

**BOOK OVERVIEW: SOHRAB AHMARI, *THE UNBROKEN THREAD: DISCOVERING THE WISDOM OF TRADITION IN AN AGE OF CHAOS* (NEW YORK: CONVERGENT BOOKS, 2021), 298 P.**

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Our civilization, especially its central part, is increasingly marked by “crowd madness” (the title of Douglas Murray’s book), a madness that, as Patrick Deneen describes in his book *Why Liberalism Failed*, is primarily a product or perhaps a mere side effect of liberalism. Liberalism (and its early modern predecessors), for all its positive aspects, has led to a radical redefinition of the sublime classical - whether ancient or Christian - understanding of freedom as freedom from unbridled passions and/or sin, or freedom acquired through self-restraint, discipline, sacrifice and nurturing virtue.

In New York, the heart of the liberal-producing world, an Iranian Catholic turns to the wisdom of traditions from various civilizations and epochs (from China before Christ to the traditional Christian piety of the American black population) and lovingly writes a guidebook for his four-year-old son Maximilian.

Sohrab Ahmari, an author of *The Unbroken Thread*, was born in Iran, where he lived with his liberal parents until he moved to the United States with his mother in his early teens. Even before he moved to the United States, Ahmari was irresistibly attracted to the freedoms, and above all, the (seductive) “freedoms” offered by liberal America. Although he flirted with Marxism in his youth, Provi-

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dence intended a different life path for this curious journalist. He soon realized, as he briefly notes in the introduction to the works presented here, that “the Western dream of autonomy and choice without limitations is, in fact, a dungeon, while the obsolete and ‘limiting’ can set us free.” In other words, Ahmari internalized the sublime Christian notion of freedom, and in the introduction of *The Unbroken Thread*, the author cites the example of the embodiment of such freedom in the person and work of the Catholic saint Maximilian Kolbe who voluntarily laid down his life in Auschwitz for another unknown person.

Three centuries after the Enlightenment, a different concept of freedom prevails in the West - one that emphasizes the unhindered possibility of an individual choice of various “lifestyles”; not freedom (from vice, sin, and, in general, decadence) rooted in self-restraint and fueled by the authority of tradition and religion (8-9). As his four-year-old son Maximilian, named after Kolbe, would not one day find himself in the shackles of the liberal concept of freedom, Ahmari leaves him a book as a guide - a beacon of tradition in a time of (moral) chaos.

The work is divided into two parts (*Things of God and Things of Man*) in the form of 12 chapters-questions (six in the first and six in the second part) through which, based on traditional thought and stories about the lives and deeds of famous people or further past, questions today’s liberal-progressive dogmas. In the first question-chapter (*How do you justify your life?*) Ahmari laments the fact that the truth today has been reduced to (scientific) facts and (rhetorically) wonders what it is that motivates us to move forward in difficult times if it is not love, grace, or some other “subjective” experience despised by ruthless scientism that worships exclusively the

“objective”. (26) Ahmari answers in more detail this question, which sooner or later we all face, through the story of the life and work of Clive S. Lewis (1898–1963), a British writer who wrote at a time when scientific views of the world were increasingly taking a swing. Planet Malacandria in Lewis’s science fiction *Out of the Silent Planet* presents, explains Ahmari, an allegory in which the writer illustrates to readers how different forms of knowledge - both those based on modern science/technology and traditional and/or “primitive” - can coexist harmoniously (40). Accordingly, advanced technology and science do not necessarily imply “moral shortcuts” (43). In his life’s journey, Lewis realized this truth and realized that a scientific, “cold” or rationalist approach could not be applied to life in its entirety. “If a man chooses to treat himself as a raw material, he will be a raw material,” Ahmari quotes the wise words of a British writer who eventually found his way back to Christianity and died in 1963 “at his beloved Oxford” (45-46).

The next chapter (*Is God reasonable?*) continues on the same track - the track of harmony between reason and faith. Unfortunately, the author writes, many believers today think that faith is a sphere beyond reason (47-48). This is unfortunate because even before Christ, Greek philosophers, practicing “love of wisdom” (philosophy) or mere reason, *de facto* came to know the “God of classical theism” (50-51). The ancient Greeks were intrigued by the Jewish *Book*, even in the centuries before Christ, and this connection was further strengthened with the advent of Christianity. The author writes that the famous sentence “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and God was the Word” (as our Bartol Kašić wrote) could only astonish (in a positive sense) the Greek world. Kašić’s / Croatian “Rieč” is the Greek Logos, which, in addition to the “word,” would mean “reason” (or reason) to the Greek speaker (51,

52). Some ancient and medieval Christian writers sought to separate reason from the (Christian) faith. “If the Middle Ages had produced only people of this type,” writes Ahmari, “that period would rightly deserve the title of the Dark Ages.” Fortunately, this was not the case, and many perceived philosophy and religion as friends, but religion was now the “starting point” (53). The medieval thread of thought according to which faith and reason are not compatible with the “scissors of common sense” (57) was cut by St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), to whom the author dedicates this chapter. In short, Aquinas taught that there is “only one truth” that can be reached by faith and reason, but that both should be nurtured by enriching or complementing each other (59). His five paths or five proofs of the existence of God are also on the trail. “If our minds can know God’s existence,” Ahmari writes, “it is good news” for both philosophy and religion. “The God who allows us to know him through reason is a reasonable God” (61-63).

The third chapter (*Why would God want you to take a day off?*) focuses on the life and thought of Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907-1972), a Jew of Eastern European descent and a rabbi who is of interest to Ahmari primarily because of his thoughts on *Shabbat*. Namely, Heschel wrote that the Sabbath guarantees “inner freedom” and peace. God-centered thinking, that is, thinking directed towards eternity, Heschel explained, is the only guarantee of human dignity and social justice. Without this thinking, all evil could be easily relativized. It is important to emphasize that it is not enough just to contemplate on God, but to nurture this God-centered vision through prayer and ritual - in real-time. “It is the Sabbath” (70, 74). And while with the Roman destruction of the (Second) Temple, the Jews lost refuge in the place, “they could not lose their refuge in time - the Sabbath” (75). Something that would be a “waste of time” for

Heschel's hard-working American fellow citizens was an absolutely necessary act of "abandonment," i.e., sacrifice without which people cannot gain inner freedom and dignity (78, 79). The West forgot the Sabbath, that is, Sunday, because of "maximum market freedom" and "choice." At the same time, the number of divorces, lonely and drug-addicted people is growing, and the number of newly established families is declining. "A world without the Sabbath is a world without a soul" (81).

At the beginning of the next chapter (*Can you be spiritual without being religious?*), the author laments the fact that more and more people in the West have lost their religiosity (82-83). "I believe in God, but I don't go to church" is a well-known cliché. Nevertheless, Ahmari reminds us that we humans do many things without value in itself, but in doing so, we symbolically communicate. On the other hand, religion combines rituals "with the belief in the ultimate meaning of life" (85). To answer the question in the title of the chapter, the author peeks into the lives and works of Victor Turner (1920-1983) and his wife Edith (nee Davis) (1921-2016). Both Victor and Edith were non-religious in their youth, and religion and rituals interested them only on a scientific level. They gained fame by studying the traditions of the African people Ndembu (87-88). In short, observing the rites of members of these people, Turners concluded that "a religious rite is necessary to build an authentic community" (*Communitas*) (91-92). One rite, in which the God Ndembua voluntarily allows himself to be humiliated and killed and thus redeems his mortal followers, particularly touched the Turners and ultimately drove them to change their own beliefs. After witnessing the ceremony, the Turner couple could not observe the religion they were surrounded by in childhood in the same way as before. They realized that ritual and religion are necessary aspects of what

makes us human and what unites us in the community. They became Catholics (96-97).

In the fifth chapter (*Does God respect you?*), Ahmari rhetorically asks whether God can be a comfort, hope, and path to those who suffer daily humiliation, poverty, and injustice. The question he posed was the life of Howard Thurman (1899-1981), an American intellectual, *civil rights* activist, Christian theologian, and black man who lived under the “regime [*Jim Crow* – o p. V. M.] that insulted the Cross in attempts to legitimize racism” (105). Thurman’s grandmother, who spent much of her life as a slave, was a deeply religious woman. As a boy, she told him that the white owner of the plantation where she was enslaved would sometimes allow a black pastor (also a slave) to preach to assembled slaves. This pastor always ended his sermon with an additional message, whispering: “You are not slaves ... you are children of God” (109-110). The young Thurman became a member of the Baptist Church and lived under the strict tutelage of a religious couple. The discipline and restrictions imposed on him created in Thurman an unusual sense of freedom and self-confidence (111). He was diligent and obedient and worked hard to reach the *Rochester Theological Seminary*, where he excelled among white students (113). By the 1930s, Thurman, Ahmari writes, had a clear mission in life - to diagnose the messy/unjust world of American segregation and the spiritual-ethical prescription as a way out of that mess. The material for this project, the author explains, Thurman found in the life and, above all, the suffering of Jesus Christ. At the heart of his monumental work, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (1949), is “that the form of Christianity that justifies racial oppression” has nothing in common with the authentic faith that Thurman called “Jesus’ religion” (114). Ahmari writes that although Thurman sometimes uncritically accused almost all institutionalized Christianity,

his writing on the importance of Christianity for people *with their backs against the wall* remains relevant today when many Christians hold their faith beyond the political sphere (115). In contrast, Thurman held that Jesus could not be indifferent to the political reality of his time. Christ was a member of a minority and oppressed ethnic-confessional group.

The sixth and final chapter of the first part of the book (*Does God Need Politics?*) begins with the author's observation that the pre-modern West - whether Judeo-Christian or Greco-Roman - did not know as sharp a distinction between "religion" and "politics" as Christians today, rather, they consider it desirable (122). This chapter is dedicated to St. Augustine (354-430), a man who in his later years defended Christianity when many Romans attacked this religion as the alleged cause of the decadence of their empire. Despite his mother's persistent attempts to convert him to Christianity, in his youth - while living in North Africa - Augustine flirted with Manichaeism and lived a debauched life (129-130). Although he later moved away from such a life in the company of Christian friends in Milan, he felt immense sadness over a decade of life he had spent as a slave to his appetites. In a moment of despair and loneliness, Augustine heard a voice say to him, "Pick it up and read it." Then he hurried into the room, opened the book of Paul's epistles, and stumbled upon a sentence that would win his heart forever for Christ. Man consists of both body and soul, and faith in the incarnate God is - Augustine realized - the only medium between God and beings of spirit and flesh. According to Ahmari, Augustine was soon baptized and became a priest. He was later ordained a bishop on his native African soil, and it was there that he fiercely defended Christianity against attacks by anti-Christian neo-pagans (132-133). To refute the pride of his anti-Christian compatriots, Augustine portrayed the en-

tire history of mankind as a story of two cities (states). He titled his major work *De civitate Dei contra paganos*, which is most often translated into Croatian as the *Božja Država*. According to Augustine, as the author summarizes, God's State (city) represents a community of believers who, therefore, "live by faith in this passing time" and travel "as strangers" in the midst of ungodliness. The earthly state (city) is the home of those who exalt their gods. The foundation of the earthly state is self-love, which goes even to contempt for God. Rome was, *par excellence*, an earthly city, and Augustine set himself the task of showing that Rome was equally violent, even more violent, before accepting Christianity as the official religion. But on a deeper level, Ahmari writes, Augustine's goal was to show that the Roman *res publica* was not a true *commonwealth* because its inhabitants did not share a (true) sense of justice. The Romans, Augustine wrote, were (too) often driven by the libido of domination, that is, the desire for domination which - despite the *rule of law* rhetoric - was the cause of countless imperial wars, bloody civil conflicts, and, in general, fratricide (135-138). To the counterattack of the neo-pagans who claimed that the faithful, supposedly obsessed with eternal life, were incapable of caring for the common good, Augustine responded by proposing a God-fearing minister-ruler. Its feature would be "true piety" as the source of "true virtue." Thus, rulers who would have a religious view of governance would strive for the common good, that is, the State of God, which is almost unthinkable today in the liberal West (139-142).

The book's second part (*The Things of Humankind*) begins with the chapter-question, *how must you serve your parents?* which takes us to China before Christ. In this modern age, the author begins, the relationship between parents is often seen as a zero-sum financial game. But, Ahmari wonders, do we owe our parents anything more?



The answer lies in the tradition of civilization, which is based on the issue of filiality and the duty of children to their parents (and older relatives). The most famous Chinese thinker who taught that loyalty and respect for parents (and the elderly) was at the root of humanity was Confucius (551-479 BC) (146, 149-150). As he told his disciples, Confucius did not want to create anything new but to affirm the old (the authority of tradition). In short, children should take care of the emotional and material needs of their (old) parents and do so with love and joy (151, 157-159). Even if our parents do not fulfill their duties to us, they are still our parents, which imposes specific responsibilities on us. The vital tradition, as Ahmari interprets Confucian thought, “must” celebrate this ideal. According to Confucian thought, it is allowed, of course, to chasten our parents, but gently and respectfully. Filiality must not be the subject of negotiations/calculations; otherwise, it easily disappears. Namely, parents are not a mere coincidence of our existence and personality, and therefore our duties towards them are not the same as those we voluntarily choose to accept or reject. The author concludes this idea is rooted in the Chinese tradition and wisdom affirmed by the great Confucius, which “makes sense” centuries later.

*Should you think for yourself?* - the author asks in the title of the eighth chapter. Liberalism, Ahmari continues, answers that question in the affirmative. Nevertheless, in the liberal part of the West today, there is very little freedom of speech (thinking out loud) as promised to us by the liberals of the 19th century (164-165). One such liberal was William Gladstone, a British politician who - ironically - began his career defending the institution of slavery, an institution condemned by the papacy three centuries earlier, to vehemently accuse the papacy (in later years) of allegedly enslaving body and mind. The person who defended British Catholics from

the then fierce anti-Catholicism was the famous convert Father John Henry Newman (1801-1890). The story of Newman's conversion to Catholicism is not in the author's focus. The chapter focuses on Newman's ideas on the connection between conscience and authority and what it means to think for oneself (168-169). Although he was on his way to ordination as an Anglican priest, Newman sought to reconcile the Anglican Church with an older Christian (or rather Roman Catholic) past. Because of this, that church's hierarchy regularly rebuked and silenced him. Despite flirting with Rome, Newman at first resisted conversion. One of the reasons or sources of his suspicion was the Roman devotion to the Virgin Mary. As long as these doubts persisted, Newman argued that he had no right to "act against his conscience." According to the author, Newman claimed that he had no right to "act against his conscience." Therefore, his main guiding thread of life, the aforementioned conscience, initially kept Newman away from the Catholic Church. However, his struggle against liberalism - the "anti-dogmatic principle" according to which "every dogma, every authority, and every hierarchy was called into question" - eventually brought him under the auspices of the Roman Church. Following his conscience, with diligent reading, reflection, and prayer, Newman soon became a Catholic priest (172-173). Contrary to what liberalism claims, he taught that authority and conscience are "friends and allies." Authority forms conscience, and conscience is at the same time also authority. Personal authority, according to Newman, is authority only when it is in accordance with conscience and universal law. The worldview, concludes Ahmari, that considers conscience to be purely subjective or "animal," completely removes the authority on which many self-sacrifices (which the conscience dictates) rest, such as the sacrifice made by Oskar Schindler. Accordingly, Newman defended the pope's authority and criticism of the liberal concept of "free conscience." As Newman ob-

served, absolutely free thought and “conscience” are only delusions. Society always chooses some orthodoxy, some dogma, so it is better to be the one who nurtures the true conscience (176-179). Asked if we should always think for ourselves, Newman would answer by saying that we should always act in accordance with a conscience that reflects an inner awareness of objective moral law. In doing so, Newman would add, we must form our courts under firm authority. Authorities should be questioned, but not excessively, because - as Ahmari caricatures - otherwise, very quickly magazines intended for minors are entirely free to write about the details of anal sex. The “freedom” of conscience, promoted by the Gladstone Liberals, was continued a century later in the 1960s by student activists under the motto *think for yourself*. The minds of such “free-minded” persons very quickly find themselves in the shackles of decadence, and large corporations or big capitalists very quickly profit from such “revolutionaries” and “subversives” (179-182).

At the beginning of, in my opinion, the central chapter of the book (What is freedom for?), Ahmari describes and summarizes the famous speech of the Russian intellectual and writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1918-2008) to Harvard graduates in 1978. Despite what was expected, Solzhenitsyn gave a speech in which he first pointed out the shortcomings of the liberal West, such as 1) the culture of legalism, which encouraged the fulfillment of selfish interests to the limit of law (laws as the only moral standard); 2) the tyrannical notion of law (which society has left undefended concerning certain individuals) and 3) the media for which their agendas are more important than conveying the truth to the readership (184-187). Solzhenitsyn’s speech provoked a storm of criticism, in fact confirming the exclusivity of many liberals. But, the author rhetorically wonders, could Solzhenitsyn teach Western liberals about freedom?

Yes! This Russian writer, concludes Ahmari, with his work *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*, showed how even under the conditions of the worst repression, one could remain completely free, that is, he established the difference between true and false freedom. Although unjustly imprisoned and subjected to daily dehumanization, Ivan Denisovich Shukhov, unlike Fetjukov, is not subject to the pressures of the evil regime and lives his life as a prisoner with dignity and love for his neighbors, especially other camp inmates. Although imprisoned in the gulag, he finds (inner) freedom (190-194). Solzhenitsyn noted that the liberal West, by reducing freedom to mere legalism without natural and traditional restrictions, is not free in its own way. The excess of individual rights “paved the way for new slavery.” Solzhenitsyn first noticed this in the work of the Western media, such as a reporter who, without any scruples or remorse, fabricated a story by writing that another Moscow reporter had handed Solzhenitsyn a secret letter allegedly sent to him by his wife. And this even though it endangered the life of Solzhenitsyn’s wife, who was still in Moscow!

Later, he was disappointed that various bookstores refused to sell his painstakingly written and deeply instructive books because their earnings came first, not his message to the world. Solzhenitsyn also noted that the Western obsession with profit benefits communist regimes. According to the author, he was convinced of this when a Swiss trading company fired an employee (translator) due to a complaint from a Soviet client. Namely, that client attacked Solzhenitsyn’s works, to which the employee asked him if he had read them at all. That was enough for dismissal in an old libertarian and democratic state. In short, Solzhenitsyn saw in the West individuals and society that did not distinguish the freedom to do good deeds from the freedom to do evil deeds. According to Solzhenitsyn, the latter

cannot be qualified as freedom because it leads to self-humiliation (he witnessed this as a detainee in a gulag). This idea, the author reminds us, brings us back to the Christian thought that the one who sins becomes a slave to sin (unlimited passions, vices, etc.). According to Solzhenitsyn, the West began to change the genuine concept of freedom with false freedom in the Renaissance, when it was believed that man was an inherently good creature and a moral vertical in itself. This culminated in the Enlightenment, that is, liberalism and communism - two sides of the same coin. The latter two ideologies, of course, differed in how to free humanity from natural and traditional constraints: individualistic or collectivist. The communist vision of liberated humanity restricted true freedom and led to millions being killed and tortured. The distortions of true freedom in the liberal West in Solzhenitsyn's time were more subtle but real. In the West, Ahmari quotes the great Russian writer, "the idea of freedom is redirected to unlimited passion ... in the direction of evil forces (so that no one's 'freedom' is limited!"). The only "barrier" is the law, which is a weak barrier. Finally, Ahmari concludes the chapter by noting that since Solzhenitsyn's speech at Harvard, things in the West (of which the great Russian spoke) have further deteriorated (194-199).

The next chapter (*Is sex a private matter?*) focuses on the life and, above all, the thought of feminist Andree Dworkin (1946-2005). Among other things, she vehemently opposed pornography, so much so that the then NOW president accused her of flirting with fascism because her anti-pornographic stance led Andreu Dworkin to a tacit "alliance with enemies: social conservatives" (205). Her "radical" view that "what women and men do in the privacy of the bedroom is inherently public and inherently worrying" was neither older nor more radical than the view of sexual intercourse in Chris-

tianity (205-206). Ironically, Ahmari notes, Dworkin as a woman of radicalism in the 1960s and 1970s, opposed to traditional sources of authority and restraint, was most abused by liberal hippie men, not some atavistic traditionalists (208-209). Andrea Dworkin's views on sexuality brought this feminist, as she noted, to a de facto "puritanical [Christian] camp." She, just like St. Augustine, understood that lust (*libido dominandi*) was a problem. Namely, when sexual lust prevails, it subordinates "our noble beliefs about human equality and dignity, about restraint and self-control." Given that sexual intercourse is "the cornerstone of the basic social unit" (man, woman, child), feminist Dworkin held that it is foolish to consider sex a purely private matter, and the Catholic saint Augustine (214-216) thought similarly. Unfortunately, she treated all traditional teachings about sexual intercourse as an invention of men to legitimize their supremacy. In short, as Ahmari observes, Andrea Dworkin did not realize that tradition — which tamed male lust more than any modern alternative — was, in fact, her ally (219-220).

The penultimate chapter (*What do you owe your body?*) Deals with the philosophical thought of Hans Jonas (1903-1993). As a young man, this German and Jewish intellectual had the philosopher Martin Heidegger and the Protestant scholar Rudolf Bultmann as teachers. Both were part of a movement that later became known as existentialism. One day in 1924, Bultmann commissioned Jonas to study the Greek phrase *gnosis theou* - the knowledge of God - in the Gospel of John. Jonas spent the next three decades studying the issues arising from this task, and in the process, became the first modern philosopher to interpret an ancient religious phenomenon known as Gnosticism (224-227). What is Gnosticism? It is the desire to transcend the world and "the gap between man and what he is in," Ahmari quotes Jonas. It is about the idea and feeling that peo-

ple have to transcend the (tangible) world of creation (231), and even that the body is a kind of dungeon. This idea in its various nuances, of which perhaps the most resounding is the Manichean one, was in sharp contrast to mainstream Christianity. According to the author, The Church Fathers emphasized the bodily nature of Christ's appearance (235). Heidegger praised Jonas's dissertation, but he did not seem interested in the phenomenon of Gnosticism *per se*. According to the author, Heidegger was pleased that one of his students would form a new interpretation of Gnosticism through his (Heidegger's) existentialist framework. This is precisely what Jonas did and two decades later gave a very sharp moral condemnation of acosmism, whether ancient or modern existentialist (238-9). He left Nazi-dominated Germany while his professor Heidegger joined the Nazi party. Meanwhile, in the United States, Jonas realized an apparent connection between the Gnostic rejection of the cosmic order and moral responsibility and Heidegger's modern political irresponsibility. Jonas believed that the cosmic, anti-worldly, and anti-corporeal attitude leads to nihilism, and his former teacher Heidegger also wandered into this moral dead end. So what, the author wonders, do we owe to our bodies? Is the body merely a vessel we can discard in the service of the mental-spiritual beings who sustain it? Today, Gnosticism, as Ahmari observes, is clearly present in gender ideology (241-242). But "the human body is an image of moral responsibility. To accept the body ... means to accept oneself ... limited and rooted in ... natural realities. (...) The urge to transcend the physical — whether through transhumanist projects or obsessive surgical modifications — is always a call to irresponsibility, and it is indeed an old temptation" (244).

The last chapter (*What's good about death?*) brings us back to the wisdom of the Romans. At the center of the chapter is the thought

of the Roman philosopher Seneca (4th century BC-65), a man who spent his whole life contemplating and writing about death and who taught friends and the entire Roman world to live each day as if it were their last, that is, to come to terms with mortality (251). Seneca was a Stoic, and being a Stoic meant mastering one's own passions and urges, contemplating nature, and seeking the inner realm of virtue (252). Whether for frail health or for the turbulent Roman political reality in which he operated, Seneca was on the verge of death all his life. Therefore, it is not surprising that this Roman philosopher learned many lessons about the end of his life. Four lessons on death stand out in particular: 1) Those who prepare for death can avoid "humiliating the forcible expulsion from the land of the living"; 2) Seneca, the author writes, taught that the fear of death is not only meaningless, but "prevents us from holding the right perspective in relation to our lives"; 3) People do not die in the same way, but death itself is a form of equality; 4) "Death gives meaning to life ... Just as with storytelling, so with life, it is important how well [it] has been done, not how long." According to the author, this most straightforward lesson is the strongest and most inconsistent with our time of obsession with longer life and hiding the physical indicators of relentless aging (254-260). "He who does not want to die does not want to live," Seneca said. This is wise teaching, Ahmari concludes, because being alive is possible only in relation to the endpoint [of life] - death. When nothing is on the scales in a story, the story is boring. Without its endpoint, "life loses its vitality." For Stoics like Seneca, death was only part of the natural order, while for Christians, death is the result of the sinfulness of the first humans, a rift that God himself repaired. Both traditions promise the final unification of the human soul with the whole of which it is a part: for the Pagans, it is the Logos, and for the Christians, it is a face-to-face meeting with God. When, finally, Emperor Nero, whom his old mentor Seneca



had been a thorn in his side, sent a centurion to Seneca's house to offer him the usual end-of-life choice - execution or suicide - there was no doubt which Seneca option to choose (261-262)

Sohrab Ahmari's fascinating and beautifully conceived book ends with a message/letter that this Catholic intellectual leaves to his son Maximilian.