed also his philosophy.

After his conversion he expressed his idea about the eternal fight between the Dark One and the Creator using human surrogates, and that idea couldn't be possible before the Bore, when people knew nothing about the Dark One. Unlike the topics about reason and meaning, Ishamael likes to speak and argue about this fight of champions, and to hint about his competence on this question, i.e. to act like a philosopher having this thesis among his basic theoretical statements. That also indicates a change in his philosophy.

The meaning of his new name, "Betrayer of Hope", means that he was associated with "hope" before, for to betray it. Maybe the circumstances of how Ishamael got his name can fully explain the name itself - he publicly declared his conversion to Shadow at a conference devoted to solutions for the problems after the Bore (maybe this conference was associated with hope to heal the problems), and his action caused serious riots. One of the prominent defenders of the Good (as Aes Sedai were considered in those times) changing side to the Evil was really a great shock. But the problem would be not so great if he was known to be suspicious in his beliefs before, if there was anything ambiguous in him before this incident. Semirhage also was a prominent Aes Sedai when she declared herself publicly for the Dark One in the first days, but she did not shock as much as Ishamael did, because she was already somewhat scandalous. I bet, nobody thought of Ishamael doing anything wrong before that act (here a comparison to the 'Destroyer of Hope', Sammael, who was one of the foremost generals for the Light before to turn to a general for the Shadow in a very decisive battle). If Ishamael's pre-turning theories were used by the para-darkfriendish circles of these times, it wouldn't be such a shock. And if his early theories were used by them in the beginning they would be widespread, and would not be lost. Ishamael was one of the known participants at that conference; what was known about Elan Morin until his public declaration made the people to think he would effectively fight against the Shadow's early influence.

Also maybe his pre-Shadow philosophy was specifically associated with "Hope". It could be some spiritual and historiosophical kind of "Hope" because of the kind of influence it had; it could be even named "philosophy of Hope". If it was associated with "Hope" for the Age of

Legends society, the name "Betrayed" of "Hope" would fit especially well to the circumstances.

So, most likely when turning to Shadow, Ishamael repudiated his previous philosophy and the basic statements of Elan Morin's philosophy were lost. But even when a philosopher changes his basic statements, he most often retains the techniques of thought he uses for arguing and explaining his statements, and also his standards for what is a well-shaped theory. Most of these traits are neutral to Light and Shadow, and remain the same after the most radical changes. If Elan Morin Tedronai was a WhiteAjah-like logician before, he wouldn't act in the way he is acting now (Semirhage or Mesaana could be this kind of logician, but not Ishamael).

The only philosophy Ishamael discusses in the books is the struggle between Light and Shadow during the endless turning of the Wheel on the widest scale possible. As a particular branch of philosophy, this will be historiosophy, metaphysics in the deepest sense of the world's history from the world's beginning to world's end. Interestingly, real-world historiosophical philosophies, if they are successful and influential, are most often somewhat esoteric for the common population, and influence the arts more than other aspects of the culture. Such theories about the deep sense of the history are also often the base for philosophies stressing the concept of Hope. Hence it is probable that Elan Morin Tedronai was historiosophical also in his early writings.

The titles of his lost books are about reason and meaning, not about the world's turning and hope. Ishamael no longer shows any visible interest in "reason" or "meaning". However there is still an area of Ishamael's current interest that can be connected with topics like "perceived meaning". It's his competence about information, its change and its manipulation. "Father of Lies" is known as a description of the Dark One, but Ishamael as Baalzamon definitely contributed a lot to this reputation. All the manipulation of information done by the Shadow during the Third Age was supervised by him. I would also say that he is responsible for the high reputation of the Shadow 3000 years after the defeat of the Shadow, and the reason that there were always plenty of volunteers to become Darkfriends. Other Forsaken also think of Ishamael as one known to lie every time he could gain the slightest advantage. (The source is Moghedien's monologue in Tanchico.) Also Ishamael always seems to be very interested in how people perceive the reality, and at least part of his major efforts was concentrated on that. He made a lot about shaping public opinion about some topics especially in the time of Hawkwing and after that. There is a pattern in the way the people think about the White Tower and about geopolitical issues, etc in regions the Shadow could influence. Ishamael's hand is visible in the in shaping of the Seanchan mentality (and he speaks about the Seanchan as his success; he is piling it on of course, but there was some basis).

Usually philosophical treatises about "perceived meaning" address the issue of how meaning reflects things. If the meaning reflects the phenomena precisely and correctly, there is no need to concentrate on the process of perceiving. But the theme of "perceived meaning" becomes very important if in the process of the perceiving there are some changes, and especially if the process of perceiving is selective according to person's predetermined beliefs and manner of thinking. One notices only what one's mind is ready to notice, and after noticing it, one translates it into one's clichés - that's the main concern of every philosophical theory focussing on "perceived meaning". The most developed philosophies about perceived meaning are Kantian and Neo-Kantian transcendental philosophy, where the central statement is that reality itself has no own meaning, it's rough unorganized stuff, and must be filtered through a person's predetermined "a priori" logical premises to achieve any usable meaning (compare it with the title of the second of Elan Morin Tedronai's books: "Reality and the absence of meaning" ). Kantian philosophy looked for pre-experience presuppositions necessary for every reason and every knowledge, and common for every possible thinking mind, but of course other philosophers after Kant stressed cultural differences, social factors (e.g. Marx ) , subconscious psychological processes (e.g. Freud), historical development of beliefs etc. (sometimes even some mythical biological differences determining who will perceive what - as e.g. the Nazis did) as the real models that determine how people perceive the world. In the last case the character of the cultural, psychological and historical processes will determine the beliefs, kind of thinking and conclusions of the particular culture, community or individual, and thus it will determine their fates. And the fact is that the real-world philosophies that concentrate on culture-, history-, socially- or psychologically relative factors of perceived meaning, most often include also considerations and predictions about the fate of some social groups or cultural institutions. Most real-world philosophies that deal with such "perceived meaning" issues are too esoteric for wide popularity, and, if they have influence outside philosophy, it's most often in the arts (even if these kind of philosophies most often pretend to be mainly important for sciences). This fits into the description of Elan Morin Tedronai's philosophical influence.

The second book of Elan Morin Tedronai was entitled "Reality and Absence of Meaning". Such a title most likely means that Elan Morin Tedronai's statement was that reality itself hasn't meaning for mankind, it is only a rough material, and it is only the human mind that can give significance to anything, that can organize the rough data and create meaningful image of the world. Maybe it included the belief that humans can produce more than one interpretations of the reality, incompatible with each other, but both true, i.e. that both are completely supported by all the facts and completely explaining everything. So it becomes matter of choice what path of theorizing will be taken and it will result in a different destiny.

The third book of Elan Morin has the title "the Disassembly of Reason". What could this title "Disassembly" mean? The concept of "deconstruction" of the deconstructivists can give the best possible clue. If the "perceived meaning" is not direct reflection of reality (that is marked by "absence of meaning" ), but depends on underlying historical, cultural, psychological etc. factors, and also decisive historical choices, so the current standards for Reason will require the analysis of the unconscious premises in them. Because these premises were unconsciously involved when the standards of Reason were assembled or constructed, the process of analysis will be a "deconstruction" or "disassembly". Something like an attempt of psychoanalysis of the Reason itself.

Such theories are intended to be considered by large social project and considerations, but usually they are not really used for that, because even if these theories are very detailed, they usually do not have practical usage, but focus on analysis and developing integral conceptions. These theories can excite human imagination, however, and so influence arts.

As far as can be deduced from the titles of his books, this is most likely what Elan Morin's philosophy was before his turn to the Shadow.

If meaning is always dependent on problematic premises, then a philosopher could not rely on simple conclusions, because even the most obvious fact could become another meaning by other circumstances. Such a philosopher would prefer many things to maintain a conclusion, than one thing to prove it. Exhaustiveness of the possible factors will be more important than the precision of the particular premises. And a contradiction would be the indication not of a mistake, but rather of a tension in the dynamics of the different factors that gives the opportunity to twist the situation in the philosopher's favour if he/she properly shifts the balance). Every statement would be examined for every possible aspect and conjectures, and every possible statement would be taken into account to have the full picture. It would be impossible to have a precise view on every particular detail, because such philosopher would focus on deeper trends. The ideas would be logical, and can find surprising regularities on a large scope, but could fail on simple details. This logic could understand the unusual thinking of another culture, but fail to see some obvious consequence. In the German and French philosophy there are many examples of such a theoretical style.

If a mind who usually thinks in that manner begins to plan something practical, how will his philosophical habits affect his plans? First, the plans would be complicated, because such a mind requires a rich context to reach any conclusion. Simple plans will be too malleable for him. He would try if possible to turn every aspect having relation to the

situation, so that the context as a whole becomes advantageous to him. Complicated plans can have many points of failure if there is a sequence of preparations to be done. But our philosopher will seek to find situations and events that will have effect whatever their outcome will be. For that kind of a philosopher, what is most important is the conjecture or combination of the details, not particular details. Finding points of instability, creating tensions, and using that for to place seeds of what is needed in all possible details would be the ideal plan for such kind of mind.

We see this in Ishamael/Moridin. He always uses very complicated and large-scaled plans, and he acts somewhat contradictory in their implementation. So against Rand Ishamael tempts him one moment, and the next he threatens him, and then tempts him again. He wants Rand alive, but his Darkfriends try to kill Rand, and Baalzamon himself sometimes tries it (I believe it's seriously). He works in parallel at many many points, and every time he seems to try both ways. He often said to Rand and to others that by every outcome he will win. Later as Moridin, he plays both sides of the sha'rah board, and that is his view about what happens in the world. I.e. Ishamael's efforts are not about the outcome of each particular step of his plans, but in the sum of all attempts, and in the nuances that his multiple attempts bring in the world are his best result. He is controlling not the line of the events, but the pattern of the situation. However, he is not so strong in precise implementation. And in a direct fight, i.e. when there is single point of failure, the inexperienced Rand three times defeated the mighty Baalzamon. As Moridin, he stops facing Rand and begins to manipulate Rand's environment in a very complex and convoluted way, and is attempting to put Rand into his machine of meanings, to change the environmental conditions of his situation.

He is compensating the lack of insight in particular events with his insight in the nuances of larger processes. He has the reputation of being "more than half-insane" according to those around him (i.e. he is not very adequate about some usual situations), but he is maybe the best living expert on the turnings of the Wheel and the fight between Light and Shadow. These larger processes are where he can find nuances and strive for something definite. This is somewhat similar to the way the Wheel acts. The Wheel has some hard to understand goals, that it can accomplish if not in one way then in another, and the form of the implementation is not known before the implementation itself. The Wheel is very ... wasteful in what it does - e.g. when it wants a Dragon to be reborn, it spins many false dragons in; and achieving some prophesied thing with one person it sometimes drastically changes the fate of whole nations and even continents... When it wants to change something, it changes the environment, and many things related or unrelated to it... All that leads me to the suggestion that Ishamael intentionally tries to act in the manner the Wheel is acting. And, if my thoughts about his style of thinking as Elan Morin Tedronai are not wrong, the Wheel's manner of action would be the ideal manner of

action for such mind.

Maybe this was how Elan Morin Tedronai turned to the Shadow: he attempted to understand the Wheel's mechanism and decided that he understood the global Wheel processes a degree deeper than the common human point of view; then he tried to use his capabilities to understand the newly opened Bore (and the Dark One) and he understood it too well, and was caught in its context, so that it became his own. Too deep an insight into another's context of meanings can make this context your own.

Ishamael is not the type of leader who wants to control every detail of his actions. He was never a general even when the Shadow was in open war against the whole other world. There are no indications of him being a province governor. Rather he uses capable subordinates as military leaders, administrators etc. He punishes his subordinates very severely for failures and disobedience, but even his ordinary Darkfriends have too much self-initiative. My impression is that Ishamael tolerates and even encourages it. He prefers many different actions in the direction he wants, rather than few, but precise, actions. His power and his control are based on the extent of the activity, and also on creating dynamic balance. He prefers to have a force to make a pressure and another force to balance the first force, and third force to intervene between the first two forces... etc. Interestingly, those Forsaken who are straightforward, who make their perimeter of defence and fight for their positions, who can be localized, die first or suffer the greatest damages. The best surviving until now are Graendal, whose style is to manipulate the context (but to a lesser extent than Ishamael's plans) and to a degree Demandred, who is also IMHO jiggling with incompatible forces. These two are closer to Ishamael's style.

IMO it's Ishamael who insisted on the elimination of Herid Fel. Fel did not do much for Rand, he gave very dim answers, when he was there to give them. But what Fel did was give an alternative or competitive global interpretation of the fight between the Light and Shadow, and about the turnings of the Wheel. Fel always stressed the metaphysical aspect of the problem. E.g. about the Aelfinns' answer about the Cleansing, Fel saw in that "correspondence between principles of higher philosophy and the philosophy of nature" (sp). Most general or meta-things and a rival style of global interpretation. And if I'm right, the style of global interpretation is the most important thing for Ishamael.

Moridin's reaction against Fain is also significant. Fain is "very annoying" and Moridin finds him important enough to mention, but he uses phrases that make Fain look insignificant. Fain is a wildcard out of Moridin's control, but that's not fatal, Moridin can use chaos-machines out of his control for his purposes. The problem with Fain is that the Mordeth-ingredient has his own style of Evil. Fain is seeding another metaphysical, global principle of Evil, in rivalry with the Shadow's

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principle of evil. So he is dangerous for Moridin, but Moridin cannot confess that because it would mean acknowledging that his interpretation is not the only one.

Another implication is that the Shadow's efforts in preparation for Tarmon Gaidon are focused on assuring that the Dragon and his main allies will have the required style of actions. The fight is about the spiritual conditions of the future meeting one on one of Rand and the Dark One. So, for example, Cadsuane/Sorilea avowed goal to teach Rand to laugh and cry again is something of primary significance. Alivia's presence with her child-like innocence combined with full experience in acting in dangerous situations can be a chance for Rand to survive the spiritual fight against Moridin. (In his two first victories against Baalzamon Rand relied on his most basic and simple attachments.) It's critical for Rand to see the global picture himself and not in the style Moridin wants.

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