

Review of: "The Active Door – Transformation Symbolism in Nietzsche and Suhrawardi"

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I celebrate the publication of this thought-provoking and challenging article by Andrew Burniston while at the same time I appreciate the possibility of expressing and sharing some reflections.

First of all, I agree with the author that the specific approaches and premises of both Jung and Corbin in relation to Nietzsche are, shall we say, a bit forced and that Burniston makes this very clear from the beginning. Why? I would like to recall that both authors, together with R. Otto, were the backbone of the Eranos Circle, a space for reflection, search, and thought that tried, supported by the rigor of their knowledge, to guide and mediate between East and West. But this mediation, carried out under the sign of Hermes, as stated in the founding document, aspired to contribute to a reconciliation of opposites in contemporary man, the object of serious disorientation in a desacralized world.

This is the key to their respective approaches.

In this regard, Henry Corbin, philosopher, iranologist, and scholar of Islamic mysticism, and translator of Heidegger into French, was the first one to coin the term "imaginal" or "active imagination," which alludes to the human and cosmic dimensions, a term that we will find in many of his works. Indeed, as it is very well explained in the article, Corbin dedicated his studies to Suhrawardi (12th century), a Persian philosopher murdered by Saladin for strongly and decisively questioning the caliphal function, alien to the true Islamic tradition. At this point, I would like to refer to a few things about Suhrawardi. First of all, he was a philosopher, strictly speaking, and less a Sufi mystic. He was clearly a thinker with Ismaili influences. This is shown in his main work, *The Philosophy of Illumination* (translated by J. Walbridge and H. Ziai, 1999), which is far from the translation carried out by Corbin. The French scholar only wanted to highlight the aspect of the imaginal, and less the criticism of Suhrawardi to the philosophy of his time. Suhrawardi and Nietzsche had many voices, according to the author of this clear and attractive article. Both prophetic, and also light, crazy, and bold. They put the deficiencies of the notion of the subject under the magnifying glass and questioned the values of their respective eras in search of a new meaning. Like Zarathustra (9th century BC), who stated in *Yasna 30:9*, "May we be the ones who renew existence!" as a prophet who, within the framework of the Mazdean tradition, will return as a perfect man to restore the world, like Suhrawardi, who, based on the ancients, established in his *Philosophy of Illumination* that his method is confirmed by the experience of the ancients: "In everything that I have said about the science of lights, I was assisted by those who have walked the path of God. This science is the same intuition of the inspired and enlightened Plato, guide and teacher of wisdom, and of those who were before him from the time of Hermes - the first of the wise men - to the time of Plato, including vigorous pillars of wisdom like Empedocles, Pythagoras, and others. The words of the ancients are

symbolic and are not open to refutation. Criticisms made of the literal meaning of his words failed to apply to his real intentions, because a symbol cannot be refuted. This is also the basis of the Eastern doctrine of light and darkness, which was the teaching of Persian sages such as Jamasp, Frashostar, Bozorghmer, and others before them. It is not the doctrine of the infidel magicians nor the heresy of Mani, nor that which leads to associating other gods with God – may He be exalted above such anthropomorphisms!" Like Nietzsche, who brought us Zarathustra as a superman to denounce false values and affirm that "God is dead." Which God has died? That of Christian morality that turned citizens into slaves of themselves. Allow me at this point to suggest that the aforementioned authors Zarathustra, Suhrawardi, and Nietzsche speak to us of a decadence that must be transformed and overcome. They speak to us of gods that do not conform to man. God has not died. Those who have died are the god or gods who distract human beings from their eternal vocation. That is why the concept of the "active door," which is part of the title of this article, is vital. In this sense, I will refer to Suhrawardi, who effectively set us on the path that philosophy is essentially a wisdom that is a reflective and illuminating experience.

About half a century earlier than Ibn 'Arabi (d.1240), Suhrawardi introduced his own independent 'imaginal world', what Corbin has called the *mundus imaginalis*, a fourth 'imaginal' world, alongside the intelligible, the spiritual, and the material. This imaginal world - a substance made of shadows - operates like an isthmus or an intermediary realm between the world of pure light and the physical world of darkness. This imaginal world, lying somewhere between this physical world and the world of the species and of Platonic Forms, is the lowest threshold of the world of souls. In the imaginal world, entities somehow possess an existence of their own - some, prior to their coming into existence in this world. The imaginal world contains images that are not embedded in matter, a plane of "ghosts, of the forms in mirrors, dreams, and worlds of wonder beyond our own" whose lights need to be unveiled. The imaginal world provides us the material for the miraculous. It is where the metahistorical visions of Imams occur, where eschatological forms and images will perhaps be manifested for the souls of the deceased, so that they may continue to perfect their souls (Philosophy of Illumination 148.29-150.17).

I congratulate the author for his article that is consistent in its substance, and clear and simple in its form. But fundamentally, I am pleased that Suhrawardi, a vital author for Islam, is brought to this space in an original and accurate way. Prf. Dr. Andrea De Vita. Department Chair, Islamic Department, School of Oriental Studies, Universidad del Salvador, Argentina.