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# Reason and the Spiritual Journey in the Company of Anselm and Suhrawardi

**No More Nonsense: Reason and the Spiritual Journey in the Company of Anselm and Suhrawardi**

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## Abstract

Ermanno Bencivenga is a superb teacher, and his short book of 132 pages, *Logic and Other Nonsense: The Case of Anselm and His God*,<sup>1</sup> he excels at teaching us about history, philosophy, logic, the psychology, politics and theology of Anselm of Canterbury and much else along the way. I am blessed to be able to count myself among his former students, and I offer this critique as a token of appreciation for what I learned from him at Rice University when he was there in the early eighties. This is actually my second examination of this work, for it is a work that repays rereading.<sup>2</sup>

Although the book appears to be about Anselm and his famous ontological argument, appearances are often deceiving, or, perhaps it would be better to say that the author uses appearances in order to draw us into philosophical reflections of a very different nature than what the reader might first expect. There is a sophisticated irony that suffuses the entire book. Indeed, Anselm often seems to be an incidental figure, a mere example by which to illustrate various points Prof. Bencivenga makes about the unity of the self, the political implications of reason, and logic. So, it seems only fair to take advantage of the discussions here to discuss these and related issues, particularly as they pertain to the spiritual paths fared by Anselm and Suhrawardi. I introduce Suhrawardi to provide some contrast to Bencivenga's Anselm, and to allow for comparison between how the issues raised by Prof. Bencivenga may be viewed from differing perspectives related to the intellectual traditions of Christianity and Islam.

Suhrawardi (1156–1191), known as Shaykh al-Ishraq, the Master of Illumination, was martyred at the

orders Saladin, who retook Jerusalem from the crusaders, while the Archbishop of Canterbury, St. Anselm (1033–1109), served the Pope who initiated the crusades, Urban II. Both Anselm and Suhrawardi were involved in religious politics, both were seriously engaged in spiritual wayfaring and in guiding others on the spiritual path, and both were innovative in their attempts to prove the existence of God.

Prof. Bencivenga's book has four chapters, each headed by a passage from T. S. Eliot's *Murder in the Cathedral*, which is about another Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Becket (r. 1162–1170). Eliot's play is a psychological study, like Bencivenga's, and it has been criticized for being unfaithful to the history it uses to examine the author's own reflections on doubts and loyalties. Since in this review, my aim is to broaden the scope of the discussion of the issues raised to open a way to the consideration of Islamic philosophy and theology, it may be appropriate to make use of some passages from Goethe's *West-östlichen Divan*, which has an irony all its own.

## 1: The Program

*Dort, im Reinen und im Rechten,  
Will ich menschlichen Geschlechtern  
In des Ursprungs Tiefe dringen,  
Wo sie noch von Gott empfangen  
Himmelslehr' in Erdesprachen,  
Und sich nicht den Kopf zerbrachen.* [3](#)

Prof. Bencivenga tells us that Anselm wrote his proofs of the existence of God for a small circle of friends, all monks. 'To do what, if it is going to tell them nothing new? To get where, if they are already there?' (5–6) What's the point of this? Prof. Bencivenga critically considers a couple answers: (1) to obtain intellectual pleasure; (2) to find further cause to thank God Who endowed us with reason by means of which to know him.

Prof. Bencivenga looks askance at the first of these, and suspects that the second only comes into play when there is some challenge to the legitimacy of belief. When belief in God is placed under pressure by atheists, the pious may attempt to vindicate themselves with a clever proof. In other words, Prof. Bencivenga doesn't trust Anselm when he explains his motivation for proving the existence of God, not because he suspects him of lying, but of a kind of dissimulation. There are doubts lurking in the hearts of Anselm and his students, and the proof is given to suppress these doubts.

The proof, however, can tell believers who harbor no secret doubts something new—not the content of the conclusion, but that it is provable by reason alone, without any empirical premises. It can also serve another function: the proof might be a device for spiritual guidance. Prof. Bencivenga does not consider these possible motivations for offering the proof. Of course, he does not overlook these possibilities because of carelessness. I must confess that I have not seen anyone discuss how the proofs could play

a role in the guidance of novices on a mystical path. It might seem absurd to suggest such a thing. Mysticism is about visions and experiences of unity that defy logic while the proofs are paradigmatic products of discursive reason.

In the environments of Anselm and Suhrawardi, however, the philosophical tradition was not divorced from ideas about gaining mastery over the self and one's desires. The forms of mysticism associated with Plato and the neo-Platonists had ample representatives in the Christian and Muslim worlds during the period of the crusades, and in these mystical traditions logical training was considered necessary for the development of the intellect, the highest part of the soul that must come to dominate the passions and appetites.

I do not mean to suggest that Anselm's use of the proofs for the existence of God was no more than the moral equivalent of Plato's injunction to let none enter who are ignorant of geometry.<sup>4</sup> Working through the proofs does strengthen the intellect, but they do more: they direct one's intellect toward God; they preoccupy the intellect with a search beyond the sensory world for God.

Prof. Bencivenga reminds us that Kant has shown that we really ought to distinguish empirical from transcendental issues. It is only through empirical knowledge, Prof. Bencivenga claims, that we learn anything 'about the world' and are enabled to move 'more efficiently in it.' (8) Certainly this was not Kant's own view, for Kant held that non-empirical issues of morality have an important role to play on how we build a community; while Prof. Bencivenga holds that transcendental issues (by which Prof. Bencivenga means conceptual issues), are to be solved only by rational reflection; and all this can do is to make us feel better, more at home in the universe, more loved, 'whatever.' Of course, Anselm can be excused for not reading Kant, while we would have to argue at some length if we would beg to differ. So, we can disagree with Prof. Bencivenga about many points here. First, we could argue about his reading of Kant. Second, we could question the empirical/conceptual split on which Prof. Bencivenga relies, whether it conforms to Kant's view or not. Third, we could try to imagine what Anselm's own position would be on such questions. Let's put aside the first two questions, and ponder the third a bit.

Anselm, unlike Kant, did not have a very optimistic view of experience as a source of knowledge. Experience can only tell us of fleeting temporal affairs, not knowledge of eternal truths. Neo-Platonism, to the extent that it can be found in Augustine, provided the intellectual background in which Anselm did his thinking.

"It is evident, then, that a living substance exists in a greater degree than one that is not living, a sentient than a non-sentient, and a rational than a nonrational."<sup>5</sup>

The cognitive faculties of sentience and intellection are directed toward lower and higher realms of being. Thus, Chapter LXVI of the Monologion explains that the nearest approach to the Supreme Being is through the rational mind. Empirical knowledge just doesn't cut it. Prof. Bencivenga, however, seems to think that the danger posed by empirical knowledge is too much certainty: '[W]e are told [by Anselm]

that, if the statements of faith could be proved true by experience, there would be no merit to faith itself.<sup>6</sup> This makes Anselm sound like a latent Kierkegaard, but Anselm's point in the passage cited by Prof. Bencivenga is merely to explain why heavenly rewards for the elect are delayed, and by no means suggests that doctrinal principles could be proved true by experience. The problem with experience is not that it provides certainty that leaves no room for faith, but that it provides no knowledge at all of eternal verities.

Prof. Bencivenga attributes to Anselm an attitude that emphasizes the independence of practice from theory, but he offers the weakest textual support for this: citations of Anselm's sound practical advice, caution, and insistence on obedience. He is eager to have us see Anselm in this way because he thinks that the need for obedience arises with the realization that theory cannot serve as a guide in practical matters. Prof. Bencivenga insinuates that at some level Anselm realized that transcendental concerns with theology are useless for practical guidance in life, and that's why he insisted on such strict obedience. Where theology cannot guide, obedience can. When Anselm calls for rectitude in truth and justice and the implementation of papal decrees without compromise, Prof. Bencivenga sees in the uncompromising attitude evidence of an unwillingness to apply reason to practical matters. Reason is tolerant, Anselm isn't; so, Anselm confines reason to a theoretical realm where it can pose no threat to the ecclesiastic authorities. Prof. Bencivenga's notion of a compromising practical reason is an anachronism, as is the idea that Anselm would separate the empirical from the transcendental along Kantian lines:

"The logical reconstruction of reality is a mere subjective epiphenomenon that is to remain entirely private, entirely apart from the social sphere, and as such is not to raise any trouble.' (14–15) For Anselm, this would be one of those ideas about that which cannot be imagined. As Anselm sees things, rationality requires obedience to the will of God, even when we cannot understand the point of what God commands. The Church represents the will of God, for, according to Catholic teaching, the Pope is the vicar of Christ on earth,<sup>7</sup> and hence, reason demands obedience to him even as it demands obedience to God.

Boso. What is the debt which we owe to God?

Anselm. Every wish of a rational creature should be subject to the will of God.

Boso. Nothing is more true.

Anselm. This is the debt which man and angel owe to God, and no one who pays this debt commits sin; but everyone who does not pay it sins. This is justice, or uprightness of will, which makes a being just or upright in heart, that is, in will; and this is the sole and complete debt of honor which we owe to God, and which God requires of us."<sup>8</sup>

If Prof. Bencivenga should respond that he is merely using Anselm as a manikin on which to try on different styles of his own thought, then he should provide some argumentation in support of his idea

that metaphysics has a mere epiphenomenal status with respect to practical affairs. The contrary view, according to which theory, rational reconstructions, and other ideas are interwoven with feeling to motivate activity, is one that has been a constant theme in the neo-Platonist legacy within both the Christian and Islamic traditions. In Shahrazêri's introduction to Suhrawardi's *Hikmat al-Ishraq* (Wisdom of Illumination) he explains:

"You are aware that human perfection consists in the theoretical sciences, that the science of practical wisdom is also theoretical, and that improvement of character is acquired by turning the soul away from distractions and by purifying it from hindrances in order to become perfected".<sup>9</sup>

Much later, this sort of idea was taken up by idealists, and is advocated explicitly by the American idealist, William Ernest Hocking (1873–1966). Hocking argues that: "...the value of any object of attention is nothing other than the entering of that reality-idea into the thought of the object."<sup>10</sup> The connection between idea and value enables Hocking to link knowledge with love. Just as religion cannot be reduced to feeling, conversely, love itself has a cognitive component. Love is the working of an idea, a 'reality-thought', in experience to find beauty and value. Love and sympathy require cognizance of another, and hence the understanding of external reality. Hocking goes so far as to say, 'Interest in objectivity, which we have found at the root of all idea-making, is love itself directed to reality.'<sup>11</sup> Notice, too, that Anselm sees the intellectual cognizance of God as perfected in love, and he is quite explicit about the practical moral consequences of the living faith that issues from such love.

"Hence, with however great confidence so important a truth is believed, the faith will be useless and, as it were, dead, unless it is strong and living through love. For, that the faith which is accompanied by sufficient love is by no means idle, if an opportunity of operation offers, but rather exercises itself in an abundance of works, as it could not do without love, may be proved from this fact alone, that, since it loves the supreme Justice, it can scorn nothing that is just, it can approve nothing that is unjust".<sup>12</sup>

Likewise, for Suhrawardi, the ascent of the intellect is associated with love, and has practical moral consequences.

"In the proportion that the love mixed with mastery increases, pleasure and affection increase in our world, as does the mutual love of animals. If that is the case here, then what have you to say about the world of true and perfect love and of the pure, perfect dominance that is entirely light and luster and life?"<sup>13</sup>

Suhrawardi presents us with an allegory that also tells of the intricate relation between knowledge and love. In his 'On the Reality of Love or the Solace of Lovers,' he tells us that the first thing God created was the intellect and that the intellect is endowed with the ability to know God, to know itself, and to know that which was not and then was. From these three abilities there appear Beauty, Love, and Sorrow, respectively. Love becomes exiled from Beauty and returns to it after a long journey. The journey of love is through knowledge of the self and it leads to knowledge of God.<sup>14</sup>

Hocking too, after he argues for an organic relationship between feeling and idea, turns to religious feelings, religious fear and hope, and claims that they are “in part instinctive recognitions of the immediate vital bearing of such idea–possession upon every conceivable human value.”<sup>15</sup> He concludes that “It is only by a recovery of ‘theoretical’ conviction that religion can either maintain its own vitality or contribute anything specific to human happiness.”<sup>16</sup>

Prof. Bencivenga points out that Anselm admits that ignorance of theory need not be an obstacle to personal piety. The piety of children is ample testimony to this. Does this not then suggest that Anselm was at some level aware that his theological theories were mere epiphenomena? Not necessarily. Hocking reminds us that the space of the child is no less infinite than the space of the physicist. The child’s ideas may be naïve, but the use of them is still the work of reason. Hocking even suggests that children may more easily achieve religious understanding because the concepts with which they reason are simpler.<sup>17</sup>

One of Suhrawardi’s visionary treatises is called, “On the State of Childhood.”<sup>18</sup> He explains that the understanding of children is limited, but with the recognition that they need guidance comes true knowledge, and this is the beginning to the spiritual path. Ignorance of theory is no obstacle to beginning the search. Indeed, if the trappings of theoretical knowledge lead one to pride or to indifference with regard to spiritual wayfaring, such knowledge can be an obstacle to piety. On the other hand, the spiritual path is itself a search for knowledge; and although the mystics stress the importance of direct experiential knowledge, it is only natural for this to result in a more theoretical mysticism.

Like Hocking and Suhrawardi, Anselm doesn’t see juvenile piety as any reason to deny that it is through the intellect that one best comes to know and love God. Indeed, in the *Proslogion*, Anselm describes another motive for the pursuit of intellectual knowledge of God: it is an element of what we were made for.

“But the rational being cannot love this Being [i.e. God], unless it has devoted itself to remembering and conceiving of it. It is clear, then, that the rational creature ought to devote its whole ability and will to remembering, and conceiving of, and loving, the supreme good, for which end it recognizes that it has its very existence.”<sup>19</sup>

Anselm’s responses to Guanilo have seemed confused to most commentators, and Prof. Bencivenga is no exception. Anselm’s argument is that if the essence of God is properly understood, it must exist in reality, too, independent of the understanding. Guanilo asks how we can be sure that we really have God existing in the understanding. Words aren’t enough, for that’s how Anselm explains the impossible thought on the part of the fool who says in his heart that there is no God. The fool is just toying with words. At the same time, Anselm admits that the essence of God is unknowable. In that case, aren’t we all just toying with words no matter whether we tell ourselves that God exists or that He doesn’t exist?

Anselm’s response to this last difficulty is that there is a sense in which we do not grasp the essence of

God. It is beyond us. Yet, in another sense, we do grasp it, as though “through a glass”, in the Pauline phrase.<sup>20</sup> We do not have to understand God perfectly in order to make true statements about him and draw correct inferences.

For often we speak of things which we do not express with precision as they are; but by another expression we indicate what we are unwilling or unable to express with precision, as when we speak in riddles. And often we see a thing, not precisely as it is in itself, but through a likeness or image, as when we look upon a face in a mirror. And in this way, we often express and yet do not express, see and yet do not see, one and the same object; we express and see it through another; we do not express it, and do not see it by virtue of its own proper nature.<sup>21</sup>

It is worthy of note here that Anselm is giving instructions for gaining a kind of vision. Our vision is clouded and we need to clarify it. The proper employment of reason is taken to be a means to clarify our intellectual vision of divinity.

Anselm understands just as well as Frege, Tarski and Carnap that language is often misleading. Some jargon or regimentation may help us avoid the traps into which more ordinary forms of language may lead us. But unlike Frege and his successors, Anselm and Suhrawardi hold that real things may exist merely in the mind, like numbers, or they may exist outside the mind, too. What then of God? Could He exist only in the mind? No, because if He were limited in this way He wouldn't be God. Why can't we say the same thing about a greatest conceivable island? Because then we would be merely toying with words. There is no such thing in the mind or anywhere else. Rational methods will not always enable one to discern whether something is really grasped in the mind or whether it is a verbal illusion. For that, one must train the intellect to pay attention, to look beyond the words and images that are interwoven with our thoughts to their meanings.

Of course, the atheist insists that there is no God to be present in the mind and from whose presence there we may infer His necessary existence in the external world, as well. The fact that Anselm presupposes the contrary and the fact that his motto gives priority to faith may lead some to classify him as a fideist. This would be an error. At least, Anselm is not a fideist in the sense in which the term is applied to Kierkegaard or Wittgenstein. He may be forced to admit that proofs can only take us so far, but that does not mean that he holds that the assumptions needed are to be taken on a blind faith without the use of the intellect. It is the intellect that sees that God is truly present in the mind, and not just a jumble of meaningless ideas. In order for the intellect to see this, faith is needed. The absence of faith is an obstacle to the clarity of intellectual vision. Faith is not required because reason stops short; rather, faith is required for the proper employment of reason where proofs are insufficient.

## **2: The Program Criticized**

Mich verwirren will das Irren,  
Doch du weißt mich zu entwirren.

Wenn ich handle, wenn ich dichte,  
Gib du meinem Weg die Richte![22](#)

In the preface to the *Proslogion*, Anselm describes his obsession with his logical puzzle, and admits that he thought it might be unattainable, but he couldn't stop thinking about it. His puzzle was: "whether there might be found a single argument which would require no other for its proof than itself alone; and alone would suffice to demonstrate that God truly exists, and that there is a supreme good requiring nothing else, which all other things require for their existence and well-being; and whatever we believe regarding the divine Being." Prof. Bencivenga calls the obsession with this task an addiction. It commands more attention than it is due, being, after all, a mere theoretical reflective pastime.

Prof. Bencivenga is not at all sympathetic to the idea that such an obsession might be an expression of piety, described by Hocking as man's basic desire to know reality. Prof. Bencivenga chides Anselm for his deathbed wish—that God might give him a bit more time to solve the problem of the origin of the soul—because he sees him as denying the importance of other activities because of his passion for the intellectual life. The preoccupation with the ontological argument, Prof. Bencivenga notes, distracted Anselm from his prayers. He seems to think that Anselm was a hypocrite. Prof. Bencivenga also notes that Anselm pushed himself to his limits with ascetic discipline while he discouraged this sort of excess in others. He told others never to leave the monastery while he himself found occasion to undertake various journeys. None of this establishes a very strong case against Anselm, and normally we should take a more charitable view.

Prof. Bencivenga, however, takes the tone of the psychoanalyst. He sees layers of subconscious tendencies of which Anselm himself was unaware. Anselm does not use healthy metaphors when talking about reason: binding and force instead of exploration and adventure. Reason is a weapon. The theologian is God's soldier. These are slurs. Anselm's metaphors are no more militaristic than those of other philosophers. However, the attempt to put Anselm on the analyst's couch raises its own questions. What is the purpose of looking for Freudian slips in the writings of an eleventh century theologian? Does it provide us with a deeper understanding of the man or his works? It certainly allows the author to take a position of superiority. There is no need to question one's own attitudes where they conflict with those of an historical character if one is maintaining a clinical interest in a patient. There is no possibility of dialogue.

Notice that the dialogue with the fool in the *Proslogion* is not really a dialogue— for there can be no reasoning with the fool. So, what's the point? The fool, like some of Anselm's own students, questions the authority of Church doctrine because he can't make rational sense of it. Anselm takes the role of advisor: to give a solution to the logical puzzle while at the same time trying to get the fool to admit that there are things he cannot understand and that the Church knows better. The problem with the fool (Latin: *insipiens*) is not mere stupidity; it is also pride. The fool mocks faith. The therapy begins with the elimination of fallacies and the quest for logical purity that has been annunciated by logicians throughout

the ages. But what is needed to cure the fool according to Anselm's pedagogy is inculcation by example and the proper attitude with which to receive the example.

Anselm's logic is for believers only. It is a fight for the soul of the believer who hears the call of the infidel, does not want to heed it, but has doubts. Theory is not merely a luxurious ornament to faith and practice, feelings and worship, but is a necessary antidote to the doubts that threaten all of these things. When doubt is put to rest, one feels exalted, satisfied, freed from its nagging, justified in one's loyalties. Doubt is frightening because it makes one suspect that things are as one dare not say.

Prof. Bencivenga is as certain of his position as Anselm is of his faith. It is no more possible for Prof. Bencivenga to consider the faith of Anselm a live option than atheism was an alternative faced by Anselm. For Anselm, the fool's position is merely a logical possibility. The fool is a stooge that enables Anselm to explore ways of gaining an intellectual purchase on faith. For Prof. Bencivenga, Anselm takes the position of the fool. There is no point in arguing with him seriously. The point of sparring with him is only to secure what is undeniable from the start, and maybe to be able to put to rest a few nagging doubts of students.

Reason does not tell us what is merely actual. It tells us what is necessary, possible or impossible. To show that something is necessarily true, a *reductio* will suffice; but that does not show how it could be—for that, some sort of model or explanation is needed. A fascinating example is given in Anselm's *Epistola de Incarnatione Verbi*.<sup>23</sup> Anselm refutes the view that the Father and the Holy Spirit are incarnate with the Logos by showing that absurdities and impieties would follow. Yet the text breaks off (in the first draft) when trying to show how the orthodox view is possible. Actually, the text breaks off after mentioning a difficulty for the official view that an opponent might raise: "either the three persons are the three things, or, if they are one thing, the Father and the Holy Spirit are incarnate."

The problem for the logician is how to answer the argument of the opponent. The first disjunct is obviously wrong—tri-theism contrary to Church teaching. How can the three persons be one thing yet only one person be incarnate? The answer is clear: a person is not a thing. Persons are incarnate, not things. What we've started doing here, in technical terms, is constructing a model—on behalf of the Catholic who says in his heart "three". But Anselm is after more. In a later draft he says that he wants to prove that necessarily only one person can be incarnate. But here, too, what he is after is more than the absurdity of the negation of the supposedly necessary proposition. What is wanted is an understanding of "how it can be so."

Anselm aims at bringing as much of what he knows to be true within the realm of intellectual understanding. His optimism about this project was in sharp contrast with many others in the Church who felt that the human intellect was such a dull instrument that the wiser course was to stick with the simple acceptance of revealed truth. The rhetoric of the theologian is neither a dialogue with a fool (which would be impossible), nor with an infidel (unimaginable), but with the novice who seeks the aid of the master theologian in the attempt to dispel demonic doubts. It is almost as if the theologian plays the

role of exorcist: “We have sufficient evidence, then, to dispel the contradiction that threatened us....”<sup>24</sup> Anselm writes because of the solicitous entreaties of certain brethren.

Likewise, Suhrawardi writes reluctantly in response to the demands of students. In every seeker or student, he tells us, there is a portion of the light of God, small or great.<sup>25</sup> He writes to assist such a seeker, but not just anyone who would make inquiry from idle curiosity. For them such teaching would be useless. When Anselm writes about divine light, it is always as the seeker peering from afar through the darkness. In any case, both Anselm and Suhrawardi write as teachers and spiritual guides. They address the faithful.

Both Anselm and Suhrawardi use philosophy to impart spiritual guidance. It is through the domination of the highest parts of the intellect over the lower faculties that one achieves liberation. Prof. Bencivenga suggests that rationalization has liberating functions to play as well as necessitating ones, but only because it can serve to undermine authority as well as to support it. At this point, at least, he’s not laying his cards on the table. He seems to see liberation as confined to the rejection of authority. The idea that liberation could be found in submission rather than insurrection—let alone that liberation could be a release from the passions and appetites that hold the spirit back from God—does not seem to have a place in his thinking, although it seems much more in keeping with the sort of view advocated by Anselm. This is the role of the student: to importunately call the cards of the master. That’s how Suhrawardi finally came to write his *Hikmat al-Ishraq*, after all.

### 3: The Program Revisited

Im Rebel gleichen Kreis  
Seh ich gezogen,  
Zwar ist der Bogen weiß,  
Doch Himmelsbogen.<sup>26</sup>

Prof. Bencivenga is not unaware that he might be doing no more than entertaining himself with his own cleverness. (66) He might be looking for a struggle where in fact there are only what Pierce called “paper doubts.” Real doubts have to be, as James insisted, living, momentous and forced,<sup>27</sup> and this only happens when there is a real alternative to the authorities one would challenge. It’s not enough to just play with possible narratives and to ask “Why not?” The space has to be found in which such suggestions might be considered more than just the free play of ideas.

Prof. Bencivenga is sensitive to these sorts of worries, and considers whether theological questions and answers are worth the effort. If it is best to deal with evil thoughts by distracting oneself from them, why not do the same thing with the questions of the infidel and imbecile? Why try to fight them on their own terms? In his practical advice in letters to others, Anselm cautions against too much wisdom and the poison of the reason of the infidel, yet in his theoretical works, Anselm is captivated by the argument. Is he hypocritical?

If not, Prof. Bencivenga appears to be at least suspicious that the doubts in Anselm are real, and that's why he goes to such pains with them. Prof. Bencivenga finds evidence for this, again, in importunity. In his prayers, Anselm speaks as though he really would challenge God, the saints, all that is good and holy. Of course, this sort of importunity is part of the piety common to both Christians and Muslims. We find it in the prayers of the Shi'ite Imams and in Sufi poetry, too. It is not a unique factor in the psychological turmoil of Anselm.

Whatever doubts Anselm mentions in prayer or theological discussion, they are still mere paper doubts because they could never get him to leave the Church, for he had nowhere else to go. He could leave his father after a teenager's quarrel and find refuge in the monasteries. Where could he go, however, with his doubts about the teachings of the Church? He might have gotten depressed or have had a nervous breakdown—even Cartesian doubts may be that effective in the wrong circumstances—but what makes doubts real is association with a live alternative.

Although Prof. Bencivenga finds Anselm an attractive figure on some level, despite their religious-political differences, and although he is fascinated by considering the doubts Anselm may have concealed, he does not reveal anything of his own doubts. He plays the detached role of historian-analyst and never questions his own commitments to freedom, authenticity, or to questioning authority. He sees Anselm as one who might secretly challenge God, saying to Him, "I will call your cards." (77)

There is, however, another clever strategy that Prof. Bencivenga does not discuss, also very effective in shoring up religious authority, another way of treating the predilection for sin: draw the attention of the sinner to lesser sins, steer him from serious challenges to authority by providing opportunity and directing his attention toward inconsequential ones. One can effectively maintain a dress code by occupying potential rebels with violations of minor details. Perhaps this strategy should not be called "clever" or even a "strategy" because the authorities usually seem just as taken in by it as their small fry adversaries.

Prof. Bencivenga, however, suspects that the voice speaking within Anselm's soul is the voice of reason, a voice more amenable to Prof. Bencivenga's own sensibilities, more inimical, as he sees it, towards the Church. The author sometimes sees Anselm as a genius like himself, pushing the outer limits of what might be allowable or possible. (85)

Eventually, Prof. Bencivenga does come out from behind his analyst's mask a little bit, but only as much as the analyst who mentions that he himself has undergone analysis. He uses a spy novel to introduce the idea that several voices might speak from within a person each with an equal claim to be the "real me." This is a theme that is explored in much of Prof. Bencivenga's subsequent work, as well as a previous book on Montaigne.[28](#)

Prof. Bencivenga has presented three views of Anselm's motivations for proving the existence of God, all of which he finds flawed: not (1) entertainment, because it is too serious; not (2) police work, because

too risky; and not (3) subversion, because it is too “earnest” (i.e., too pious?). So, Prof. Bencivenga suggests that Anselm had conflicting and confused motives. The question of intention, or motive, according to the author, reduces to mere patterns of overt actions. In a note Prof. Bencivenga forces Anselm into his own Procrustean bed and in doing so sketches a rather unseemly picture of the religious significance of intention and virtue. He baldly states that intention must be either what one declares or else be reducible to overt behavior. Although most religious traditions would deny that these are the only alternatives, the author does not seem inclined to conceive anything greater. Prof. Bencivenga paints a picture that seems much too radical for the description of the Archbishop of Canterbury at the turn of the 11th to 12th centuries.

Despite his doubts about any ultimate “I” and his alternative proposal of conflicting inner voices, Prof. Bencivenga has no trouble reassuring us that his own sympathies lie with Marcuse: “I too, despise logic as an instrument of domination,... but then I find consolation in the thought that it’s not so easy to play with fire.” (88–89) What is Prof. Bencivenga really doing here? He is confessing his loyalties after he has told us that his model of the human soul is Pym, the character in the spy novel who has no loyalties, who betrays all the loyalties he declares. So, should we believe him? Or should we not rather take his description of the perfect spy as a confession, and take his anti-authoritarian stance as a deception, and, of course, as a self– deception, too? After all, the perfect spy is always sincere at the moment of whatever it is he is asserting. The assertion becomes a lie because that sincere voice is so easily replaced by another contrary one.

Clearly, Prof. Bencivenga identifies on some level with Anselmo d’Aosta, the Italian scholar and logician appointed to a position of respect in an English speaking environment. The identification is so strong that we fear that what is being presented as being about Anselm is really more autobiographical than meets the eye. The psychoanalyst, like Freud, ends up telling us more about himself than about his patient, let alone the human psyche. Perhaps we should take the identification with Anselm more seriously. The author does show us his cards in the guise of Anselm, but it is only one aspect among others.

## **4: That, Than Which A Greater Cannot Be Thought**

Ist es möglich! Stern der Sterne,  
Drück ich wieder dich ans Herz!  
Ach, was ist die Nacht der Ferne,  
Für ein Abgrund, für ein Schmerz!  
Ja, du bist es, meiner Freuden  
Süßer, lieber Widerpart!  
Eingedenk vergangner Leiden  
Schaudr ich vor der Gegenwart.[29](#)

Here Prof. Bencivenga introduces another genius, logician and intellectual spy: Alan Turing. Turing

committed suicide in 1954 under pressure from the British government after “hormone treatment” for his homosexuality. Prof. Bencivenga treats him as if he were persecuted for challenging authority with his unorthodox logical theories. Once again, we find the author projecting something from his own psyche onto the historical figure—not quite his own autobiography, but a projection, nonetheless, of his own fancy.

Anselm explains his motivation for the proof with the Augustinian slogan: *Fides quaerens intellectum*, faith in search of an understanding. Prof. Bencivenga rejected that excuse in the first chapter on the grounds that the stated aim was impossible, and that’s what started him off looking for alternative motives. Then I commented that unreachable aims might still provide adequate motivation. The quest for perfection is not dulled by knowing in advance that it is not to be attained. However, aside from all this, Prof. Bencivenga’s arguments for the futility of Anselm’s task fall short. Prof. Bencivenga argues from the unknowability of the essence, but all Anselm is after is understanding of lesser truths of faith, and orientation on the path toward what lies beyond our abilities.

Another comparison with Turing can help us see this point. Both Turing and Anselm were concerned with upper bounds, with what is not computable and the *Entscheidungsproblem* and with that than which a greater cannot be imagined. Turing’s result could undermine a formalist philosophical theory of mathematical truth, but Anselm’s result, if it led one to realize that God is inconceivable, would only make the religious ideology, according to Prof. Bencivenga, more unassailable. The idea here is that an inconceivable God cannot be proven not to exist. However, there are plenty of ways to undermine a religious ideology aside from casting doubts on the existence of God. The first significant blows to Catholicism came from those who raised doubts about the authority of the Pope, not from those who doubted the existence of God. Prof. Bencivenga considers this sort of point for a few seconds, but dismisses it with the excuse that Anselm counsels thinking of nothing but God.<sup>30</sup> The counsel on meditation, however, is clearly beside the point. Support for the Church by no means is made more secure by demonstrating ineffability!

Indeed, when we look through religious histories, it seems that often those who were the greatest rebels, Eckhart, Ibn ‘Arabi, Pseudo-Dionysius, etc., were also some of the most prominent heretics and were persecuted by the religious authorities. Certainly, Prof. Bencivenga knows this as well as we do, so why the subterfuge? The whole idea that one is doing something liberating and revolutionary by questioning the existence of God only began to dawn on human awareness around the time of Voltaire, and atheistic ideologies only challenged the authority of the Church and its allies in the 19th century! Needless to say, none of these challenges had anything to do with ineffability. Furthermore, Prof. Bencivenga presents the religio-political situation too simplistically, as if the guys with the white hats in his film are always the forces of revolutionary atheism and the bad guys are always the ecclesiastical authorities.

When we look for patterns in our actions, however, mere regularity can no more suffice as an indication of characteristics of the self than it can suffice for a theory of causality. Regularity theories are notorious

for their inability to weed out coincidence. In both intentionality and causation one needs to consider not just the facts, but what would happen in counterfactual situations. Suhrawardi writes:

“Errors may also occur when the actual is taken to be potential, or vice versa; when something essential is taken to be accidental, or vice versa; or when beings of reason and intellectual predicates are taken to be concrete—such as when someone hears that “Man is a universal” and thinks that its being a universal is something predicated of it as a concrete thing by virtue of its being described by humanity; or when a thing’s image is taken in place of the thing itself; or when a part of a thing’s cause is taken in place of the cause; or when in *reductio ad absurdum* a thing that is not the cause of the negation of the conclusion is taken to be so.”[31](#)

To understand the motives behind the proofs, we do better to look at how they figured in actual historical disputes than to search for mere regularities. On a more personal psychological level, the theologian pursues proofs and seeks to shore up reason within the Church in order to strengthen the Church, in order to assist in its reform, finding ways to remove its inconsistencies, irrationalities, unreasonablenesses, and to gain understanding. The thirst for understanding cannot be denied. What else is the appeal of philosophy?

“We cannot, even if we would, prevent ourselves from thinking about the frame and principles and destiny of our lives; and we believe that the right use of reason brings us nearer truth, not farther away from it. Thus philosophy itself may be said to be founded upon a belief, a belief expressed long ago by Socrates, that “the unexamined life is not worthy to be lived by a man.”[32](#)

Prof. Bencivenga seems to be drawn to a more Freudian interpretation of intellectual play as a form of searching for the mother by the child, but religion has its own myths about the original quest, and the home whose refuge we seek. These myths or allegories also have philosophical versions in Plato, and in the Neoplatonists the story of Odysseus often was taken as an allegory for the soul’s homeward journey.

Suhrawardi is also famous for his philosophical allegories, one of which is called “A Tale of Occidental Exile”,[33](#) and his spiritual geography has been studied extensively by Henry Corbin.[34](#)

Like Suhrawardi, Anselm writes of exile. In the Proslogion, Anselm prays:

“O Lord, my God; I do not know thy form. What, O most high Lord, shall this man do, an exile far from thee? What shall thy servant do, anxious in his love of thee, and cast out afar from thy face? He pants to see thee, and thy face is too far from him. He longs to come to thee, and thy dwelling-place is inaccessible. He is eager to find thee, and knows not thy place. He desires to seek thee, and does not know thy face. Lord, thou art my God, and thou art my Lord, and never have I seen thee. It is thou that hast made me, and hast made me anew, and hast bestowed upon me all the blessing I enjoy; and not yet do I know thee. Finally, I was created to see thee, and not yet have I done that for which I was made”.[35](#)

Suhrawardi is more upbeat about the human condition. “Those who follow the path shall consummate what God hath written for them in the primal inscription.”<sup>36</sup> At the end of his allegory of exile, he writes:

“I was in the midst of this tale when my condition changed and I fell from the air into a low place among a people who were not believers. I was as a prisoner in the region of the occident. There remained with me a pleasure, however, I am unable to explain. I moaned and wailed out of regret at being separated, and that comfort was a dream that quickly passed.

May God save us from the captivity of nature and the bonds of matter. Say, ‘Praise be unto God! He will show you his signs, and ye shall know them; and thy Lord is not regardless of that which ye do.’ And say, ‘God be praised! But the greater part of them do not understand.’ And prayers upon His prophet and his family all”.<sup>37</sup>

Although man is fallen, cast into exile, this is no cause for despair. All of spiritual wayfaring is a trek homeward. It is also what Muslims refer to as the “greatest jihad”,<sup>38</sup> the struggle against the self, and for Suhrawardi, this involves a gradual process by which successively more primitive levels of the soul are conquered or liberated, brought into consciousness and subject to the will, a will that obliterates itself in the light of divine will.

Prof. Bencivenga reassures us that in the sort of struggle described by Anselm (and Suhrawardi), we are not to worry because “no one is going to get hurt” (102), since we are not really dealing with God or any other basic reality, but merely with the limits of our own understanding. This begs the question against the seriousness of the quest. It is a post-Kantian attitude, at any rate unavailable to Anselm. As for no one getting hurt, didn’t Becket get murdered in the Cathedral precisely because of the same sort of loyalty to the Church against the powers of the state advocated by Anselm as a result of his own religious quest?

Secondly, Prof. Bencivenga tells us that reason is always stumped when dealing with God because of the peculiar logic of the Trinity. This is an area where Islam displays a more rationalist strain than Christianity, but only above a certain rather sublime level. Below that, both are in pretty wide agreement about how to use philosophical theology to approach some sort of understanding of God, man and the world and their relations. Prof. Bencivenga makes much of the never ending character of the quest, but the same is true of all intellectual pursuits, physics no less than philosophy. There is no coming to the end of it.

Prof. Bencivenga also proposes that the ontological argument might be a way of letting off steam. (103) If reason seems incapable of providing a justification for faith, the ontological argument might help by showing why, by showing that it is due to its own weakness that reason that cannot assure us of the existence of anything more than a something than which a greater cannot be conceived. Reason either backs up dogma, or is insufficient to oppose it. Prof. Bencivenga sees the ontological argument’s characterization of God in terms of the incapacity of our abilities to conceive as implicitly inviting the

reply that the proof tacitly assumes limits to reason that throw its own validity into question.

Philosophy has put pressure on religion ever since Plato raised doubts about Homer's depiction of the gods. When Christianity came to confront Greek thought, the first reaction was to condemn philosophy as a pagan. Paul sees the worldly wisdom of the Greeks as potentially undermining the Christian message: "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power."<sup>39</sup> In time, some Christians began to see human wisdom as a divine gift, not to be deplored but employed in His service. Few have been as optimistic in this regard as Anselm. Among Christian theologians today there are still those who suspect that reason would empty faith of its power, while others adhere to a reconciliation of reason and faith. The fideist position is susceptible to attack from those who see it as an admission that there is no good reason to accept faith. Reconciliation, however, can be approached from various directions. Anselm sees reason as lending its strength to faith to provide answers to hypothetical infidels. In recent years, however, philosophers have become more sensitive to the limits of reason. This has given encouragement to theologians who think they have discovered that reason does not have teeth sharp enough to harm faith.

All of these trends can be found in the Islamic world, too. There are Muslim fideists who suspect that philosophy is nothing more than worldly cleverness opposed to divine revelation. Among Muslim philosophers, however, reason is seen as a divine light. If it is weak, it is because we have not followed it sufficiently, or because we have restricted it to the crutch of mere discursive reasoning. If reason undermines the literally interpreted faith of the masses, it is because it reveals a truth deeper than what they are prepared to understand. Suhrawardi, like Avicenna and many other Muslim philosophers, cautions that his books should not be allowed to fall into the hands of the ignorant.

Contrary to the opposition some theologians have mounted against philosophy, there is also a religious motivation to win whatever prestige has been accorded to the philosophical tradition to the service of religion. Christians have often revered the philosophers as sages, despite admitting that they were pagans. Among Muslims, efforts to view the pagan Greek philosophers as covert monotheists has been especially strong (and continues through the present day), and one of the foremost exponents of this view has been Suhrawardi.<sup>40</sup> In his introduction to *The Philosophy of Illumination*, Suhrawardi writes:

"Do not imagine that philosophy has existed only in these recent times. The world has never been without philosophy or without a person possessing proofs and clear evidences to champion it. He is God's vicegerent on His earth. Thus shall it be so long as the heavens and the earth endure. The ancient and modern philosophers differ only in their use of language and their divergent habits of openness and allusiveness. All speak of three worlds, agreeing on the unity of God. There is no dispute among them on fundamental questions. Even though the First Teacher [Aristotle] was very great, profound, and insightful, one ought not exaggerate about him so as to disparage his master. Among them are the messengers and lawgivers such as Agathadaemon, Hermes, Asclepius, and others".<sup>41</sup>

So, another motivation for employing philosophical method in service of religion may be to win the veneration that has been accorded to the philosophers for religion. Furthermore, one may claim with Suhrawardi that there is a *sophia perennis* that is expressed in both religion and philosophy, although the Catholic Church only came to advocate its own version of the doctrine of a *philosophia perennis* long after Anselm.[42](#)

Prof. Bencivenga starts off with the reasonable observation that the greatest danger to any ideology is posed by a rival ideology that can perform the same functions. However, one can only doubt the seriousness of the suggestion that Bruno's infinite universe posed just such an alternative and that it was right around the corner from Anselm. Four hundred years is hardly just over the horizon. What was literally just over Anselm's horizon was Islam, not modernity. Rational theology, however, was not employed in the confrontation with Muslims to challenge their beliefs— instead, the Crusades continued, and wildly distorted ideas about Islam gained currency throughout Europe. Theology was used to boost morale behind the monastery walls, and to help maintain the impression that Christian culture was as rational and philosophically prestigious as that of the infidel.

For Prof. Bencivenga, however, the intellectual heroes to compete with and then supercede the theologians would be scientists rather than Saracens. He tells a peculiar tale of the liberating social consequences of the spread of scientific ideas. Untold is how scientific authority came to abstain from religious or political aspirations to leave the political forces more rapacious than ever. Prof. Bencivenga's own aspirations are not so apolitical. He dreams of how the scientists will eventually "cross a threshold" and "force the political and administrative powers to constantly rewrite directions..." (110). In the real world, however, scientists (and philosophers) tend to support whatever politics are dominant.

When have the scientists ever led an insurrection, instigated some reform, or taken any other significant political action? Notable individuals can be found, but as a group, they tend to be disappointing. The most politically active group in the university is the student body, not the faculty. When someone like Noam Chomsky does appear, he is castigated by the media as an aberration. Of course, the European intelligentsia have always been more political than the American. Generally, however, scientists are confined to offering expert advice about how best to protect the interests declared by the politicians. Whatever religious commitment is found among government officials or corporate executives, far from providing any constraint on injustice, seems to be subverted for worldly ends. The religion that remains with them often seems little more than a talisman to give them confidence and apocalyptic visions.

Prof. Bencivenga sees Anselm as someone who is dedicated to keeping things unchanging—the ultimate conservative. This is unfair. Surely, Anselm saw the flaws of administrators, the petty corruptions and treacheries as well as the revolutionary. Indeed, his attachment to the pope may have been due in large part to his hopes in the reforms for which the pope was known as a staunch advocate. The disagreement between Anselm and the revolutionary would be more about method. Should one support rebellion against the secular authorities, or seek to bring about change by preaching, exhortation

and by spreading the wisdom that comes with philosophical exercise?

The book ends with a prayer. It is a prayer more sarcastic than ironic, but ignoring any acerbity, it is not an altogether bad prayer. Let us join the author in prayer, confess to God that our understanding is faulty, although “this pale, confused grasping is some reflection of You” and because of how pale and confused it is, we can continue to strive and pray, and be nourished by whatever “tension, and encouragement, and hope” You may grant us. And instead of the cinematographic “fade to black” with which the author closes, we might pray with Suhrawardi,

“Remove us from Your wrath to Your Mercy, from our darkness to Your light!”<sup>43</sup>

Praise be to Allah, the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden. Peace and benedictions upon Your prophet, Muhammad, and his folk, all of them.

<sup>1</sup>. Ermanno Bencivenga, *Logic and Other Nonsense: The Case of Anselm and His God* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993). All page references to this will be put in parentheses in the text.

<sup>2</sup>. The first review was delivered at the Mulla Sadra Conference in Tehran in 2004: „No Nonsense: Proving God with Anselm and Suhrawardi“. The present review contains virtually no material that was presented in the earlier review.

<sup>3</sup>. Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *West-östlicher Divan*, Buch des Sängers, Hegire, (<ftp://sailor.gutenberg.org/pub/gutenberg/etext00/8wdvn10.txt> [6]):

There, in the pure and in the right,  
I want to take the human race  
To penetrate into the depths of their origins,  
Where they still received from God  
Heavenly teachings in earthly speech,  
Without breaking their heads over it.

<sup>4</sup>. The famous inscription above the door to the Academy is not established historical fact, however. See <http://plato-dialogues.org/faq/faq009.htm> [7].

<sup>5</sup>. *Monologion* in St. Anselm, *Proslogium; Monologium; An Appendix in Behalf of the Fool by Gaunilon; and Cur Deus Homo*, tr. Sidney Norton Deane (Chicago: Open Court, 1926), Ch. XXXI, p. 90, URL=[http://www.ccel.org/ccel/anselm/basic\\_works.all.html](http://www.ccel.org/ccel/anselm/basic_works.all.html) [8].

<sup>6</sup>. Fn. 8, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup>. The title, *Vicarius Christi*, was first used by Pope Gelasius I (r. 492–496). At times the title was also used by other bishops in an implicit challenge to the authority of the Pope.

<sup>8</sup>. *Cur Deus Homo*, Ch. XI, 199. Boso was a monk at Bec, Anselm’s close friend and a companion on many of his travels. The *Cur Deus Homo* is written as a dialogue between Boso and Anselm.

<sup>9</sup>. John Walbridge & Hossein Ziai, *Suhrawardi, The Philosophy of Illumination* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1999), xxxix. Shahrazêri was Suhrawardi’s contemporary and biographer.

<sup>10</sup>. William Ernest Hocking, *The Meaning of God in Human Experience: A Philosophic Study of Religion* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press and Oxford University Press, 1912), 130. The revised 1924 edition of this work has been reprinted in Whitefish, MT by Kessinger Publications, 2003.

<sup>11</sup>. Hocking (1912), 135.

<sup>12</sup>. *Monologion*, Ch. LXXVII, 139.

<sup>13</sup>. Suhrawardi (1999), 148.

<sup>14</sup>. W. M. Thackson, Jr., tr., *The Mystical & Visionary Treatises of Suhrawardi* (London: Octagon, 1982), 62–75.

[15.](#) Hocking (1912), 137.

[16.](#) Hocking (1912), 137.

[17.](#) Hocking (1912), Ch. VIII.

[18.](#) W. M. Thackson, Jr., tr., *The Mystical & Visionary Treatises of Suhrawardi* (London: Octagon, 1982), 51–61.

[19.](#) *Monologion*, Ch. LXVIII, 131–132.

[20.](#) 1 Cor. 13:12.

[21.](#) *Monologion*, Ch. LXV, 127–128.

[22.](#) Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *West-östlicher Divan*, Buch des Sängers, Talismane, (<ftp://sailor.gutenberg.org/pub/gutenberg/etext00/8wdvn10.txt> [6]):

Error wants to entangle me,

But You know how to untangle me. If I act, if I poeticize,

Give my way the right direction!

[23.](#) See fn. 23, p. 48.

[24.](#) *Monologion*, Ch. XXII, 80.

[25.](#) Suhrawardi (1999), 1.

[26.](#) Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *West-östlicher Divan*, Buch des Sängers, Phänomen, (<ftp://sailor.gutenberg.org/pub/gutenberg/etext00/8wdvn10.txt> [6]):

In the fog the same circle

I see drawn,

Although the rainbow is white,

It is still heaven's rainbow.

[27.](#) William James, *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Dover, 1956), 2.

[28.](#) Ermanno Bencivenga, *The Discipline of Subjectivity: An Essay on Montaigne* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990).

[29.](#) Johann Wolfgang Goethe, *West-östlicher Divan*, Buch des Sängers, Wiederfinden, (<ftp://sailor.gutenberg.org/pub/gutenberg/etext00/8wdvn10.txt> [6]):

It is possible! Star of the stars,

To press you again against my heart!

Oh, what sort of an abyss, what sort of pain is the night so far away?

Yes, it is you, my joyous, sweet, dear counterpart! Recalling past sufferings,

I shudder before the present.

[30.](#) Fn. 10, p. 99.

[31.](#) Suhrawardi (1999), 33–34.

[32.](#) William Ernest Hocking, *Types of Philosophy*, 3rd ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), 6.

[33.](#) W. M. Thackson, Jr., tr., *The Mystical & Visionary Treatises of Suhrawardi* (London: Octagon, 1982), 100–108.

[34.](#) See, for example, Henry Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977)

[35.](#) *Proslogion*, Ch. I, 3.

[36.](#) Suhrawardi (1999), 158.

[37.](#) W. M. Thackson, Jr., tr., *The Mystical & Visionary Treatises of Suhrawardi* (London: Octagon, 1982), 107–108.

[38.](#) This term is derived from a narration attributed to the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, according to which after returning from a battle he commented that they were returning from the lesser jihad and that the greater jihad still remained. When asked what was meant by the greater jihad, he ﷺ replied that it was the jihad against the self. The narration can be found in *Wasa'il al-Shi'ah*, Vol. 15, bab 1, p. 161, no. 20208.

[39.](#) NIV (1 Cor. 1:17).

[40.](#) See John Walbridge, *The Leaven of the Ancients: Suhrawardi and the Heritage of the Greeks* (Albany: SUNY, 2000).

[41.](#) Suhrawardi (1999), 3–4.

[42.](#) The doctrine was made official by Pope Leo XII in his Encyclical „Aeterni Patris“ (1880), in which it was claimed that the philosophia perennis finds expression in the works of Thomas Aquinas.

43. Suhrawardi, „The Tablets of `Imad,” (tr. Legenhausen and Aavani, unpublished) from Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Shihaboddin Yahya Sohravardi Oeuvres Philosophiques et Mystiques, Tome III (Tehran: Académie Impériale Iranienne de Philosophie, 1977), 195.

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