

CHAPTER I

CREATION AND DESTRUCTION IN ANCIENT AND RENAISSANCE HERMETISM

Mercury saw all Argus' eyelids closed and every eye vanquished in sleep. He stopped and with his wand, his magic wand, soothed the tired resting eyes and sealed their slumber; quick then with his sword struck off the nodding head and from the rock threw it all bloody, spattering the cliff with gore. Argus lay dead; so many eyes, so bright quenched, and all hundred shrouded in one night.

Ovid, "Io" in *Metamorphoses*

I. Contemporary Holistic Esotericism and the New Age in Perspective

A. An Attempt to Define the Hydra

1. A moment within the Hermetic Tradition

In this work, we often use the term, "New Age," in a broad sense to describe contemporary esoteric spirituality, even though New Age per se was a religious and spiritual movement that seemed to reach its peak in the late 1980's and then fade out of existence – at least as a "movement." For example, Steven J. Sutcliffe, in *Children of the New Age: A History of Spiritual Practices*, goes so far as to suggest that it no longer exists, but has dispersed into other contemporary religious currents.¹ In an article on "New Age Religion" (2002), one of the foremost experts on the subject, Wouter Hanegraaff suggests that New Age should be seen as a "buzzword."² Often it is used a "catch-all phrase" that simultaneously encompasses a very broad spectrum of various religious ideas, practices, traditions and presuppositions that often seem to be mixed with other sometimes seemingly opposing religious ideas, practices, traditions and presuppositions.³ New Age, as it is called by observers and not always by participants, is not a unified movement in the sense of an organized religion. Most of its supposed adherents rather describe themselves as "spiritual" as opposed to being "religious."⁴ New Age is a contemporary form of esoteric spirituality.

As suggested, what makes New Age so difficult to categorize is the fact that most people, whom academics or observers call "New Agers," do not consider themselves as such. For

¹ See, for example, Steven J. Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age: A History of Spiritual Practices* (London: Routledge, 2003).

² Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "New Age Religion," *Religions in the Modern World*, ed. Linda Woodhead (London: Routledge, 2002) 249.

³ Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, reprint 1999) 67, 149. Heelas states: "Those disillusioned by the aridity of Christian services, or who want something other than a theistic God, do not have to go far to find a form of Christianity which should cater for them."

⁴ Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (London: Blackwell, 2005) 1.

example, some spiritual gurus like Sankara Saranam, a.k.a. Eric Dwight Ben-Meir, forthrightly denounce New Age. Although many of the cosmological presuppositions posited in Saranam's book, *God without Religion: Questioning Centuries of Accepted Truths*, are similar to those of the original New Age Movement, he claims that it is a movement that ignores "humanity while proclaiming unity with the universe."⁵ He believes that his "God without Religion Movement" avoids those pitfalls.

In some sense, Saranam's "Movement" highlights the problems associated with the study of "New Age." On the one hand, it appears that there is a group of people, who profess something like "New Age beliefs," but on the other hand, they are no where to be found. What one person deems to be categorized as "New Age," another person rejects as a category. At a popular level, some people identify New Age as something as innocuous as incense burning and practicing yoga, while others see it as a conspiracy of evil *magi* to take over the world.⁶ Most of these "conspiracy writers" focus on the negative stance that New Agers or contemporary esotericists take against more dogmatic or traditional forms of Christianity, by proposing a "religionless" spirituality that anticipates a new type of civilization and even humanity that will transform the earth. Most of these "conspiracy writers" are skeptical of these utopian pretensions, pointing to the covert violence that lurks beneath some New Age presuppositions. Therefore, it is difficult to find a way or an approach that takes both understandings of "New Age," as both simultaneously innocuous and potentially dangerous, seriously.

Perhaps one way to do this is to indeed no longer see New Age as a separate "movement," but as a moment within a larger spiritual, but also esoteric tradition, which has roots within western culture. In the same article written by Wouter Hanegraaff, mentioned above, he suggests that the original sources for New Age Religion were esoteric currents in Jewish and Christian culture, especially Hermetic *Gnosis* and Renaissance Hermeticism that became secularized, or divorced from its heterodox Christian roots in confrontation with Modernity. This secularized esoteric Hermetism reached its peak in the nineteenth century Hermetic and occult

⁵ Sankara Saranam, *God without Religion: Questioning Centuries of Accepted Truths* (East Ellijay, GA: The Pranayama Institute, 2005) 65-66. For example, on the front jacket cover of his book, ben-Meir states: "Disillusioned with organized religion, some people escape into New Age movements and others retreat from their spiritual moorings altogether. A more satisfying and transformative option is to embark on a quest to discover God on your own. Using time-tested tools of spiritual investigation, it becomes possible to examine your present beliefs, explore the nature of God and sense of self, and ultimately expand your identity."

⁶ See for example, Constance E. Cumbey, *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow: The New Age Movement and our Coming Age of Barbarism* (Shreveport: Huntington House, 1983); Constance E. Cumbey, *A Planned Deception: The Staging of a New Age 'Messiah'* (East Detroit: Pointe Publishers, 1985); Douglas R. Groothuis, *Unmasking the New Age* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1986); Randall N. Baer, *Inside the New Age Nightmare* (Lafayette: Huntington House, 1989).

revival, which followed a similar revival in the eighteenth century.⁷ To a great extent, we have come to agree with Hanegraaff's estimation about the sources of "New Age," and have attempted to define the contemporary phenomenon as a Hermetic tradition within the greater Hermetic Tradition that has antecedents in Antiquity.

2. The Academic and Religious Work of Peter Kingsley

a. The Hermetic Tradition: A Store-House for Alternative Traditions

In order to define our object of study, i.e. New Age as a Hermetic trend, we will also rely extensively on the work of Peter Kingsley, primarily because Kingsley, a well-known academic, has also claimed to have re-discovered the religion of the ancient Presocratics, which he alleges to have found through his study of Hermetism. With his School of Wisdom, he has become a contributor to the development of contemporary Hermetic spirituality, which is now located in the mountains of the state of Georgia. Claiming that the Hermetic Tradition became a carrier of Pythagorean and Presocratic philosophy and spirituality, Kingsley attempts to take the *Corpus* texts out of the world of pure academia and elucidate their human dimension, i.e. how they were used by human people as a guide to inspiration and initiation.

On his website, he implies that he also practices the "mystical ecstasy" of the Parmenidean and Empedoclean tradition and wants to transmit it to others. According to him, when used rightly, it will heal the current crisis of Western culture. He says that the goal of his work is to "bring back to life and make accessible again, the extraordinary mystical tradition that lies forgotten right at the roots of the western world." Like most contemporary esotericists and New Agers, Kingsley is a perennialist; that is to say, he believes that some primordial or universal tradition of wisdom underlies all religions or religious expressions. However, he does not point East, but believes that the primordial tradition can be found at the "root" of the western philosophical tradition, that is, in the life and works of the Presocratic philosophers. Ominously, Kingsley warns that the West must *return* to its source of meaning, or it will have no future.⁸

On his website, Kingsley admits that the purpose of the "return" to the Presocratics is to discover an *immediate and direct experience of one's own divinity*. As we will see, this is a recurrent theme in much contemporary esoteric as well as New Age discourse. Since self-divinization is the goal of his philosophy, Kingsley's work both fits within the framework of contemporary esotericism, but has also become one of its "sources." The need to become a "god" is made clearer in his discussion of the ancient philosophers, Parmenides and Empedocles.

⁷ "New Age Religion," *Religions in the Modern World*, 254-257.

⁸ Peter Kingsley, "Home," www.Peterkingsley.org/home.cfm.

Concerning Parmenides, he says that he was a priest of Apollo and a “healer, who worked through ecstasy,” whose “logic,” “when understood rightly and applied in daily life, has the mysterious power of taking us back to the gods.” He says that Empedocles was a “sorcerer,” (i.e. a *pharmakeus*) who “openly announced that he had realized his immortality.” “Through his poetry, he recorded techniques, which are as powerful now as they ever have been, to lead people to the direct experience of their own divine nature.” Kingsley’s books and seminars provide ample background information and discussion of ecstatic or mystical techniques for potential adherents to re-construct their own “Pythagoreanism.”⁹ Kingsley claims that the thought of the Presocratics was preserved through the greater Hermetic Tradition, developing into a kind of “store-house” for marginalized esoteric spiritual traditions.

b. Four Characteristics of the Greater Hermetic Tradition

Because the Hermetic Tradition as such became a kind of spiritual “store-house” for ideas and techniques, this accounts for the many contradictory elements within the tradition itself, but also for its tremendous popularity as an undercurrent within western spirituality. Esoteric thinkers and occult practitioners could pick and choose from a broad smorgasbord of ideas and practices they deemed subjectively useful for their particular purposes, which aligns it with the popular practices of today. Thanks to its association with the ancient Egyptian priest “Hermes Trismegistus,” the Hermetic Tradition provided a more acceptable vehicle for the transmission of so-called “deviant” philosophies, despite criticism, even within Antiquity. From late Antiquity through the Renaissance, the Hermetic Tradition provided a cover that allowed otherwise condemned practices, like magic, to continue to exist and flourish.

Kingsley discusses four elements or characteristics that he believes are necessary to understand the Hermetic texts as well as the broader Hermetic Tradition in which we contend New Age participates. These elements help us to understand why on the one hand New Age appeared to be a contemporary religious “movement,” albeit a solipsistic one, but on the other hand, seemed to transform itself out of recognition. According to Kingsley, first, in the history of Pythagoreanism, “originality and the ability to keep going beyond one’s predecessors were considered essential aspects of the creative inspiration which is need to keep the esoteric transmission fresh and alive.”¹⁰

Second, and related to the first point, one must keep in mind that as a philosophical/theological tradition, which associated itself with the patronage of the god Hermes,

⁹ Peter Kingsley, “Parmenides & Empedocles”, www.Peterkingsley.org/home/pages.cfm?ID=5.

¹⁰ Peter Kingsley, “An Introduction to the Hermetica: Approaching Ancient Esoteric Tradition,” *From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition*, ed. Roelof van den Broek and Cis van Heertum (Amsterdam: In de Pelikaan, 2000) 26.

it was “*by definition* a tradition which was perpetually shifting, changing, refining itself, moving beyond itself. It was a tradition that managed to retain its essential power at one level by, at another level, staying in a state of perpetual flux: adapting itself, presenting a new face to each new generation and in response to new situations.” This explains why New Age or Contemporary Holistic Esotericism, as an esoteric tradition that is extremely indebted to the greater Hermetic Tradition, is able to adapt and change and appear differently from its previous forms in Antiquity, the Renaissance and even throughout Modernity (i.e. in the Enlightenment and during the Romantic period). This also explains why New Age seemed to appear as a well defined movement in the 1980’s, but after the Harmonic Convergence debacle, quickly seemed to disperse and disintegrate in the 1990’s. Certain “family resemblances” are still detectable in other spiritual movements. The fact is, by definition as a Hermetic Tradition, New Age cannot be categorized as a “movement” per se, but should be seen as a fragmentary moment within the greater Hermetic tradition that was rediscovered and re-interpreted in the Renaissance, but has some antecedents in the iatromantic Presocratic philosophers, especially, Pythagoras, Parmenides, Empedocles, and Heraclites. Because of this, one can speak of Hermetic traditions and envision New Age as one of these.

Three, Kingsley claims that one should see the contradictory elements with the various traditions as an integral part of the Tradition’s teaching process itself. “Speaking theoretically one could say that contradiction is the only way of pointing to the divine, which is beyond the limitations of human logic and reason.” Kingsley believes that this formal aspect of the Hermetic texts, i.e. the purposeful use of contradiction in the texts, but also within the Tradition, links them to the “Gnostic library near Nag Hammadi: texts where fundamental contradictions are deliberately presented in the form of riddles or enigmas.”

Fourth, and related to the third point, contradictions were used in such a way to purposefully “confuse provoke, force people back on themselves and – as a preliminary to launching them into a totally new dimension of knowing – make them realize how little they really knew before.”¹¹ For example, the use of the *koan* in Zen Buddhism, where a nonsense statement is presented to the student, similarly helps him to discover a broader, yet, unspeakable dimension of Reality. The purpose of the koan is not to test the student’s ability to solve logical puzzles, but to help him to focus his attention, in some sense, away from himself. Kingsley claims that a similar *method* or technique of contradiction was frequently used in the Pythagorean Tradition in order to force the disciple to concentrate his attention on the problem at hand:

¹¹ “An Introduction to the Hermetica: Approaching Ancient Esoteric Tradition,” *From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition*, 26-27.

Particular sayings given to a pupil to force him to focus his whole awareness on a problem and put all his energy into it, rather than listening passively and just accepting whatever he is taught. It was the energy generated by working on the riddle that transformed the pupil, made the teaching come alive inside him. The process was an initiation in its own right, and this is a point that explains why initiations in the ancient world were often intimately associated with riddles. Scholars nowadays tend to make the mistake of assuming that riddles of this type were always accompanied sooner or later with an answer; with a neat explanation duly handed out to the chosen initiate. What they miss is the fundamental fact that the struggle of confronting the riddle was, itself, the initiation.¹²

From this short description, we see how both the perpetually changing faces of contemporary western esotericism as well as its internal contradictions are somehow part and parcel of the Hermetic Tradition itself. Although the New Age Movement seemed to emerge out of the Hippie-movement of the 1960's and reach its peak in the late 1980's, given its close connections to the nineteenth century Hermetic revival, Renaissance Hermetism and through it, ancient Hermetism, we can more easily place this brief phenomenon within the much longer history of western religious thought. Namely, we shall interpret it as a particular temporal expression within the larger framework of western Hermetic esotericism that was revived in the Renaissance. The eclectic nature of the Hermetic Tradition itself -- as a miscellaneous store-house of esoteric techniques and ideas that allows each practitioner to pick and choose according to his own interests, tastes and abilities -- accounts for its ability to appear as both innocuous, but sometimes also more threatening.

B. Longing to Return to the Mythical Golden Age

1. Constructing Difference

In *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity*, Paul Heelas says the term New Age is meant to convey the idea that a “significantly better way of life is dawning,”¹³ over the old way of life. The old way of life, or “old age,” refers to the way of life dominated by traditional western Christianity. In order to break through to the new way of life, a new way of thinking is needed. This new way of thinking is understood as a *paradigm change* and should revitalize culture and transform the individual's as well as society's consciousness, which includes a consciousness of innate divinity. For many contemporary people, God is no longer seen or experienced as a transcendent other, who is not to be equated with our physical universe and existence, but *is* this universe. God is understood as the *cosmos* or Nature and the

¹² “An Introduction to the Hermetica: Approaching Ancient Esoteric Tradition,” *From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition*, 26-27.

¹³ *The New Age Movement*, 15.

cosmos is believed to be One Mind, Spirit or Consciousness. The human being or mind is understood to be a fragment of the divine totality of consciousness and is itself, therefore, divine.

Kocku von Stuckrad, in *Western Esotericism: a Brief History of Secret Knowledge*, says that for the most part, western esoteric discourse should be seen as a method of constructing “otherness” or “difference” over and against the (formerly) dominant discourse of traditional theistic Christianity, which contemporary esotericists attempt to define as “dualistic.” He says that these contemporary forms of esoteric discourse “merged from a conception of the cosmos, which one can call holistic or monistic.”¹⁴ In *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought*, Hanegraaff showed that the original New Age Movement positioned itself against traditional Christianity, seeing it as a block to progress, or at least an irritating hurdle that must be overcome in order to enter this new and significantly better historical epoch. In this new epoch, a higher sort of humanity and culture will be possible,¹⁵ where people will become conscious that they are already divine. As Shirley MacLaine was reported to have said: “If everyone was taught one basic spiritual law, your world would be a happier, healthier place. And that law is this: Everyone is God. Everyone.”¹⁶ This new holistic epoch is perceived to be a “Golden Age” that can be achieved through the *destruction* of the “old” state, which is deemed degenerate in some form. As we will see, the violent destruction of the “old” is often understood as a “sacrifice.”

Holism is a form of radical spiritual monism, which can be expressed by the alchemical and hermetic credo: *Hen to Pan* or “One is All.” New Age holism is sometimes expressed as pantheism, sometimes as panentheism, but also as a form of panpsychism, which envisions Nature not only as alive and sympathetic, but also to varying degrees conscious.¹⁷ Holism might

¹⁴ Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*, trans. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke (London: Equinox Publishing, 2005) 10-11. Von Stuckrad goes on to say, “The concept of ‘otherness’ also acquires a significant role in the analysis of discourse. ‘Otherness’ or ‘deviance’ are interpretative tools in cultural studies, which illustrate the construction of difference. Once there is a majority, deviant minorities develop, and moreover both through the exclusion of the ‘Other’ on the part of the majority, as well as through the conscious tendency of the minority towards its own constructions of meaning. Those claims of making ‘actual knowledge’ individually accessible has sharpened this encounter. Many manifestations of esotericism form a spectrum of deviant religious options, be these Christian ‘heresies,’ or polytheistic and pantheistic models that dissent from a monotheistic world-view.”

¹⁵ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998) 514-521.

¹⁶ *The New Age Movement*, 2.

¹⁷ See Simon Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 275-276. Blackburn describes panpsychism in a way that is both quite similar to ancient animism and New Age holism. Panpsychism is “either the view that all parts of matter involve consciousness, or the more holistic view that the whole world ‘is but the veil of an infinite realm of mental life’ (Lotze). The world, or nature, produce living creatures, and accordingly ought to be thought of itself an alive and animated organism, literally describable as possessing reason, emotion, and a ‘world-soul.’ The view that man is a microcosm, or small version of the cosmos, which can therefore be understood in anthropomorphic terms, is a staple theme in Greek philosophy. It passed into the medieval period via Neoplatonism, and became shared by Leibniz, Schopenhauer, Schelling, and many others. Its most intelligible modern

even develop into *panenanthropism*. Panenanthropism is a rare psychological disposition, which developed out of the ancient idea that the human person is a microcosm of the macrocosm. When the microcosm/macrocosm idea is understood within a pantheist worldview, so that the human person is seen to be the microtheos of the macrotheos, then, eventually the microtheos/macrotheos analogy can be collapsed and then reversed. When this happens, the individual might begin to believe that he is the macrocosm or the “Creative-I.” This occurs in such a way that the isolated individual estimates himself to be the only existent being in the universe, because he *believes himself to be* the universe. He mistakes himself for the Divine Mind and collapses the totality of Reality into his finite mind or ego. No longer does he perceive himself to be a part of the *cosmos*, but the *cosmos* has become a fragment of his infinite mind.

2. A Return to Animism

The term “holism” can be interpreted in different ways, but is for the most part a revival of ancient forms of monistic thinking, which can be understood as animistic. Animism was a term coined by the British anthropologist, Sir Edward Tylor (1832-1917), best known for his definition of culture,¹⁸ to explain the religious worldview of primitive peoples. Tylor created the word from the Greek word, *anima*, meaning “soul,” “breath,” “life-principle” or “life-force” in order to describe what he considered to be the earliest stages of magical thinking. He coined the term to capture early peoples’ belief that everything was permeated by a life-force.¹⁹ Primarily, animism is more a way of experiencing reality than a theory of it. According to Von Stuckrad, contemporary forms of holism are animistic, but also ancient animism was “holistic”:

The conception of a living nature is also usually developed in a holistic context, whereby world and cosmos are conceived as a dynamic plait of connections. These kinds of animistic traditions can be found in nature-philosophical, pantheistic and animistic world-views that have recurred throughout European cultural history. The notion of a *prisca theologia* or a *philosophia perennis* also counts among the motifs which stimulate an esoteric discourse. The reception of Gnostic doctrines or texts like the *Corpus Hermeticum* or the *Chaldean Oracles* produces a recurrent tropos, to be analysed in the sense of constructing alternative identities.²⁰

The broad acceptance of holism or contemporary animism might account for the growing popularity of neo-shamanism as well as spirituality of the Presocratic philosophers. As Kingsley

version is perhaps the view that for environmental reasons we do well to think as if the world is a complex organism (sometimes rather preciously called Gaia), whose unity is as fragile as that of any living thing.”

¹⁸ Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Finn Sivert Nielsen, *A History of Anthropology* (London: Pluto Press, 2001) 23. Tylor saw civilization and culture as concomitant and defined them in this way: “Culture, or civilization, taken in its broad, ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. (Tylor 1958 [1871]: 1).”

¹⁹ Nevill Drury, *Shamanism* (Shaftsbury, Dorset: Element Books, 1996) 9.

²⁰ *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*, 11.

has shown, what we today anachronistically call “animism” was probably the psychic milieu in which western philosophy first took root. The early Presocratic philosophers, the founders of western philosophy, probably experienced reality in a similar fashion as some contemporary holists, influencing their beliefs about the *cosmos* and existence. With the re-discovery and popularization of the *Corpus Hermeticum* in the Renaissance, mentioned above, this more “primitive mode” of magical-thinking made a come-back, continuously challenging traditional Christianity²¹ from within and most recently from without. It has not only influenced the western esoteric tradition, including New Age, but also modern western philosophy up to the present day.

3. A Return to a Magical Worldview

In his *A General Theory of Magic*, Marcel Mauss says that Tylor saw magic and animism as inherently related, offering “no other explanation of magic than the one provided by his general theory of animism.”²² In Sigmund Freud’s *Totem and Taboo* (1913), he claims that animism is the basis of magic.²³ Influenced by nineteenth century Darwinism, Freud explains that animism is one of the three great phases of thought, the others being religious and scientific. Although his understanding of animism was influenced by Enlightenment notions of “progress,” and his theories on oedipal rebellion have for the most part been rejected, his understanding of magic and animism is extremely useful. According to Freud, the deeper essence of magic is related to what primitive peoples imagined they could control through the power of their thoughts. That is, the motive to practice magic was grounded in human wishes, or desires to realize one’s own thoughts. “All we need to suppose is that primitive man had an immense belief in the power of his wishes. The basic reason why what he sets about by magical means comes to pass is, after all, simply that he wills it.”²⁴ Furthermore, “his wishes are accompanied by a motor impulse, the will, which is later destined to alter the whole face of the earth in order to satisfy his wishes.”

Freud claims that initially humans attributed virtue to the will and its accompanying wishes, but as time passed, the accent shifted from *motives*, i.e. why one wants something, to *methods*, i.e. how to get what one wants. “It thus comes to appear as though it is the magical act

²¹ The term “traditional Christianity” is used as a more inclusive and as a less ideologically loaded term than, for example, “orthodox Christianity,” which might refer to Eastern Christians, or might be used as a label by some Christians to distinguish themselves from other Christians, whom they deem to be “less” Christian, or “dogmatic Christianity,” which is often used by occultists as a slander against “traditional Christianity.” The term, “traditional Christianity,” for all of its limitations, refers to those Christians, who historically ascent in a broad sense to the Nicene Creed and an even broader sense to those Christians, who have affirmed throughout history that Jesus of Nazareth, as the only Son of God, is the Christ.

²² Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Animism*, trans. Robert Brain (London: Routledge, 1972) 15.

²³ Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement between the Mental Lives of Savages and Neurotics*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1950, 1980) 97-98. Frances Yates makes similar claims in Frances A. Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964, reprint 1991) 381, 436.

²⁴ *Totem and Taboo*, 104.

itself which, owing to its similarity with the desired result, alone determines the occurrence of that result.”²⁵ Magic arose as a response to the practical need to control the chaos of the surrounding environment and is a technique used to accomplish this. “Hand in hand with the animistic system, there went a body of instructions upon how to obtain mastery of men, beasts and things -- or rather over their spirits. These instructions go by the names of ‘sorcery’ and ‘magic.’”²⁶ Freud provides a broad definition of sorcery, claiming that it is the “art of influencing spirits by treating them in the same way as one would treat men in like circumstances: appeasing them, making amends to them, propitiating them, intimidating them, robbing them of their power, subduing them to one’s will -- by the same methods that have proved effective with living men.” Magic, on the other hand, “makes use of special procedures and not of everyday psychological methods. ... Magical methods can, among others, be used in dealing with spirits, and magic can be applied as well to cases where, as it seems to us, the process of spiritualizing Nature has not yet been carried out. Magic has to serve the most varied purposes -- the subjection of natural phenomena to the will of man.”²⁷ Hence, the underlying principle governing magic is the belief that one’s own desires and thoughts are all powerful. Freud calls this belief the “omnipotence of thoughts.”²⁸ In the animistic worldview, the one whose will is the strongest or whose thoughts dominate is the one who dominates the world. The one who dominates the world is, at least temporarily, the highest god. Put in a different way by a contemporary of Freud, Friedrich Nietzsche, in what was later to become known as *The Will to Power*, § 1067, in the (magical) worldview, “*The world is the will to power – and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power – and nothing besides!*”²⁹

The understanding of magic as a function of the will or desire is significant, coming from the founder of modern psychology. In fact, it somehow reveals the connections between ancient magic and the field of modern psychology, especially that of Carl Jung. Israel Regardie, in *Foundations of Practical Magic: An Introduction to Qabalistic, Magical and Meditative Techniques*, says that the practice of contemporary magic is, like primitive magic, concerned with human psychology (e.g. the interior motives and desires of human beings). Regardie, one of the great contemporary magicians, claims that the ultimate purpose of magic is to advance the evolution of humanity and civilization towards a higher level. Throughout the book, Regardie displays his profound knowledge of the Hermetic Tradition, the teachings of the Theosophical

²⁵ *Totem and Taboo*, 105.

²⁶ *Totem and Taboo*, 97-98.

²⁷ *Totem and Taboo*, 98.

²⁸ *Totem and Taboo*, 107.

²⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968) 550.

Society as well as the psychology of Carl Jung, aligning his understanding of the aims of magic with many of the aims of contemporary esotericism as it has been expressed by the New Age Movement. According to Regardie:

Putting it simply and briefly, let me say at the outset that Magic concerns itself in the main with the world of modern psychology. That is to say, it deals with that sphere of the psyche of which normally we are not conscious but which exerts an enormous influence upon our lives. Magic is a series of psychological techniques so devised as to enable us to probe more deeply into ourselves. To what end? First, that we shall understand ourselves more completely. Apart from the fact that such self-knowledge in itself is desirable; an understanding of the inner nature releases us from unconscious compulsions and motivations and confers a mastery over life. Second, that we may more fully express that inner self in everyday activities. It is only when mankind as a whole has reached, or perhaps when the more advanced men and women in the world have evolved, some degree of inner realization that we may ever hope for that ideal utopian condition of things – a wide tolerance, peace, and universal brotherhood. It is to ends such as these that Magic owes its *raison d'être*.³⁰

B. J. Gibbons explains this more clearly in *Spirituality and the Occult: from the Renaissance to the Modern Age*:

As Marcel Mauss observed, it is the magician's 'power over his own being' that constitutes 'the prime source of strength'. For men like Pico della Mirandola, 'subjective' magic involving the spiritual illumination of the magician, would lead to 'transitive' magic, offering control over the external world. That is why magic, even when it attempts to command the elements, is always a psychological system working through inner spiritual forces. It may involve elaborate rituals; it may even as in alchemy, appear to be a primitive and misguided science. These external elements of magic are really no more than aids in concentrating the inner forces of the magicians. Magic is an act of will. Balzac expressed the magician's outlook in one of his novels: 'The human will was a material force similar to steam-power... He who has learned the technique [of concentrating it] could modify as he pleased everything relating to mankind, even the absolute laws of nature.'³¹

According to Gibbons, "Magic stands at the origins of the modern cult of 'self-realization', which sometimes takes the form of a secular spirituality. Stoddard Martin has observed that 'A first function of magic is to create an effective type of personality.' Magic is essentially a means of concentrating the will and of engaging the imagination. Although most Westerners are inclined to dismiss it as ineffective nonsense, the fact is that magic works -- although it may not work in the way that magicians think it does."³² ... Magic was a way of 'turning the magician into a fully realised human being.'³³ That is to say, the magician or sorcerer is a human being, who – having

³⁰ Israel Regardie, *Foundations of Practical Magic: An Introduction to Qabalistic, Magical and Meditative Techniques* (Great Britain: Aeon, 1979) 27-28.

³¹ B. J. Gibbons, *Spirituality and the Occult: from the Renaissance to the Modern Age* (London: Routledge, 2001) 54.

³² *Spirituality and the Occult*, 13-14.

³³ *Spirituality and the Occult*, 24-25.

a profound knowledge of human psychology -- knows how to get what he wants. The desire to become a “fully realized human being,” implies the ability to become a god. A god is someone, who is able to surmount the laws of nature and, therefore, fate and is able to achieve the objects of his desires. His ultimate desire is, namely, immortality. In this sense, magic is both a system of salvation and a tool to save oneself through one’s own will power. Throughout this work, we will see how this magical worldview, despite protestations from traditional Christianity, influenced and continues to influence western spirituality.

II. The Hermetic New Age.

In the previous section, we suggested that New Age is an esoteric and even magical way of thinking about reality, which posits self-divinization as a means to salvation. That is, in order to escape from the anonymity of the Totality, one of the main goals of the New Age is to realize oneself as “God.” Occult techniques, or esoteric practices, are used to obtain the *necessary experience* of divinization. There are a wide palette of techniques (e.g. yoga, massage, reiki, etc.) and tools (e.g. incense, music, aroma therapy, the use of light and colors, crystals, etc.) available to help the seeker to achieve his spiritual aims. In this sense, New Age is not different from practices found in other, older Hermetic traditions. Von Stuckrad says that the Hermetic Tradition, unlike like the Gnostic Tradition re-discovered in Nag Hammadi, is more concerned with the divinization of man and his liberation from fate, or *heimarmene*, through the knowledge or *gnosis* of his condition, than with redemption from evil matter. In this sense, the Hermetic Tradition differs from the Gnostic Tradition, although they share a common “field of discourse, because certain themes and arguments link the individual groups.” Together with the Neoplatonic tradition, the Hermetic and Gnostic traditions assume that the soul carries within it a divine spark, which eventually “incarnates on Earth by descending through the heavenly spheres and is there subject to the laws of the archons, and thus to *heimarmene* (See *Poimandres*, CH 1, 9).... . The redemption of man from the shackles of matter and his re-ascent into the home of light proceeds in tandem with ethical demands which the adept must accept.”³⁴

In contrast to the traditional Orthodox Christian understanding of deification by grace or *theosis*, Von Stuckrad says that “in the *Corpus Hermeticum* (CH) it is the inner disposition of the believer which enables him to ascend, not an external act of grace, nor a cultic activity,”³⁵ like participation in the Eucharistic liturgy. This is made clear in *Corpus Hermeticum* 1, 24-27, which is also often called the *Poimandres*, a section we will discuss in more detail later. It is important to note, however, in *Corpus Hermeticum* I, Hermes Trismegistus is initiated by a tremendous being, which was unbounded in size, called *Poimandres* (Cf. CH, I, 1ff). When the Hermetic adept’s ascent through the spheres was complete, his divinization followed, whereupon he saw himself in the Mind of God. Probably, this meant that he experienced himself as a part of the Totality, or as a microtheos of the macrotheos. However, as we will show, in later Hermetic traditions, which developed throughout the Renaissance, perhaps beginning with the philosophy of Giordano Bruno, it was possible to not only see oneself *in* the Mind of God, or to experience oneself as a divine part of the divine whole, but to envision oneself *as* the Mind of God. We call this psychic possibility or disposition “panenanthropic,” mentioned above.

³⁴ *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*, 20-21.

³⁵ *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*, 21.

Of course, not everyone who picks or chooses spiritual techniques, methods or tools are consciously seeking “divinity.” The vast majority of people who, for example, burn incense to relax or practice yoga to get in shape are not the object of our study. In this work, we are mainly concerned with a small, but growing number of people, who consciously use occult practices to achieve altered states of consciousness in order to develop a magical personality and realize their “divinity.” As we will show, the process of self-divinization within the Hermetic scheme also often implies a form of self-destruction, be this psychological, spiritual or even physical. When the monistic doctrine of “All is One” is taken to extremes or panenanthropically, then, this can also imply a supposed need for cosmic destruction. However, before we can discuss how the panenanthropic disposition developed, we will need to gain a better understanding of the historical development of the Hermetic Tradition itself. We will start by seeing how the term New Age has evolved.

A. The Hermetic Tradition in Context

1. A Genealogy of the term “New Age”

Wouter Hanegraaff says that many contemporary commentators see the term “New Age” as originating in the poem, *Milton*, by the gnostic-hermetic poet William Blake (1757-1827) or with the American, Warren Felt Evans in his *New Age and Its Message* (1864).³⁶ Heelas believes that the term “New Age” can most probably be traced back no farther than the Great Seal of the United States (1782), with its Latin motto, *novus ordo seclorum*, inspired by American Freemasonry. It can also be found on the back of the U. S. dollar. He admits that insufficient research has been applied to the matter.³⁷ The Great Seal is also one of the first places where the anticipation of a “new age” is associated with a “new world order,” an important theme in contemporary esotericism and New Age proper.³⁸ According to Jeffery Meyer in *Myths in Stone: Religious Dimensions in Washington, D.C.*, the crafting of the Great Seal was a microcosm of the designing of Washington itself. In 1776, “Congress appointed its most prominent thinkers, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams to ‘bring in a device for the seal for the United States of America’ for their approval.”³⁹ Although many of their ideas were rejected, those that highlighted the sentiment that Divine Providence was behind the founding of the nation

³⁶ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 95-96n.

³⁷ *The New Age Movement*, 15, 17.

³⁸ See, Alice Bailey & Djwhal Khul, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/externalisation/exte1073.html. In a piece entitled, “The Coming World Order,” written supposedly in 1940, they say: “It is necessary, therefore, to speak with directness ... to point out the lines of demarcation between the right and the wrong ways of living, between a vision of the *new world order* and the retrograde plans of the so-called ‘new order’ with which the totalitarian powers seek to bewilder humanity.”

³⁹ Jeffrey F. Meyer, *Myths in Stone: Religious Dimensions of Washington, D. C.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001) 30.

were encouraged. It was generally felt by the founding fathers, amongst whom Benjamin Franklin and George Washington were Masons, that the democratic principles of the United States should become a universal model against tyranny. In later designs, the reverse side of the seal “showed a Masonic thirteen-stepped pyramid surmounted by the all-seeing eye of the Architect of the Universe.”⁴⁰

According to C. W. Leadbeater, in *Freemasonry and its Ancient Mystic Rites*, the pyramid refers to the ancient Egyptian religion and her mysteries, as a “great public institution, supported by the State, centres of national and religious life to which people of the better classes flocked in thousands...”⁴¹ Amongst other things, Leadbeater was a former Church of England clergyman, Freemason, Theosophist and founder/Bishop of the Liberal Catholic Church (LCC). Although a relatively unknown figure today, Leadbeater contributed greatly to the development of the New Age movement and shows the connections between New Age, Theosophy and esoteric secret societies like Freemasonry. Concerning the spiritual importance of “Egypt,” he claims that “Egypt was thus the centre of spiritual illumination for the entire western world, and all those who sought the Great Initiations were attracted to it; and it is this fact which explains the reverence paid to the Egyptian Mysteries by learned Greeks in later times.” The center of the national public religion and State was the pyramid, called “‘Kuht, ‘The Light’. It was built on the most exact astronomical and mathematical calculations, and provided a veritable key in stone to the enigmas of the universe.”⁴² Leadbeater says that as modern Freemasonry symbolically builds Solomon’s Temple, a symbol of the self, similarly, the ancient initiates of the Egyptian Mysteries symbolically engaged in the building of the pyramid, the state.

The mystical building of the sacred state is, according to Leadbeater, symbolized in the processes of Nature, in which the Egyptians participated and were themselves. Hence, the ascension of the pyramid steps and “the ceremonies of the Mysteries were also intended to portray the higher evolution of man, his return to the divine source whence he came, through the development of the higher part of his nature, which is not merely consequent upon practices of meditation and ceremonial, but even more upon the living out of the ethical precepts which were taught. [...] Each degree of the Mysteries was designed to reflect one or other of the great Initiations of the White Lodge, so that the initiates of this lower level might prepare themselves ultimately to enter the Path of Holiness and so strive after the fullness of union with Osiris, the Hidden Light.”⁴³ We take Leadbeater’s interpretation seriously, because it shows how a

⁴⁰ *Myths in Stone*, 31.

⁴¹ C. W. Leadbeater, *Freemasonry and its Ancient Mystic Rites* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1998) 24.

⁴² *Freemasonry and its Ancient Mystic Rites*, 25.

⁴³ *Freemasonry and its Ancient Mystic Rites*, 26.

forerunner of the New Age Movement, like Leadbeater, associated Egyptian spirituality -- which we will see means hermetic Spirituality -- with a higher evolution of humanity.⁴⁴

In 1907, we come across the term again in England. The English literary critic, Alfred R. Orage (1873-1934) chose it for the title of his extremely influential weekly literary paper, *The New Age*.⁴⁵ At the turn of the century, Orage was the leader of the English Nietzscheans, and like Leadbeater mentioned above, was a member of the Theosophical Society. Orage, an intellectual elitist, admired the thought of Nietzsche as much as the Gnostic-hermetic poetry of William Blake and saw a connection in their thought.⁴⁶ The English Nietzsche Society included illustrious literary figures, who were also supporters of Helena Blavatsky's Theosophical Society, such as George Bernard Shaw, W. B. Yeats, James Joyce, D. H. Lawrence, amongst others.⁴⁷ Yeats was also a member of the society of ceremonial magic, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn adhered to the Hermetic idea, which was revived in the Renaissance, that divine energy was present in everything and that people could use these latent powers or energies to discover the divine nature within. This is an idea that Renaissance esotericism shares with contemporary esotericism and New Age.⁴⁸ The honor of introducing the term "New Age" in its contemporary context goes to the already mentioned Theosopher, Alice Bailey.⁴⁹ Bailey's husband, Foster, was an influential Freemason and Theosophist.⁵⁰ Hanegraaff says that her "influence on the New Age movement, especially in its early phase, is pervasive."⁵¹

As discussed, one of the earliest known references to the term "new age" was the coded reference in the Great Seal of the United States of America, through the use of the pyramid and the "Divine Eye," to the Mysteries of Ancient Egypt. The fact that the seal was to a large extent conceived by Freemasons, which, according to Joscelyn Godwin, "by the late eighteenth century had become the principal shelter of the Hermetic tradition," brings our project into focus.⁵² Given the great rivalries between various Masonic factions, this is not to say that all Freemasons interpreted Hermetic ideas uniformly, only that Masonry allowed Hermetic ideas to become

⁴⁴ *Freemasonry and its Ancient Mystic Rites*, 25.

⁴⁵ *The New Age Movement*, 17.

⁴⁶ See A. R. Orage, *Friedrich Nietzsche: The Dionysian Spirit of the Age* (London: T. N. Fouis, 1906).

⁴⁷ For a good survey on Nietzsche's impact on turn-of-the century England, see David S. Thatcher, *Nietzsche in England 1890-1914: The Growth of a Reputation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970).

⁴⁸ Susan Greenwood, *De Encyclopedie van Magie & Hekserij: Een geïllustreerd historisch verslag van spirituele werelden*, trans. Ineke Willems (Utrecht: Veltman Uitgevers, 2002) 172.

⁴⁹ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 95.

⁵⁰ For example, Foster Bailey's book, *The Spirit of Masonry*, was published by Lucis Publishing, the publishing house of Lucis Trust, the Bailey's Theosophical-type organization. See Foster Bailey, *The Spirit of Masonry* (New York: Lucis Publishing, revised ed. 1979).

⁵¹ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 95; ed. James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton, *Perspectives on the New Age* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) xi.

⁵² Joscelyn Godwin, "Music and the Hermetic Tradition," *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*, (Albany: State University of New York, 1998) 189.

commonly accepted amongst many influential thinkers, politicians and business people, under the cloak of conventionality. In this sense, Masonry provides an important link between New Age and Ancient Hermetism.

Hermetism has been acknowledged to be a significant influence in the formation of contemporary esoteric ideas,⁵³ and can be traced back to a group of texts called the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Together with Neopythagoreanism, Stoicism, Neoplatonism, the mystical tradition of the Jewish Kabbalah, Hermetism forms the basis of the esoteric tradition in the West.⁵⁴ Hermetism, or the thought related to the *Corpus Hermeticum* and other Hermetic texts, was combined with Renaissance Christianity by some Neoplatonic theologians, who were looking for a way to challenge the Aristotelianism of the Schoolmen. It is to this history that we now turn.

2. Background to the *Corpus Hermeticum*

In 1463, a Macedonian monk in the service of Cosimo de Medici rediscovered the edited text of the *Corpus Hermeticum* (CH),⁵⁵ which until that time had only been known through the polemical writings of the Church Fathers. Cosimo had established the Florence Platonic Academy, under the intellectual guidance of one of the great Renaissance scholars of the time, Marsilio Ficino. Initially, the purpose of the Academy was to translate the entire works of Plato into Latin and disseminate them for further investigation. At the time of the discovery, Ficino had already gathered and prepared the complete works of Plato for translation. However, so monumental was the discovery, Cosimo ordered Ficino to halt his work and immediately translate the Hermetic texts.⁵⁶

a. Theoretical and Technical Hermetica

The *Corpus Hermeticum*, or *Corpus*, is a body of roughly eighteen texts, plus the Latin *Asclepius*. Although the *Asclepius* was probably first composed in Greek, the full text only exists in Latin. A Coptic version of the middle section of the *Asclepius*, with many differences to the Latin version, was found in Nag Hammadi.⁵⁷ These, amongst other more magical and alchemical texts, were attributed to the legendary Egyptian priest, Hermes Trismegistus, or the Thrice Great Hermes. The *Corpus* itself was mostly written in the form of philosophical or theological discourses by the so-called Hermes Trismegistus, often, to his son Tat. The name Tat is an allusion to the Egyptian god, Thoth, who was the Egyptian equivalent of the Greek god Hermes.

⁵³ Cf. *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 387-396.

⁵⁴ Antoine Faivre, *Access to Western Esotericism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) 52.

⁵⁵ Antoine Faivre, "Renaissance Hermeticism and the Concept of Western Esotericism," *Gnosis and Hermeticism: From Antiquity to Modern Times* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998) 113.

⁵⁶ Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, 13-14.

⁵⁷ Ed. James M. Robinson, "Introduction to the Asclepius 21-29," *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (New York: HarperCollins, 3rd ed., 1990) 330.

The *Asclepius* is addressed to a certain Asclepius. This is an allusion to the Greek and Roman god of healing and medicine, who was the son of the sun god Apollo and Coronis.

Garth Fowden, in *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* has placed the writings in their proper social and cultural context, that is, within the 2nd and 3rd century AD “Greek-speaking milieu in Egypt.” Some of the ideas propagated in the texts are of an earlier Egyptian origin.⁵⁸ His work dispelled certain presumptions by the great Dominican scholar André-Jean Festugière that the *Hermetica* should be placed in an entirely Greek Platonic milieu.⁵⁹ More recent work by Peter Kingsley in, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition*, suggests that the Hermetic Tradition was also an important conveyor of the Empedoclean or Presocratic magical tradition. This tradition has strong connections to early Greek shamanism or *iatromantism*. As mentioned earlier, he suggests that already in Antiquity, the *Hermetica*, or Hermetic texts, served as a store-house for alternative philosophies.⁶⁰

The *Corpus Hermeticum* is a group of more philosophically or theologically oriented texts belonging to a larger body of texts called *Hermetica*. Bearing in mind that these are somewhat artificial designations, today, some contemporary scholars refer to these more philosophical/theological texts as the “theoretical *Hermetica*.” Another group, which is far broader in scope with a more practical emphasis, is referred to as the “technical *Hermetica*.” The “theoretical *Hermetica*” are concerned with helping the human person understand “the origins, nature and moral properties of the divine, human and material being so that man can use this knowledge to save himself.”⁶¹ The “technical *Hermetica*” are more occult oriented and concerned with practical matters like astrology, alchemy, formal or ceremonial magic, healing, etc.⁶² These texts offer occult tools, i.e. rituals, magical formulas, knowledge of the stars, minerals, plants and their specific influences, etc., which help one to save or heal oneself. Most of these texts, both practical and theoretical, claim in some way to be hermetic, or make use of the *dramatis personae*, Hermes Trismegistus, sometimes Mercurius-Trismegistus.⁶³ Mercurius is

⁵⁸ Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes: A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) 213.

⁵⁹ Festugière’s monumental, but somewhat dated work on the *Hermetica* was published in four volumes. A. J. Festugière, *La Révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste: L’Astrologie et les Sciences Occultes*, vol. 1 (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1944); *La Révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste: Le Dieu Cosmique*, vol. 2 (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1949); *La Révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste: Les Doctrines de L’Âme*, vol. 3 (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1953); *La Révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste: Le Dieu Inconnu et la Gnose*, vol. 4 (Paris: Librairie Lecoffre, 1954).

⁶⁰ Peter Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), see especially 372ff.

⁶¹ Brian P. Copenhaver, “Introduction,” *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a new English translation with notes and introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, reprint 2000) xxii.

⁶² “Introduction,” *Hermetica*, xxxv.

⁶³ *The Egyptian Hermes*, 5.

the Roman equivalent of the Greek god Hermes. According to Brian P. Copenhaver, a contemporary editor and translator of the *Corpus*:

The documents that scholars have included in this category cover a considerable span of time, from the second century BCE to the fifth century CE, and their contents are mainly spells of practical intent, meant to conjure a god or demon, bring a vision or a dream, foretell the future, attain invisibility, compel a lover, thwart an enemy, catch a thief, ease the pain of gout or drive insects from a house. The people who wrote the papyri had hundreds of reasons for needing a magic spell and scores of gods and spirits to call upon. Hermes, naturally, was one of them...⁶⁴

Although known by occult practitioners, the “technical” or more occult oriented *Hermetica* were dismissed by scholars and intellectuals alike as “popular.” This was a pejorative term used by Festugière, who considered the more philosophically oriented texts to be “learned.” This distinction distorted the way in which the texts were actually used and perceived by the people to whom they belonged. Fowden claims that the theoretical and technical *Hermetica* should not be seen as two separate tendencies, the one “higher intellectual” and the other “lower magical,” but that both are intimately connected in their total cultural, intellectual and religious framework. That is, within the context of the “literate but not especially learned pagan.”⁶⁵ The theoretical texts provided an accessible intellectual framework in which to apply practical or “technical” occult skills. Copenhaver says:

Instead of a theory of magic, the theoretical *Hermetica* present a theory of salvation through knowledge or *gnōsis*, yet this theory was the product of a culture that made no clear rigid distinction between religion as the province of such lofty concerns as the fate of the soul and *magic* as a merely instrumental device of humbler intent. The spell cited above from PGM V⁶⁶, for example, has its goal *enpneumatōsis* or “inspiration,” literally, filling with *pneuma* or spirit. Was it a religious or a practical aim to seek such inspiration from Hermes? What we know of the role of *pneuma* in Gnostic and early Christian religion and also of its place in Stoic physics and Galenic medicine should convince us that the question implies a false, unhistorical dichotomy. Salvation in the largest sense -- the resolution of man’s fate wherever it finds him -- was a common concern of theoretical and technical *Hermetica* alike, through the latter texts generally advertised a quotidian deliverance from banal misfortunes of disease, poverty and social strife,

⁶⁴ “Introduction,” *Hermetica*, xxxv.

⁶⁵ *The Egyptian Hermes*, xxi.

⁶⁶ Cf. “Introduction,” *Hermetica*, xxxiii-xxxvi. Copenhaver gives an example of a spell: “Take 28 leaves from a pithy laurel tree and some virgin earth and seed of wormwood, wheat meal and the herb calf’s snout... pounded together with.... the liquid of an ibis egg and made into a uniform dough and into a figure of Hermes wearing a mantle, while the moon is ascending... Let Hermes be holding a herald’s staff. And write the spell on hieratic papyrus or on a goose’s windpipe.... and insert it into the figure for ... inspiration (*enpneumatōsis*)... [Put the spell] at the feet of Hermes... and recite as on the altar you burn incense. / Hermes, lord of the world, who’re in the heart, O circle of Selene, spherical and square, the founder of the words of speech, pleader of justice’s cause... who with your lamps give joy to those beneath the earth’s depths, to mortals who’ve finished life. The prophet of events and dream divine you’re said to be, who send forth oracles by day and night; you cure all pains of mortals with your healing cares. Hither, O blessed one... both graciously appear and graciously render the task for me a pious man... without deceit appear and prophesy to me.”

while the former offered a grander view of salvation through knowledge of God, the other and the self.⁶⁷

As stated, *Hermetica* concern all of the ancient texts, be they “theoretical” or “technical,” which in some way associate themselves with either the so-called Egyptian priest Hermes Trismegistus, or the more alchemical Mercurius-Trismegistus, or call themselves “hermetic.” The *Corpus Hermeticum* is a specific body of a smaller collection of more philosophically oriented texts. According to Faivre, because of the complexity involved, not only must we distinguish between *Hermetica* and the *Corpus Hermeticum*, but we must also distinguish between “Hermetism” and “Hermeticism.” Faivre says, “Hermetism” “refers to the ensemble of the *Hermetica* as well as to the literature inspired by it during the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and even thereafter.”⁶⁸ “Hermeticism” is used in a broader sense and “designate[s] the general attitude of mind underlying a variety of traditions and/or currents beside alchemy, such as Hermetism, astrology, Kabbalah, Christian theosophy, and *philosophia occulta* or *magia* (in the sense these two words acquired in the Renaissance, that is, of a magical vision of nature understood as a living being replete with signs and correspondences, which could be deciphered and interpreted).”⁶⁹ This broader category is important for our discussion of Contemporary Holistic Esotericism, especially New Age, which experts recognize as a form of Hermeticism, or a cosmic religiosity similar to Hermeticism.⁷⁰ From now on, we will adhere to Faivre’s terminology, because it allows us to distinguish between the above-mentioned historical periods.

b. A Tenuous Relationship with Early Christianity

During the Byzantine era, the more theoretical texts were selected out of the larger body of *Hermetica*, primarily for their lack of magical references.⁷¹ The later Byzantine editing through the eleventh and fourteenth centuries probably occurred due the traditional Judeo-Christian rejection of the practice of magic, the specific condemnation of hermetic magic by the early Church Fathers, as well as the systematic criticism of magic within the mainstream, that is, Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical traditions. However, the editing also led to one of the most fascinating historical miscalculations and misinterpretations in modern western history. The Renaissance dating of the texts, somewhere around the time of Moses, led most to believe that the newly discovered *Corpus Hermeticum* was non-corrupted, pure ancient wisdom written by the

⁶⁷ “Introduction,” *Hermetica*, xxxvi-xxxvii.

⁶⁸ “Renaissance Hermeticism and the Concept of Western Esotericism,” *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*, 109.

⁶⁹ “Renaissance Hermeticism and the Concept of Western Esotericism,” *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*, 110.

⁷⁰ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 392.

⁷¹ “Introduction,” *Hermetica*, xxxii.

Egyptian priest Hermes Trismegistus at the very beginning of religion as such. Through an uncharacteristic lack of critical analysis,⁷² the Renaissance Neoplatonists believed that the *Corpus* was one of the “oldest” and, therefore, purest, or highest sources of knowledge, sometimes estimating it superior to the Bible.⁷³

This misinterpretation was in due part to their mention by several Christian fathers, amongst others, Lactantius (260-330 AD), St. Augustine (354-430 AD) and St. Cyril of Alexandria (376-444 AD). The reputation of Hermes was further elevated, given the belief that the Greeks had received important philosophical ideas at the feet of Egyptian priests. For the men of western Antiquity as for the men of the Renaissance, Egypt was the source of religion and knowledge. In his *Stromata*, the Greek-Egyptian father, Clement of Alexandria (+/- 200 AD) reinforced this idea amongst Christians.⁷⁴ Furthermore, Lactantius in his *Divine Institutes* treated the Hermetic writings favorably, quoting regularly from them as if they were on par with the Bible, as pagan prophecies foretelling the advent of Jesus Christ.⁷⁵ St. Augustine, however, condemned the writings for their connection to the practice of magic and as a snare of demons.⁷⁶ His treatment of the *Hermetica* seems to be an attempt to mitigate the influence of Lactantius,⁷⁷ especially with what concerns the *Asclepius*.⁷⁸ Augustine’s attempted “damage control” is especially clear in *De Civitate Dei*, 18, 23, where he discusses the prophecies of the Erythraean Sibyl and Lactantius’ usage of her.⁷⁹ He quotes from the text in *De Civitate Dei*, 6, 23, making it clear that Hermes Trismegistus is not as orthodox as others make him out to be.⁸⁰ In *Contra*

⁷² Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, 160. For example, Lorenzo Valla showed that the *Donation of Constantine* was a forgery, that Dionysius the Areopagite was not the same Areopagite in the Acts of the Apostles and *Ad Herennium* used as a text of rhetoric in the Middle Ages was not really by Cicero. About this Yates says: “Compare this with the unfailing gullibility with which Ficino swallows as *prisca theologia* texts which are really Hellenistic in date.”

⁷³ Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, 2-3.

⁷⁴ Clement of Alexandria, “Stromata,” 6.4, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. II, ed. Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprint 2001) 488. “There are then forty-two books of Hermes indispensably necessary [i.e. for the role of the priest]; of which the six-and-thirty containing the whole philosophy of the Egyptians are learned by the forementioned personages [i.e. Egyptian priests and scribes] and the other six which are medical, by the *Pastophoroi* (image-bearers), -- treating of the structure of the body, and of diseases, and instruments, and medicines, and about the eyes, and the last about women.”

⁷⁵ Lactantius, “The Divine Institutes,” 4, 15, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. VII, trans. Rev. William Fletcher (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprint 2001) 115-116. Lactantius quotes the Sybils between quotations from the prophets Zechariah and Isaiah. Cf. also, Brian P. Copenhaver, “Introduction,” *Hermetica*, xliii; Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, 8.

⁷⁶ “Introduction,” *Hermetica*, xxxi-xxxii.

⁷⁷ Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, 11.

⁷⁸ Trans. Brian P. Copenhaver, *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a new English translation with notes and introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, reprint 2000) Asclepius [37], 89-90. The text condones the Egyptian practice of “making gods,” or “calling up” the souls of demons into statues.

⁷⁹ Saint Augustine, “The City of God,” 18, 23, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. II, ed. Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, trans. Rev. Marcus Dods (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprint 1997) 372-373.

⁸⁰ *The City of God*, 6, 23. According to St. Augustine, although he predicts the Christian overthrow of paganism, when he does this, “he speaks as one who is a friend to these same mockeries of the demons, and does not clearly express the

Faustum Manichaeum, Augustine connects Hermes to the Manicheans. He condemns the writings of Hermes as well as those of Orpheus and the Sibyls, due to their promotion of demon worship and idolatry.⁸¹

According to Yates, despite Augustine's protestations, ironically, it was Augustine who would give credence to the idea that the *Hermetica* (i.e. technical and theoretical) were extremely ancient. He provided a genealogy of ancient men, listing Hermes Trismegistus only several generations after Moses.⁸² Later Renaissance figures like Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499) and Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola (1463-1492) would use Lactantius' positive assessment of Hermes to justify their use and study of Hermetic magic, but would use Augustine's genealogy to verify Hermes Trismegistus' antiquity. They ignored Augustine's explicit condemnation, and in doing so, helped to rehabilitate the authority of the Latin *Asclepius* as well as the practice of magic as a noble, even Christian art. Yates states:

Marsilio Ficino, who took such extreme care to present the revival of Plato and Neoplatonism as a movement which could be accorded with Christianity, allowed a fringe of magic to penetrate into this movement, thus inaugurating those philosophies of the Renaissance in which magical undercurrents are never far absent. The theory of the *prisca theologica*, of the piety and antiquity of Hermes Trismegistus, *priscus theologus* and, offered an excuse for Ficino's modern philosophical magic. The attraction of the *Asclepius* had probably already been exerting its pull in the earlier Renaissance, and when Ficino ... found a new revelation of the sanctity of Hermes and a confirmation of Lactantius' high opinion of him as the prophet of the '*magus* Son of God', he felt authorised to adopt the Lactantian view and tried to evade the Augustinian warning. ... We must not forget that the other *prisci theologi*, such as Orpheus or Zoroaster, were also *magi*, and also authorised by their antiquity revivals of forms of magic. Yet Hermes Trismegistus is the most important of the *prisci magi*, from the point of view of the incorporation of magic with philosophy.⁸³

c. Isaac Casaubon and the Deconstruction of the Hermetic Myth

In the seventeenth century, the brilliant Protestant scholar of Greek, Isaac Casaubon, demonstrated that the *Corpus* could not have been written before Moses. According to Jean-Pierre Mahé, in *Annales ecclesiastici*, Casaubon undermined their general credibility by showing that the texts could have never been translated from ancient Egyptian into Greek, as they were not

name of Christ. On the contrary, he deplores, as if it had already taken place, the future abolition of those things by the observance of which there was a resemblance of heaven, -- he bears witness to Christianity by a kind of mournful prophecy."

⁸¹ Saint Augustine, "Contra Faustum Manichaeum," *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. IV, ed. Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, trans. Rev. Richard Stothert (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprint 1996) 199, 200, 205, 206. See especially, *The City of God*, 16, 23-27.

⁸² *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 11-12. In *The City of God*, 18, 39, St. Augustine says: "Besides, what for the most part, was that memorable doctrine of theirs which was called wisdom but astronomy, and it may be some other sciences of that kind, which usually have more power to exercise men's wit than to enlighten their minds with true wisdom? As regards philosophy, which professes to teach men something which shall make them happy, studies of that kind flourished in those lands about the times of Mercury, whom they called Trismegistus, long before the sages and philosophers of Greece, but yet after Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, and even after Moses himself."

⁸³ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 58.

cited before the first Christian century. Furthermore, the texts used later Greek vocabulary, namely, αθθεντια, υλοτης ουσιωτης, etc.; the *Poimandres* or *Corpus Hermeticum* I, contained a number of anachronisms strongly resembling the Gospel of John as well as the fact that the texts used a number of loan terms from Plato.⁸⁴ Casaubon thought that the *Corpus* and the Sibylline Oracles were pseudepigraphical, authored by a Christian or corrupted by Gnostic Christian additions.⁸⁵ That is to say, the illustrious Hermes Trismegistus could not be included with the ancient sages, and his wisdom was even later than Jesus'. For traditional Christians, this meant that his knowledge was basically unreliable, due to its associations with Christian Gnostic heresy. According to the logic of emanationist Neoplatonism, such "late" knowledge could only be deficient knowledge. Therefore, the legendary Hermes became recognized as exactly that, a legend. Despite the unmasking of this gross intellectual miscalculation, occult sciences associated with Hermetism continued to influence the development of Western philosophic and scientific thinking. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, perhaps even due to its recognized associations to Christian heresies, Hermeticism experienced a revival amongst anti-Christian occultists.

It was in the atmosphere of Renaissance humanism that neo-Hermetism was born, an atmosphere of pessimistic fatalism similar to the second-century Graeco-Roman world. Renaissance humanists like Ficino and Pico attempted to harmonize Christianity with the hermetical writings, while attempting to dabble in its magic. With the re-discovery of the *Corpus*, Platonism, Neoplatonism, Kabbalah, *magia*, alchemy, etc., the great synthetic minds of the Academy began to search for what they hoped to be the underlying core of all religious traditions,⁸⁶ the *prisca theologica*. It was also in Florence's Platonic Academy that the fascination with a *philosophia perennis*, a philosophy that they believed reached back to some primordial source, thought to have its origins in Egypt, was born in the West. Even though the term was coined by Augustinus Steuchus in 1540, his sympathies with Ficino's project connect the term with the goals of the Platonic (and Hermetic) Academy.⁸⁷ The desire to rediscover the "source" or "origin" -- the Ur Religion that gave birth to all religions -- was revived in eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and continues to fascinate esotericists today.

⁸⁴ Jean-Pierre Mahé, *Hermes en Haute-Egypte* (Québec: Presse de l'Université Laval, 1982) 8.

⁸⁵ *Hermes en Haute-Egypte*, 9.

⁸⁶ "Renaissance Hermeticism and the Concept of Western Esotericism," *Gnosis and Hermeticism: From Antiquity to Modern Times*, 114.

⁸⁷ Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964) 50.

B. The Reformation of the World through Formal Magic

Primarily, the *Hermetica* reflect the discontent of the age, yet, are inextricably bound to it in so far as they tried to harmonize all of the various philosophical ideas that were popular during the second-century AD. These include Platonism, Neoplatonism, Stoicism, Judaism, Gnosticism⁸⁸ and, as suggested, important strands of Presocratic thought.⁸⁹ Similarly, the Renaissance was an age of discontent and known for its propensity to synthesize many seemingly disparate strains of thought. This synthesizing or syncretic drive helps to account for the contradictions within the movements as well as the sympathies between Ancient and Renaissance Hermetism (combined with Platonic and Neoplatonic thought), ancient and medieval Gnosticism but also New Age. Both ages (Ancient and Renaissance) were in fact looking for *experiential knowledge*, which would bring them beyond the impasse of their given intellectual framework to an authentic *gnosis* and certainty of salvation. The Hermetic writings promised a saving *gnosis*, based on a program of mystical ascent, after which one could hear the universal harmony described by the Pythagoreans and Orphics.

As suggested, ancient Hermetism is a monistic conception of reality, which is similar to New Age holism, where all is one and is “alive.” God, the Monad, is described simultaneously as Mind, Consciousness, Energy and Power (Cf. *CH*, III, 1, 19, 20). Like the Presocratic Empedocles, the *Corpus* claims that God is a sphere, supposedly because the head is spherical and contains the Mind (Cf. *CH* X, 11). Hermetism is, therefore, similar to Presocratic hylozoism or animism. Hylozoism was an ancient form of materialism, derived from the Greek words, *hyle* or “matter” and *zoë* or “life.” In hylozoism, all matter is believed to be endowed with divine life or spirit, and the human being is a divine microcosm of the divine macrocosm (i.e. as *God the cosmos*), where the material macrocosm is the totality of all there is. Hylozoic animism posits that matter and God exist co-eternally and that matter (or *hule*) is filled with spirit or Mind and is divine. For example, the Latin *Asclepius* says: “There was God and *hulē* (which we take as the Greek for ‘matter’), and attending matter was spirit, or rather spirit was in matter, but it was not in matter as it was in god nor as the things from which the world came were in god.” (*Asclepius*, 14) ... “But spirit stirs and governs all the forms in the world, each according to the nature allotted it by god. *Hulē* or matter, however, receives them all, <spirit> stirs and concentrates them all, and god governs them, apportioning to all things in the world as much as each one needs. He fills them all with spirit, breathing it into each thing according to the quality of its nature.” (*Asclepius*, 17)

⁸⁸ Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, 4.

⁸⁹ Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic, 343-347.

Yates intimates that Hermetism, like Gnosticism, was an unsuccessful attempt to overcome the decadence of the Roman Empire, and break through its fatalism, by returning to a supposedly more “pure” Egyptian period. Ironically, many of the Renaissance imitators of the Roman Empire adopted this (unbeknownst to them) unsuccessful philosophy, and with it the fatalism of the Roman Empire, in the hopes of breaking through the cultural and theological impasse of Scholasticism. By identifying itself with the supposedly “most ancient” knowledge and magic of the Egyptian priests, the *Corpus Hermeticum* seemed to elevate the degenerate or decadent strains of “Greek” philosophy contained within it to a “higher,” “purer,” more “holy” level. The Renaissance *magi*, being of the same synthesizing and fatalistic mindset of the second-century, believed that they had come to possess something that would help them to attain the “Philosopher’s Stone” and escape fate. According to the late Ioan P. Couliano in *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*:

In Renaissance thought, the concept of “nature” is much broader than our own, since it also includes all sorts of nonquantifiable existences -- from the gods, heroes, and demons of Neoplatonism to the ‘rudimentary beings’ of Paracelsus -- which we know nothing about for want of ever having met or observed them. Certainly our concept of “nature” has been scrupulously expurgated of those entities. On the other hand, “nature” in the Renaissance was overpopulated with them, and magic prided itself on turning their exceptional qualities to account. In the second place, natural determinism, in Renaissance thought, did not concede any margin of chance. Everything bore the rigid and implacable stamp of destiny, free will itself being a mere invention of the theologians which must be blindly endorsed. In our day we believe our encounters and our feelings are due to chance; on the other hand, a man of the Renaissance would show us, horoscope in hand, that they were predetermined by the position of the planets in the zodiac on the day of our birth and the day of our encounter. He might even do more, helping our will to realize its secret or public inclinations. When someone finds himself poor while wishing to be rich, to be in love with a person who despises him, to have powerful enemies who destroy his plans, or when the weather is good when it should have rained, or vice versa, he resorts to magic. The human condition has its limits, which the magician can transcend.⁹⁰

Like the ancient *magus*, the Renaissance *magus* believed that he could reform his world and himself through formal magic, i.e. specific rites, rituals, ceremonies and formulas. He thought that this would counter-act what he understood to be a form of decadence within Christian culture, but also the decadence within his own personality. Through the power of his divinized will, formal magic would help him attain the *Beatific Vision*, for which he longed.⁹¹ The *Beatific Vision* is the word used, more often in the West, for the doctrine of deification by grace or

⁹⁰ Ioan P. Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, trans. Margaret Cook (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) 110-111.

⁹¹ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 220-222. We will discuss the “personality reform” aspect of hermetic magic at later stage, when we deal more specifically with the problem of Giordano Bruno.

theosis;⁹² however, the Hermetic Renaissance vision was not a “face-to-face” vision with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. It was an astrological vision of the heavens based on the principles of sympathetic and astrological magic placed within the framework of hylozoic pantheism.

Because the Renaissance did not just retrieve ancient pagan sources, but also ancient Christian sources, this confusion was understandable. Vladimir Lossky, in *The Vision of God*, states that also many of the influential early Alexandrian (i.e. Egyptian) fathers, like Clement and Origen, over assimilated the Platonic and Gnostic ideals of contemplation, mistaking it for Christian deification or transfiguration, and thereby separated theory (*theoria*) from actual life experience.⁹³ For Clement, a convert who displays a keen knowledge of the pagan Mystery Religions and philosophy, *gnosis* (knowledge) of God often seems to eclipse love (*agape*) or being in a loving relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Although Clement was not a Hermeticist, Lossky points out that not only does Clement mention the writings of Hermes Trismegistus in the *Stromata* (fragments), but also his “notion of *gnosis* reminds us of certain passages in *Poimandres*, [from] the collection of so-called hermetic tracts written in Egypt, in which knowledge is presented as a deifying formula by which one is raised to the sphere of the fixed stars. ... Thus the theme of the contemplation of God which must inevitably be raised in Christian thought is presented first in a form not free from accretions alien to Christianity.”⁹⁴ Lossky believes that Clement’s ideal of the intellectualistic contemplative was more a literary fiction, drawn from the pagan ideal of the philosopher with which he was familiar, than true to life.⁹⁵

To achieve divinity was a special concern of the Renaissance, but this was more formulated within the categories of ancient pagan Hermetism than orthodox Christianity. The nineteenth century historian of the Renaissance, Jacob Burckhardt states: “Of the rest it may perhaps be said with some approach to accuracy that, after they became familiar with Antiquity, they substituted for holiness -- the Christian ideal of life -- the cult of historical greatness.” For example, crimes like perjury were excused by citing the immorality of *great* men, like Julius Cæsar.⁹⁶ Hence, Christian deification or transfiguration, which concerned the restoration of the full image and likeness of God originally bestowed to humanity and whose effects were a personal life of holiness, a life that all Christians could imitate, was replaced with an elitist and

⁹² See *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 2548 (New York: Doubleday, 1995) 671. See also Vladimir Lossky, *The Vision of God*, trans. Asheleigh Moorehouse (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1983).

⁹³ *The Vision of God*, 53.

⁹⁴ *The Vision of God*, 54.

⁹⁵ *The Vision of God*, 54-55.

⁹⁶ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (New York: Random House, 2002) 301.

intellectualistic ideal of achieving the “immortality of the gods” or “poets,” represented more in pagan myth and poetry of the heroes than biblical narrative and stories of the saints.

C. Marsilio Ficino

1. *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda*

This basically heterodox understanding of Christian deification would be appealing to Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola, mentioned above. At the beginning of this chapter, we discussed how Ficino, the leader of the Florence Platonic Academy, translated both the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the complete works of Plato for Cosimo de Medici (+ 1464). Due to his influence, the *Corpus* and other Hermetic texts became increasingly accepted by various Renaissance philosophers. Not only did Ficino concern himself with the translation of the abovementioned ancient texts, but he also wrote many other texts that were influenced by his study of both Platonism and Hermetism. D. P. Walker in *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* says that Ficino’s book, *De vita coelitus comparanda* (1489), had an enormous impact on Renaissance *magia*, by offering a cosmological and anthropological framework within which to develop it. Ficino used the traditional tripartite division of the human person as body, soul and intellect (*mens*). Ficino presented the book as a commentary on the works of Plotinus, especially *Enneads*, IV, 3, xi, where Plotinus makes a reference to how the ancient sages erected statues and shrines in order to draw down and capture within them “the divine presence.”⁹⁷ This section concerns his concept of the “World Soul” as well as how the nature of “all” entities participate in the Divine Being.⁹⁸ Plotinus’ reference is similar to the famous “god-making passage” in *Asclepius* 37, to be discussed, and is important to understand Ficino’s advocacy of talisman magic. This is a type of magic that supposedly energizes objects with either celestial or chthonic powers.

The pantheist-animist philosophical framework propagated in the *Corpus Hermeticum* allows one to perform talismanic magic based on the law of correspondences. The law of correspondences is based on the analogy that the human person is a microcosm of the macrocosm and that nature is *sympathetic*. The concept of *sympathy* is then related to the concept of *causality*. Von Stuckrad says:

If all parts of the cosmos are regarded as being linked to each other – philosophy of nature speaks of *monism* or even *holism* – then the principles of causality have a simultaneous effect upon all parts. The connection between various levels of the cosmos, even if these are naturally subject to causality, can be interpreted as a connection of correspondences. For esotericism in general and

⁹⁷ Cf. D.P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic: from Ficino to Campanella* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1958) 41.

⁹⁸ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 64-65.

astrology in particular the consequence is that the stars, which are just as much part of the world-soul as men, stand in a dynamic relationship of correspondence to the terrestrial Earth. The observation of their moments provides information about developments on Earth.⁹⁹

It was based upon this framework that Ficino built his own system. Paul Oskar Kristeller, in *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance*, states that although Ficino was always willing to submit to the authority of the Church and willing to abandon his more heterodox propositions, “he comes close to a concept of natural religion” and in many ways prefigures the later “Deists and other advocates of a universal religion.”¹⁰⁰ Walker says that for Ficino, the magic that Hermes Trismegistus advocates is not “bad” demonic magic, but “good” magic, which comes from his own perceived superior insight into the nature of the All and his own estimation of his “good” intent. For Ficino, the celestial images needed to create talismans are not connected to demons, but to the Ideas that descend from the World Intellect “through the ‘seminal reasons’ in the Soul of the World, to the material forms in the Body of the World.”¹⁰¹ Yates states:

Thus Ficino’s commentary on the Plotinus passage becomes, by devious ways, a justification for the use of talismans, and of the magic of the *Asclepius*, on Neoplatonic grounds -- on grounds that the ancient sages and the modern users of talismans are not invoking devils but have a deep understanding of the nature of the All, and of the degrees by which the reflections of the Divine Ideas descend into the world here below. ... *De vita coelitus comparanda* is a commentary only secondarily on Plotinus and primarily on Trismegistus, or rather on the passage in the *Asclepius* in which he described the magical Egyptian worship.¹⁰²

Although Ficino’s conception of the world was strictly hierarchical “in which each being occupies its places, and has its degrees of perfection, beginning with God on the top” and ending with “shapeless primal matter,” his conception was neither merely Neoplatonic nor Hermetic, but his own creative interpretation. Kristeller says that Ficino intentionally revised Plotinus’ conception in order give the human soul a leading position, which later served as the basis for Pico’s manifesto on the dignity of man. “The soul is truly the mean of all things created by God, he tells us. It is the middle between higher and lower beings, sharing some its attributes with the former, and some with the latter.” Ficino’s understanding of the Scale of Being is not static, but a “dynamic unity,” held together “by active forces and affinities.” His adaptation of the Neoplatonic/Stoic doctrine of the world soul and astrology, which emphasized the planetary influences on the soul, served as the foundation for his reinterpretation of the microcosm/macrocosm analogy.

⁹⁹ *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*, 17.

¹⁰⁰ *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance*, 48.

¹⁰¹ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 67.

¹⁰² *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 66.

Now since for Ficino thought has an active influence upon its objects, and since love, according to Plato's *Symposium*, is an active force that binds all things together, and since the human soul extends its thought and love to all things from the highest to the lowest, the soul becomes once more, and in a new sense, the center of the universe. The soul is the greatest of all miracles in nature, for it combines all things, is the center of all things and possesses the forces of all. Therefore, it may be rightly called the center of nature, middle term of all things, the bond and juncture of the universe.¹⁰³

According to Ficino, *Eros* or Love is the basis of magic. As we will see more clearly towards the end of this chapter, Ficino's erotic understanding of magic is based on his acceptance of the Stoic doctrine of universal pneumatic sympathy, where "Love" for the other attracts things based on their inherent similarity or *sympathy*. Hate or repulsion is merely a negative attraction or *antipathy*. Couliano explains: "Love is the name given to the power that ensures the continuity of the uninterrupted chain of beings; *pneuma* is the name given to the common and unique substance that places these beings in mutual relationship. Because of *Eros*, and through it all, all of nature is turned into a great sorceress."¹⁰⁴ Ficino's erotic magic is both inter-subjective and spiritual, or pneumatic. It functions "by virtue of the law of pneumatic interaction between individuals," which includes astrological influences.¹⁰⁵

Basing herself upon the work of D. P. Walker,¹⁰⁶ although he was influenced by Plotinus, Yates insists that Ficino did not develop his theory of pneumatic sympathy from Plotinus' *Enneads*, on which Ficino claims to be commenting. He most probably derived this theory from the *Picatrix*, having owned a copy, and the *Asclepius*. The *Picatrix* is a book of demonic magic, where stars are connected to demons. It viewed necromancy as the height and summit of "science," and explained how one could draw down celestial influences or powers and make talismans.¹⁰⁷ As we will see, the author of the *Picatrix* probably derived his theory through layers of Stoic and Presocratic thought embedded within the larger *Hermetica*.

However, instead of seeing the planets in a "demonic" manner, he envisioned them as "natural forces" or "energies" that could be drawn down and used.¹⁰⁸ Through Ficino's influence, the ancient understanding of "demons" and "entities" begins to be transformed into psychological qualities and projections. His work sets the stage for the eighteenth and nineteenth century occult revivals, the psychologization of reality, and through these, the New Age Movement, especially

¹⁰³ *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance*, 43.

¹⁰⁴ *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, 87.

¹⁰⁵ *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, 107.

¹⁰⁶ *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, 36, 40-41.

¹⁰⁷ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 69.

¹⁰⁸ Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge University Press, 1990), 146; *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 73.

as it was formulated by Carl Jung. In many ways, Ficino's work established the basis for Jung's psychological understanding of alchemy. For example, the bestselling Jungian author Thomas Moore, in *Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life*, attempts to re-introduce a more alchemical understanding of spirituality and healing common in the Renaissance. For example, when speaking about depression, he reintroduces the concept of melancholy and its traditional esoteric connection to the god Saturn. Moore makes allusions to Ficino and shows the continued connection between Renaissance Hermetism and New Age Hermeticism. He says:

Polytheistic religions, which see gods and goddesses everywhere, offer useful guidance toward finding spiritual values in the world. You don't have to be a polytheist in order to expand your spirituality in this way. In Renaissance Italy, leading thinkers who were pious and monotheistic in their Christian devotion still turned to Greek polytheism for a wider range of spirituality.¹⁰⁹

2. Magic as an "Art"

In the Bible, the redemption of Creation is related to the redemption of humanity (cf. Gen 3:17; Rom 8:22). However, in the Renaissance, the redemption of both nature and humanity came to be increasingly understood as a sole human responsibility. The microcosm/macrocosm analogy, which had been interpreted theistically, came under pressure and began to collapse. Some Renaissance men began to interpret redemption as a "magical act on the part of man rather than a forensic act on God's part."¹¹⁰ Art became to be seen less as a gift from God and more as man's tool to achieve human salvation.

Renaissance music, poetry, literature and visual art could also be considered talismanic. All of these "arts" could be created with the intention of transmitting talismanic images, which were able to transform the imagination and, hence, desires of the recipients during contemplation. Yates suggests that many of the great works of Renaissance art, for example from Botticelli or Raphael, might have been painted for this purpose.¹¹¹ Renaissance magic also functioned as a system of memory and art became an occult tool. The magician used talismanic images (be they auditory, pictorial or verbal) to transfigure his limited human mind to mirror that of the *cosmos*. After committing the talismanic pictures of the *cosmos* to memory, he could later manipulate or use them at will. All the magician had to do was to look within himself. This is because he believed that the knowledge of his own being was proportionately analogous to knowledge of the *cosmos*, which was increasingly understood as the Totality.¹¹² In operating on himself, he could

¹⁰⁹ Thomas Moore, *Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life* (New York: HarperPerennial, 1994) 241.

¹¹⁰ *Spirituality and the Occult*, 34.

¹¹¹ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 104, 333.

¹¹² *Spirituality and the Occult*, 34.

consider himself to be the architect of his own redemption as well as the savior of the entire world. It is for this reason that in the Renaissance and ensuing periods, like the Enlightenment and Romanticism, art (painting, poetry and music) was understood as a tool that could be used in the redemptive process. As Gibbons says:

The underlying attitude is autoplasmic, seeking control over the world by 'self-manipulation' instead of 'by operating directly on the external environment'. Cosmic redemption was simply the most general instance of one of the basic laws of magic, the law of contiguity [i.e. correspondences]. In its simplest form, this law suggests that the part contains the whole. It follows from this that an act performed on one part of an organism will produce effects on the whole. Man is a part of the cosmos: an operation performed on or in him will therefore affect the entire universe. Since the great world around us is simply a reflection of the little world within, changes in the spiritual state of man are accompanied by changes in the physical state of the universe.¹¹³

Since magic is a system of memory, or an "art," this means that memory forms an intermediary link between *Eros* [i.e. sexual desire] and magical operations. This is not to say that art or memory per se are magical. Memory is essential for learning and for any kind of spiritual development. Nevertheless, for the Renaissance magician, talismanic art was not just to be looked at, or music heard, but "reflected on and remembered within,"¹¹⁴ in order to manipulate it. Memory and the imagination became instruments to increase one's power, when deemed appropriate. Memory was used to store phantasms or appearances arising from the imagination,¹¹⁵ which were later evoked through erotic desire. The imagination could be manipulated for the benefit of the *magus* to seduce a potential admirer, or to curse an enemy, etc. The magician became a magical operator, because he was able to effectively manipulate his own and another's desires, or will, through the stimulation of the images he created or suggested to the imagination, which had been stored in the memory. For example, the modern "art" of advertising also stimulates desires through the creation and manipulation of images in the targeted consumer's imagination and, as such, might be considered a weak form of natural magic.

Ficino not only attempted to reconcile Hermetic magic with traditional Christianity, but also Orphic magic. He was known to sing incantatory "Orphic Hymns" to the sun god, Apollo, who was conceived as a force of nature in the same way that the Stoics conceived Zeus as corresponding to the Universal Reason or *Pneuma* that pervades all things. These hymns were written during the same time as the *Corpus*, and were also erroneously believed to be of a primordial Antiquity, written by Orpheus himself. Ficino imagined that the music of the

¹¹³ *Spirituality and the Occult*, 24-25.

¹¹⁴ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 76.

¹¹⁵ *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, 32.

planetary spheres and universal harmony taught by Pythagoras could be recreated. “Thus one could sing Sun hymns, or Jupiter hymns, or Venus hymns attuned to those planets, and this, being re-enforced by the invocation of their names and powers, was a way of drawing down their influences.”¹¹⁶ Hearing the universal harmony was a sign of one’s own divinization; however, during evil times, when man did not conform to “the laws of Nature,” the harmony was blocked. As we will see, this meant that a new world cycle would need *to be initiated* to bind the “evil” influences that prevented the harmony from being heard.

D. Giovanni Pico della Mirandola

1. Combining Hermetic Magic with the Kabbalah

After Ficino, one of the most influential Renaissance *magi* was Pico della Mirandola, mentioned above. Pico’s idea was to inaugurate a “new” type of natural or sympathetic magic on a par with the natural sciences of his day, namely, astrology and alchemy. He also wanted to develop an “all-comprehensive system of knowledge, intended to embrace and reconcile the most different rational and religious disciplines.”¹¹⁷ He based his new magic on Ficino’s *De vita coelitus comparanda* and the Jewish Kabbalah. Pico deemed natural magic inefficient, i.e. unable to contact archangels.¹¹⁸ In other words, Ficino’s sympathetic magic did not go far enough. Pico added the use of the Kabbalah and talismans, which were “energized” with the power of magical Hebrew characters and figures, but also “good angels” in order to unite the “virtues in heaven with those on earth, or ‘marries the world’.”¹¹⁹ This was meant to strengthen Ficino’s natural magic. He notes that the magical principles of Pico’s own Kabbalistic angelic magic are the same as those of the *Picatrix*’s demonic magic, even though both Pico and Ficino were careful to conceal this.

According to Yates, Pico’s kabbalistic magic operated through the intellectual (or invisible) part of the soul as opposed to natural magic’s operation on the natural *spiritus* or affections. The intellectual operation happens when the Kabbalist’s soul separates from his body (i.e. the mystical ascent of the soul, or an “out of body experience”), freeing him to communicate with the archangels.¹²⁰ In *Hasidism: between Ecstasy and Magic*, Moshe Idel, Professor of Jewish thought at Hebrew University, calls this technique, known in Hassidic circles, *devequt* or

¹¹⁶ Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, 78.

¹¹⁷ Fabrizio Lelli, “Picco Della Mirandola,” *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006) 950.

¹¹⁸ Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, 91. Yates quotes from Pico, *Opera*, 105: “Nulla potest esse operatio Magica alicuius efficaciae, nisi annexum habeat opus Cabalae explicitum uel implicitum.” And, “Nulla nomina ut significatiua, & in quantum nomina sunt, singula & per se sumpta, in Magico opere uirtutem habere possunt, nisi sint Hebraica, uel inde proxime deriuata.”

¹¹⁹ Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, 88. Cf. also D.P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic: from Ficino to Campanella*, 36.

¹²⁰ Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, 99.

“cleaving to God.”¹²¹ Although similar to a mystical experience, it has a magical structure. Yates clarifies:

It is this relationship of the *Sephiroth* with the spheres of the cosmos, which makes of Cabala a theosophy related to the universe. And it is this relationship which makes it possible to speak of Cabalist magic as the completion of natural magic, or a higher form of natural magic reaching higher spiritual forces which are yet organically related to the stars.¹²²

However, unlike the pagan forms of Hermetic magic found in the *Picatrix*, Renaissance Kabbalah endeavored to steer clear of demons, or angels with evil intent, as well as protect the operator from their potential evil seduction.¹²³ That is to say, the mystical ascent through the spheres could go wrong when the *magus* failed to properly “purify” himself through ascetic practices. These practices mortified fleshly desires, onto which demons (bad angels) could bind or attach themselves.¹²⁴ Asceticism was required of the more Platonic magician, because demons -- sometimes understood as evil thought-projections, which exist on an astral level -- could bind themselves to and manipulate the operator’s inclinations and desires without his awareness. The less one was bound by either human or superhuman desires, the more “free” one was to operate instead of being “operated on.” Hence, “stoic” indifference and the annihilation of desires, which are located in the “flesh,” provided the magical operator with the freedom to bind others and from being bound oneself. The soul ascended through the spheres of the ten *Sephiroth*, “ten divine structures which bring the world into being through emanation and make up the different levels of reality.”¹²⁵ These are often mystically conceived as the Tree of Life or Supernal Adam. Pico also understood these in relations to the planets and constellations, as did many gnostic Jewish Kabbalists, suggested above.¹²⁶

2. Theosophical-Theurgical and Ecstatic Kabbalah

“Kabbalah” means “received tradition” and has to do with an oral tradition of interpretation and experience, which in the past was often only associated with mystical and esoteric currents. According to Idel, in *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, “there are two major trends in Kabbalah: the theosophical-theurgical and the ecstatic,” which he distinguishes through a phenomenological

¹²¹ Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995) 86-89.

¹²² *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 101.

¹²³ Frances Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge, 1979) 80.

¹²⁴ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 100.

¹²⁵ Alan Unterman, *Dictionary of Jewish Lore and Legend* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991) 175.

¹²⁶ Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism: and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (New York: Schocken Books, 1971) 263. For example, there is an idea in Jewish mystical tradition that claims that the 12 tribes of Israel really correspond to the 12 signs of the Zodiac.

analysis of Kabbalistic texts and the Kabbalists' own self-understanding.¹²⁷ Instead of focusing on “schools,” as did Gershom Scholem, his groundbreaking work has helped to distinguish trends within the historical development of Kabbalah and avoid bunching all Kabbalism together as an aberrant and heretical form of “Jewish Gnosticism.” Idel claims that the theosophical-theurgical type of Kabbalah is “a theory of the elaborate structure of the divine world – and the ritualistic and experiential way of relating to the divinity in order to induce a state of harmony. This is a highly theocentric form of religiousness that, while not ignoring the needs of the human being, tends to conceive of religious perfection as instrumental for exerting effective influence on high.”¹²⁸ It is more “exoteric” and is a form of open and public interpretation of the Torah and the *halakhah*. The *halakhah* refers to the commandments and the Jewish rabbinical legal tradition, which regulates religious and social practice. Hence, the theosophical-theurgical form of knowledge was more acceptable to orthodox Jewish Rabbis:

The theurgical approach was part of the classical rabbinic conception of the commandments and could justifiably be regarded as an important rationale for the *mizvot* that, *inter alia*, helped motivate the persistent observance of the commandments by Jews. The theocentric attitude assumed ‘open’ theology or theosophy, conditioned by the dynamics of human activity centered on the *halakhah*; it was a strictly nomian system and, consequently, exoterically open to all Jews and therefore obligatory. The theurgical performance of *mizvot* did not include dangerous or ecstatic moments and could be regarded as part of what Max Kadushin described as ‘normal mysticism’.¹²⁹

What Idel terms as “ecstatic Kabbalah” is another matter. This type of Kabbalah is “highly anthropocentric, envisioning the mystical experience of the individual as itself the *summum bonum*, regardless of the possible impact of this mystical status on the inner harmony of the Divine,” or community.¹³⁰ This ecstatic type of Kabbalah mirrors, therefore, more Hermetic and magical forms of ecstasy. Although its original practitioners were Jewish, ecstatic Kabbalah is related to contemporary secularized anomian expressions of Kabbalah, deriving from the occultist Éliphas Lévi and the ceremonial magical order, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.¹³¹ There are also connections to the New Age Jewish Kabbalism of Yehuda Berg.¹³² In his *The Power of Kabbalah*, we get the sense that by learning how to “channel” and control desire, one can “get what one wants.” This aligns Berg’s “Kabbalah” more closely to magic than to higher

¹²⁷ Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) xi.

¹²⁸ *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, xi.

¹²⁹ *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, xiii.

¹³⁰ *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, xi.

¹³¹ Nevill Drury, *The Dictionary of the Esoteric* (London: Watkins Publishing, 2002) 166. The Golden Dawn used the “Tree of Life as a matrix or grid for comparing the archetypal images of different mythologies that could be employed in ceremonial magic. For example, the merciful father (Chesed) has parallels in other pantheons, namely Odin (Scandinavia); Zeus (Greece); Jupiter (Rome), and Ra (Egypt).”

¹³² Yehuda Berg, *The Power of Kabbalah* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2003) xx.

forms of biblical interpretation. Another example of this popularized form of Kabbalah is Melinda Ribner's *New Age Judaism: Ancient Wisdom for the Modern World*,¹³³ which is endorsed by the New Age author of *The Celestine Prophecy*, James Redfield.

It is possible that the Christian *magi* had access to both traditions, which had been disseminated from Provence, perhaps through Ramon Lull (1235-1315). Lull, Lully or Lullus was a Spanish Christian mystic and evangelist, who had visited Provence during his travels.¹³⁴ Before the Renaissance, however, no detailed information or documentation about the movement exists. Because of the acceptance of the Kabbalah by many Renaissance Christians, who believed that through it they could prove Jesus' divinity and used it for proselytizing purposes, the first critical response was initiated by more traditional Jews, namely, Rabbi Elijah del Medigo and Rabbi Yehudah Messer Leon. These two men were Aristotelian philosophers in the tradition of Maimonides. Rabbi del Medigo, whose approach was similar to Lorenzo Valla, noted the affinities between the Kabbalah coming out of Provence and Spain with Neoplatonism. This led him to conclude that the Kabbalah was a late phenomenon. These resemblances, however, led to other conclusions by Platonic Christian *magi* like Pico, who saw Hermes as a contemporary of Moses, and tended to "interpret the Kabbalah Platonically ... Those same resemblances that helped Del Medigo to postdate Kabbalah helped his contemporaries to regard it as a source of Platonism, and hence as of greater antiquity."¹³⁵ Pico and Del Medigo were in contact with each other. Although Del Medigo warned Pico about "adopting quasi-gnostic forms of thought," and creating a "neoplatonized Christian version of Jewish Kabbalah," Pico ignored his warnings. He believed that the Kabbalah established the link between "rational and religious systems of thought,"¹³⁶ which would allow him to construct a comprehensive philosophy.

3. The Dignity of Man, the Magus

Through the correspondence between Del Medigo and Pico, we see that Renaissance Judaism contained the same Aristotelian vs. Platonic/rational vs. intuitive tensions as Renaissance Christianity. Like their Jewish counter-parts, the men of Florence's Platonic Academy, to which both Ficino and Pico belonged, were dissatisfied with the results of rationalistic Scholasticism.

¹³³ Melinda Ribner, *New Age Judaism: Ancient Wisdom for the Modern World* (Deerfield Beach, Florida: Simcha Press, 2000) 17. James Redfield, the author of *The Celestine Prophecy*, endorses Ribner's New Age Judaism. Ribner claims that pantheism "opens her thought up" to everyone: We may think that we believe in God, but often it is only what we want or think God should be that we believe in. We want God on our terms, and for many that is merely a more romanticized or improved version of themselves: God should be everything we want Him to be or we do not believe in Him. He should protect and love us. He should be good to us. It is popular to say that 'God is love.' That is a Christian concept. The Torah says, 'God does good, and creates evil.' God in Judaism is not something sweet and sentimental but rather the underlying reality that encompasses good and bad."

¹³⁴ *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, 11-18.

¹³⁵ *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 2.

¹³⁶ "Picco Della Mirandola," *The Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, 951.

They wanted to replace it with another philosophy that allowed for a more personal and deifying experience. The *Corpus Hermeticum* not only provides the philosophical framework for envisioning oneself as a god, but is also a kind of manual for how one goes about procuring such an experience. For example, in *CH X*, entitled “The Key,” meaning the hermeneutical key to understand the nature of God, Hermes tells Tat that when the soul is in the body, it cannot be deified. The soul is only able to become deified after it separates from the body in an out-of-body experience, rises through the celestial spheres, and is able to take in the totality of the *cosmos* from on high, yet, “without leaving the earth behind.” Hermes says in *CH X*, 25, “Therefore, we must dare to say that the human on earth is a mortal god, but that god in heaven is an immortal human. Through these two, then, cosmos and human, all things exist, but they all exist by action of the one.” In *CH XI*, the initiate is told that unless he can make himself “equal to god, [he] cannot understand god; like is understood by like.”

In this passage, God is equal to the *cosmos*. The experience is put within the context of “understanding,” or as a mental or contemplative exercise. The presumption of making oneself equal to God, with the ability to imagine oneself as God, the *cosmos*, is presented as a necessary step towards divinization. After the soul separates from the body, the deifying experience comes when the soul sees itself in the Divine Cosmic Mind, (*CH*, XIII, 13) which is, then, interpreted as the disciple’s re-birth into a “god.” The master Hermes tells his disciple. “Do you not know that you have been born a god and a child of the one, as I, too, have?” (*CH*, XIII, 14). Because Hermes Trismegistus has already had such an experience, he is in the position to transmit it to his disciple, Tat. This experience was, however, most probably understood within a Platonic or Neoplatonic framework that conceived of reality as a scale of Being that had its source in the realm of ideal forms.¹³⁷

It is towards this Hermetic experience of “salvation” that Pico’s work is aimed. This is obvious in Pico’s *Oration on the Dignity of Man* or *Oratio de hominis dignitate*. The *Oration* is one of the most famous and influential works of the Renaissance and considered by many to be its “Manifesto.”¹³⁸ It also became, according to Yates, “the great charter of Renaissance magic,” lending support to the acceptance of the magical scheme of self-divinization within some heterodox Christian circles.¹³⁹ The *Oration* was originally planned as an opening speech of a public disputation held in Rome in 1486. At this disputation, Pico hoped to prove in 900 theses

¹³⁷ C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960) 10-11.

¹³⁸ Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Renaissance Thought and its Sources*, ed. Michael Mooney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979) 178.

¹³⁹ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 86.

that formal magic, i.e. with rites, rituals, ceremonies and formulas, and especially magical uses of the Kabbalah, was compatible with Christianity.¹⁴⁰

According to Kristeller in *Renaissance Thought and its Sources* in *The Oration*, Pico claims that the human person, unlike all other creatures, shares all of the gifts that God originally gave to individual creatures. “Man, therefore, has no clearly determined essence or nature. He is neither celestial nor earthly, neither mortal nor immortal. On the contrary, he may *become all of this through his own will*. The Creator gave him the germs of every sort of life. Depending on whatever potentiality he developed, he may become a plant, an animal, a celestial being, an angel, or he may even be unified with God himself. Man therefore possesses all possibilities within himself. It is his task to overcome the lower forms of life and to elevate himself toward God. (Italics mine).”¹⁴¹ Pico hoped to establish for himself a bridge between heaven and earth through “the right use of natural substances in accordance with the principles of sympathetic magic.”¹⁴²

It is, therefore, significant that Pico opens his *Oration* with a text found in *Asclepius* 6. Pico says that he had been reading the records of a Muslim sage, Abdul the Saracen. When this man was asked what he considered to be the “most worthy thing of wonder” “on the world’s stage”, Abdul exclaimed that there was “nothing more wonderful than man.” Pico says that “Mercury,” Hermes’ Roman counterpart, held the same opinion when he said, “a great wonder, Asclepius, is man.”¹⁴³ By using this passage from the *Asclepius* to open his speech, Pico clearly assumed that Mercury or Hermes’s opinion would hold great weight with his audience, even though in the end, it did not. Unlike Augustine, Pico saw no conflict between the *Asclepius* and traditional Christianity. On the one hand, Pico uses the passage as a positive affirmation of his position; however, he is clever enough to not elaborate on it.

Perhaps he had something to conceal. In fact, further down in the text (i.e. *Asclepius* 6), Mercury/Hermes not only states that “man is a great wonder,” but also that he should be “worshipped and honored.” Unlike other brutes, man is able to become a god and shares his origin with that of demons. Displaying a more Gnostic, i.e. pessimistic, view of matter and human nature, the *Asclepius* claims that not only is man “conjoined to the gods by a kindred divinity,” but also inwardly despises everything that is earthly.

Man ‘has been put in the happier place of middle status so that he might cherish those beneath him and be cherished by those above him. He cultivates the earth; he swiftly mixes into the elements; he plumbs the depths of the sea in the keenness of his mind. Everything is permitted

¹⁴⁰ *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 148.

¹⁴¹ *Renaissance Thought and its Sources*, 174-175.

¹⁴² *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 88.

¹⁴³ Pico della Mirandola, *On the Dignity of Man*, trans. Charles Glenn Wallis (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1998) 3.

him: heaven itself seems not too high, for he measures it in his clever thinking as if it were nearby. No misty air dims the concentration of his thought; no thick earth obstructs his work; no abysmal deep of water blocks his lofty view. He is everything, and he is everywhere.’¹⁴⁴ (*Asclepius*, 6)

As Kristeller shows, Pico derived his understanding of human nature from this passage in *Asclepius* 6. Although there are certain parallels with the traditional Christian conception of human nature, especially the belief that the human being was originally created with exceptional almost divine dignity (cf. Ps 82:6; Jn 10:34), Pico’s “Renaissance Manifesto” re-introduced a more pagan understanding of human nature into the western tradition and served to continue to put pressure on divine transcendence. It did this by by-passing the traditional doctrine of original sin and implying that deification or transfiguration might be a product of human effort alone. Furthermore, in the great Renaissance *magi*, we see the intellectual collapse of the divine transcendence into the realm of created immanence, although this is somewhat mitigated by their loyalty to the Platonic world of ideal forms.

Pico’s version of “human dignity” has caused much confusion within certain sectors of Christianity itself. The confusion concerns what constitutes a truly Christian conception of the human person, which, on the one hand, accepts the reality and effects of sin but, on the other hand, affirms God’s ultimate plan of salvation, which includes a process of transfiguration or *theosis*. Although humans are expected to help in the process of their own perfection by developing virtues, traditional Christian deification or transfiguration occurs through God’s grace (Cf. St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 3, 19, 1 and St. Athanasius, *De Incarnatione*, 54), entailing the healing and recovery of the full image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26), which the first man and woman had damaged by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and their expulsion from the paradisiacal garden (Gen 3). Given the confusion, after the Reformation, Christians in the West took either Pico’s position (e.g. contemporary esoteric Christianity), or denied its possibility (e.g. orthodox Protestantism) or sought to avoid the topic in theological discourse (e.g. Roman Catholicism). The contemporary New Age understanding of the human person and the process of divinization displays more similarities to Pico’s and is, therefore, more magical. Given the importance of the notion of divinization in New Age and our suggestion that it is connected to the magical Hermetic understanding of divinization, we will now focus our attention on the Hermetic material.

¹⁴⁴ *Hermetica*, *Asclepius* [6], 69-70.

III. Hermetic Salvation and Theodicy

A. Mind and Will

According to *Corpus Hermeticum* IV, although God shared reason with all human beings, Mind, which is co-equal to the Divine Mind, is only given to those who immerse themselves in the Divine Mind and realize the purpose of their existence.¹⁴⁵ In *Corpus Hermeticum* XII, Mind is said to be the “very essence of god.” Hence, the mind in humans *is* God; “among humans, therefore, some are gods and their humanity is near to divinity” (CH XII, 1). This means to say that not all humans possess the dignity of divine Mind. Ignorance, therefore, is the greatest vice. Hence, those who do not or are unable to have this gnostic experience of salvation miss the boat, so to speak. “Those human souls that do not have mind as a guide are affected in the same way as souls of animals without reason,” and are annihilated (CH, XII, 4), because they lack higher consciousness or Mind.

In the Hermetic-Neoplatonic framework, God is essentially conceived of as Mind, but also as Will. Antoine Faivre says, in fact, in the *Hermetica*, “the notion frequently arises that God’s activity is his will, and that his essence consists in ‘willing’ all things.”¹⁴⁶ *Corpus Hermeticum* X, “The Key,” says that “God’s activity is will, and his essence is to will all things to be.”¹⁴⁷ Therefore, with the acceptance of Hermetism within Western Christianity, the traditional Thomistic emphasis on God’s Goodness and Reason was inverted to emphasize God’s Will and Omnipotence. This shows similarities between the Hermetic concept of God and William of Ockham’s (1288- 1348) nominalist approach, adopted by many Protestant denominations at the Reformation. The similarities of these two approaches might explain why Hermetism was popular amongst many Protestants, especially in the Enlightenment, although this deserves further research. Faivre says that the emphasis on the primacy of the divine will is carried on by Hermetical German theosophy. “In this respect the influence of Jacob Boehme in German philosophy up to Hegel, Schopenhauer, and even beyond is well known. In pagan *gnosis*, the will is a necessary attribute of all who would see the light; the would-be philosopher must want to

¹⁴⁵ CH, IV, 3, 4. For example, Tat tells Hermes that only certain humans receive divine mind. Hermes replies: “He wanted it put between souls, my child, as a prize for them to contest.” According to Hermes, God-Mind, “filled a great mixing bowl with it and sent it below, appointing a herald whom he commanded to make the following proclamation to human hearts: ‘Immerse yourself in the mixing bowl if your heart has the strength, if it believes you will rise up again to the one who sent the mixing bowl below, if it recognizes the purpose of your coming to be.’” “All those who heeded the proclamation and immersed themselves in mind participated in knowledge and became perfect people because they received mind. But those who missed the point of proclamation are people of reason because they did not receive <the gift of> mind as well and do not know the purpose or the agents of their coming to be.”

¹⁴⁶ Antoine Faivre, *The Eternal Hermes: from Greek God to Alchemical Magus*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin (Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1995) 55.

¹⁴⁷ CH X, 2.

know, and it is his will that he calls upon when he evokes intermediary or heavenly spirits.”¹⁴⁸ Faivre stresses that the Hermetic “state of mind is characterized by a preference for will, on a human as well as divine level.” The so-called Hermetic state of mind is also the basis for the performance of magic, or the determined manipulation of the will or desires of others, based on one’s belief in *sympathia* or the connection between all things. Although in Antiquity and the Renaissance, the basis of sympathy was understood as a shared *spiritus* or *pneuma*, in Modernity, it increasingly become to be understood psychologically.

1. Gnostic Salvific Experience

a. The Experience in the *Corpus Hermeticum*

i. A Vision of Oneself in the Mind of God

The desire to become a god or to realize one’s inherent divinity shows the connections between the aims of ancient magic, Gnostic Hermetism and Contemporary Holistic Esotericism. As suggested, we should see the philosophical or theological hermetic texts as a theoretical foundation for magical “salvation,” while the technical or more magical texts provide a practical way to achieve salvation within the theoretical framework, which is a pantheistic or animistic one.¹⁴⁹ As stated, separation of these two types of texts only leads to misinterpretations. In this worldview, God is considered to be Mind and Will and even Energy (cf. *CH* XI, 5, XII 8, XII 20). Salvation to a higher spiritual state occurs through the process of self-divinization or making oneself equal to “God,” (*CH*, XI, 20) who is understood as the *cosmos*. According to J. – P. Mahé and Gilles Quispel, this idea is found in the famous *Poimandres* or *Corpus Hermeticum* I, 18,¹⁵⁰ discussed above.

Mahé says that by ascending up the spheres to the source of Being, which is something like the moment of the Big Bang, they are able to directly experience the presence of the One, invisible God, which is revealed in All. The goal is to see oneself in the All, for “He who knows himself, knows the All”¹⁵¹ (Cf. *The Aphorisms of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius* (DH), ix, 4). One begins to see oneself in the All through spiritual exercises of the imaginatory type.

¹⁴⁸ *The Eternal Hermes*, 55.

¹⁴⁹ John van Schaik and Reinout Spaink, “Voorwoord en Verantwoording,” *De Hermetische Code* (Kampen: Uitgeverij Ten Have, 2006), 8. Having said that, there is some effort on the part of some modern Hermeticists, especially in the Netherlands, to claim that Ancient and Renaissance Hermetism is Pantheistic. For example, a book entitled *De Hermetische Code*, sponsored by the Origenes-Institute, implies that after Hermetism was integrated into the Christian context, God was no longer understood to be outside of Creation, but active within Creation. According to them, “That is not pantheism, as traditional Christians have often claimed. Because it is for the Christian hermetici absolutely clear that God remains still also always totally Other. Hermeticism is not pantheism, but panentheism. That is: God is nevertheless in Creation, but is not congruent with it.” (My translation) The Origenes-Institute is linked to Steiner’s Anthroposophical Society, an important basis of New Age thought.

¹⁵⁰ J. –P. Mahé, “De weg naar de onsterfelijkheid,” *De Hermetische Gnosis in de Loop der Eeuwen: Beschouwingen over the invloed van een Egyptische religie op de cultuur van het Westen* (Amsterdam: Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, 2003) 39.

¹⁵¹ “De weg naar de onsterfelijkheid,” *De Hermetische Gnosis in de Loop der Eeuwen*, 27.

ii. Initiatic Literature

Peter Kingsley, who claims to have had similar experiences, says that we should see the *Asclepius* as a text that outlines the process to procure an ecstatic mystical experience. Although some scholars, like Festugière could only see the contradictions in the text, Kingsley says that the contradictions constitute an essential fixture of a deliberate and meaningful system, whose purpose is to guide the adept along the path towards illumination. First, the initiate is brought to a position of utter despair and hopelessness in the attempt to push him to give up all of his old beliefs and “attachments to a world increasingly seen as imperfect.”¹⁵² Kingsley points out that although most scholars are keen to uncover the “doctrine” underlying the text, they forget to analyze the content of the dialogue and the way that the disciple “is thrown into despair, mocked, frustrated, hears his words twisted by his teacher as soon as they come out of his mouth: is left speechless, dismantled, almost disintegrated, as the necessary prelude to being reborn from the world of silence.” The *Asclepius* presents a process based on a system that believes that “everything worth knowing can be thought out and reached through our minds.” It is such a cruel and ultimately destructive process that few were and are prepared to go through it. According to Kingsley, this is because their desire for knowledge of the ultimate is too weak, or they are insufficiently dissatisfied with things as they are. Kingsley says that the “disintegration of the thinking process [and] demolition of the mind” is the heavy price that a disciple must pay for awareness of the ultimate.¹⁵³ Based on an analysis of language and content, Kingsley believes that the type of experience that the *Corpus Hermeticum* is trying to teach is ultimately reproduced in the so-called alchemical bible, *The Emerald Table*, supposedly written by Hermes himself.¹⁵⁴ The question will be whether the “demolition” of the mind will in fact bring about the desired results in most adepts, or is another recipe for mental manipulation of the weak.

Kingsley believes that the *Corpus Hermeticum* in its totality should be read as initiatic literature. *CH*, I, provides the initial catalyst for the initiate to begin his spiritual journey, which should end in a spiritual and intellectual vision that comes in *CH*, XIII, entitled: “A secret dialogue of Hermes Trismegistus on the mountain to his son Tat: On being born again, and on the promise to be silent.”

¹⁵² “An Introduction to the Hermetica: Approaching Ancient Esoteric Tradition,” *From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition*, 24-25.

¹⁵³ “An Introduction to the Hermetica: Approaching Ancient Esoteric Tradition,” *From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition*, 29.

¹⁵⁴ “An Introduction to the Hermetica: Approaching Ancient Esoteric Tradition,” *From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition*, 32-33.

Kingsley says that the heart of the Hermetic Tradition is the relationship between the master and his disciple or child.¹⁵⁵ The Master is in a sense responsible for his disciple's progress. The exhortation to keep the teachings a secret is part and parcel of this relationship. The fact that the teacher continues to call the disciple "child" means that the disciple must learn that, like the universe, his knowledge is not fixed. "The truth is that he, too, needs to keep finding what he knows: needs to discover it freshly at every moment. The disciple's job is actually to learn to share this process, to develop the same awareness." Kingsley states that, in fact, the disciple must in some way fuse with the teacher and "become one in spirit" with him, which is understood as "breathing together."¹⁵⁶ This form of relationship was translated to Persian Sufism, "where the intimacy of the relationship between teacher and disciple is described as 'being of the same breath' (*ham-dam*)."¹⁵⁷ Kingsley believes that the Hermetic Tradition was "kept alive in central and southern Egypt, especially by alchemical circles," showing the close connection between Hermetic esotericism and alchemy. In the early Islamic world, it passed into Persian Sufism,¹⁵⁷ the more mystical form of Islam.

iii. Meeting the Unbounded Being or Poimandres

In *CH*, I or the *Poimandres*, the scene is set, and Hermes' authority as a "master" is established. Hermes desires to understand the nature of reality and to know God. He is taught by an enormous "unbounded being," who presents himself as the "mind of sovereignty," mentioned earlier. (*CH*, I, 1-3) First, the individual mind expands as it races up through spheres, where the initiate encounters the tremendous "unbounded being," mentioned above, and who in this instance is called "Poimandres." Later, he makes himself known as the Divine Mind. The "being" changes appearance and initiates the priest Hermes Trismegistus into the cosmic secrets by providing him with a vision of the Divine Cosmic Mind.¹⁵⁸ Initially, the "being" appears opposite to the initiate, but towards the end of the procedure or spiritual journey, he realizes that the being is himself, or that he is already "one" with it. The initial experience is given in the first lines of *Corpus Hermeticum*, I, 1:

Once, when thought came to me of the things that are and my thinking soared high and my bodily senses were restrained, like someone heavy with sleep from too much eating or toil of the body,

¹⁵⁵ "An Introduction to the Hermetica: Approaching Ancient Esoteric Tradition," *From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition*, 35.

¹⁵⁶ "An Introduction to the Hermetica: Approaching Ancient Esoteric Tradition," *From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition*, 37.

¹⁵⁷ "An Introduction to the Hermetica: Approaching Ancient Esoteric Tradition," *From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition*, 38.

¹⁵⁸ As we will see, this experience is structurally similar to the experience that shamans have with their "spirit-guide," magicians with their magical assistant, the *parhedros*, and alchemists with their alchemical assistant, Hermes/Mercurius/Aion, etc.

an enormous being completely unbounded in size seemed to appear to me and call my name and say to me: ‘What do you want to hear and see; what do you want to learn and know from your understanding?’ (Italics mine)

Towards the end of chapter One, Hermes asks the Divine Mind to explain to him again about the way up, or how to have a divinizing “out-of-body experience.” The being explains that the separated soul rushes upwards and passes through seven levels. At the level of the eighth, or the region of the ogdoad, the initiate is deified, receives cosmic power and joins other deified beings - supposedly other humans who have gone through a similar process. Beyond this, the initiate begins to hear the universal harmony and is then allowed to ascend to the level of the ninth and to the “father.” He surrenders or sacrifices his personality to the powers, and is then himself filled with power and “enters into god.” Poimandres encourages Hermes to not delay. He should also go through the self-divinizing process so that he will be able to later guide those who are worthy of initiation, and “through you the human race might be saved by god.” (CH, I, 24-25).¹⁵⁹ That is to say that Hermes Trismegistus, and those who follow in his footsteps, were understood to be the “saviors” of mankind.

When we view the *Corpus* as it stands as initiatic literature, we see that by CH XIII, the Hermetic disciple, Tat, has gone through all of the processes and exercises, but has not yet had the necessary *experience*. He is impatient and wants to go onto the next and final stage of enlightenment, to the stage of self-divinization. Kingsley says that he wants his master to tell him how to do this, but what he has to learn cannot be taught, but only experienced. The disciple begins the dialogue by criticizing his master for not giving him a step-by-step plan, or speaking “straightforwardly” about how one is “born again” or attains divinity:

My father, you spoke indistinctly and in riddles when talking about divinity in the *General Discourses*; claiming that no one can be saved before being born again, you offered no revelation. But after you talked with me coming down from the mountain, I became your suppliant and asked to learn the discourse on being born again since, of all the discourses, this one alone I do not know. And you said you would deliver it to me when ‘you were about to become a stranger to

¹⁵⁹ “First, in releasing the material body you give the body itself over to alteration, and the form that you used to have vanishes. To the demon you give over your temperament, now inactive. The body’s senses rise up and flow back to their particular sources, becoming separate parts and mingling again with the energies. And feeling and longing go on toward irrational nature. Thence the human being rushes up through the cosmic framework, at the first zone surrendering the energy of increase and decrease; at the second evil machination, a device now inactive; at the third the illusion of longing, now inactive; at the fourth the ruler’s arrogance, now freed of excess; at the fifth unholy presumption and daring recklessness; at the sixth the evil impulses that come from wealth, now inactive; and at the seventh zone the deceit that lies in ambush. And then, stripped of the effects of the cosmic framework, the human enters the region of the ogdoad; he has his own proper power, and along with the blessed he hymns to the father. Those present there rejoice together in his presence, and, have become like his companions, he also hears certain powers that exist beyond the ogdoadic region and hymn god with sweet voice. They rise up to the father in order and surrender themselves to the powers, and, having become powers, they enter into god. This is the final good for those who have received knowledge: to be made god. Why do you still delay? Having learned all this, should you not become guide to the worthy so that through you the human race might be saved by god.” (CH, I, 24-25).

the cosmos.' I have prepared myself, and I have steeled my purpose against the deceit of the cosmos. Grant me what I need and give me – whether aloud or in secret – the <discourse on> being born again that you said you would deliver. I do not know what sort of womb mankind was born from, O Trismegistus, nor from what kind of seed. (CH, XIII, 1)

In fact and as discussed, speaking in riddles is precisely an initiatory technique used to help the disciple break down his normal thinking processes and achieve an altered state of consciousness.¹⁶⁰ Instead of speaking to the disciple clearly, the master or Trismegistus tells his disciple Tat that after having out-of-body experiences, he is no longer what he appears to be. He has become a “stranger” to sensuality. “Now you see me with your eyes, my child, but by gazing with bodily sight you do <not> understand what <I am>; I am not seen with such eyes, my child.” (CH, XIII, 3) Tat responds with frustration and declares that he is *about to go mad* with such puzzling speech. Trismegistus implies that in order to be “enlightened,” Tat will also need to have such a *self-divinizing experience*. However, at this stage of the initiation, Tat appears to be only concerned with receiving answers from standard questions. “Tell me this especially: Who is the progenitor of rebirth?” Whereupon Trismegistus tells him that the progenitor of re-birth or self-divinization is “the child of god, primal man, by god’s will.” (CH, XIII, 4) Oddly enough, this is a question to which Trismegistus responds clearly and distinctly, however, Tat tells him that he is “speechless” and that he sees no external change in Trismegistus’ physical form.

Given the disciple’s strange reaction to Trismegistus’ -- on this occasion -- lucid response, we surmise that Tat has interpreted Trismegistus’ response to mean that he indeed believes to have become the “primal man” or *Anthropos*. Or, more probably, he believes that he has in some respect fused or identified with him. This means that the ancient Hermetic self-divinizing vision went hand-in-hand with a vision of the primal man, with whom one is expected in some sense to identify. If we recall, CH, I, 26 gave an explanation of what happens when one enters the region of the *ogdoad*, or the eighth sphere. There one joins others, who have already attained divinity. Given the Neoplatonic background, this means that many constitute the one, or the many men constitute the One Man.

iv. The Gnostic Myth of the Fall of the Primal Man into Evil Matter

In the *Corpus*, the “primal man” is first mentioned in CH, I where the unbounded being conveys knowledge about the origin of mankind to Hermes Trismegistus. In CH, I, 12, the being Poimandres says that “Mind, the father of all, who is life and light, gave birth to a man like himself whom he loved as his own child. The man was most fair: he had the father’s image; the god, who was really in love with his own form, bestowed on him all his craftworks.” CH, I, 14-

¹⁶⁰ “An Introduction to the Hermetica: Approaching Ancient Esoteric Tradition,” *From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition*, 26-27.

15, then explains how mortal mankind came into being through the archetypal primal man's sexual union with Nature.

Having all authority over the cosmos of mortals and unreasoning animals, the man broke through the vault and stooped to look through the cosmic framework, thus displaying to lower nature the fair form of god. Nature smiled for love when she saw him whose fairness brings no surfeit <and> who holds in himself all the energy of the governors and the form of god, for in the water she saw the shape of the man's fairest form and upon the earth its shadow. When the man saw in the water the form like himself as it was in nature, he loved it and wished to inhabit it; wish and action came in the same moment, and he inhabited the unreasoning form. Nature took hold of her beloved, hugged him all about and embraced him, for they were lovers. Because of this, unlike any other living thing on earth, mankind is twofold – in the body mortal but immortal in essential man. Even though he is immortal and has authority over all things, mankind is affected by mortality because he is subject to fate; thus, although man is above the cosmic framework, he became a slave within it. (CH, I, 14-15)

In fact, the primal man, who was located above the celestial framework, stoops and looks down through the spheres onto Nature, which leads to their "love relationship." Nevertheless, although the primal man copulates with Nature, in effect, he does not fall in love with Nature, but only with his own lovely form that was reflected upon Nature's surface, i.e. in water, and with his shadow on earth. This is a mythical narrative of a Gnostic fall from heavenly grace that in some sense mirrors the Hebrew story of the Fall of Adam in Genesis.¹⁶¹ Whereas Adam's fall was from greed and disobedience, the primal man's fall came from mingling with matter or Nature, which was considered evil. Still, Nature latched onto the Man and bore the ancestors of humanity, who contained within themselves both the image of the primal man and unreasoning nature. In the Hermetic myth, therefore, mankind is a degenerated form of the primal man and his goal is to return to the higher state of the primal man, which is superior to, or "above," the present mortal state.¹⁶² The individual man must recognize his heavenly origin in the original primal man and reverse the stages of the heavenly man's fall, by ascending through the spheres in ecstatic contemplation. As C. H. Dodd says:

We are told how man, any man, may gain immortality and rise to unity with God. The stages of the ascent recapitulate the stages of the fall of Ἀνθρωπος, but it is no mythical being in view, but you or I. The divine Man, child of God, has become, to put it so, the Man in men, of divine origin, and capable of redemption from the taint of matter and mortality into the life of God. He may never have been meant for anything else. On the other hand, in so far as the author took his Platonism seriously, he must have believed in the real existence of eternal archetypes (as indeed he speaks of τὸ ἀρχέτυπον εἶδος), and his Ἀνθρωπος is probably as real as they. He is in some sort the equivalent of the Platonic 'idea' of man, and the author means to say that this 'idea' of man is

¹⁶¹ *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 42-43.

¹⁶² "Notes," *Hermetica*, 106.

essentially divine, but has become implicated in the taint of matter, from which it needs to be released.¹⁶³

v. Birth in God

Therefore, Trismegistus' response to Tat's question confirms the interpretation that he believes that has been elevated to mirror the archetypal form of the *Anthropos*, since he tells Tat that "in this you are deceived, for my mortal form changes daily, altered in time toward increase and decrease – as a deception." (CH, XIII, 5) Since others have also entered into the eighth and ninth spheres, Trismegistus believes that he has become "one" primal *Anthropos* and shares in his primordial divinity, even though his material form at a particular moment is limited and, therefore, fluid. Although it is impossible to know exactly what second century Egyptian Hellenists believed at the time, the fact that he is initiating Tat to have a similar experience leads one to believe that there was a belief that the many could in some way participate in this "one primal form" of the one Divine Mind, which was understood as "birth *in* god."

At this point in the dialogue, Tat's attitude begins to change and he resigns himself to ignorance. Although he had hoped to become wise, in fact, *he believes that he has finally gone insane*. Trismegistus tells him that what he has to understand to become divine (i.e. birth in god) is not understood by the senses, but by "power and energy." Tat seems to doubt that he might have "power," but Trismegistus confirms the opposite. It is inherent within him, but he only needs to "draw it" to himself "and it will come. Wish it and it happens. Leave the sense of the body idle, and the birth of divinity will begin. Cleanse yourself of the irrational torments of matter." (CH, XIII, 7) Then, Trismegistus explains the twelve torments or vices that one must go through before one attains divinity. The basis of the attainment of divinity is the expulsion of these vices. After this, one can allow the ten virtues to develop, or the decad, which is the opposite or an inversion of the twelve vices. Then, Trismegistus says that Tat has come to know the means of rebirth.

The arrival of the decad sets in order a birth of mind that expels the twelve; we have been divinized by this birth. Therefore, whoever through mercy has attained this godly birth and has forsaken bodily sensation recognizes himself as constituted of the intelligibles and rejoices. (CH, XIII, 10)

Finally, Tat seems to have understood how one is "reborn in god," or how to enter into him. He becomes something like a participant in or a willing part of the world-soul or the *anima mundi*. He says to Trismegistus:

¹⁶³ *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 43.

Since god has made me tranquil, father, I no longer picture things with the sight of my eyes but with the mental energy that comes through the powers. I am in heaven, in earth, in water, in air; I am in animals and in plants; in the womb, before the womb, after the womb; everywhere. But tell me this also: how is it that the torments of darkness, twelve in number, are repulsed by ten powers? By what means, Trismegistus? (CH, XIII, 11)

Trismegistus explains the ten can repulse the twelve, which are astrologically determined. “This tent – from which we also have passed, my child – was constituted from the Zodiacal circle, which was in turn constituted of [] entities that are twelve in number, one in nature, omniform in appearance.” (CH, XIII, 12) When the twelve torments retreat or when they have been vanquished by the initiate, then, the ten virtues are able to enter. This is because the soul is supposedly engendered from the decad. Like a system of concentric circles, the henad contains the decad within it. Trismegistus must have said the “magic word,” for at this point, Tat exclaims: “Father, I see the universe and I see myself in mind.” (CH, XIII, 13) That is to say, the universe and the Divine Mind are One and Tat sees himself as a part of it. Trismegistus confirms that through seeing himself in the Divine Mind, Tat has experienced rebirth or divinization. It is, however, not for everyone, i.e. the mob or herd, but only for the chosen elite:

This, my child, is rebirth: no longer picturing things in three bodily dimensions. ... through this discourse on being born again that I have noted down for you alone to avoid casting it all before the mob but [to give it] to those whom god himself wishes.

Tell me, father, does this body constituted of powers ever succumb to dissolution?

Hold your tongue; do not give voice to the impossible! Else you will do wrong, and your mind’s eye will be profaned. The sensible body of nature is far removed from essential generation. One can be dissolved, but the other is indissoluble; one is mortal, the other immortal. Do you not know that you have been born a god and a child of the one, as I, too, have? (CH, XIII, 13-14)

Like Hermes Trismegistus, Tat has become a “child” of the primal *Anthropos*. After experiencing oneself as participating *in* the “primal man,” which in Hermetic thought is understood as participating in the Divine Mind, Tat claims that he wants to sing a secret hymn of praise that was transmitted to them by the unbounded being, Poimandres, or the “mind of sovereignty,” who is the personification of the primal man. As we will see, he can also be understood to be the alchemical deity, Aion (eternity).¹⁶⁴ Thereafter, the formula for the secret hymn is given, where the singer thanks god, i.e. the Divine Mind, for giving him “the energy of the powers.” (CH, XIII, 18) He asks that a speech offering is acceptable and that Life preserves the universe within him, as a microtheos of the macrotheos. Tat goes on: “For you, O mind, are a shepherd to your word, O spirit-bearer, O craftsman [demiurge]. You are god!” Then, he says

¹⁶⁴ “Notes,” *Hermetica*, 94-95; 99.

that his “man,” i.e. the primal man or *Poimandres*, who Tat has also now become or in whom he now participates,

Shouts this through the fire, through air, through earth, through water, through spirit, through your creatures. From your eternity [Aion], I have won praise, and in your counsel I have found the rest I seek; I have seen, as you wished it. This praise that you have told, father, I have also established in my cosmos.

Hermes then attempts to put some kind of limitation onto Tat’s experience and says: “Say ‘in the intellectual cosmos,’ child. (CH, XIII, 19-21) That is to say, least Tat mistake himself for the *cosmos* Itself, or that he reverses the hierarchical order of Being and collapse the cosmos into his own intellect, Hermes reminds him that he participates in the cosmic primal man and not the other way around. Hermes is in a sense applying a “breaking mechanism,” which we will show was somehow forgotten or misjudged in the Renaissance in the thought of Giordano Bruno.

b. The Experience in the Gnostic *Discourse on the Eighth and the Ninth*

The same type of universalizing experience, or divinizing vision, is required in Gnostic divinization. This is made clear from the Gnostic *Discourse on the Eighth and the Ninth* or Codex VI, found in Nag Hammadi. The text was probably used as an “introductory text” by small groups or by a master and his disciple “devoted to secret knowledge and mystical experience.”¹⁶⁵ It was discovered with a Coptic version of the *Asclepius*, mentioned above, revealing the similarities between the two systems. Like the *Corpus*, the *Discourse* begins when a disciple reminds his spiritual master that he had promised to initiate him into the mysteries of the “eighth and the ninth,” implying the divine realm and the highest level of spiritual attainment.¹⁶⁶ Therefore, the Gnostic initiate’s impatience with his master is similar to Tat’s impatience with Hermes. After instruction, both the initiate and the master pray a formal prayer (Cf. VI, 52-56), whose culmination is reached in VI, 57, a request for a visionary experience: “So that your vision may come. Lord, grant us the truth in the image. Allow us through the spirit to see the form of the image that has no deficiency, and receive the reflection of the pleroma from us through our praise.”¹⁶⁷ Through the master’s guidance, the initiate is then allowed to enter into the eighth sphere and then into the ninth (ennead). According to Mahé, the apotheosis of the divinizing vision is found in VI, 58. There, the initiate sees himself in the Cosmic Mind.¹⁶⁸ This

¹⁶⁵ Douglas M. Parrott, “Introduction to the Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth,” *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (New York: HarperCollins, 3rd ed., 1990) 321.

¹⁶⁶ “Introduction,” *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, 321.

¹⁶⁷ Trans. James Brashler, Peter A. Dirkse, and Douglas M. Parrott, *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, The Nag Hammadi Library in English (New York: HarperCollins, 3rd ed., 1990) 324.

¹⁶⁸ De weg naar de onsterfelijkheid,” *De Hermetische Gnosis in de Loop der Eeuwen*, 47.

is the same vision described above in *CH*, XIII, 13. “Father, I see the universe and I see myself in mind.” In *Discourse*, VI, 58, the gnostic says: “How [shall I describe] the universe? I [am Mind and] I see another Mind, the one that [moves] the soul! I see the one that moves me from pure forgetfulness. You give me power! I see myself!”¹⁶⁹

Douglas M. Parrott says that before the visionary experience of the eighth and ninth can be procured, the initiate must first pass through two other levels. First, he must attain a level of ritual purity (56,27-57,1), similar to the experience of expelling the 12 vices discussed in the *Corpus*. Thereafter, he must “banish ignorance by mastering the knowledge found in certain books (54,6-18),” which would allow the virtues to enter. By doing this, he shows that he desires to become the embodiment of the universal mind. “The initiate then enters the eighth by recognizing the presence of universal mind, and responds to this recognition by joining the chorus of the eighth and singing a silent hymn to the universal mind. He reaches the ninth when he experiences his own unity with universal mind and receives the confirmatory vision in which the chorus of the eighth sings to him (59, 24-60, 1).”¹⁷⁰

‘I will offer up the praise in my heart, as I pray to the end of the universe and the beginning of the beginning, to the object of man’s quest, the immortal discovery, the begetter of light and truth, the sower of reason, the love of immortal life. No hidden word will be able to speak about you, Lord. Therefore my mind wants to sing a hymn to you daily. I am the instrument of your spirit; Mind is your plectrum. And your counsel plucks me. I see 61 myself! I have received power from you. For your love has reached us.’

‘Right, my son.’

‘Grace! After these things I give thanks by singing a hymn to you. For I have received life from you, when you made me wise. I praise you. I call your name that is hidden within me: a ō ee ō ēēē ōōō iii ōōōō ooooo ōōō ōō uuuuu ōō ōōōōōōōōō ōōōōōōōōō ōō. You are the one who exists with the spirit. I sing a hymn to you reverently.’¹⁷¹

c. Becoming Aion

i. The Identities of Aion

Seeing oneself in the Mind of God meant seeing oneself in the “primal man” or *Anthropos*, mentioned in *CH*, XIII, 4. This is understood as a concentric “birth in God,” which makes one a god. In fact, one becomes a microtheotic man of the macrotheotic Man, who was eventually understood to be the alchemical deity of Time and Eternity “Aion.” Seeking his favour would help to speed up the processes of Time and Nature. Aion “dwells in the zenith of heaven,”¹⁷² the ethereal region to where one made one’s ascent. His was a powerful name invoked by both

¹⁶⁹ *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, 324.

¹⁷⁰ “Introduction,” *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, 322.

¹⁷¹ *The Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, 326.

¹⁷² Jack Lindsay, *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (London: Frederick Muller, 1970) 242.

magicians and alchemists to achieve their goal to become “égal à la divinité.”¹⁷³ Anna Scibilia notes, “The deity to which the magician addresses the invocation for obtaining the *parhedros*, is Helios, the solar deity who, in this and any other documents, assumes a cosmic character by being identified with Aion, ‘Eternity’.”¹⁷⁴ According to R. P. Festugière, Aion is the Supreme God and is associated with the sun. Although he is never assimilated to Hermes, prayers and invocations to this elevated solar deity shed light not only on magical belief in Antiquity, but also important technical hermetic texts like the *Kosmopoia*, the *Korē Kosmou* but also *Corpus Hermeticum* XIII.¹⁷⁵ Mahé notes that indeed ancient Hermetism developed a method for the magician to become Aion, or “Cosmic God, Cosmos and Eternity.”¹⁷⁶ How the Hermeticist became Aion or the “primal man” will be discussed shortly, after we delve into his other identities.

For example, Lindsay says that Aion was often assimilated to Mithras, but also to the alchemical *Ouroboros*.¹⁷⁷ Although Aion was the god who resides *in* the sun, in Alexandria, he was also associated with Kore or Persephone, the goddess of the underworld. It was said that he was even born by her,¹⁷⁸ bringing him in close association to the Orphic myth of the god, Dionysos. In fact, Dionysos-Zagreus is associated with the chthonic, or subterranean, Zeus.¹⁷⁹ Already by the time of Heraclitus, Aion was clearly associated with the chthonic Zeus.¹⁸⁰

Like Hermes, and as intimated, Aion was closely associated with Dionysos, for he was also the child of Persephone and Zeus. Walter Burkert says that “at Alexandria a cult of Aion as the god of Time had grown up, in association with Kore, the earthmaiden. On the fifth of January a statue of the god was brought by torchlight into the open from an under-earth sanctuary dedicated to Kore; and while pipes and tambourines played, it was carried seven times round the temple, then, taken below the ground again. We are told that the rite signified the birth of Aion on this night by Kore”¹⁸¹ which is clearly an allusion to the birth of Dionysos in Eleusis. Therefore, early alchemists not only associated themselves with Hermes, but also – like the Orphics – with the Mysteries of Dionysos.

¹⁷³ Anna Scibilia, “Supernatural Assistance in the Greek Magical Papyri,” *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, eds. Jan N. Bremmer & Jan R. Veenstra (Leuven: Peeters, 2002) 76.

¹⁷⁴ “Supernatural Assistance in the Greek Magical Papyri,” *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, 80.

¹⁷⁵ *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste : L'Astrologie et les Sciences Occultes*, 296-297.

¹⁷⁶ “De weg naar de onsterfelijkheid,” *De Hermetische Gnosis in de Loop der Eeuwen*, 45.

¹⁷⁷ *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, 264.

¹⁷⁸ *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, 262-263.

¹⁷⁹ W. K. C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion: A Study of the Orphic Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952) 113.

¹⁸⁰ *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, 82-83.

¹⁸¹ Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. John Raffan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985) 225.

In Hellenic times, Aion became the god of Time or Eternity, probably based on Plato's interpretation of "Aion" in the *Timaeus* as "Eternity."¹⁸² L. Couloubaritsis estimates in his article "La Notion d'Aion chez Héraclite" that Plato reversed the original meaning of "Aion" by making it a condition of *chronos* or chronological time. Couloubaritsis bases himself on a text of Euripides, where he says that "L'Aiôn enfant du Temps (*chronou*), et Moira engendrent beaucoup de vicissitudes."¹⁸³ Or, "Aion [Eternity], child of Time (*Chronos*), and Moira [Destiny] generate (or breed) many successive alterations." Couloubaritsis claims that the term "aion" was probably first used in Homer's *Iliad* meaning, "vital force" or "life," and later in Heraclitus and Empedocles, meaning more "the life-time of a thing." Significant to our later discussions on Aion, Couloubaritsis points to Nietzsche's interpretation of Heraclitus fragment, (see also Diels nr. 52), where Heraclitus says: Αἰὼν παις ἐστὶ παιζὼν πεσσευὼν παιδὸς ἡ βασιλῆη.¹⁸⁴ Covering the destructive side of the Greek, Couloubaritsis translates the fragment as: "Aiôn est un enfant qui joue en déplaçant les pions: la royauté d'une enfant."¹⁸⁵ Brooks Haxton, a contemporary translator of the Heraclitan fragments, gives the following interpretation: "Time is a game played beautifully by children,"¹⁸⁶ totally ignoring Heraclitus' use of the verb *pipto*, meaning "to fall down from a higher point," "to fall to pieces," "to collapse," "to go down," "to be destroyed," or "to be ruined." Another possibility, however, could be: "The child Aion amuses himself with the destructive game of a king." That is, like ancient kings who held the power to create and destroy at a whim, Aion, as the vital-force of time, plays the same "game" with humanity.

According to Nietzsche, in *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, for Heraclitus, "Die Welt ist das Spiel des Zeus, oder physikalischer ausgedrückt, des Feuers mit sich selbst, das Eine ist nur in diesem Sinne zugleich das Viele —."¹⁸⁷ Couloubaritsis explains that "L'Aiôn est, pour Nietzsche, cela même qui joue le fond, le feu avec lui-même, qui l'assemble et le métamorphose, qui donne vie et mort. Par cette prise de position, il met en chemin tout un mouvement de pensée, qui prétend dépasser la métaphysique."¹⁸⁸ That is to say, Nietzsche

¹⁸² L. Couloubaritsis, "La Notion D'Aion Chez Héraclite," *Ionian Philosophy* (Athens: International Association for Greek Philosophy and International Center for Greek Philosophy and Culture, 1989) 108.

¹⁸³ "La Notion D'Aion Chez Héraclite," *Ionian Philosophy*, 108.

¹⁸⁴ Heraclitus, *Fragments*, trans. Brooks Haxton (London: Penguin Books, 2001) 79. Haxton translates it euphemistically: "Time is a game played beautifully by children."

¹⁸⁵ "La Notion D'Aion Chez Héraclite," *Ionian Philosophy*, 106. Or, (my translation) "Aion is a child who plays, while shifting pawns: The royalty of a child."

¹⁸⁶ Heraclitus, *Fragments*, 51.

¹⁸⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Die Philosophie im tragischen Zeitalter der Griechen*, *Nietzsche Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe 1870-1873*, Nachgelassene Schriftgen, Dritte Abteilung, Zweiter Band (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1973) 322. My translation: "The world is Zeus' game, or expressed more physically, the fire with himself, in this sense, the one is merely the same as the many."

¹⁸⁸ "La Notion D'Aion Chez Héraclite," *Ionian Philosophy*, 106.

believes that Aion is the equivalent of the Stoic “Zeus,” or the creative primal fire that is to be found at the center of all existence. For Aion/Zeus, reality is a game of destruction and creation, of perpetual change and transfiguration, of conferring life and death. Nietzsche’s understanding of Aion as the Chthonic Zeus, who was also strongly associated with the Orphic Dionysos-Zagreus, will be important for our later discussion of Nietzsche’s own “spirituality.” Ironically, Nietzsche believed that his position of asserting a foundationless foundation of reality, i.e. based on Aion/Dionysos’ playful mode of thoughtless cyclical creation and destruction of the universe, was not metaphysical. As such, Couloubaritsis claims that Nietzsche tried to return to a meaning closer to Homer, who associates “aion” with “psyche,” as a vital-force (Cf. *Iliad* 16, 453).

Therefore, Nietzsche interpreted the “Heraclitan Logos,” i.e. Aion, within the logical framework of the metamorphosis or transfiguration of fire, which infinitely gathers together and disperses, like a child’s but also artist’s game. For like fire, only the artist and the child can “innocently” create and destroy. Couloubaritsis explains:

C’est ainsi que se joue, c’est l’Aïôn que le joue avec lui-même. Comme un enfant, qui, au bord de la mer, élève et détruit des tas de sable et recommence de temps à autres son jeu, par le besoin qui force l’artiste de créer, par cet instinct du jeu sans cesse réveille qui ‘appelle au jour des mondes nouveaux’, de même le feu se transforme en terre et eau et produit le multiple, la multiplicité des choses en devenir. Bref, jeu créateur sans règles ou plutôt selon ses propres règles intrinsèques qui ne sont pas conformes à un principe de raison, le devenir héraclitéen se déploie comme un jeu.¹⁸⁹

Nietzsche probably based his interpretation of the Heraclitan fragment as an analogy of reality with the “building sandcastles” on the verb, *pipto* (πιπτω), whose definition we gave above. That is to say, Nietzsche sees his supposedly “foundationless” Aionic Reality as a game of creation and destruction. It is like the child’s innocent or amoral play of building sand castles, which are built only to be washed away again by the incessant movement of the ocean’s waves or the child’s foot. In such an understanding of Reality, where there are no rules that could conform to a universal principle of reason, there is only Will. Unless one wants to be washed away like one of the “royal child’s” sandcastles, then, one must make oneself equal to the Will of the royal child, that is, to that of Dionysos/Aion. That Nietzsche, and via Nietzsche, Carl Jung both identified with “Aion,” will become clearer in later chapters, shedding light on their understanding of divinity and divinization.

¹⁸⁹ “La Notion D’Aion Chez Héraclite,” *Ionian Philosophy*, 106.

ii. The Divinizing Aionic Vision

How ancient Hermeticists -- who were strongly influenced by both Stoic materialism and Platonic idealism, whose ideal forms were the really real --,¹⁹⁰ actually understood union with God/Aion is hard to know for sure. The previous sections, where we discussed Gnostic union with the primal man, give us a good idea. However, how ancient Hermeticists interpreted union with God/Aion was not necessarily how the early Renaissance Hermeticists understood it and surely not how later Enlightenment and Romantic Hermeticists understood it. C. H. Dodd has attempted to explain that for the ancient Hermeticists, knowledge of God and not merely knowledge about Him was salvific. This is because, the Gnostic Hermeticists believed that only “like could comprehend like.” That is why the Divine Mind or the unbounded Poimandres says to Hermes in XI, 20 that he must become *like* God, i.e. like the primal Poimandres, who presented himself as the infinitely expansive “mind of sovereignty,” in order to be able to receive the necessary salvific knowledge. In this context, becoming like God is clearly a mental exercise of the imaginary type. Mind or Poimandres explains to Hermes:

See what power you have, what quickness! So you must think of god in this way, as having everything – the cosmos, himself the universe – like thoughts within himself. Thus, unless you make yourself equal to god, you cannot understand god; like is understood by like. Make yourself grow to immeasurable immensity, outleap all body, outstrip all time, become eternity [or the eternal being, i.e. Aion] and you will understand God. Having conceived that nothing is impossible to you, consider yourself immortal and able to understand everything, all art, all learning, the temper of every living thing. Go higher than every height and lower than every depth. Collect in yourself all the sensations of what has been made, of fire and water, dry and wet; be everywhere at once, on land, in the sea, in heaven; be not yet born, be in the womb, be young, old, dead, beyond death. And when you have understood all these at once – times, places, things, qualities, quantities – then you can understand god. (CH, XI, 20)

Mind/Poimandres tells Hermes that he must become like the eternal being, i.e. Eternity, which became to be understood as the “deity” Aion. Dodd says that under the influence of Platonic dualism, the Hermeticists conceived of a noumenal world that is transcendent and eternal. It is the archetype of the phenomenal world. The Hermetic gnostic would want to have access to this world in order to achieve the necessary saving *gnosis*. However, given their attempt to fuse Platonism with Stoicism, like the Stoics, they also conceived of God impersonally as power and energy. They believed that “God” communicated with the world through rays of this power and energy, performing like the Stoic world-soul. Nevertheless, in order to solve the antinomy between the more personalized system of Platonic archetypes and the impersonal system of the Stoics, Dodd claims that they also conceived of Aion -- who became conflated with the eternal

¹⁹⁰ *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 11.

primal man --, as an intermediary entity between God and the world.¹⁹¹ This explains to some extent why God is conceived simultaneously as more impersonal Mind, Will, *Cosmos*, Energy, etc., but also as Poimandres, *Anthropos* and Aion, etc. This intermediary role is clear in *CH*, XI, 2, where Mind or God tells Hermes:

Hear how it is with god and the universe, my child. God, eternity [i.e. Aion], cosmos, time, becoming. God makes eternity [i.e. Aion]; eternity [i.e. Aion] makes the cosmos; the cosmos makes time; time makes becoming. The essence (so to speak) of god [the good, the beautiful, happiness,] wisdom; the essence of eternity [i.e. Aion] is identity; of the cosmos, order; of time, change; of becoming, life and death. (*CH*, XI, 2)

Dodd says, “If the equivocation of the term be allowed for, then the statement that the worshipper must himself become an ‘aeon’ is intelligible. The doctrine is then clear: Αἰών mediates between God and the world; by becoming an αἰών, by identifying himself with Αἰών, man knows God.”¹⁹² Dodd says, however, that we should not think that the ancient Hermetic worshipper believed that they literally became the “primal man.” They must have understood union with Aion in the Platonic sense, that is, symbolically. Nevertheless, as we will see, Aion did eventually become hypostasized as a Hermetic/alchemical deity. Later Hermeticists in the Renaissance and after the Reformation, however, began to interpret identification with Aion less symbolically and more literally. This more literal interpretation is concomitant with the breakdown of the ancient and medieval symbolic realm after the iconoclasm of the Reformation.

In order to become the god “Aion,” or immortal, Mahé says that the ancient Gnostic Hermeticist built upon the idea of correspondences. He imagined the three worlds, God, cosmos and humanity fitting together like concentric circles. The method depended on the Hermetic aphorism: “God is in Himself, the cosmos is in God, man is in the cosmos” (*DH* vii, 7), and on the belief in universal sympathy or the law of correspondences.”¹⁹³ Since the energies of the human soul are supposedly in sympathy with the energies of the planets and stars, these can be used to attract divine energy into oneself and to see God.¹⁹⁴ Mahé then points to the earlier mentioned revelatory text in *CH*, XIII, 7. Because the structure is so important, we recall that in this text, Tat first questions Hermes about “being born again.” (Cf. *CH* XIII, 1). Tat demands that his father clearly explain to him how to be born again. Hermes tells him that his own re-birth in the Mind of God occurred in a vision, during an “out-of-body experience.” Thereafter, he was no longer as he appeared to be, i.e. a mere mortal. (Cf. *CH* XIII, 3). Tat tells his father that he is

¹⁹¹ *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 23.

¹⁹² *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 24.

¹⁹³ “De weg naar de onsterfelijkheid,” *De Hermetische Gnosis in de Loop der Eeuwen*, 45.

¹⁹⁴ “De weg naar de onsterfelijkheid,” *De Hermetische Gnosis in de Loop der Eeuwen*, 46.

going mad, and demands that Hermes tell him who is the “progenitor of rebirth.” Hermes tells him that it is the primal man (*CH* XIII, 4), who in Hermetism was understood to be the “unbounded being” Poimandres, introduced in *CH*, I, but also as “Aion” (*CH*, XIII, 20). Hermes says that one must be empowered (like primal man) in order to understand “birth in God.” In *CH* XIII, 7,¹⁹⁵ Hermes tells his son how to achieve the Aionic vision, which leads to re-birth in God, functioning something like an incarnation of the *anima mundi*.

Mahé says that in order to prepare, one must begin to get used to feeling the omnipresence of the spirit in space and time. Referring back to *CH* XI, 19, he says that the Hermetic adept must learn how to command his spirit to take part in astral travel. Although ordinary people are unable to do this, thanks to the Hermetic adept’s power of the imagination, he imagines himself as being omnipresent himself. Then, Mahé points to *CH* XI, 20, already mentioned, showing how the structure of the *Corpus Hermeticum* itself is initiatic.

Mahé says that through mental exercises, which also implies a temporary form of mental imbalance or insanity (Cf. *CH* XIII, 6), one can make the experience one’s own. However, the adept must first be initiated through the mystery of rebirth described in the Gnostic *Discourse on the Eighth and the Ninth*. The adept works his way up through the spheres to the tenth sphere, or the *dekas* (*decad*) the level of the Unborn God, who is also called *agennetos*. He is the eternal primal man, the *aeon* of *aeons*, who is simultaneously one and ten, a cryptographic reference to the name Aion itself. In numerology, *alpha* is equal to the Greek number one, and *jota* is equal to the number ten, while the last two letters of his name, i.e. “on” mean, “He who is.”

At the end of the vision Mahé says that one sees oneself in the Cosmic Mind¹⁹⁶ (see also *CH*, XIII, 13) and becomes co-equal to Aion. The priest-magician ends with a formula to the goddess of magic and the moon Selene,¹⁹⁷ Helios’ sister, or to Hecate, a similar goddess of night and magic, who we will discuss in more detail later. At the end of the formula, supposedly, one realized that one’s nature was like the primal man’s (i.e. Aion’s), that is, eternal and divine. In western spiritualities, which have been strongly influenced by Hermetism, including modern forms of self-divinization, this structural scheme is often repeated, although somewhat mutated.

2. The Magical Assistant: the *Parhedros*

As suggested, to become conscious of the fact that one is already divine requires assistance. For example, we saw in *CH*, I, Hermes initially needed the assistance of the divine being,

¹⁹⁵ “Draw it [power] to you, and it will come. Wish it, and it happens. Leave the senses of the body idle, and the birth of divinity will begin. Cleanse yourself of the irrational torments of matter.” (*CH*, XIII, 7)

¹⁹⁶ “De weg naar de onsterfelijkheid,” *De Hermetische Gnosis in de Loop der Eeuwen*, 47.

¹⁹⁷ “Supernatural Assistance in the Greek Magical Papyri,” *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, 84.

“Poimandres,” who initiated him in the mysteries of the eighth and the ninth. Jan Bremmer in his article on “Magic in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles,” points out that “magicians were traditionally believed to be accompanied by a ‘demon’ that helped them perform their magic, the so-called *parhedros*,”¹⁹⁸ or magical assistant, a concept found in the *Papyri graecae magicae* (PGM) or the *Greek Magical Papyri*. The PGM is a name given to a body of texts containing practical magical spells, formula, hymns and rituals, which originated from Graeco-Roman Egypt somewhere around the second century BC up to the fifth century AD, and can be categorized as technical *Hermetica*.¹⁹⁹

Anna Scibilia shows in her article “Supernatural Assistance in the *Greek Magical Papyri*” that the *parhedros* obtained by the magician was an “entity,” or “deity,” “specifically defined as ‘assistant of the great god’ and therefore subordinated to a powerful deity, with whom he has to accomplish the tasks assigned to him.” The texts are addressed to *archidaimones* or “chief daimons” but also to Aion.²⁰⁰ The texts show the hierarchical nature of the magical worldview and the chthonic entities populating it.²⁰¹ These demons, gods (deities) or deceased spirits assisted the magician in magical operations, such as casting a spell, foretelling the future, exorcising a spirit, etc.

A magician obtained his *parhedros* by participating in rituals that presented him to the divinity as an equal.²⁰² The assistant could appear to the *magus* in different forms, “as a divine being in human form,” like an *angelos* or a Nephtys, an Egyptian name for a domestic goddess.²⁰³ Sometimes the *parhedros* is introduced in the form of a deity like *Eros*, or sexual attraction,²⁰⁴ who is also identified as a *daimon* or a “divine being.”²⁰⁵ Sometimes, the *parhedros* would appear in the form of a physical object,²⁰⁶ or as an evil spirit (*kakodaimôn*) or as a good

¹⁹⁸ Jan Bremmer, “Magic in the Apocryphal Acts of the Apostles,” *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, eds. Jan N. Bremmer & Jan R. Veenstra (Leuven: Peeters, 2002) 54.

¹⁹⁹ Hans Dieter Betz, “Magic and Mystery in the Greek Magical Papyri,” *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 248.

²⁰⁰ *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, 242.

²⁰¹ “Supernatural Assistance in the Greek Magical Papyri,” *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, 79.

²⁰² “Supernatural Assistance in the Greek Magical Papyri,” *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, 76.

²⁰³ “Supernatural Assistance in the Greek Magical Papyri,” *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, 77. She appeared as an old woman in search of her divine beauty, revealing the transitory nature of her materialization.

²⁰⁴ Hugh Parry, *Thelxis: Magic and Imagination in Greek Myth and Poetry* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1992) 96.

²⁰⁵ Georg Luck, *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985) 163.

²⁰⁶ “Supernatural Assistance in the Greek Magical Papyri,” *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, 77-78.

spirit (*Agathos Daimon*). Socrates, in Plato's *Phaedrus* (242B), interpreted his *daimon* as a kind of "inner voice" or "guardian angel," which restrained him from doing wrong.²⁰⁷

According to Scibilia, the *Papyri* reveal that the desire of the magical operator was to obtain *power*, or a "kind of omnipotence that allowed him to act on all cosmic levels."²⁰⁸ Through the *parhedros*, a *magus* could achieve the objects of his desires, which he would be unable to achieve were it not for daimonic assistance. The *parhedros* offered the *magus* his own divine power to "kill and destroy," but also furnished medicines or remedies (*pharmakon*) for recovery. Moreover, the *parhedros* had knowledge or *gnosis* that the *magus* needed to save himself. Hence, the *parhedros* was a practical vehicle for temporary salvation from death. As we will see, the contemporary New Age practice of channeling angels or Ascended Masters mirrors this Pre-Christian scheme.

3. Magical Friendship

In pre-Christian Antiquity, it was generally believed that the great mass of humanity – except the *magus* or god – was destined to obscurity in Hades. According to Jules Gross in *The Divinization of the Christian according to the Greek Fathers*, "after the incineration of the body, the *psyche* – an ephemeral shade or vapor, which, though devoid of strength, is nevertheless 'like the perfect image of the person and of one's bodily configuration' – descends into Hades, which never releases its prey."²⁰⁹ This belief is reflected in the Old Testament, where the dead are called "shades" (*rephaim*) and descend into *Sheol*, sometimes understood as the "Pit." This description bears similarities to the archaic understanding of Hades found, for example, in Homer.²¹⁰

The aim of most people was to somehow escape the dreary destiny of Hades. Hades or *Sheol* was a fate that all wanted to avoid, and magic was believed to be a method that postponed this fate, at least temporarily. For many, the Mystery Religions provided comfort that initiates would not only be granted immortality in the next life, but also a better existence than the uninitiated in Hades.²¹¹ They were not liberated from subterranean gloom, but were promised that their future existence would be less gloomy than the uninitiated. As will become clear, alchemy as well as Gnostic and Hermetic magic are soteriological systems that are structurally

²⁰⁷ *Arcana Mundi*, 171.

²⁰⁸ "Supernatural Assistance in the Greek Magical Papyri," *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, 79

²⁰⁹ Jules Gross, *The Divinization of the Christian according to the Greek Fathers*, trans. Paul A. Onica (Anaheim: A & C Press, 2002) 13.

²¹⁰ John W. Cooper, *Body, Soul & Life Everlasting: Biblical Anthropology and the Monism-Dualism Debate* (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000) 52-54.

²¹¹ *The Divinization of the Christian*, 21.

analogous to that of the Mystery Religions and historically related.²¹² As ancient forms of solipsistic self-divinization, the fate of the individual alchemist and magician were slightly better than the initiate of the Mystery Religions. In order to increase one's chances of a better after-life, one might participate in several Mystery cults as well as practice magic and even alchemy. The annihilation of individual identity was postponed by allowing the ancient *magus* to ascend to higher spheres of existence.

That is to say Being, which was considered to be a monistic Totality, was not split open or dramatically changed as it is in traditional Christianity, but was expanded and distanced from Hades, by stacking up consecutive layers of existence on top of each other. Since reality was considered to be an enclosed Totality, theoretically, there was no real difference between the higher celestial spheres and Hades. One just had the *impression* that one was "distancing" oneself from the final impersonal destiny of every living human being, but this impression was an illusion.

According to the *PGM*, at death, the *magus* will not go to Hades, "to which man was originally directed," but will attain an "aerial perspective on the afterlife." That is, in order to acquire the power to be released from the destiny that awaits everyone, death or Hades, one must be able to gain knowledge, *gnosis*, from those who have achieved the same. Through magical rituals and sacrifices to the deity,²¹³ the magician becomes as much an initiate (*mystês*) as a priest of his own Mystery (*mystêrion*). The magician practices sacred magic (*hiera magia*), which is his religion.²¹⁴ The *magus* is the priest of his own salvation and divinization, offering sacrifices to the deity, not excluding himself.

The *magus* must sacrifice to the deity, because the *magus* could not achieve his goals alone. Therefore, he sought an exclusive and personal relationship, even "friendship" with the entity in question, because through participation *in* the entity's divine nature, the *magus* would be deified. This might be related to a passage in *CH*, X, 21 that the human mind, which we saw is the human's source of divinity, becomes a demon "in order to serve god." Hugh Parry says in *Thelxis*, that the magician projected his or her own "violently erotic feelings" and desires onto the "god" or "deity."²¹⁵ Through this projection, the *magus* became "one" or was united with the "god" in question. The oaths made during the rituals were permanent and "assumed the

²¹² Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structures of Alchemy*, trans. Stephen Corrin (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962) 149ff.

²¹³ "Supernatural Assistance in the Greek Magical Papyri," *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, 84.

²¹⁴ "Magic and Mystery in the Greek Magical Papyri," *Magika Hiera*, 248.

²¹⁵ "Supernatural Assistance in the Greek Magical Papyri," *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, 83.

characteristics of a real pact.”²¹⁶ Thereafter, the *magus* could be called the “friend of aerial spirits.”²¹⁷ Even though the magician was primarily concerned with obtaining material benefits, Scibilia emphasizes that the “daimonic friendship” was considered to be a salutary communion or *communio salutaris*.²¹⁸

Such is the effect of the *apothanastismos*, the directions how one can become immortal and pass through the heavens. The magician thus acquires a special destiny with a different perspective, as the spell tells him: ‘you will be [worshipped] as a god since you have a god as a friend’ (190-191). However the *magos* acquires this ulterior destiny only by applying a spell that forces the divinity to act. It is not an autonomous decision of the divinity, but, on the contrary, a surrender to the *epanankoi logoi*, ‘spells of coercion’, of the person who has united his *nous*, ‘mind’, to the divine spirit. This ritual, then, can be considered as the most interesting example of a symbolic ritual of death and rebirth. The magical power that the *magos* acquires does not, in the end, effect his definitive transformation, since he continues to need his *parhedros*, without whom he would be no more than a common mortal.²¹⁹

Within the framework of hermetic magic, divinization was the ultimate goal of the magician, and implied the ability to achieve one’s ultimate desires, that is, to save oneself. In order to be able to achieve one’s desires, one needed to develop one’s personality as a “magical operator” or manipulator. The practice of magic is a *gnosis* of how to manipulate the desires of the gods and humans. The ultimate desire was, of course, liberation from the common human destiny, i.e. death, Hades or “life in the shades,” into “immortality” in the aerial abodes. However, immortality was not a gift that one received, but a state that one took by means of coercion and manipulation of the will of the *daimon* through magical formulas and rituals. Scibilia says that:

In general, the sphere of magic is qualified by power, the power to equally attract, manipulate and use for its own ends spells and recipes -- in short substances that would remain inactive if deprived of supernatural activation. The magician wishes to achieve knowledge and in order to obtain it, he often has to persuade divinities to assist him in reaching his own ends. The fact that in the corpus of papyri magic operates through ‘coercion’ can be considered as a unifying element. The presence of ‘coercive’ elements needs no other justification than the real needs of the operator.²²⁰

²¹⁶ “Supernatural Assistance in the Greek Magical Papyri,” *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, 81.

²¹⁷ “Supernatural Assistance in the Greek Magical Papyri,” *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, 81.

²¹⁸ “Supernatural Assistance in the Greek Magical Papyri,” *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, 80.

²¹⁹ “Supernatural Assistance in the Greek Magical Papyri,” *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, 86.

²²⁰ “Supernatural Assistance in the Greek Magical Papyri,” *The Metamorphosis of Magic from Late Antiquity to the Early Modern Period*, 74.

Therefore, daimonic “friendship” was a form of union, or *systasis*, which implied a reciprocal relationship of a certain type. According to the late Samson Eitrem, “A good illustration of the sophisticated etiquette of ‘union’ with the divinity (*systasis*) is provided by a partially hexametric invocation of Helios-Apollo that solemnly apostrophizes the god’s soothsaying laurel. A *systasis* with the Moon completes this consecration of the dream-bringing night.”²²¹ This union was not a union between “lovers,” as is clear from the Greek. Συστασις means a “struggle with wild beasts” as in the “gathering of a pack of wolves” or “permanence.”²²² In this sense, both wills are permanently bound to each other through a reciprocal relationship of struggle and competition.

B. The *Picatrix*

1. Historical Background to the *Picatrix*

Previously, we mentioned the book of so-called demonic magic, the *Picatrix* and the possibility of Ficino and Pico’s dependence on it for developing their theories on magic. The *Picatrix* was probably first written in Arabic somewhere in the twelfth century by someone of Sabean influence, under the title *Ghâyat Al-Hakim (The Goal of the Wise)*. It was extremely popular during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. A Spanish version was written very early on, before the Spanish king Alphonse the Wise commissioned a Latin version in 1256.²²³ According to Tamara M. Green in *The City of the Moon God: Religious Traditions of Harran*, the *Ghâyat Al-Hakim* was probably written in the city of Harran.²²⁴ This city was known in the Bible as the hometown of Abraham’s father, Terah (Gen 11:31), and Jacob went there to get his wives Leah and Rachael (Gen 28 and 29). Today, the ancient site of the city is located close to the Turkish town Urfa. Green says that:

The *Picatrix* is a mélange drawn from a number of Arabic works on various aspects of the Hermetic tradition, including those of Jabir, and following that tradition, seeks in the opening chapter to establish a ‘philosophical’ basis for the practice of various sorts of theurgistic magic. ... And every aspect of magic, both theoretical and practical, depends on this interrelatedness of the terrestrial and celestial; theoretical magic concerns itself with the knowledge of the heavens, while the practical deals with the materiality of nature.²²⁵

The *Picatrix*, as a practical guidebook on various magical procedures, explains how to make magical talismans by using lists of magical images, such as the 36 decans (as divine beings, gods

²²¹ Samson Eitrem, “Dreams and Divination in Magical Ritual,” *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991) 177.

²²² Cf. ed. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Walter Bauer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979, 2nd ed.) 794-795.

²²³ Béatrice Bakhuche, Frédéric Fauquier and Brigitte Pérez-Jean, “Introduction,” *Picatrix: Un Traité de Magie Médiéval* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003) 5.

²²⁴ Tamara M. Green, *The City of the Moon God: Religious Traditions of Harran*, *Religions in the Graeco-Roman World* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992) 188, 191, 213.

²²⁵ *The City of the Moon God*, 186.

or demons)²²⁶ and their corresponding zodiacal signs.²²⁷ Although the terms are often used interchangeably, according to *The Dictionary of the Esoteric*, a talisman is “a magical object, like a charm, which is worn to *attract good fortune*. The talisman is often inscribed with the god-name or image of a supernatural power believed to bring good luck to the person wearing it.”²²⁸ An amulet, however, is “a small object, worn or carried as *a protection against misfortune or evil*” (Italics mine). Amulets can be anything from a rabbit’s foot to something more ornamented.²²⁹ In the *Picatrix*, the practice of the occult art of making talismans is placed within a Neoplatonic and hermetic framework.²³⁰ Saturn, after the Sun, plays the most important role as a planetary deity. “The preparation of the sacrifice of a bull in his honor is given special prominence,”²³¹ indirectly connecting Hermetism to the Mysteries of Dionysos. The sacrifice of a bull might also be related to the Egyptian Apis, who was the symbol of the god Osiris. Nevertheless, given the similar nature of their deaths, he was related to Dionysos in the Hellenistic period.

The *Picatrix* also contains many similarities to the *Corpus Hermeticum*, especially *Asclepius* 37, where it discusses how humans have discovered the divine nature and how the ancient Egyptians learned the art of making gods. Supposedly, they drew power or energy out of natural matter and then combined it with the souls of demons; thereafter they implanted them into statues that resembled the gods of the Mystery Cults.²³² This is, of course, the same procedure for making talismans. In the *Picatrix*, it claims to “contain a lost knowledge retrieved from a hidden past,”²³³ as well as to transmit important knowledge from philosophers like Aristotle and Plato, but also the physics of the Presocratic philosopher, Empedocles, whom we will discuss more at length in the next chapter. It takes over his four-fold division of reality as fire, air (aither), water and earth,²³⁴ and his magical play of sympathy/attraction and antipathy/repulsion in the form of

²²⁶ According to Yates, the “decans” were really Egyptian sidereal (star) gods, which had been fused with Chaldean astrology and then connected to the Greek Zodiac. Commenting on a text from *CH*, III, Yates says: “The decans appear here as powerful divine or demonic forces, close to the circle of the All, and above the circles of the Zodiac and the planets and operating on things below either directly through their children or sons, the demons, or through the intermediary of planets.” *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 47.

²²⁷ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 53.

²²⁸ *The Dictionary of the Esoteric*, 300.

²²⁹ *The Dictionary of the Esoteric*, 11.

²³⁰ “Introduction,” *Picatrix: Un Traité de Magie Médiéval*, 8-9.

²³¹ *The City of the Moon God*, 214.

²³² *Hermetica*, Asclepius, [37], 89-90. “What we have said of mankind is wondrous, but less wondrous than this: it exceeds the wonderment of all wonders that humans have been able to discover the divine nature and how to make it...”

²³³ *The City of the Moon God*, 186.

²³⁴ Trans. Béatrice Bakhuche, Frédéric Fauquier and Brigitte Pérez-Jean, *Picatrix: Un Traité de Magie Médiéval* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2003), or *Picatrix*, II, 8, 3: “Voilà pourquoi je dis que la chaleur, la froideur, l’humidité et la sécheresse sont semblables au feu, à l’air, à l’eau et à la terre, qui sont divisés en nombreuses parties par les sens et l’intellect.”

Love and Hate respectively.²³⁵ It would have indeed been very easy for Ficino to derive his theory of erotic magic from the *Picatrix* and, ultimately, from Empedocles via the Stoics.

As in Romanic Idealism and New Age, in the *Picatrix*, God and the World are perspectives of the One Divine Mind. God is not “Other” to Creation, as in traditional Christian theism. “Man is a little world reflecting the great world of the *cosmos*, but through his intellect he can raise himself above the seven heavens.”²³⁶ However, it is only the human being, as microcosm of the macrocosm, who practices science, in Latin, or philosophy, in Greek. Only the human being can attain perfection, which is a synonym for the attainment of knowledge, and ascend through the celestial spheres. In this context, the goal of philosophy is to provide a theoretical basis (i.e. a paradigm or worldview) to become a magical operator, or effective personality. This will in turn allow the *magus* to develop the power to intellectually ascend through the spheres. In the *Picatrix*, only a philosopher-magician, who has been endowed with the power of reason and intellect, can be truly called a human being. Those who are not endowed with reason and intellect are considered to be less than human and are the “raw material” of Nature, so to speak. Men and women, who do not have the intellectual capacity to study philosophy and magic, are handicapped or ignorant in some way, are merely human beings in appearance. The *Picatrix* asserts:

Et celui-là est parfait qui atteint le dernier degré de la science et qui honore et aime ces degrés de la science. De tels hommes sont appelés philosophes en grec; en latin en revanche, ils sont compris comme amants de la science. Celui qui ne pratique pas les sciences est imparfait et d’une faible autorité, et, par conséquent, ne doit être appelé homme que par le nom, l’apparence et la figure de l’homme. Il a d’abord été donné à l’homme d’étudier les sciences qui permettent de connaître la nature de l’homme en soi et qu’il est lui-même un microcosme semblable au macrocosme, qu’il est un corps achevé, avec un esprit rationnel, un corps doué d’âme et de raison, qu’il est quelque chose de séparé, avec ces trois esprits, de toutes les choses du monde et de tous les animaux en tant qu’il est capable de connaissance parce que les hommes peuvent appréhender les faits contingents, déterminer ce qui n’est pas vrai, et s’intéresser à ce qui est dans le monde et ce qui sera appréhendé en tout lieu (du monde naturellement) par leur science et leur intellect, et retenir par leur force et leur puissance ce qu’ils entendent. Et par là, l’homme voit dans son intellect ce qui peut arriver dans la journée, et dans l’homme, c’est-à-dire dans un microcosme, ce qui est semblable aussi au macrocosme dont il est l’image dans sa forme et dans les caractéristiques qu’on trouve en lui. Il est semblable aux animaux par tous les caractères naturels, et il est séparé des animaux par son art et ses sciences.²³⁷

Like most Hermetic materials, the *Picatrix* does not see a division between philosophy and formal magic, but sees philosophy as the necessary background to magic. This explains somewhat why New Agers want a paradigm change from traditional Christian theism to esoteric

²³⁵ “Introduction,” *Picatrix: Un Traité de Magie Médiéval*, 10.

²³⁶ Cf. *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 51.

²³⁷ *Picatrix*, I, 6, 1.

holism. In the *Picatrix*, magic is the natural and logical conclusion of philosophy,²³⁸ and its crowning glory is necromancy,²³⁹ which is the divination of the future through communication with the dead spirits, demons or a *parhedros*. In contemporary language the practice of necromancy is structurally similar to the practice of spiritism or New Age channeling, although the New Ager would not consider that he is in communication with a spirit of the dead. As we saw above in our discussion of the magical assistant, or the *parhedros*, for the practicing magician, necromancy is a totally amoral technique or tool to achieve his goals. It is merely a tool to be used by either a good or evil *magus*. From the perspective of the *magus*, there is nothing intrinsically evil about magic, or trying to bend the will of “the others” to one’s own will, only the final intention of the *magus* is determinative. According to the *Picatrix*, “philosophy” is a necessary step that the *magus* must take for the practice of formal magic as well as the moral “guarantee” that only “good” magicians practice it.²⁴⁰ Despite the discussion of morality, the *Picatrix* is full of instructions on how to make destructive talismans to destroy cities and persons or to poison wells and waterways.²⁴¹ The magician of the *Picatrix* was not a dilettante. He needed a profound knowledge of all the various medieval sciences, like mathematics, geometry, physics, astronomy -- used to plan astrological charts -- as well as music, the science of proportions, etc. to practice his trade and achieve salvation.²⁴²

2. The Talismanic Solar City on the Mountain of the Moon: Adocentyn

Another important aspect of the *Picatrix*, which would have an effect on especially later Renaissance *magi*, is its description of a legendary talismanic city called Adocentyn, where men are versed in ancient sciences, especially astronomy. This idea of an ancient city with its sun temple on Mountain of the Moon, founded by Hermes,²⁴³ would live on through ideas propagated in Tommaso Campanella’s *City of the Sun* or *Città del Sole*. Clearly, the text alludes to the Egyptian Ennead of Heliopolis, or the City of the Sun, but one that has also been equally influenced by Hebrew imagery. According to the *Picatrix*, the Chaldean *magi* passed on the information that Hermes “a d’abord construit une maison de talismans avec lesquels il connaissait le volume du Nil face au Mont de la Lune; c’est là qu’il a fait la maison du Soleil.” According to the medieval document, Hermes built the city upon a model of something like the heavenly

²³⁸ “Introduction,” *Picatrix: Un Traité de Magie Médiéval*, 6.

²³⁹ “Introduction,” *Picatrix: Un Traité de Magie Médiéval*, 7.

²⁴⁰ “Introduction,” *Picatrix: Un Traité de Magie Médiéval*, 8.

²⁴¹ *Picatrix*, II, 9, 7: For example: “Pour attirer le malheur sur le lieu de ton choix et pour qu’il ne soit jamais habité. Fais ces figures sur une lame de plomb avec un crâne de porc, au jour et à l’heure de Saturne, quand le deuxième décan du Capricorne et à l’ascendant et que Saturne s’y trouve aussi; place la lame dans le lieu que tu veux voir dépeuplé. La force mauvaise de Saturne se répandra en lui, et il ne sera jamais habité, tant que la lame y restera...”

²⁴² “Introduction,” *Picatrix: Un Traité de Magie Médiéval*, 9; See also *Picatrix*, IV, 5, 1.

²⁴³ *Picatrix* IV, 3, 1.

Jerusalem, which contained a special tree that produced all kinds of fruits. This is a clear allusion to the Tree in the original paradisiacal garden of *Genesis*, revealing some sort of Jewish or Christian influence.

This passage in the *Picatrix* is related by allusion and association to three important passages in the *Asclepius*. The first is *Asclepius* 26, where it speaks of the passing of the senility of the “old age” and the restitution of the Egyptian religion, but also *Asclepius* 27²⁴⁴ as well as the famous “god-making passage” in *Asclepius* 37.²⁴⁵ The *Picatrix* speaks about how Hermes made spirits enter into the animal forms that guarded each cardinal gate of the city, who were then able to speak. After the destruction of the “old” and the subsequent restoration of the “new” and “higher” version of the Egyptian religion, it claims that “powers and effects of other gods,” probably meaning the planetary deities or decans, “will be distributed through all things that are.” Thanks to a magical lighthouse that radiates a different color on each day of the week, and special talismans that Hermes had placed throughout the city, the city’s magical solar priests are able to regulate the virtues and vices of all of all of the inhabitants. “Tout autour de la cité, il disposa des talismans divers et de toutes sortes, dont la vertu rendait les habitants vertueux, pur de toute infamie et de mauvaises langueurs.”²⁴⁶

²⁴⁴ *Hermetica*, *Asclepius* [27], 83. “The one who dispenses <life,> whom we call Jupiter [Zeus], occupies the place between heaven and earth. But Jupiter Plutonium [Chthonic Zeus, or Dionysos] rules over earth and sea, and it is he who nourishes mortal things that have soul and bear fruit. The powers of these gods invigorate crops, trees and soil, but powers and effects of other gods will be distributed through all things that are. The gods who rule the earth will <withdraw>, and they will be stationed in a city founded at Egypt’s farthest border toward the setting sun, where the whole race of mortals will hasten by land and sea.”

“But tell me where these gods of yours are now, Trismegistus?”

“Stationed in the great city on the Libyan Mountain. And, for the time being, let that be their story.” (Brackets [] mine).”

²⁴⁵ *Hermetica*, *Asclepius* [37], 89-90. “Let us turn again to mankind and reason that divine gift whereby a human is called a rational animal. What have we said of mankind is wondrous, but less wondrous than this: it exceeds the wonderment of all wonders that humans have been able to discover the divine nature and how to make it. Our ancestors once erred gravely on the theory of divinity; they were unbelieving and inattentive to worship and reverence for god. But then they discovered the art of making gods. To their discovery they added a conformable power arising from the nature of matter. Because they could not make souls, they mixed this power in and called up the souls of demons or angels and implanted them in likeness through holy and divine mysteries, whence the idols could have power to do good and evil.”

²⁴⁶ *Picatrix*, IV, 3, 1. Before this, it states: “C’est lui qui a édifié une cite à l’est de l’Égypte, d’une longueur de douze milles, où il a construit un château qui avait quatre portes sur ses quatre côtés. Sur la porte orientale il a placé une forme d’aigle; sur la porte occidentale, il a construit la forme d’un taureau, au sud la forme d’un lion et au nord celle d’un chien. Il y a fait entrer les esprits spirituels qui s’exprimaient en lançant des paroles; personne ne pouvait franchir ses portes sans leur ordre. Là il a planté des arbres, au milieu desquels se dressait un grand arbre qui produisait tous les fruits. Au sommet du château, il a fait construire une tour qui atteignait une longueur de trente coudées et au sommet de laquelle il a placé une coupole qui changeait de couleur à chacun des sept jours. À la fin des sept jours, elle recouvrait la couleur de début. Cette cité, chaque jour, se couvrait de la couleur de la coupole, et ainsi la cité brillait d’une couleur chaque jour. Tout autour de la tour, il y avait de l’eau en abondance, où vivaient de nombreuses espèces de poisons...”

C. The Influence of the *Asclepius*

1. World Destruction in *Asclepius* 26

As discussed, both Ficino and Pico were also indebted to the *Asclepius*, but also the *Picatrix* for their understanding of the human person and the nature of natural magic. As Hermetic texts, there are certain similarities in how both the *Picatrix* and the *Asclepius* understood reality. Although St. Augustine had warned against the *Asclepius*, Ficino and Pico ignored his warnings. Their works served to re-habilitate Hermes and the practice of magic in the eyes of many Renaissance philosophers and theologians as a noble, even Christian, art.²⁴⁷ However, as time wore on, it became clearer that the ideas contained in the *Hermetica* were incompatible with traditional Christianity. Christianity and magical Hermetism would part their ways, eventually leading to the process of the secularization of western esotericism, beginning in the Enlightenment.²⁴⁸

As suggested earlier, we believe that *Asclepius* 26 has indirectly helped to concretize the understanding of a new age in Modernity through its re-habilitation in the Renaissance. Although a new age is not specifically mentioned in the text, the explicit reference to the passage of the “old age,” in Latin *senectus*, implies a dawning of some type of new one. The term *senectus* means “old age” but also “senility.” Because reality for Hermeticists is essentially mental, *senectus* is an extremely appropriate term, in the sense that when a human person (microcosm) grows old, his or her mental faculties often deteriorate or degenerate. In this interpretation, just as the microcosm deteriorates with age, so too the macrocosm deteriorates and must die in order to be re-born anew. However, in a cyclical understanding of reality, this means that the older age must not merely “pass away,” but be destroyed so that a new age can emerge out of the ashes of the old one, again and again. In a traditional Christian understanding, although the microcosm and macrocosm face deterioration, and although the human person can be considered a microcosm, they are both sustained and will be rejuvenated by a Creator God, who is not the macrocosm. Moreover, human and cosmic rejuvenation does not happen over and over again. Now, however, we quote the passage in full:

²⁴⁷ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 58. Yates states: Marsilio Ficino, who took such extreme care to present the revival of Plato and Neoplatonism as a movement which could be accorded with Christianity, allowed a fringe of magic to penetrate into this movement, thus inaugurating those philosophies of the Renaissance in which magical undercurrents are never far absent. The theory of the *prisca theologica*, of the piety and antiquity of Hermes Trismegistus, *priscus theologus* and magus, offered an excuse for Ficino’s modern philosophical magic. The attraction of the *Asclepius* had probably already been exerting its pull in the earlier Renaissance, and when Ficino ... found a new revelation of the sanctity of Hermes and a confirmation of Lactantius’ high opinion of him as the prophet of the ‘Son of God’, he felt authorised to adopt the Lactantian view and tried to evade the Augustinian warning. ... We must not forget that the other *prisca theologi*, such as Orpheus or Zoroaster, were also Magi, and also authorised by their antiquity revivals of forms of magic. Yet Hermes Trismegistus is the most important of the *prisca magi*, from the point of view of the incorporation of magic with philosophy.”

²⁴⁸ This is an interesting theory suggested by Urszula Szulakowska in *The Sacrificial Body and the Day of Doom: Alchemy and Apocalyptic Discourse in the Protestant Reformation* (Leiden: Brill, 2006).

‘Such will be the *old age* [*senectus*] of the world: irreverence, disorder, disregard for everything good. When all this comes to pass, Asclepius, then the master and father, the god whose power is primary, governor of the first god, will look on this conduct and these willful crimes, and in an act of will -- which is god’s benevolence -- he will take his stand against the vices and the perversion in everything, righting wrongs, washing away malice in a flood or consuming it in fire or ending it by spreading pestilential disease everywhere. Then he will restore the world to its beauty of old so that the world itself will again seem deserving of worship and wonder, and with constant benediction and proclamations of praise the people of that time will honor the god who makes and restores so great a work. And this will be the geniture of the world: a reformation of all good things and a restitution, most holy and reverent, of nature itself, reordered in the course of time (but through an act of will,) which is and was everlasting and without beginning. For god’s will has no beginning; it remains the same, everlasting in its present state. God’s nature is deliberation; will is the supreme goodness.’

‘Deliberation <is will>, Trismegistus?’

‘Will comes to be from deliberation, Asclepius, and the very act of willing comes from will. God wills nothing in excess since he is completely full of all things and wills what he has. He wills all that is good, and he has all that he wills. All things are good that he considers and wills. Such is god, and the world is his image -- (good) from good.’²⁴⁹

The above text has been interpreted by each generation differently. For example, the pious, intellectualistic Platonic Christian Ficino, faced with the moral decline of Western Christian culture, would not have interpreted the lament of the passing of the “old age” and the advent of a “purer” Egyptian religion as St. Augustine had interpreted it. Augustine was still struggling against the dominance of the magical, animistic worldview of classical Roman Antiquity, within which the *Asclepius* was written. St. Augustine quotes from the text in *De Civitate Dei*, 6, 23, making it clear that Hermes Trismegistus is not as orthodox as others make him out to be. Augustine takes the prediction in *Asclepius* 26 to be a prediction of the Christian overthrow of paganism. However, although Hermes makes this positive prediction, “he speaks as one who is a friend to these same mockeries of the demons, and does not clearly express the name of Christ. On the contrary, he deplores, as if it had already taken place, the future abolition of those things by the observance of which there was a resemblance of heaven, -- he bears witness to Christianity by a kind of mournful prophecy.”²⁵⁰ In *Contra Faustum Manichaeum*, Augustine connects Hermeticism to the Manicheans, and condemns the writings of Hermes, as well as those of Orpheus and the Sibyls, due to their promotion of demon worship and idolatry.²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ *Hermetica*, Asclepius [26], 82-83.

²⁵⁰ *The City of God*, 8, 24, p. 161.

²⁵¹ Saint Augustine, “Reply to Faustus the Manichean,” *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. IV, ed. Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, trans. Rev. Richard Stothert (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprint 1996) 199, 200, 205, 206. Given the Manichean Heretic Faustus’ high appraisal of the writings, plus their intimate connection to the Sabeans, it would be interesting to view the *Corpus Hermeticum* as the way that heretical Christian gnosticism entered into the “orthodox” Church through the backdoor. See especially, “The City of God,” 16, p. 23-27.

For Renaissance pantheists and animists, however, the matter was different. They had been reared within the dominant theistic worldview that seemed to be coming apart at the seams. Jacob Burckhardt points out that, long before Ficino, Italy had re-incorporated the pagan mindset of the Roman Empire into their psyche. By Ficino's time, the great intellects and despots of Italy had been striving for almost two centuries to imitate the ancient cultures of Rome and Greece in all areas of life, such as politics, religion, art and morality, albeit behind a Christian façade. Perhaps the decay of traditional or medieval Christian culture during the Renaissance, despite the great intellectual advances, had less to do with traditional Christianity than with the tacit acceptance of pagan ideals and the desire to imitate late pagan Roman culture? For Ficino, however, Yates says:

The passing of the holy Egyptian religion is identified with a breaking up of the moral law, and its eventual restoration with the restoration of morality. The decay of the "religion of the world" brought with it the decay of ethics and utter moral confusion. Hence the pious and good man should hope for its promised return, and the lament could begin to look quite differently from the way Augustine saw it, could begin to seem like an injunction to infuse into a decayed Christianity something of the Egyptian spirit of piety and morality.²⁵²

Although later philosophers and even recent scholars have tried to interpret *Asclepius* 26 as prophesying the "Death of God" or even Christianity, it is clear that the passage concerns the passing of Greek religion or Hellenism.²⁵³ Fowden explains the reception of *Asclepius* 26 in relation to *Asclepius* 24 and 25. "This passage and others similar to it have much impressed modern commentators, who have concluded that we have to do here with a prophecy of a final and definitive *Götterdämmerung*. In fact it is Egypt whose doom is foretold, while the gods merely withdraw to heaven, whence they return to earth after its purification by flood, fire or plague. And even then, when all things will be new, Egypt will still be the true home of the gods."²⁵⁴ Like many insular civilizations that are suddenly confronted with a new and more assertive culture, Egypt did not know how to react and was overwhelmed by the more assertive Greek culture. Egyptian civilization began to disintegrate and gradually committed, "in varying degrees, communal suicide."²⁵⁵ The acceptance of Greek rational philosophy, which was highly critical of the magico-religious worldview -- a worldview synonymous with the Egyptian one --

²⁵² Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, 41-42.

²⁵³ *The Egyptian Hermes*, 38-39. Based on the early Church Father Lactantius' interpretation of the Hermetic texts as an ancient pre-Christian prophecy concerning the rise of Christianity, we cannot claim that these texts were written against early Christianity. Fowden, against Mahé, confirms Yates interpretation.

²⁵⁴ *The Egyptian Hermes*, 40.

²⁵⁵ *The Egyptian Hermes*, 42.

helped to undermine the traditional Egyptian value system.²⁵⁶ Therefore, the text should be understood as a description of the disenchantment of the land through the acceptance of rationalizing Greek ways after the invasion and subjugation of Egypt by Alexander the Great in 332 BC.²⁵⁷ According to the Egyptian priestly perspective, by accepting the Greek gods, which included Greek rational religion and nihilism, the Egyptians accepted the destruction of their own civilization. Given their cyclical understanding of the universe, after a period of destructive purification, the gods would eventually return to the land.

As stated, the scene was set in *Asclepius* 24 and 25, where the general deteriorating situation in Egypt was described. Because the Hellenistic Egyptians rejected the gods, the gods departed, leaving the country like a desert and tomb. People ceased to marvel at the beauty of the world and became weary of living, preferring death and destruction. “In their weariness the people of that time will find the world nothing to wonder at or to worship. This all – a good thing that never had nor has nor will have its better – will be endangered.”²⁵⁸ Garth Fowden translates the end of the passage with: “will be threatened with destruction.”²⁵⁹ According to the Egyptian author, who himself displays a strong sense of nihilism, everything would be reversed or inverted, because the Egyptians’ accepted Greek nihilism. In the period of disintegration, the people:

will prefer shadows to light, and they will find death more expedient than life. No one will look up to heaven. The reverent will be thought mad, the irreverent wise; the lunatic will be thought brave, and the scoundrel will be taken for a decent person. Soul and all teachings about soul (that should begin as immortal or else expects to attain immortality) as I revealed them to you will be considered not simply laughable but even illusory. But – believe me – whoever dedicates himself to reverence of mind will find himself facing a capital penalty. They will establish new laws, new justice. Nothing holy, nothing reverent nor worthy of heaven or heavenly beings will be heard of or believed in the mind.²⁶⁰

Although the author gives the impression that Egypt is facing something new, the concept of the total annihilation of humanity was not new to Egyptian thought. In fact, the *Asclepius* might be playing on thoroughly Egyptian motifs in developing its prediction of annihilation. In his article, “The Hermetic Apocalypse and other Greek Predictions of the End of Religion,” Roelof van den Broek discusses the pharaonic background of Egyptian apocalyptic texts in relation to the *Asclepius*. In the Egyptian literary tradition, most texts follow a similar structure: “a visionary proclaims to a king that the kingdom and its institutions, the worship of the gods and social

²⁵⁶ *The Egyptian Hermes*, 81.

²⁵⁷ Lucia Gahlin, *Egypt: Gods, Myths and Religion* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2002) 7.

²⁵⁸ *Hermetica*, Asclepius [25], 82.

²⁵⁹ *The Egyptian Hermes*, 41.

²⁶⁰ *Hermetica*, Asclepius [25], 82. It is interesting that the author cannot make up his mind whether the soul is immortal or will become immortal.

relations will be ruined. Strangers will occupy the land, the natural cycle will be overthrown; the gods will abandon Egypt, death will be ruling everywhere. But then the gods will send a new king; the foreigners will be driven out, relations will be restored, the gods will return and be worshipped again.” Van den Broek points out that the *Asclepius*’ apocalyptic section follows the same scheme, except for the fact that it is the gods themselves, not a king, will restore religion. That is to say, unlike “all other Egyptian apocalyptic texts ... it has no connection with a royal ideology.” This leads Van den Broek to the conclusion that the *Asclepius* is therefore describing the last phases of the aging world, right before the “beginning of a new cosmic cycle.”²⁶¹ We suggest, however, that the *Asclepius* might be following another, older more mythical scheme, where indeed the gods or god restores order.

2. The Book of the Divine Cow

In a text known as *The Book of the Divine Cow*, a reference to the mother goddess Hathor, tells of the near destruction of the human race by Sekhmet, Hathor’s vicious side. Versions of the myth were found in five pharaonic tombs of the New Kingdom in the Valley of the Kings, located on the west bank of the Nile at Thebes (ca. 1550-1069 BC). Experts say that the style and language of the myth, however, point to the Middle Kingdom (ca. 2055-1650 BC). In the myth, the sun god Re learns that humanity is set to rebel against him. Out of revenge, Re allows Sekhmet to destroy humanity, but after a day of blood and gore, Re decides that they have learned their lesson. Sekhmet, however, wants to continue the massacre and must be tricked into stopping. After getting drunk on beer colored to look like human blood, Sekhmet forgets about her lust for blood and returns to her more peaceful manifestation.²⁶²

In the myth of Hathor, initially, the “highest god” desires the destruction of humanity; however, the penultimate moment before the deed is accomplished, he changes his mind and saves it. The “highest god” is simultaneously the one, who instigates the crime against humanity and the one who saves it from final destruction. From a Girardian perspective, this myth conceals the existence of a real bloodbath that was too much for the Egyptians to bear. For people captured by the structures of mythical thinking, the Hathor myth was probably an interpretation of some actual catastrophe, for which everyone felt responsible, but could not face without descending again into chaos. We see the ancient rationalization of this type of mythical violence in the Stoic doctrine of *Ekpurosis*, on which we will now focus our attention.

²⁶¹ R. Van den Broek, “The Hermetic Apocalypse and other Greek Predictions of the End of Religion,” *From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition*, ed. Roelof van den Broek (Amsterdam: In de Pelikaan, 2000) 98-99.

²⁶² Lucia Gahlin, *Egypt: Gods, Myths and Religion* (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 2002) 70-73.

D. Stoicism and the Stoic Doctrine of *Ekpurosis*

1. Stoic Cosmology

As stated, the *Hermetica*, which includes the *Asclepius* and the *Picatrix*, contains strains of Stoic doctrine and Presocratic thought. As we saw, Ficino's doctrine of *spiritus* or *pneuma*, in the *De vita coelitus comparanda*, was one of the most influential documents for the Renaissance theory of magic, although later magicians would adapt or "strengthen" it by adding their own more powerful magic. Ficino did not derive his theory from Plotinus, but from the *Asclepius*, the *Picatrix* and ultimately from the Stoics, whose thought is embedded therein.

In Antiquity, the works of the Stoics Zeno of Citium (336/5-264/3 BC) and Chrysippus (281/278-208/205 BC) were the springboard for operations in practical magic.²⁶³ Jack Lindsay in *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt* points out that the Stoics developed their ideas amidst the breakdown of the city-state and the imposition of Alexander the Great's kingship. They attempted to accept the new situation by suppressing the importance of the individual. However, their denial of this importance, of the inherent dignity of each individual human being, actually drove them deeper into themselves. This is the origin of the development their "ethic of self-sufficiency, endurance, and *apatheia*,"²⁶⁴ which helped them to cope with daily life.

For the most part, the Stoics adhered to a type of sophisticated materialism or naturalism, conceiving "God" as conscious Nature, an idea which would later be adapted by Giordano Bruno and Baruch Spinoza.²⁶⁵ God was "a living being," but not "a personal deity external to Nature," even though they often evoked the name Zeus. In *Stoicism*, John Sellers states that the Stoic version of materialism did not need "to refer to anything outside Nature in order to account for Nature's movement and order. While remaining naturalists, they conceive Nature as a living being that organizes and regulates itself. Their cosmology has thus been described as a 'cosmobiology' (Hahm 1977: 136)." Ilya Prigogine's theory of self-organization and James Lovelock's "Gaia hypothesis," which envision nature as a self-regulating system, are perhaps contemporary versions of the Stoic understanding of Nature. For example, these modern versions of Stoic naturalism have been accepted by some New Agers as scientific proof for the "holistic worldview."²⁶⁶

The Stoics took many of their major cosmological doctrines from the Presocratics, especially Empedocles and Heraclitus, who believed that fire was the basic world-substance, but they also borrowed from Plato and Aristotle.²⁶⁷ According to Frederick Copleston, for the Stoics,

²⁶³ *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, 112.

²⁶⁴ *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, 20.

²⁶⁵ John Sellers, *Stoicism* (Los Angeles: The University of California Press, 2006) 93.

²⁶⁶ *Stoicism*, 95.

²⁶⁷ Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Greece and Rome*, vol. 1 (New York: Image Books, 1993) 387.

“God is the active Fire (πῦρ τεχνικόν) which is immanent in the universe (πνεῦμα διήκον δι’ οὐλοῦ του κόσμου), but he is at the same time the primal Source from which the crasser elements that make the corporeal world come forth. These crasser elements proceed from God and are at length resolved into him again, so that all that exists is either the primal Fire -- God in himself -- or God in his different states. When the world is in existence God stands to it as soul to body, being the soul of the world. He is not something entirely different from the stuff of the world, his Body, but is a finer stuff, the moving and forming principle -- the crasser stuff, of which the world is formed, being itself motionless and unformed, though capable of receiving all sorts of movement and form.”²⁶⁸ Therefore, the world of Nature was, according to the Stoics, “God’s body,” an idea taken over in the *Corpus Hermeticum* and related to re-birth of the Hermetic initiate as Aion or the primal man. For example, in *CH*, IV entitled, *A Discourse of Hermes to Tat: The Mixing Bowl or the Monad*, Hermes says to Tat that all things that are, should be considered as God’s body. In *CH* XI, 4 entitled *Mind to Hermes*, the Divine Mind tells Hermes:

God is the soul of eternity [i.e. Aion]; eternity [Aion] is the soul of the cosmos; heaven is the soul of the earth. God is in mind, but mind is in soul, and soul is in matter, yet, all these exist through eternity [Aion]. Inwardly, a soul full of mind and god fills this universal body in which all bodies exist, but outwardly soul surrounds the universe and brings it to life. Outwardly, the universe is this great and perfect living thing, the cosmos; inwardly, it is all living things.

For the Stoics, God’s body is, however, created out of the vapors of the primeval Fire, which successively becomes air or aither, water and then earth. From this, comes the air and the elementary fire, or the sun.²⁶⁹ As we will see, this was a Stoic re-interpretation of the Empedoclean understanding of cosmogony.

Although Hermetism is more idealistic, Stoic cosmology was for the most part an expression of monistic materialism, or a form of hylozoism. Nature is passive, while reason, or God, or the primeval Fire, as the Soul of the World or *anima mundi*, is active. “Matter was seen as of two kinds, *hyle*-like or passive, and *pneuma*-like or actively cohesive. Coherence was a positive force, *synetike dynamis*; and *pneuma*-like matter was characterized by tension, *tonos*, an inner heat of fire. As *pneuma* entered into organic and inorganic matter alike with its admixture of air and fire, it pervaded the whole universe and made it a single inter-related unit drawn together by an endless series of tensions.”²⁷⁰ Although they conceived of *pneuma* as different from the elemental fire, the creative or primal fire (*pur technikon*) was most probably the same as

²⁶⁸ *A History of Philosophy: Greece and Rome*, vol. 1, 388.

²⁶⁹ *A History of Philosophy: Greece and Rome*, vol. 1, 389.

²⁷⁰ *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, 21.

the *pneuma* that pervaded the universe.²⁷¹ Lindsay says that this Stoic doctrine also played an important role in the development of alchemy. Copleston explains the doctrine further:

In inorganic objects the Universal Reason or *πνεῦμα* [spirit] operates as a *εξίς* [practice or skill] or principle of cohesion, and this holds good also for plants -- which have no soul -- though in them the *εξίς* has the power of movement and has risen to the rank of *φύσις* [Nature]. In animals there is soul (*ψυχή*), which shows itself in the powers of *φάντασια* [appearance, apparition] and *ορμή* [impulse, inclination or desire], and in human beings there is reason [*logos*]. The soul of man is therefore the noblest of souls: indeed it is part of the divine Fire which descended into men at their creation and is then passed on at generation, for, like all else, it is material. *το ηγεμονικον* [a guiding spirit or principle] the dominant part of the soul, has its seat in the heart according to Chrysippus, apparently on the ground that the voice, which is the expression of thought, proceeds from the heart. (Some other Stoics placed *το ηγεμονικον* in the head.) Personal immortality was scarcely possible in the Stoic system, and the Stoics admitted that all souls return to the primeval Fire at the conflagration. The only dispute was on the subject of what souls persist after death until the conflagration; and while Cleanthes considered that this held good for all human souls, Chrysippus admitted it only in regard to the souls of the wise.²⁷²

Couliano tells us that it was the Stoic, Zeno of Citium, who developed the doctrine of universal pneumatic sympathy. As stated, the Stoics believed that the entire universe was a “living organism, endowed with the faculty of reason, able to engender rational microcosms: *Animans est igitur mundus composque rationis*.”²⁷³ For them, Universal Reason was also spirit, or *pneuma*, and is animated by a principle, the *hegemonikon*, within the soul. Unlike Aristotle who saw *pneuma* as an “ethereal intermediary between the soul and body,” the Stoics considered *pneuma* as the soul itself.²⁷⁴ As we have stated, *pneuma* was also associated with the divine primal or creative fire and, therefore, with God. The pneumatic principle is not idealistic, but materialistic. Based on the doctrine of universal sympathy, just as the universe, or *macrocosm*, possesses the faculty or principle of reason (*the hegemonikon*) in its heart and is the analogical equivalent of the sun, so too does the human person, or *microcosm*. “The harmony between human psychology and the psychology of the cosmos is therefore complete; just as the psychic *pneuma* animates our whole organism, so also the cosmic *pneuma* enters even the most remote extremities of this great organism called the world.”²⁷⁵

Having written two books on the subject, Chrysippus also used pneumatic theory to ground his understanding of soothsaying and the interpretation of dreams. As Couliano points out, from the theory of soothsaying, it is just one step away from a theory of practical or formal magic. Soothsaying, in a sense, taps into the natural flow of *pneuma*, or Divine Spirit, while

²⁷¹ *Stoicism*, 98.

²⁷² *A History of Philosophy: Greece and Rome*, vol. 1, 392.

²⁷³ *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, 112.

²⁷⁴ *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, 113.

²⁷⁵ *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, 112.

formal magic, with its rites, rituals, ceremonies and formulas, endeavors to “attract, nourish, and accumulate or store up the divine spirit. In most cases, the *pneuma* is contained in a material object made for this purpose or in an animal. With this reservoir of spiritual energy within his grasp, the magician counts either on obtaining knowledge of the future or achieving some practical purpose.”²⁷⁶ Following from this, Stoic pantheistic materialism was a deterministic system of belief that denied human freedom or liberty. Fate and providence were aspects of God; nonetheless, humans could experience an “interior freedom” when their judgments of or attitudes (moods) about events accorded with the Divine Reason as microcosmic agreement with the macrocosmic Divine Will. Magic, like soothsaying, was a means to transcend “fate.” Freedom meant, therefore, “doing consciously, with assent, what one will do in any case.”²⁷⁷ By accepting the stoic understanding of *pneuma* and universal sympathy upon which to ground his theory of magic, Ficino also inadvertently accepted their fatalism, which would be transmitted to a long series of *magi* after him.

It is perhaps due to their assent to monistic materialism that the Stoics denied the possibility of intrinsic evil or an act that is evil in itself. Human intention makes an act evil, while the act is in itself amoral. Hence, rape, murder, incest, abortion, homosexuality, committed for a “good” reason, or in accordance with the “laws of Nature,” could be “good” or “moral.” No action is wrong in itself, and Zeno declared that cannibalism or incest are in themselves morally indifferent.²⁷⁸ Moral character is determined by the intent of the doer to act in accordance with the laws of Nature. To live a virtuous life then is to live a life in accordance with the Divine Will, or in accordance with the law of Nature (*physis*). Since Nature is self-perfecting and self-developing, so too the human person who is endowed with reason. The goal of microcosmic human life is to follow the law of the macrocosm, or the universe. Copleston explains that the virtuous life is a life in which nothing is forbidden by the universal right reason, “which pervades all things and is identical with Zeus, the guide and governor of the universe.”²⁷⁹

2. World Conflagration

One of the basic laws of Nature was *ekpurosis*, or cyclical destruction by universal conflagration. The Stoics claimed to have derived this doctrine from Heraclitus, although scholars are in disagreement whether Heraclitus actually taught this idea.²⁸⁰ *Ekpurosis* is the doctrine “in which the whole world returns to the primeval fire, from which it was born,” again and again. Sellers

²⁷⁶ *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, 112-113.

²⁷⁷ *A History of Philosophy: Greece and Rome*, vol. 1, 389.

²⁷⁸ *A History of Philosophy: Greece and Rome*, vol. 1, 396.

²⁷⁹ *A History of Philosophy: Greece and Rome*, vol. 1, 395-396.

²⁸⁰ Robin Waterfield, *The First Philosophers: The Presocratics and the Sophists*, Oxford World’s Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 35.

says that the doctrine of *ekpurosis* was a consequence of the Stoics worldview or belief that the *cosmos* was a “spherical being, surrounded by infinite void (DL 7.140).” This was also an opinion that was held by Empedocles and taken over by both the Stoics and the author of the *Corpus*. Although the *cosmos* was finite, the void was infinite. This meant that they conceived of the *cosmos* as having an edge.²⁸¹ The edge between the *cosmos* and the void allowed the Stoics to posit the world’s eternal return of the same. At certain moments, the Stoics believed that the finite *cosmos* would be dissolved back into the primal creative fire, the *pur technikon*, mentioned earlier. As stated, the *pur technikon* was also associated with God, *pneuma* and the *anima mundi*, which regulated the cycles. Since the *cosmos* was a “finitely extended living being, a spherical continuum of matter held together by the breath or *pneuma* that pervades it,” like other living beings it had a limited life span. Since the primal fire was identified with both God and reason, the conflagration was sacred, like the flame on top of the sacrificial altar. At the moment of conflagration, the world becomes pure fire or pure *pneuma*.²⁸² Thereafter, the world re-creates itself again.

God forms the world and then takes it back into himself through a universal conflagration, so that there is an ending series of world-constructions and world-destructions. Moreover, each ‘new’ world, which is concomitant with the occult idea of the ‘return to the source’, resembles its predecessor in all particulars, every individual man, for example, occurring in each successive world and perform the identical actions that he performed in his previous existence.²⁸³

Given Stoic morality, the destruction of Creation and humanity within it was not “evil,” but was seen from the perspective of the eternal return, and was ultimately deemed “good.” Since God is fire and God is “good,” the periodic destruction and creation of the universe was also deemed “good.” Because “freedom” is achieved on the basis of one’s interior ability to conform to or agree with the “laws of Nature” (including the destruction of the entire *cosmos*), the position of the virtuous “wise man” is not to stubbornly rebel against Nature, or the Divine Will, but to submit to it. By saying “Yes” to universal destruction, one conforms oneself to the Divine Will, follows Destiny and gains “freedom,” even if this means one’s own destruction. Those who are able to master their passions or affections and induce a state of apathy or indifference, like Nature, are “wise.” Those who rebel against “Nature” are “fools,”²⁸⁴ because in the end, the individual human being has no special or ultimate dignity. Therefore, the best attitude towards the doctrine of *ekpurosis* was agreement, although many Stoics did not agree with it.

²⁸¹ *Stoicism*, 96.

²⁸² *Stoicism*, 99.

²⁸³ *A History of Philosophy: Greece and Rome*, vol. 1, 389.

²⁸⁴ *A History of Philosophy: Greece and Rome*, vol. 1, 398.

Conclusions and Comments

Up until the Renaissance, formal magic was consciously practiced throughout the Middle Ages, although this was restrained by both secular and ecclesiastical authorities.²⁸⁵ Consequently, magic existed in the shadows and on the periphery of society. This was not the case in the Renaissance, where magic became acceptable to many of the intellectual religious elite, who were looking for new ways to do theology and philosophy. Unlike Medieval magic, Hermetic Renaissance magic could be performed elegantly.²⁸⁶ Some contemporary esoteric trends mirror the mood of the Renaissance. For example, Marsilio Ficino went around singing monodic Orphic hymns, which he believed reflected the Pythagorean harmonies of the cosmic spheres,²⁸⁷ functioning similarly to the “trance” music played in many New Age stores today. As a “physician,” he prescribed homeopathic remedies and encouraged his wealthy patients to surround themselves with the aromas of various flowers and soothing colors of jewels, not unlike contemporary aroma and crystal therapies.²⁸⁸ Hermetic Renaissance magic, like Contemporary Holistic Esotericism, was an elitist pastime for the rich and bored. Having said this, although the “mood” and “style” of ancient-medieval magic and Renaissance magic were painfully different, their philosophical framework remained the same, as does the philosophical framework of New Age.²⁸⁹ This was made evident in our discussion of the *Picatrix*.

More disconcerting is the trend to combine the acceptance of ancient monism, which we anachronistically call “animism” and its implied fatalism with the psychologization of gods and planetary demons (decans) into natural energies and forces. Ironically, this paved the way for the psychologization of Reality, which is prevalent in New Age or contemporary holistic ways of thinking. In the monistic scheme, like the ancient pagan gods, God supposedly contains both good and evil within himself. Since the human being is a microtheos of the macrotheos, one can

²⁸⁵ *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 176-180.

²⁸⁶ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 107-108. As Yates explains, “We begin to perceive here an extraordinary change in the status of the magician. The necromancer, concocting his filthy mixtures, the conjuror, making his frightening invocations, were both outcasts from society, regarded as dangers to religion, and forced into plying their trades in secrecy. These old-fashioned characters are hardly recognizable in the philosophical and pious magi of the Renaissance. There is a change in status almost comparable to the change in status of the artist from the mere mechanic of the Middle Ages to the learned and refined companion of princes of the Renaissance. And the magics themselves are changed almost out of recognition. Who could recognise the necromancer studying his *Picatrix* in secret in the elegant Ficino with his infinitely refined use of sympathies, his classical incantations, his elaborately Neoplatonised talismans? Who could recognise the conjuror, using the barbarous techniques of some *Clavis Salomonis*, in the mystical Pico, lost in the religious ecstasies of the Cabala, drawing archangels to his side? And yet there is a kind of continuity because techniques are at bottom based on the same principles. Ficino’s magic is an infinitely refined and reformed version of pneumatic necromancy. Pico’s practical Cabala is an intensely religious and mystical version of conjuring. Just as the old necromancy was ultimately derivable from late antique types of magic which flourished in the context of the Hermeticism, or pagan Gnosticism of the early centuries AD, so did the old conjuring go back to the same period and the same type of sources. ...”

²⁸⁷ *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 147.

²⁸⁸ *Magic in the Middle Ages*, 146.

²⁸⁹ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 392.

use these (now psychologized) energies or forces, be they good or evil, to increase one's power. One can either draw down energies, e.g. when their origin is celestial, like angels, but also draw up energies, e.g. when their origin is chthonic, like the energies of nature or demons, depending on one's intentions. Given the fact that Ficino was not only the translator of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, but also Plato's works, this was probably still understood within a Platonic/Neoplatonic scheme of emanation "from above." Although Ficino and Pico were careful to only drawn down celestial energies, i.e. and avoid chthonic ones, later, less concerned *magi* like Giordano Bruno were not.

Thanks to Ficino's hermetic reinterpretation, which psychologized the gods as forces of Nature, the recognition of the potential for real violence that lies behind the Hermetic texts becomes difficult again. Instead of building upon the real interpretive advances of Early Christianity, the Renaissance synthesis of Hermetic Christianity fell back into a form of re-mythologization. Since the gods were no longer believed to be early humans, who were engaged in real horrific violence, individuals began to identify with the gods' creative, but also destructive powers. The danger became that, eventually, the *magus*, who identified himself with Re, Zeus or even Dionysos, might begin to see himself as both the destroyer and savior of humanity. The philosophical scheme that might seem to justify such cosmic destruction could be found in the Stoic doctrine of world conflagration. All he needed was spiritual or religious framework to justify it well as an occult method to achieve it. As we will show, this framework was found in his reversal of Neoplatonic emanation and his method in the more hermetic interpretations of spiritual or psychological alchemy, which is less a medieval proto-science that was practiced to uncover the secrets of nature or even to create material gold, but as a religious process of psychological self-divinization. It is to this problem we now turn.

CHAPTER II

AB AETNA! DIVINIZING SELF-SACRIFICE

Purification de l'argent.

Rendre tout argent pur et brillant. Prenez une partie d'argent et la même quantité de plomb, laissez fondre au four jusqu'à ce que le plomb soit consumé. Faites cela souvent jusqu'à ce qu'il devienne brillant.²⁹⁰

Alchemical Papyrus of Leiden

I. Alchemical Self-Divinization

The popularity of alchemy has resurged in recent years, due to the number of bestselling books on the subject. Paulo Coelho's *The Alchemist* (1988; English 1993) was an international bestseller and served to introduce the subject to a broad public. Coelho is an interesting representative of contemporary esotericism in that he attempts to remain connected to the Roman Catholic tradition, although this relationship is tenuous and raises many questions. *The Alchemist* is a story about the spiritual journey of a little Spanish shepherd boy named Santiago. At the beginning of the story, Santiago has a troubling dream and goes to an old gypsy woman to have it interpreted. In the dream, a child leads him to the Egyptian pyramids and tells him: "If you come here, you will find hidden treasure." The old woman interprets the dream and encourages him to set off on a voyage to discover the Pyramids, where he will find his treasure.²⁹¹ Eventually, he follows her advice. On his journey, Santiago does reach the pyramids as well as meets an alchemist, who can turn material lead into gold; however, the story actually concerns Santiago's own spiritual journey and transformation into a man. We will not delve further into the story, but Coelho's own association of alchemy with Egypt, a subtle reference to Hermetism, is remarkable and lends support to our contention that certain strands of contemporary esotericism and New Age have roots in or at least ties to ancient Hermetism.

As seen in the previous chapter, in late Antiquity, magic, philosophical Hermetism, (Neo)-Platonism, Stoicism and even Presocratic philosophy were inextricably linked to each other. In the Renaissance, pious Christian thinkers like Ficino and Pico thought that they could combine the writings of "Hermes" with the Bible, whom they believed to be at the origin of the *prisca theologia*, the ancient or primordial theology. Ficino and Pico were well-intentioned;

²⁹⁰ Ed. and trans. Robert Halleux, *Les Alchimistes Grecs: Papyrus de Leyde, Papyrus de Stockholm, Fragments de Recettes* (Paris: Société d'Édition Les Belles Lettres, 1981) 91.

²⁹¹ Paulo Coelho, *The Alchemist*, trans. Alan R. Clarke (London: HarperCollins, 1993) 14.

however, we have tried to show that there was a less pious and irenic hermetic trend.²⁹² In this chapter, we will try to explore the darker side of Hermetism, which will be more clearly observed in alchemical theory. We will see how self-destruction becomes justified as a necessary step towards self-divinization, euphemistically spoken of as “self-sacrifice.” We do this to challenge some contemporary notions that hermetic alchemy is a “noble” art. For example, in *The Eternal Hermes: From Greek God to Alchemical Magus*, Antoine Faivre is under the impression that “wherever Hermes passes, religious tolerance prevails.”²⁹³ We would like to show that this is not necessarily the case.

A. Background to the History of Alchemy

1. Origin of the Name

Most scholars disagree about the origin and meaning of the word “alchemy.” Introduced to the West through the Arabic, *al-kimiya*; the prefix “al” simply denotes the definite article, “the.” Legends say that the word referred to the name of a god, while others say that it is a “derivation from the Egyptian word *keme* (black),” referring to the color of fertile Egyptian soil, or from the “Greek verb *cheo* (to pour),” referring to the process of smelting and pouring molten metals. Bernard Haage suggests that possibly the “Greek word *cheein* (pouring) became confused with the Egyptian *kem* (black) in Hellenistic Egypt.”²⁹⁴

Another interesting theory put forward by David Bain focuses on the unnoticed Greek name for Egypt in Hermetic texts, Μελανιτις γη, or the black land. This name refers to the dark color of the soil in the fertile Nile river basin.²⁹⁵ Bain points to the name’s esoteric use in Hermetic texts like the *Korē Kosmou* (*Daughter of the Cosmos*, with specific reference to Persephone) referring to the term “the perfect black.” The *Korē Kosmou* has been noted to have affinities with the *PGM*, discussed in the previous chapter as well as with alchemy and the Mysteries of Isis.²⁹⁶ For example, the *PGM* contains a prayer directed to Isis: “I call on you, Lady Isis, whom Agathos Daimon permitted to rule in the perfect black.”²⁹⁷ In fact, the name “black” or “Melaine” was given to Demeter, when she was mourning the abduction of her daughter Persephone. At that time she became known as “Demeter Melaine.” Given the

²⁹² Antoine Faivre, *The Eternal Hermes: from Greek God to Alchemical Magus*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin (Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1995) 63, 67. Some statements by Antoine Faivre that “Hermes is the antitotalitarian god *par excellence*” cannot be backed by historical reality.

²⁹³ *The Eternal Hermes*, 39.

²⁹⁴ Bernard D. Haage, “Alchemy II: Antiquity-12th century,” *The Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism* (Leiden: Brill, 2006) 16.

²⁹⁵ David Bain, “Μελανιτις γη, an unnoticed Greek name for Egypt. New evidence for the origins and etymology of alchemy,” *The World of Ancient Magic: Papers from the first International Samson Eitrem Seminar at the Norwegian Institute at Athens, 4-8 May 1997*, ed. David R. Jordan et. al (Bergen: Norwegian Institute, 1999) 205.

²⁹⁶ Μελανιτις γη, 217.

²⁹⁷ Μελανιτις γη, 218.

Hellenistic associations between Isis and Demeter, the title of the “black land” or the “black i.e. chthonic,” might be a veiled reference to the Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone or the Mysteries of Isis or both. Whatever the case, these associations point towards the affinities between Hermetism, alchemy, magic and the ancient Mysteries.

For example, as an ancient Egyptian priest, Hermes Trismegistus was said to have been the father of alchemy and author of the alchemical book or tablet of law, the *Emerald Tablet* or *Tabula Smaragdina*,²⁹⁸ of which the first law is “that which is above is like to that which is below,” or “as above, so below.” The tablet was said to be inscribed with Phoenician characters and was important source for medieval alchemy from the thirteenth century until the seventeenth century.²⁹⁹ As in the Hermetic worldview, in the alchemical worldview, the microcosmic level is fundamentally related and similar to the macrocosmic level. As mentioned, the law of correspondences is the basic presupposition of all occult sciences and lays the theoretical groundwork for the sympathetic relationship between the human being and the *cosmos*, in order to perform sympathetic or natural magic and, of course, alchemy.

2. The Development of Alchemical Understanding

a. Material and Spiritual Alchemy

It is difficult to say exactly how alchemy developed. Given its connections to the Mysteries and the Presocratics, it is possible that alchemy represents a later privatization of the more ancient ecstatic or shamanic religious experience, rooted in the animistic worldview. The first complete book of alchemy is dated around the third century AD; however, the practice probably developed much earlier, around the third century BC or before. Like magic, alchemy seems to be one of the ways in which man seeks to gain control of the world as well as himself. For example, one aspect of alchemy was concerned with the discovery of a panacea for all human ills.³⁰⁰ Sometimes this is known as the “red elixir,” a synonym for the Philosopher’s Stone. In this sense, alchemy was inherently connected to the practice of medicine and most early alchemists were also doctors. Ancient alchemy was based on the acceptance of the Empedoclean notion of the four-fold structure of nature, or the elements (i.e. Fire, Air, Water and Earth), together with an element that was added by Aristotle, namely, “ether.” Ether was understood to be the *quinta essentia*, or “quintessence,” which “constitutes the heavens and stars. This ‘ether’, also known as *spiritus*, and as *pneuma* by the Neo-Platonists, regulates the correct mixture of the sublunar elements,

²⁹⁸ Lyndy Abraham, *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 100; *The Eternal Hermes*, 20.

²⁹⁹ *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 69-70.

³⁰⁰ Herwig Buntz “Alchemy III: 12th/13th -15th Century,” *The Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006) 34.

when forming terrestrial things from the *prima materia*.”³⁰¹ This *pneuma* is also, of course, connected to the Stoic pneumatic theory, which was taken over by Ficino. When combined with the four Galenic humors (i.e. *sanguis*, *cholera*, *melancholia* and *phlegma*), ancient medical science was born. The idea was that the correct mixture of elements coupled with the humors would eventually lead to the discovery of the elixir or Stone. From this, we are able to see that medical alchemy was the practice of finding the right “mixture.” Health was understood as *Eukrasia*, or the “correct mixture,” while illness was understood as *Dyskrasia*, or the “wrong mixture.”³⁰² Therefore, the discovery of the elixir from plants, minerals or animal matter conferred upon the alchemist divine-like powers to create and to destroy. It also provided him with the tools necessary to “transmute all base metals into pure gold, cure all disease, confer longevity and resurrect the dead to eternal life.”³⁰³

Karen-Claire Voss says that the alchemists’ transmutation of base metals into gold implied a physical *metamorphosis*, or transfiguration of the alchemist that “entails a form of *gnosis*.”³⁰⁴ As seen earlier, the attainment of *gnosis* had a soteriological value and reveals the overlaps between magic, alchemy and Gnosticism. The final *rubedo* or red stage led to the Philosopher’s Stone, which signified “the attainment of the consciousness of God,” the ultimate goal of the alchemical *opus*.³⁰⁵ In its more mundane versions, however, material alchemy was a precursor to medicine and pharmacology, whose goal was simply healing the physically sick.

Given the dual role that alchemy can play, Voss distinguishes between “material alchemy” and “spiritual alchemy.” As we will see, the distinction of spiritual alchemy is a later development. Initially, all alchemists were material alchemists; they were primarily concerned with finding the formula to transmute material lead into gold or to discover the elixir of life, i.e. the early practice of medicine. A quick glance at the *Papyrus of Leiden* and *Papyrus of Stockholm* shows that many alchemists were also concerned with mundane activities like purifying all sorts of metals, making them shiny and producing tinctures for painting.³⁰⁶ Most early alchemists, as proto-scientists, appear to be primarily concerned with the discovery of the secrets of objective nature and not necessarily the use of alchemy as a “tool” or “technique” to launch a spiritual

³⁰¹ “Alchemy II: Antiquity-12th century,” 19.

³⁰² “Alchemy II: Antiquity-12th century,” 19.

³⁰³ *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 165.

³⁰⁴ Karen-Claire Voss, “Spiritual Alchemy: Interpreting Representative Texts and Images,” *Gnosis and Hermeticism From Antiquity to Modern Times*, ed. Roelof van den Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Albany: State University of New York, 1998) 150.

³⁰⁵ *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 174.

³⁰⁶ See Ed. Robert Halleux, *Les Alchimistes Grecs: Papyrus de Leyde, Papyrus de Stockholm, Fragments de Recettes* (Paris: Société d’Edition Les Belles Lettres, 1981).

journey. This does not mean, however, that they did not ever apply their discoveries to their spiritual condition.

In more psychological or spiritual interpretations of alchemy, the Philosopher's Stone is said to be able to accomplish the same as the elixir. It is often spoken of in paradoxical terms. On the one hand it is valuable, but on the other hand, worthless. It is a priceless jewel, but also no better than dung, etc. Abraham says that in order to make the Philosopher's Stone, the alchemist must have a such a comprehensive understanding of the laws of nature that he is able to reproduce macrocosmic Nature within the microcosmic alembic or alchemical beaker.³⁰⁷ Since All is One, the alembic, but also the Stone are metaphors for the alchemist at different stages of divinization. The alchemical *opus alchymicum* of *nigredo* (the black or chaotic phase of the *prima materia*), *albedo* (the white phase of purification) and, finally, *rubedo* (the red phase where the Philosopher's Stone or red elixir is processed) are metaphors for the stages of the alchemical process. Often the alchemical path towards self-divinization was described in terms of descent and ascent. The alchemical forge or furnaces were thought to be analogous to the matrix or womb of the earth into which initiates of the Mysteries descended. According to Mircea Eliade, in *The Forge and the Crucible: the Origins and Structures of Alchemy*, the alchemical forges or fires were "a substitute for the Earth-Mother, where the ores completed their process of maturation."³⁰⁸ Given the connection between gold and divinization, alchemy of especially Graeco-oriental origin gained needed insights from the Mysteries and the ancient myths that informed them.

Haage says that in pre-Christian or pagan Antiquity, the art of alchemy concerns both a theory and a practice. We saw the same inter-relatedness in our discussion of the theoretical and technical (i.e. practical) *Hermetica*. Theoretical alchemy has connections to Greek nature philosophy, meaning the philosophy of the Presocratics, as well as to more religious motifs that concern the purification of the soul and the initiation of the adept into a higher order. The process of purification and initiation that the alchemist experiences in his own soul has parallels to the work he performs on base metals. Just as the metals must undergo "suffering," i.e. are dissolved or destroyed in the hands of the alchemist, so too must the alchemist, or his ego, suffer and die. The hope is that just like the metals are forged into something new, so too will his soul be "re-born" into something higher or better than before. Haage says that "such recurrent metaphors of

³⁰⁷ *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 146.

³⁰⁸ Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structures of Alchemy*, trans. Stephen Corrin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962) 74.

suffering, death and resurrection are rooted in the mysticism of ancient myths and mystery-cults,”³⁰⁹ a connection that will be important for our later discussion.

b. The Development from the Medieval to Modern Alchemy

Naturally, as a microcosm of the macrocosm, the ancient and medieval alchemists perceived analogies between the experiments that they performed on Nature and on themselves (as a part of Nature). In the Middle Ages, however, alchemy seems to be more used as a proto-scientific method and less for spiritual endeavors. Moreover, Nature was not seen to be equal to God and alchemical analogy retained its distance from or respect for God as Creator as well as its predominantly practical or material purposes. That is to say, the type of alchemy practiced was primarily physical or material alchemy, which was used to uncover and understand the physical properties of matter, or the “secrets of nature.” This does not mean that something like spiritual alchemy did not exist, but that it was not the main focus of most medieval alchemists. Figures like St. Albert the Great or St. Thomas Aquinas, who had reputations for being alchemists, were mainly concerned with natural experiments. This did not mean that the medieval Christian alchemists did not also draw spiritual conclusions or make spiritual analogies drawn from their physical experiments. Furthermore, in the Middle Ages, the distinctions, which we now accept between philosophy, science, theology, etc., were not made or deemed necessary.

For the most part, it appears that metaphorical and symbolic language was a type of code used to hide the nature of their experiments from public view.³¹⁰ Instead of maintaining the vocabulary of pagan mysteries, the medieval alchemists replaced pagan alchemical language with Christian vocabulary in order to describe their physical – i.e. alchemical, experiments on Nature. Although it deserves further research and not within the scope of this study, it is possible that the medieval alchemists began to change the pagan vocabulary to more a more Christianizing one in order to make their alchemy more acceptable to church authorities, or simply because they believed Christian vocabulary to be more appropriate. It is also possible that like contemporary scientists want to keep their experiments under lock and key, the medieval “chemists” codified their results through the usage of Christian spiritual language.

However, with the acceptance of and even integration of Hermetic “pietism” into some Christian circles in the Renaissance, the distance between God and Nature began to collapse. This eventually led to a change in the understanding in the practice of alchemy itself. By the seventeenth century, with the aftermath of the religious and spiritual chaos caused by the

³⁰⁹ “Alchemy II: Antiquity-12th century,” 16.

³¹⁰ Lawrence M. Principe, “Alchemy I: Introduction,” ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *The Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism* (Leiden: Brill, 2006) 14.

Reformation, “spiritual alchemy,” which by now used many Christian metaphors to describe the alchemical processes, became a “Christianizing” alternative to traditional Christianity, either in its Catholic or Protestant variety. In order to “escape” from the religious, spiritual and intellectual conundrum that many individuals faced during the chaos of the religious wars, and still procure deep spiritual experiences, many people attempted to practice alchemy as a quasi-Christian alternative.

Indeed, Allison Coudert contends that the upsurge in the popularity of spiritual alchemy coincided with the disintegration of Western Christianity at the Reformation. The breakdown of the religious and spiritual unity of Christian Europe before the Reformation -- and probably the un-Christian witness of Christian leaders on both sides --, led many to search for alternative schemes of salvation. The Renaissance and Enlightenment fascination with pagan Antiquity coincided with the historical development of “spiritual alchemy,” although it was not known as that. Most spiritual alchemists were concerned with transmuting their impoverished spiritual condition into an elevated one. They used experiments from material alchemy as a “technique” to embark upon an interior spiritual journey. In material alchemy, transmuting material lead into gold is analogous to the process of self-divinization in spiritual alchemy. Therefore, they used an analogy between a corrupted state of matter and their own spiritual condition in order to derive deep spiritual insights and transmute their impoverished spiritual state into a better one. Concomitant with the mood of the Renaissance, spiritual alchemy was an attempt to return to a more pagan religious framework and experience, which nonetheless retained the usage of Christian vocabulary for its central mysteries. Although spiritual alchemy existed before the Reformation, historical evidence has shown that its influence was marginal.³¹¹

c. The Nineteenth Century “Spiritual Interpretation” of Alchemy

In the nineteenth century, a new development took place. Alchemy as such began to be spiritually interpreted. That is to say, at this time, alchemy came to be seen as a fundamentally psychological/spiritual exercise, having little to do with material realities at all. According to Lawrence Principe, what is now known as the “spiritual interpretation of alchemy,” was popularized with a work by Mary Anne Atwood, entitled *Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery* (1850). In this book, with its obvious connections to the nineteenth century hermetic occult revival, she claimed that all “true” alchemy, implying from the past to the present, was “spiritual quest.” Those alchemists who “apparently busied themselves with actual laboratory operations, were, ..., mere ‘literal souls’ who failed to perceive the hidden truth of alchemy and

³¹¹ Allison P. Coudert, “Alchemy IV: 16th – 18th Century,” ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *The Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism* (Leiden: Brill, 2006) 46.

were not ‘real’ alchemists at all.”³¹² Atwood’s book was, of course, not really historical in nature, and she failed to see the development of a more spiritualizing version of alchemy within the context of political, social, cultural and economic upheaval. In one sweep, Atwood dismissed the proto-scientific efforts of many ancient and medieval alchemists. Nevertheless, her work helped to linguistically distinguish between what we now call “material” and “spiritual” alchemy, a distinction that was unknown up until this point. The division of alchemy into exoteric, i.e. material alchemy, and esoteric, i.e. spiritual, dating back to an ancient perennial tradition, gained popularity and was accepted by many occultists as well as the psychologist, Carl Gustav Jung.³¹³

Although this process of the psychologization of Reality already began with Ficino, Jung took the spiritual interpretation of Atwood one step further and believed that alchemy was never concerned about physical processes, but always “psychological developments within the practitioner.” Principe, however, implies that Jung obfuscated the historical understanding of the development of alchemy through his uncritical acceptance of Atwood’s theory. Jung believed that the alchemist’s unusual metaphorical language was actually a “record of hallucinatory ‘irruptions of the unconscious’ which are ‘projected’ from the alchemist’s psyche onto the contents of his flasks.” Principe claims that “recent scholarly investigations of alchemy have undermined Jung’s construct,” as they have shown that most early alchemists were primarily focused on physical experimentation rather than esoteric insights into the nature of the psyche.³¹⁴

Jung represents a new phase in the understanding, but also practice of alchemy, called “psychological alchemy.” Later, we will attempt to show that this interpretation was already developing in the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche, and how Jung was inspired by his *Also Sprach Zarathustra* or *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Based on his reading of Paracelsus or Theophrastus Bombast von Hohenheim (1493/94-1541), but perhaps also Nietzsche, Jung came to see alchemy as a psychological and religious discourse. Not only did Jung’s writings on Paracelsus help to re-introduce the works the Swiss physician and theologian to a contemporary audience, but his alchemical writings also helped him to formulate what he considered to be “certain processes at work in the psyche.”³¹⁵

d. The Development of the Understanding of Alchemical Causality in Modernity

As stated, in the Middle Ages, alchemy was mainly employed as a proto-scientific tool to discover the “secrets” underlying the physical universe. As from the Renaissance, this began to

³¹² “Alchemy I: Introduction,” 13.

³¹³ “Alchemy I: Introduction,” 13.

³¹⁴ “Alchemy I: Introduction,” 14.

³¹⁵ Christine Maillard, “Jung,” *The Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006) 651.

change. In order to better distinguish between Medieval and Renaissance forms of alchemy, Voss describes three phases of alchemical development where the alchemists' conception of causality and time was altered. The first period, which probably best corresponds to the medieval epoch of traditional Christian theism, is that of *substance causality*. In this period, the alchemist saw the goal of the process, i.e. the Philosopher's Stone, at the end of a linear series of causes and effects. The subject and object relation was experienced as separated from each other.³¹⁶ This is the period of the dominance of what is anachronistically called "material alchemy," and did not necessarily conflict with traditional Judeo-Christian theism.

In the second phase, "substance causality" becomes what Voss calls *process causality*. This is probably the beginning of what is called "spiritual alchemy" and suggests the beginning of medieval alchemy's gradual separation from orthodox Christian tradition, due in large part to the Renaissance's attraction and high estimation of pagan Antiquity, which included the Hermetic Tradition. Although the subject/object as well as the linear notion of time remained identical to "substance causality," the introduction of a "divine other," or the alchemical Mercurius, meant that the Hermetic alchemist came to realize that he could not achieve resolution alone. Mercurius united the opposites at a convergence point, the sacred center, where heaven meets the earth. There was also a growing intuition that the *terminus* of the process, i.e. the Philosopher's Stone, was somehow related to the process' genesis, i.e. the "*prima materia* of cosmogonic myth."³¹⁷ Mercurius-Trismegistus was frequently invoked in alchemical traditions of Hermetic origin. Mercurius was the Roman equivalent of Hermes and was seen to be a god, or "daemon," who assisted the alchemist in his "laboratory work." In the Renaissance, with the acceptance of Hermetic animism, progressively, the understanding of Nature and God became increasingly mental or psychological.³¹⁸ Mercurius was the curious *Doppelgänger*, or psychic double projection of the alchemist. As such, he was similar to the shaman's "spirit guide" or the magician's *parhedros*.

In the third and final stage, the intuition that the beginning of the process was the same as the end became explicit. This corresponds to the Modern collapse of the transcendent realm into the *cosmos* and the gradual acceptance of various forms of monism, especially pantheism and later panentheism. Although the intuition of the process is maintained, linear time is replaced with cyclical time, and the profane becomes increasingly sacralized. In other words, death

³¹⁶ "Spiritual Alchemy: Interpreting Representative Texts and Images," *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times*, 152.

³¹⁷ "Spiritual Alchemy: Interpreting Representative Texts and Images," *Gnosis and Hermeticism From Antiquity to Modern Times*, 154.

³¹⁸ Harry Parry, *Thelxis: Magic and Imagination in Greek Myth and Poetry* (Lanham: University of America Press, 1992) 96.

became associated with birth, and creation itself could be seen as a “sacrificial victim.” Although Voss does not give this stage a name, for lack of a better word, we will call it *cyclical causality*. Voss says that this modification in the understanding of the alchemical processes was radical, because “of its profound implications for the conception and experience of the subject/object relation, causality, and possibly (although not necessarily) time.” She says that if it “were possible to posit a strict demarcation between material and spiritual alchemy one would do it at this juncture,” although she admits that even this is difficult.³¹⁹ When later alchemists (in the Renaissance and beyond) began to accept a cyclical notion of time, they came closer to the more ancient pagan understanding of Time than their medieval colleagues. That is to say, they began to experience alchemy more like their ancient Hermetic predecessors, albeit now without the Neoplatonic framework. At this point, most alchemists began to identify themselves with mythic “creators,” and saw themselves as imitating the sacred process of creation itself. The relationship between subject and object became more fluid, as the alchemists realized that in some way they “equaled both the alchemical process and the means of the process; the alchemical process was tantamount to both self-knowledge and to the knowledge of the divine”³²⁰

Especially in the last stage of modern alchemical understanding, Nature is God. In this more pantheistic and psychological understanding, God/Nature embodies both good and evil, a notion contrary to traditional Christian theodicy. In understanding Nature, one understands God as God is in God’s Self. Since one is a divine part of Nature, as a microcosm of the macrocosm, by coming to a full understanding of oneself, one comes to a full understanding of Nature, hence, God. In perfecting oneself, one perfects Nature, hence, God, etc. It was the role of the god Mercurius (or in some cases Aion), the “divine other,” to assist the alchemist in uniting opposites, or the opposites within himself. In accepting and uniting both the good and evil in himself, the alchemist felt himself to be imitating Nature/God. That is to say, he accepted self-destruction as a necessary step in the process of magical self-salvation and self-divinization, because Nature destroys itself (e.g. volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, forest fires, etc.) and regenerates itself. Although in the beginning of the process, Mercurius (or Aion) was outside of himself, in the end, the alchemist came to realize or perceive that Mercurius was himself. In this alchemical expression, the “other” was, in fact, an illusion. Therefore, with the introduction of “cyclical causality,” the possibility for the alchemist to mistake or confuse himself for the Totality became greater and opened the door for the possible development of the psychic disposition of

³¹⁹ “Spiritual Alchemy: Interpreting Representative Texts and Images,” *Gnosis and Hermeticism From Antiquity to Modern Times*, 154.

³²⁰ “Spiritual Alchemy: Interpreting Representative Texts and Images,” *Gnosis and Hermeticism From Antiquity to Modern Times*, 154-155.

panenanthropism, although this was not necessarily so. Abraham further explains the role of the alchemical Mercurius:

Mercurius is present everywhere and at all times during the *opus*. From the dark chthonic beginnings of the *opus* to the divine triumphant completion, Mercurius is not only the *prima materia* (the ‘mother’ of metals) which is sought at the beginning of the work, but also the *ultima materia* (the Philosopher’s Stone), the goal of his own transformation. Mercurius is not only the matter of the work but stands also for all the processes to which this *materia* is subjected. He is simultaneously the matter of the work, the process of the work and the agent by which all this is effected. The epigram to emblem 14 of Maier’s *Atalanta fugiens* says of this paradoxical and enigmatic force: ‘It devours itself and spits itself out, kills itself and generates itself again’ (66). And Rhasis, cited in *Zoroaster’s Cave*, states: ‘For it dissolves, and conjoyns Itselfe, makes it selfe Black and Citrine, White and Red, espouses Itselfe Conceives, brings forth, and does all to the perfect end’ (67). Mercurius is the grand master of the reiterated cycle of *solve et coagula* (dissolve and coagulate) which constitutes the alchemical work of purification... At the beginning of the *opus* Mercurius takes the form of a dark, destructive force which ‘kills’ the old metal or outmoded state of being and dissolves it into the *prima materia* (also called Mercurius). In this role Mercurius is the ultimate solvent. He then transmutes himself and is transmuted from being the poisonous waters of death into the divine life-giving elixir. He is the water of life, (the tears, rain or dew) which descends in the showers upon the blackened dead body (of metal or soul) lying at the bottom of the alembic, washing it, purifying it and re-animating it, preparing it for its union with the united soul/spirit at the chemical wedding. Metaphysically, Mercurius carries that divine love essence which kills falsehood and illusion and allows truth to arise. As the swift messenger-god, Mercurius opens up a path of light, a line of communication between the greater self and the limited personality of every day. Through this contact the body can eventually be transmuted from fleshly mortality to immortality (Hodgson, *Astrology*, 40).³²¹

In the above long but useful quotation, we saw how it was perceived that Mercurius/the alchemist needed to kill himself in order to regenerate himself. We believe that this “insight” was gained through the change in the Renaissance alchemist’s worldview or paradigm from traditional Christian theism to Hermetic Christian pantheism. That is to say, with the intellectual reacceptance of ancient animistic monism as a basis for Modern alchemistic theory and Modern uncritical fascination with ancient myth and Mysteries, alchemy became increasingly spiritualized and even psychologized, increasing the possibility for more temporal and biological expressions that required “sacrifices.”

B. The Origins of Alchemy according to Mircea Eliade

A good example of the abovementioned danger of the re-mythologization and psychologization of alchemy can be found Mircea Eliade’s exposition of the history of alchemy, *The Forge and the Crucible*. In this book, Eliade tries to understand how alchemy developed and could take hold of human consciousness, especially in Modernity. Eliade was a devotee of Carl Jung and a regular contributor to the Eranos Conferences. According to James Webb in *The Occult Establishment*,

³²¹ *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 125-126.

the Eranos Conferences were a series of “annual meetings at which scholars, mythologists, and psychologists of Jungian sympathies have expounded their views of the spiritual problems faced by modern man.”³²² He further says that “The Eranos Conferences are a compendium of all the elements of the Occult Revival, and an extension of all the elements of Jung’s work.”³²³ Carl Gustav Jung is perhaps the most important contemporary figure for modern spiritual alchemy, interpreting it as a metaphorical discourse that attempts to explain the development of the Self towards psychic wholeness or balance.³²⁴ Jung understood this as the process of Individuation, which, as we will discuss, he based on the alchemical process of self-divinization. We will not deal with Jung here, as we will discuss him later.

After the death of Jung, Eliade dominated the direction of the conferences, and became the second greatest contemporary commentator on the spiritual meaning of alchemy, witchcraft, shamanism and the occult, doing a great deal to ground the amateur study of esotericism in seeming academic objectivity. On the one hand, Eliade is a respected academic,³²⁵ while on the other hand, his work – like Jung’s -- has become a resource for many esoteric and New Age thinkers. Although a “historian of religion,” many of his presuppositions are based on a presumption that myth came before ritual. This presumption has been proven erroneous through the work of Walter Burkert in *Homo Necans*, whom we will discuss in more detail later in this chapter. Although Burkert shows the connection between alchemy, ancient myth and the Mysteries, an effort that is useful for our analysis, Eliade tends to conceal and rationalize the violence that underlies myth, the Mysteries and, hence, some alchemical processes, when it – perhaps ironically – becomes spiritualized or psychologized within a holistic framework and divorced from its role as a proto-scientific discourse. In this way, he contributes to the re-mythologization of the study of myth and religion, about which Girard has warned.

1. The Pre-History of Alchemy and Magic

a. Smiths, Miners and Metallurgists

Although he does not produce any scientific evidence, Eliade says that the first iron and metals, which humans fashioned for daily use, had a “celestial origin,” that is, from meteorites. Eliade believes that early humans interpreted fallen stones as a sacred union between heaven and earth.³²⁶ According to him, humans saw that matter from meteorites was good for making tools and weapons, but had not yet discovered ores below the ground. When metals and ores were discovered beneath the ground, because of the supposed sacred character of the earth itself, the

³²² James Webb, *The Occult Establishment* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1976) 395-396.

³²³ *The Occult Establishment*, 397.

³²⁴ Olav Hammer, “Jung, Carl Gustav,” *The Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism* (Leiden: Brill, 2006) 651.

³²⁵ “Spiritual Alchemy: Interpreting Representative Texts and Images,” 147.

³²⁶ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 20-21.

metals were seen as gestating in the womb of Mother Earth.³²⁷ When the metallurgist brought different metals together, some assigned a feminine character and others a masculine one, the fusion was seen as a sexual union, or as alchemists call it, a *mysterium conjunctionis*. The conjunction resulted in something new, for example, a new type of metal, later interpreted as a new birth.³²⁸

Eliade says that mining, metallurgy and agriculture all functioned through the presupposition of the fecundity of Mother Earth, whom they assisted in her labors and the processes of growth occurring deep within her womb. That is to say, according to Eliade, the metallurgists believed that the ores within the ground were similar to a foetus in the womb. Later, given the maternal characteristics ascribed to the earth and the embryological notion given to the origin of ores, it was believed that should the ores continue to ripen unimpeded in the “matrix,” all metals would eventually turn to gold.³²⁹ The metallurgist saw himself as collaborating with Nature, as the midwife who himself was able to speed up the natural processes, by extracting the ores/foetus before time. Eliade says that his work “was an intervention in the process of growth, an attempt to expedite maturation or to induce the expulsion of the embryo. That is why the work of the metallurgist could be looked upon as an obstetric operation, performed before its due time, an abortion, in fact.”³³⁰ Since ores were deemed useful, an abortion was also deemed “useful.”

According to Eliade, alchemy arose out of the experience of miners, smiths and metallurgists. The alchemists’ confrontation with the symbols, myths, rituals and practices of the miners, smelters and smiths probably gave rise to the alchemical “experiments.”³³¹ He says that “the alchemists, the smelters and smiths were ‘masters of fire’. All, by aiding the work of Nature, accelerated the tempo of things and, in the final instance, were substitutes for Time itself. The alchemists were not of course all aware that their ‘work’ did the work of Time. But this is not important: the essential point is that their work, transmutation, involved, in one form or another, the elimination of Time.” In a sense, the alchemists believed that they stood above and even beyond Time.³³²

Given the smiths’ work with metal and fire, they were awarded a special status. “The mastery over fire and insensibility both to extreme cold and to the temperature of burning coals, translated into ordinary terms, signify that the shaman or yogi have gone beyond the human

³²⁷ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 42.

³²⁸ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 36-37.

³²⁹ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 50.

³³⁰ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 75.

³³¹ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 148.

³³² *The Forge and the Crucible*, 171.

condition and have achieved the level of spirits. In certain cultures, the smith was considered equal, if not superior, to the shaman.”³³³ Therefore, his role was sacred, and like the gods, also ambivalent. On the one hand, he forged tools, which helped humanity to overcome chaos, but on the other hand, he forged murderous weapons, which could throw humanity back into primal chaos.³³⁴ Prioritizing myth over ritual, Eliade believes that smiths began to imitate the divine models prescribed in the community’s myths and legends, by taking on demiurgical attributes. He too was a “creator” or “artist,” in the sense of a “poet” or “maker.”³³⁵ The smith came to be seen as “the son, the messenger or the collaborator of the supreme God. He completes his work and for the most part does this in his name.”³³⁶

Due to his ability to reshape primal matter coming from the subterranean depths of Nature’s womb, the smith, more than the metallurgist, was associated with the divine, the demonic and with magic. Eliade says that this is because “‘to make’ something means knowing the magic formula which will allow it to be invented or to ‘make it appear’ spontaneously. In virtue of this, the artisan is a connoisseur of secrets, a magician; thus all crafts include some kind of initiation and are handed down by an occult tradition. He, who ‘makes’ real things, is he who *knows* the secrets of making them.”³³⁷ Because of their connection to magic, Eliade believes that smiths and metallurgists stand at the beginning of religion. Initially, “to produce something” or “to make something” had not only a religious function, but also an occult function, which the smith’s “mastery over fire” would later come to signify on a magico-religious level, both purification and transmutation.³³⁸ Because smiths and metallurgists obtained a kind of *gnosis*, or knowledge of creating and destroying, Eliade proposes that smiths and metallurgists later formed secret religious societies and developed initiatory rituals to ensure that the secret knowledge of the creative and destructive forces would be safely transmitted. According to Eliade’s hypothesis, this would then be the origin of the Mystery Religions. In the role of initiator, the smith told stories and sang songs, showing the close connection “between the art of the smith, the occult sciences (shamanism, magic, healing, etc.) and the art of song, dance and poetry. These overlapping techniques appear to have been handed down in an aura of sacred mystery comprising initiations, specific rituals and ‘trade secrets’.”³³⁹

³³³ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 81.

³³⁴ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 29, 107.

³³⁵ We should note the close semantic connections between “creator” and “artist” or “poet” through the Greek word, *poesis*, to make or create. It is from this word that we get the word, poetry.

³³⁶ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 97.

³³⁷ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 103.

³³⁸ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 107.

³³⁹ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 99.

b. The Connection to the Mysteries

Because early peoples were in profound sympathy with nature, Eliade claims that they often projected their own sexuality onto it. Their “general conception of cosmic reality [was] seen as *life* and consequently endowed with sex; sexuality being a particular sign of all living reality.”³⁴⁰ Therefore, he believes that myths, which include metallurgists or smiths, are often set in a spiritual framework where a strong fertilizing God, spouse of the Earth Mother, supplants the previous gods, i.e. matriarchal goddesses, of hunting and gathering societies. For Eliade, myths about male fertility gods reflect the transition from matriarchal to patriarchal societies. Following the line of Johann Jakob Bachofen, author of *Mutterrecht und Urreligion* (1861), Eliade believes that the matriarchal societies that worshipped the Great Mother were prior to patriarchal societies, although no authentic archeological evidence exists to support this contention, except a few terracotta figurines upon which Bachofen based his theory. Bachofen’s matriarchal theory suggested that the origin of civilization and religion was originally peaceful, because it was “matriarchal.” Until Walter Burkert’s *Homo Necans*, mentioned earlier, Bachofen’s theories were widely accepted.

As discussed, Eliade claims that the subterranean realms, such as “caves and caverns were compared to the matrix of the Earth-Mother.”³⁴¹ They, therefore, played an important role in ancient religions and rituals, linking the metallurgists search for metal within the “womb of Mother Earth” to the Mysteries. For example, the ancient sanctuary of Delphi, where the famous Pythia uttered her incomprehensible oracles, was a subterranean realm,³⁴² but it was also the tomb of the divine child Dionysos.³⁴³ At Demeter’s sanctuary in Eleusis, the hierophant and priestess of Demeter descended into the darkness of a cave to perform the ritual of the sacred union, the *hieros gamos*, which Eliade claims began through an association with fallen meteorites. Eliade romanticizes the *hieros gamos*; however, in the actual Mystery, the union resulted in the conception of the divine child Iacchos or Dionysos who, according to the corresponding myth, was soon to be murdered. This is an element of the myth that Eliade conveniently avoids. Recently, the idea of the *hieros gamos* has been re-promoted and re-mythologized in Dan Brown’s best-seller, *The Da Vinci Code*.

³⁴⁰ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 34, 36

³⁴¹ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 41.

³⁴² Carl Kerényi, *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976) 230.

³⁴³ Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of the Greek Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1903, 1991) 557.

Jane Harrison says that the *hieros gamos* was *the* central mystery at Eleusis and a joyful event.³⁴⁴ Although a “joyful” event, it was also mysteriously connected to Demeter’s arrival, who was still grief stricken by her daughter’s ravishment by Hades and abduction into the Underworld. Although no reason is given for Demeter’s need for subterfuge, she arrived disguised as a nursemaid and entered the service of the king and queen. While feeding the king and queen’s child Demophöon with ambrosia, she planned to lay him into the fire in order to “immortalize” him. Her “noble” plans were thwarted, however, when the child’s mother, the Queen Metaneira, discovered her and screamed. The astonished, but still embittered Demeter “accidentally” dropped the baby into the fire, unable to complete her work of immortalization.³⁴⁵ Taken by surprise, Demeter informed the Queen that now Demophöon must remain mortal. Understood from the Girardian perspective, the myth speaks more about rape and murder, followed by a reciprocal act of revenge. Was it the king, who had raped and abducted Demeter’s daughter? According to Girard’s understanding, the abrupt interruption of the child’s “immortalization” was clearly an act of revenge and murder. Walter Burkert agrees:

Thus, though sublimated in the myth and symbolized in ritual, the theme of infanticide is present in the mysteries. This is the theme that forms the core of so many other sacrificial festivals – the Lykaia, Pelops at Olympia, the Agrionia rituals, and Procne: the mother or nurse kills the young boy in order to hurt a man, or does so simply in madness. This tale is repeated time and again as the explanation and counterpart of the unspeakable sacrifices. At Eleusis, too, a second sacrifice appeases the wrath provoked by the preliminary maiden sacrifice.³⁴⁶

In Orphic versions of the myth of Dionysos, Persephone, Demeter’s ravished daughter, was his mother, although in some versions it was Demeter herself. Carl Kerényi in *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life* states that “according to the Cretan historians whom Diodorus follows, Dionysos was first and foremost the wine god and was born on Crete to Zeus and Persephone.”³⁴⁷ As the god of wine and vegetation, Dionysos was also an underworld god. In the Orphic version of the myth, like the dismemberment of Osiris, Zagreus is the child Dionysos torn to pieces. He was the product of Zeus’ incestuous rape of Persephone or Kore, his own child by his sister Demeter. Kerényi says that in Olympus “Zeus took the place of a snake god,”³⁴⁸ an ancient symbol of chthonic wisdom. Therefore in the Orphic version, Zeus disguised himself as a snake, in a Cretan cave,³⁴⁹ and ravished her. There, she gives birth to a “horned infant,” which is

³⁴⁴ *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, 584, 563.

³⁴⁵ Ed. Roy Willis, *World Mythology: The Illustrated Guide* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1993) 142.

³⁴⁶ Walter Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, trans. Peter Bing (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972, 1983) 282.

³⁴⁷ *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*, 110.

³⁴⁸ *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*, 113.

³⁴⁹ *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*, 113-114.

an allusion to a bull, or sometimes a he-goat. In Crete, the murder of the divine child Dionysos by the evil Titans was celebrated with the rending of a live bull with bare teeth, where they hoped to reproduce the effect of the original myth, and a more original ancient event, where child sacrifice was of the order.³⁵⁰

According to the Orphic myth, after the birth of Dionysos, Zeus' jealous wife, Hera, prompted the child's uncles, the Titans, to murder and dismember him, leaving only his heart in tact. This was subsequently brought to Zeus by Athena, who then either swallowed it or gave to Semele, his mortal lover. Semele provided Dionysos with a second womb, before she herself was tricked by jealous Hera and accidentally incinerated by her lover Zeus.³⁵¹ Harrison says that Semele is known as the thunder-smitten, an allusion to her death by Zeus' thunder-bolts, and Dionysos is known as fire-born, since his birth is attended by the light of torches.³⁵² In the Orphic version, Zeus saved the child Dionysos from the fire and stored him in his "thigh," until it was time for his birth. In Orphic myths, Dionysos was known as *Trigonos*, or "Thrice born,"³⁵³ reminding us of the triple greatness of Hermes Trismegistos.

Richard Noll says that "although no firm evidence exists of what the initiatory experience of the Eleusinian Mysteries entailed, it is generally assumed that the initiate saw some representation or had a vision of Persephone in the Underworld. This then gave the initiate 'better hopes' for his or her position in the afterlife."³⁵⁴ Although speculative, perhaps after being given a potion of ergot, a fungus that attacks grains and is known to produce psychedelic effects,³⁵⁵ the initiate was then instructed to *imagine* himself as the murdered Dionysos.³⁵⁶

c. Dismemberment and Transfiguration

i. Cosmogonic Significance of Mythical Sacrifice

Although Eliade attempts to ignore the violence that lies concealed beneath myth, he admits that the act of creation in mythological accounts occurs through "immolation or self-immolation," where the whole condition of creation rests on the act of a blood sacrifice. He does not connect "blood sacrifice" with any actual violence, but only asserts that with the introduction of the use

³⁵⁰ Walter F. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, trans. Robert B. Palmer (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1965) 192.

³⁵¹ Oskar Seyffert, *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature, and Art* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1995) 192.

³⁵² *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, 408.

³⁵³ *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*, 277.

³⁵⁴ Noll, Richard. *The Jung Cult: Origins of a Charismatic Movement* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1994) 173.

³⁵⁵ Nevill Drury, *The Dictionary of the Esoteric* (London: Watkins Publishing, 2002) 249.

³⁵⁶ It is feasible that in an induced trance, through the processes of the imagination, which was bolstered by the rituals structurally similar to the techniques of shamanism, after descending into a darkened cave, he was to imagine his own dismemberment and reassembly into a new, young god of "reconciliation." Did his mother, the high priestess Demeter/Persephone, preside over the process? Perhaps the initiate was led to believe that the shadowy figure he saw in the ritually induced psycho trance would be analogous to what he would see when he went down to Hades at death. Since he came out of the ritual in tact, he was led to believe that he would also come out of Hades in tact.

and production of metals, as instruments of creation and destruction, the idea was launched “that life can only be engendered from another life that has been immolated. [...] These kinds of cosmogony and anthropogeny will have considerable consequences; the stage will be reached where creation or fabrication will be inconceivable without previous sacrifice.”³⁵⁷ Instead of facing the real violence associated with the discovery of metal weapons, which could kill, Eliade continues down the path of re-mythologization and psychologization.

As was made clear, early miners, metallurgists and smiths believed that eventually all matter would turn to gold. Eliade asserts that at some point the early miners and metallurgists began to associate the extraction of ores with the extraction of a baby from the mother’s womb. He states that “the creation of the world from the body of a primordial being was sometimes conceived and described in terms of the shaping of a ‘foetus’. The cosmos takes shape from a primary matter, ‘embryonic’ (because formless), and ‘chaotic’. We arrive therefore at a series of equivalent or complementary images in which the sacrificed body is compared to primary matter and hence to the germinal mass and the foetus.”³⁵⁸ Just as man and woman were “fused” together in order to bring about the birth of a child, so too were metals fused together.

Eliade says that the smith and metallurgist were also related to the priest. After the extraction or “birth” of the ores, through the fusion of different types of metals to create a new substance, the idea developed that human sacrifice in a forge was not just a death, but also precipitated a new birth. Without explaining why or exactly how the practice of sacrifice began or how the “birth of child” became associated with its murder, he only says that, initially, human sacrifices into the furnaces or forges of smiths were seen as necessary to complete metallurgical operations. If we remember, as ores and metals completed their gestation in the womb of Mother-Earth, the furnaces were seen to be the matrix where the process was brought to maturation. Supposedly, in Eliade’s Romantic scheme, the link was made between abstracting ores from underground and the furnaces with the birthing process. Eliade says that sorcerers (*pharmakeus*), who were also priests and often connected to the smith, would instigate sacrificial abortions so that the foetus could be used in the rituals that were supposed to ensure a “successful” fusion or birth in the metals. Since Nature was one, and the foetus and ores were merely different modes of the unity of matter, the process of extracting the ore and aborting the baby, but also the fusion of metals and the burning of babies were supposedly seen as analogous.³⁵⁹

³⁵⁷ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 31.

³⁵⁸ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 70.

³⁵⁹ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 74-75.

Based on his prioritization of myth, or his assumption that myths precede ritual practice, Eliade speculates that the metallurgical operations were then later repeated in sacrifices, which imitated cosmogonic myths and traditions, where “metals ‘grow’ from the body of a god or semi-divine being. In the myth of the dismemberment of Indra, we are told that, intoxicated by an excess of *soma*, the body of the god began to ‘flow out’, giving birth to every kind of creature, plant and metal. ‘From his navel, his life-breath flowed out and became lead, not iron, not silver; from his seed his form flowed out and became gold.’ (*Shatapatha Brahmana*, xii, 7, 1, 7).”³⁶⁰ Through their contact with myths and smiths as well as the belief that underneath all matter lies gold, alchemists began to develop an analogical understanding. With the advent of alchemy, alchemists also began to make analogies between their work and the work and myths of the miners, metallurgists and smiths. These ideas were taken over and used for how the alchemist could turn base metal into gold. Therefore, the alchemists began to see their quest to turn lead into gold as a “birthing process” as well as a *sacrifice*. Eliade admits the connection between divinization and sacrifice, after analyzing several myths of the so-called Iron Age and at the same time refers to their connection to the myths of the fertility god Dionysos. Although he tends to rationalize violence, his analysis shows how sacrifice, understood as destruction, was perceived as necessary for the processes of creation in the mind of the alchemist. Given Eliade’s influence on contemporary esotericism and New Age religion, including the practices of neo-alchemy and neo-shamanism, it also means that Eliade’s re-mythologization has gained a popular appeal, under the umbrella of seeming academic objectivity. Eliade states:

The profound sense of all these myths is clear enough: *creation is a sacrifice*. One can put life into what one has created only by giving to it one’s own life (blood, tears, sperm, ‘soul’, etc.). Yet another series of myths which are morphologically connected with this theme speak of the origin of alimentary plants which have issued from the self-sacrifice of a god or goddess. To ensure the existence of man, a divine being -- a woman, girl, man or child -- is sacrificed; from his (or her) body sprout the different kinds of nutritive plants. This myth provides the model for the rites which must be periodically celebrated. This is the significance of the human sacrifices made for the benefit of the harvest crops: the victim is put to death, cut up and the pieces strewn over the earth to make it fertile. (*Italics mine*)”³⁶¹

Since Eliade believes that people first wrote myths and then adapted their religions accordingly, he claims that the initiates received the structure of the basic experience of the Mysteries via myth or ancient history. “The essence of initiation into the Mysteries consisted of participation in the passion, death and resurrection of a God.” He says that the meaning of myth was “communicated to him [the initiate] during initiations, in an ‘experimental’ manner. The meaning and finality of

³⁶⁰ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 69.

³⁶¹ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 32.

the Mysteries were the transmutation of man. By experience of initiatory death and resurrection, the initiate changed his mode of being (he became ‘immortal’).”³⁶² That is to say, the Mysteries gave man the sense that he too was a god. Eliade claims that the alchemist projected the structure of the Mysteries onto “matter,” which would undergo his experiments leading to transmutation. He approached “matter” in the same way that the Mysteries approached the “god,” who must necessarily suffer and undergo terrible tortures to achieve ultimate transfiguration and immortality. Like the gods, the minerals and metals must undergo dissolution and dismemberment, must die and be re-absorbed into the whole and later be transmuted into “gold.”

ii. Shamanic experience

Eliade notes that the alchemical experience of being dismembered or mutilated and then reborn is similar to the shamanic experience, whose connection to the early smiths was shown. Eliade’s book, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, also served to popularize the practice of neo-shamanism in contemporary esoteric circles. In Greece as in other countries, in order to fulfill his role, the shaman or *iatromantis* must either go through a real life experience or an initiation, where his death and rebirth is acted out. An “*iatromantis*” is an “inspired healer” and derived from the words: *ιατρος* “healer,” “physician” and *μαντις* “soothsayer,” “diviner,” “prophet,” “seer.” The *iatromantis* is sometimes called a witchdoctor or sorcerer (*φαρμακευς*). The *pharmakeus* is, therefore, a mixer of poisons or medicines, *pharmakon* (*φαρμακον*). As discussed, a *pharmakeus* was also the master of abortions needed for metallurgical sacrifices. The ancient *pharmakeus*’ connections to real human sacrifice explain why the word is also related to the word for a sacrificial scapegoat, the *pharmakos* (*φαρμακος*). The connection between the ability of the *pharmakeus* to mix *pharmakon* (medicines or poisons) and execute the sacrifice of the *pharmakos* will become clearer.

Many stories of primitive peoples concern shamans and smiths. According to one story, a shaman met a smith, who served as his initiator. The smith tore off the shaman’s body parts and put them into a forging pot to cook for three years. Thereafter, the smith reattached the aspiring shaman’s parts with his tongs and covered his body again with flesh. After he inserted new eyes, the smith informed him that he would now be able to commune with animals.³⁶³ Piers Vitebsky says that the shaman’s symbolic sacrificial death, as a *pharmakos* or sacrificial victim, is expressed as a journey through the *cosmos* that is simultaneously a *return* to the womb of the Earth Mother. In the primal chaos of the earth, he is taken apart and put back together into a new

³⁶² *The Forge and the Crucible*, 149.

³⁶³ Piers Vitebsky, *De Sjamaan: Reizen van de Ziel, Trance, Extase en Genezing van Siberië tot de Amazone*, (Kerkdriel: Libero Nederland, 2001) 60-61.

configuration, with the assistance of his *Doppelgänger* or spirit guide. The function of the shaman's spirit guide is similar to that of the magician's *parhedros*, discussed earlier. The shaman's new configuration signifies his new semi-divine status. Through this explanation, Eliade's link of alchemists to smiths and shamans is better understood.

Like Dionysos in the myth of the Titans, the shaman is not only subjected to extreme cruelty and pain, but is made present to his own subsequent death and re-memberment or resurrection. Envisioning his own death and re-birth provided him with a sense of invincibility. There are clear archetypal structural similarities between the experience of the smith, the shaman, and the Mysteries. According to Eliade, like the shaman, the alchemist also "projected on to matter the initiatory function of suffering. Thanks to the alchemical operations, corresponding to the tortures, death and resurrection of the initiate, the substance is transmuted, that is, attains a transcendental mode of being: it becomes gold."³⁶⁴ Gold here signifies the attainment of immortality and transfiguration into a god.³⁶⁵

From this description, we see how Eliade perceives the origin of the Mystery Religions, secret societies, magic and alchemy. Although his style is confusing, if we take him seriously, at first, the primitive humans saw meteorites fall from the ground. Somehow, they decided to use the metal for tools. Because they apparently already experienced the earth as a fertile mother, they created an analogy between rocks that fall from the heavens and hit the ground with the act of sexual intercourse. This then became the basis for the understanding of the *hieros gamos*. Later, they found metals beneath the ground and associated them with a foetus in the mother's womb. Eventually, they wrote myths about this. In order to create the world, the gods always needed a blood sacrifice. Then, the smiths began to imitate the divine models, who had the original knowledge of forging metals and creating the world. Smiths, who were also priests and shamans, began to make the link between extracting metals to forge weapons, birth, the fusion of metals and sacrifices into forges, represented in the cosmogonic myths. In order to pass on this information, and ensure that the knowledge of making tools and weapons did not get into the wrong hands, they formed secret societies. This eventually led to the development of the Mystery

³⁶⁴ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 151.

³⁶⁵ Unlike myth that attempts to rationalize and conceal the murder of innocent victims, the Hebrew Bible constitutes a real advance in its condemnation of infanticide and other arts associated with the practice of sorcery. This is detected in the prohibition to "not give any of your children to be passed through the fire [sacrificed] to Molech" (Cf. Lev 18:21). The ritual practice of sacrificing babies and its connection to magic is also perceived in the Deuteronomic prohibition (Dt. 18:9-13) against "detestable practices." "When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. Let no one be found among you who sacrifices his son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination, or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the Lord and because of these detestable practices the Lord your God will drive out those nations before you. You must be blameless before the Lord your God."

Religions, with their rites and rituals, including the practice of sacrificial abortion, which was deemed necessary to ensure the success of the metallurgical operations. Although Eliade believes that at a certain time society evolved from “gentle” Matriarchy to more “violent” Patriarchy, he does not elaborate on how this supposedly happens or when.

2. Ancient Alchemical Ethics

Although a bit of a digression, by looking more closely at the Roman God Mercury and his Greek counter-part Hermes, we will better understand the sacrificial nature of alchemy as it is related to the Mysteries. As the Roman god of commerce, he was identified with the Greek god Hermes, patron of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. As gods of commerce and exchange, like most ancient pagan gods, Mercury and Hermes were ambivalent, since they were also the gods of thieves and deception. This “divine ambivalence” was extrapolated to the realm of communication and language. Hermes “was the carrier of the divine word to mortals, but he also purveyed devious and corrupt communication -- lies, false oaths and deceptions.”³⁶⁶ Hermes ominously escorted brides to their bridal chambers,³⁶⁷ and assisted miners and metallurgists in their “abortions,” and helped hunters search for buried treasure.³⁶⁸ For the alchemists, Mercury encapsulated both good and evil.³⁶⁹

Because of his assistance with the beginning of life, i.e. marriage and the underground life of miners, Hermes was also an intermediary between the living and the dead, between the upper and lower worlds. Given his duties between these two worlds, he became the god of travelers and is depicted with wings on his sandals, and sometimes with his traveler’s hat, the *petasos*. He carries the staff of a herald, the *caduceus*, which he also used as a magic wand. The staff is represented with two ascending, intertwining serpents that point towards two adjoining wings.³⁷⁰ In Antiquity, snakes were the symbol of wisdom, but also of the soil and the Underworld. The wings were a symbol of transcendence and the air. Similarly, the healing god Asclepius, son of Apollo, is depicted with a staff entwined with a serpent. He was another healing god, but also the instigator of plagues and illness. According to *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols*, the wand is a symbol of power and the *axis mundi*, which all mediator-messenger gods use to travel between heaven and earth. The wand was a hermetic symbol of

³⁶⁶ *World Mythology: The Illustrated Guide*, 144. Clearly, through the ambivalence of their gods of language, the ancients were aware of the ambivalence of language, although spoken in mythological terms. This is a point that Nietzsche makes clearly in many of his writings, and we should keep this in mind.

³⁶⁷ *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*, 367.

³⁶⁸ *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature, and Art*, 286.

³⁶⁹ *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 126.

³⁷⁰ *World Mythology: The Illustrated Guide*, 144.

immanence, which pointed to the possibility of Nature *within itself* to overcome or renew itself. Cooper states:

The double serpent is the opposites in dualism, ultimately to be united; they are also the two serpents of healing and poison, illness and health, they are hermetic and homoeopathic, 'nature can overcome nature', the complementary nature of the two forces operative in the universe and the union of the sexes. They represent the powers of binding and loosing, good and evil, fire and water, ascending and descending, also equilibrium, wisdom and fertility. In alchemy they are the male sulphur and the female quicksilver, the power of transformation; sleeping and waking; the *solve et coagula* of the Great Work; the synthesis of opposites and the transcendent function of mediation between the upper and lower realms.³⁷¹

Hermes was the brother and best friend of Apollo, but as "Hermes Chthonios," the Chthonic Hermes, he greatly resembled the god Dionysos. As sons of Zeus, they were also brothers. Like Dionysos, Hermes was a shepherd and connected to music. According to legends, he discovered it. Like Dionysos-Zagreus, he was a fertility god,³⁷² seen in the description of the *caduceus* above and also a cattle-killer. Kerényi says that the title, "Zagreus," is a derivative of the "Ionian word, *zagre*, signifying 'pit for the capture of live animals'," making Zagreus a hunter of animals.³⁷³ Otto says that although Dionysos is the "Great Hunter," he "is himself hunted, the 'render' is himself rent. When his destiny overtakes him, he is very like one of his unfortunate victims."³⁷⁴ Therefore, Dionysos-Zagreus is the hunter, who is simultaneously the hunted. In this cult, he is like Hermes and worshipped as the "chthonic" or as the subterranean Dionysos, where he is not only equated with Zeus, who had turned himself into a snake to ravish Persephone, but also with Hades, who did the same.³⁷⁵ Hence, the "bull god," who is ripped apart, is also the snake, or literally dragon, who rapes his own daughter and allows his child by her to be murdered or destroyed. The destroyer, therefore, destroys himself!

Kerényi discusses an ancient Cretan formula sung in the Dionysian Mysteries as a *symbolon*, or a profession of faith or word of recognition: "*Taurus draconem genuit et taurum draco*. The bull is the father of the snake and the snake to the bull. In Greek the line runs: ταυρος δρακονος και πατηρ ταυρου δρακων. It can also be interpreted as follows: "The bull is the son of the snake and the snake is the father of the bull."³⁷⁶ Because of these associations, early Christians, who were not unfamiliar with the ancient art of association, easily equated

³⁷¹ J. C. Cooper, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978) 28.

³⁷² *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature and Art*, 286-287.

³⁷³ *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*, 82

³⁷⁴ *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, 191-192.

³⁷⁵ *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, 191.

³⁷⁶ *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*, 117. See also, for a similar presentation: Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of the Greek Religion*, 495.

Dionysos/Zeus with Satan or the devil. They perceived that they had the same seductively destructive function of the serpent in the Garden story of Genesis.

It was in the cult of *Dionysos Bougenes*, where the god was worshipped as a bull. Kerényi cites Pausanias and Plutarch's, *Questiones Graecae*, known also in the Renaissance. "On the island of Tenedos a cow with calf was cared for like a pregnant woman and then like a woman in childbed, for the benefit of Dionysos, who was known there as the 'god who crushes men.' When the calf was born, hunting boots such as the god often wore were put on it, and it was then sacrificed in place of a child, who was none other than the child Dionysos. The identity of the god with the calf and the bull is demonstrated in Greece by epithets such as *Bougenes*, 'cow's son,' and 'worthy bull', who was expected to come to the Dionysian women 'with riotous bull's foot.'"³⁷⁷ Otto claims that the infant was not a quivering innocent, but a "wild and raging bull," who was simultaneously also, *taurophagos*, or a bull eater himself.³⁷⁸ As a "lion, snake, and bull he was an object of dread to his destroyers even in his last hour."³⁷⁹ In other words, the bull-eating bull destroyed that which destroyed him, and from his aborted body sprouted "life." For those who are familiar with it, the similarities between the Dionysos myth and the alchemical *Oroboros*, or the snake that consumes its own tail, are remarkable.

Furthermore, Hermes was always present during Dionysian festivals, the *Dionysia*. The thirteenth day of the Dionysian festival, the *Anthesteria*, was called the "day of pots" or the *Chytroi*. This day was dedicated to both gods. During the last three days of the festival, all gods were banned from the city, except Hermes and Dionysos. The day before, the 12th day, was the *Choës* Day. On this day, Hermes led the spirits out of the Underworld and the *hieros gamos* between Dionysos and Ariadne was consummated. Ariadne was said to be the daughter of the evil king Minos and Pasiphae, daughter of the ancient sun god, Helios and sister of Circe, goddess of magic. When Theseus, founder of Athens, came to Crete to kill the Minotaur, a monster with the head of a bull and the body of a man, Ariadne assisted him to escape from the subterranean Labyrinth by providing him with a string to return to the light. The Minotaur was the child of Pasiphae and a white bull, therefore, also the half-brother of Ariadne. After its birth, Minos concealed it in the Labyrinth, where criminals and children from Athens were sent to their deaths as its source of food. Seyffert says that "it has been pointed out that he is the same as the Phoenician *Baal Moloch*, also represented with a bull's head and supplied with human sacrifices."³⁸⁰ Theseus was said to have killed the Minotaur and freed Athens from its terror.

³⁷⁷ *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of an Indestructible Life*, 54-55.

³⁷⁸ *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, 166-167.

³⁷⁹ *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, 193.

³⁸⁰ *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature, and Art*, 394.

When Theseus left the island, Ariadne fled with him. There are two accounts of her elopement: either Dionysos ordered her assassination on the island of Dia, close to Crete, or Theseus abandoned her, while sleeping on the island of Naxos. In this version, Dionysos comes to her rescue and makes her his bride.³⁸¹ Their wedding, and her “elevation” to the position of goddess, was celebrated on *Choë's* Day.

For the ritual, the wife of the *archon basileus* was led to a room, escorted by her fourteen maidservants, “satyrs” and revelers. There, she would perform “unspeakable sacrifices” and other “sacred secret practices.” Walter Burkert states, “How the ‘marriage’ was actually consummated is a question which remains unanswered: did the woman lie with a herm [e.g. a wooden phallus] or did the ‘king’ appear in the mask of a god?” Unlike its romanticization in the recent bestseller, *The Da Vinci Code*, the ritual ended with an allusion to violence and sacrifice, probably to Ariadne’s own death. Burkert states, “Where the setting-up of the mask-god took place and how the procession to the *Boukolion* was formed we do not know; but once again we find an illuminating analogy in the sacrificial ritual which ends with the animal skull being raised up in the sanctuary.”³⁸²

Hermes was not far away while the Dionysian revelers celebrated the *hieros gamos*. Although Hermes Chthonios was distinct from Dionysos on this day, Kerényi admits that “These are two names for the same divine person, whose condition points to the mysteries for which the ‘venerable women’ performed preparatory services.” The day after the *Choë's*, he led the dead souls back to Hades. “For the sake of the dead,” “Sacrifices were made to the chthonic Hermes.” Hermes double role on the *Choë's*, where he leads the souls of the dead as well as the bride Ariadne to her bridal chamber, is ominous.

The sacrificial character of the entire festival is highlighted by the festivities of the next day after the “day of pots.” The fourteenth day was celebrated with the swinging of little girls. Kerényi says that “Amid the erotic, ghostlike atmosphere of the Aiora, the virgins did their swinging in the houses and in the courtyards where the *pithoi* stood open. The swing moved in the world that had opened between the upper and lower regions, in imitation of the spectral Erigone, the Ariadne of Ikarion, who belonged to both realms.”³⁸³ A dark myth speaks about Ikarios, the man who brought wine to the Greeks, and his daughter Erigone. Erigone committed suicide after finding the swinging corpse of her father hanging from a well.³⁸⁴ Like Ariadne, she

³⁸¹ *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature, and Art*, 64.

³⁸² Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. John Raffan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985) 240.

³⁸³ *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of an Indestructible Life*, 307.

³⁸⁴ *Greek Religion*, 241.

was also married to Dionysos, showing that the “sacred marriage” to a god meant the certain death of the maiden.³⁸⁵

C. Another Theory Concerning the Origin of Religion

1. Homo Necans

Eliade’s understanding of the origin of religion differs from, for example, Walter Burkert, quoted above. Burkert’s understanding of the origin of religion seems more plausible and is more compatible with the traditional Christian understanding of the human person. Burkert sees hunting societies, not the activities of smiths and miners, at the origin of religion. For Burkert, the practice of sacrifice began not as a need to extract ores and fuse them into new metals, or from reading myths and then applying it to their metallurgical practices. Sacrifice began as a result of real human conflict that was eventually resolved through a greater violence. In Eliade’s conception, initiatic societies were at the basis of religion in order to transmit the secret knowledge of “making” or “creating,” which included the magical practice of baby sacrifice. Eliade tends to separate myth and actual ritual praxis. This leads to two defects in his position. Although he admits that most myths posit a blood sacrifice at the origin of creation, he fails to explain why this was so. Unlike Girard and Burkert, he also fails to account for the acts of real violence given in mythological accounts of creation, or provide a convincing reason why such sacrifices as such were deemed necessary for creation to bring ores to maturation.

In contrast to Eliade’s more romanticized version of the origin of religion and culture, which is common in some academic and esoteric circles, in his groundbreaking work, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth* (1972), Burkert sees violence and the attempt to come to terms with it, as the origin of primitive religion. His *Homo Necans* brought about an ethological “Copernican Revolution” by positing “a primacy of rites over linguistic communications.”³⁸⁶ According to Burkert, rites do not evolve out of myth, as Eliade would have it, but myth is a later attempt to understand the meaning of the violent event or series of events that led to the establishment of a given civilization.³⁸⁷ Like Girard, he breaks away from the traditional nineteenth century interpretation of the origin of religion, which attempted to dismiss or obscure the role of violence in ancient myths and texts. However, Burkert’s theory differs somewhat from Girard’s. Girard sees the first horrific murder of another

³⁸⁵ Although not really relevant here, a declaration of love to one’s “Ariadne” should not be interpreted as a declaration of romantic intention, but more as a curse. For example, Friedrich Nietzsche’s last letters to Cosima Wagner should be seen more in this light.

³⁸⁶ Burton Mack, “Introduction: Religion and Ritual,” *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation*, ed. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelley (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987) 5.

³⁸⁷ *Greek Religion*, 8-9.

human being as the beginning of civilization, while Burkert believes that it began with the first hunters' trauma of killing of animals. Although we favor Girard's theory, Burkert's has much merit and independently supports Girard's theory to some extent.

Burkert's points of departure are the pervasiveness of sacrifice in most primitive religions and the care given to the placement of bones. Concerning the first point of departure, as a historian of Greek culture, Burkert was struck by how sacrifice accompanied almost every aspect of Greek religion and life, from "festivals, seats of oracles, games, cults, mysteries, funerary rites, state ceremonies, or mythologies and drama." The second point of departure was based on the observations of Karl Meuli (1946) that "certain aspects of Greek sacrificial practice, especially the care and handling of the bones of animal victims, were similar to the practice of Paleolithic hunters." For him, the careful reconstruction of the body of the victim is a sign that the community experienced some sense of guilt for the death and hoped for an eventual resurrection or return. Because he believed that aspects of this more primitive culture were embedded within the literature, rites and practices of later Greek civilization, he set out to reconstruct a theory of ritual and religion.³⁸⁸

2. Food and Guilt

Before the formation of secret religious societies by metallurgists and smiths, Burkert believes that *Männerbund* of hunting societies were the first type of religious groups. This group was less like a lodge of proto-Masons, who were interested in passing on the "secrets" of their trade. The group was bound together by their mutual interest in the survival of the community, and their mutual guilt for the murder of the hunting victim. "At the core of this new type of male community, which is biologically analogous to a pack of wolves, are the acts of killing and eating. The men must constantly move between the two realms, and their male children must one day take the difficult step from the women's world into the world of men. Fathers must accept their sons, educating them and looking after them – this too, has no parallel among mammals. When a boy finally enters the world of men, he does so by confronting death." By imitating the hunting habits of wolves, man exchanged his role as hunted, for that of hunter.³⁸⁹ That is to say, before primitive communities figured out how to make tools that served to protect and kill, most of their energy was spent hiding and running from larger animals, not after them. Burkert insists that without this "role change," there would be no possibility to create a stable society or to develop civilization as we know it, where smiths and metallurgists carry out their work.

³⁸⁸ "Introduction: Religion and Ritual," *Violent Origins*, 24.

³⁸⁹ *Homo Necans*, 18.

Burkert suggests that before the formation of the *Männerbund*, “society” as a whole was facing starvation. At a certain moment, they realized how wolves bound together for protection and hunting of larger prey, which they shared with the rest of the pack. The early humans must have followed suit. They began to share the meat from the hunt and survived. Somehow these Paleolithic communities were able to redirect or sublimate what Burton Mack calls “interspecific” violence between male and female onto their prey. “Behavioral codes resulted (‘rituals,’ in ethological parlance) that controlled cooperative planning, departures, and the coordination of the hunt. The approach to the hunt was ritualized so as to balance and retain motivational and psychological tensions stemming from the new social formations in the interest of the objective of the hunt. The kill was the climax that released those tensions and focused attention to the prey as the living creature that had to be killed in order to provide food for those who killed it.”³⁹⁰ According to Burkert, the primitive community needed to believe that the animal had “agreed” to his own “sacrifice” or killing.³⁹¹ This became what Burkert, under the influence of Meuli, called the “comedy of innocence.”

The “comedy of innocence” must have somehow provoked the need for the services of a shaman or witchdoctor/sorcerer. During his routine of seduction, the shaman presupposed a fundamental correspondence, or sympathy, between the hunter and the hunted. His magic was an attempt *to gain the prey’s compliance to be killed for food* and at the same time absorbing guilt, making the shaman’s role central within the life of the community. Burkert notes that the rituals involved in the hunt, like purification and abstinence, placement of bones and skins in the original position of the living animal, showed that the hunters experienced an initial shock and guilt for killing and slaughtering the animal. That is, they longed to be absolved for their deed and desired restoration of the animal’s identity. Before the practice of ritual sacrifice, which is strongly connected to the magic of the shaman, there was no way to displace guilt. Shamans played an important role in the process of deflecting communal guilt for murdering the animal. As a priest and a sorcerer, shamans sacrificed animals that were really a symbol of themselves. The shaman was willing, as a *pharmakeus/pharmakos* or sorcerer/scapegoat, to ritually accept the guilt of the entire community upon himself, and become for them, like a god. Burkert believes that this is the origin of religion but also of sympathetic magic.

The ritual provides forgiveness and reparation, through frequently taking on a scurrilous character which prompted Meuli to coin the phrase ‘the comedy of innocence.’ The ritual betrays an underlying anxiety about the continuation of life in the face of death. The blood ‘act’ was necessary for the continuance of life, but it is just as necessary for new life to be able to start

³⁹⁰ “Introduction: Religion and Ritual,” *Violent Origins*, 25.

³⁹¹ *Homo Necans*, 16, 20, 37ff.

again. Thus, the gathering of bones, the raising of a skull or stretching of a skin is to be understood as an attempt at restoration, a resurrection in the most concrete sense.³⁹²

Nevill Drury, in *Shamanism*, makes similar assumptions. He points out that “by the Upper Palaeolithic Era, there is a clear indication that Man [as such] had begun to think in magical terms.”³⁹³ Hence, the earliest primitive religion probably originated as the magical religion of hunting peoples, wherever they were located. The shaman was essential intermediary between the people and the spirits of the animals, who needed to be convinced to *offer themselves up for the greater good of the people as food*. As Drury explains:

From early times, religion, art and magic seem to have been intertwined. The sorcerer was a master of wild animals -- able to control their fate through his hunting magic, adept at disguises, and a practitioner of animal sacrifice. He learned to mimic the animals and in turn based his dances on their movements, and felt he had developed a psychic bond with them. In this way, the Paleolithic hunter-sorcerer was a precursor of the archetypal shaman, who had animal familiars, clan totems, and believed that consciousness could be transformed into an animal form.³⁹⁴

3. Sexualization of Nature

As discussed above, in *The Forge*, Eliade tried to show that in the symbolic realm, the sexualization of Nature and the idea of the *hieros gamos* or sacred marriage were somehow related to blood sacrifice in the minds of the smiths and metallurgists.³⁹⁵ However, unlike Girard and Burkert, Eliade and popular esoteric authors like Dan Brown do not question the nature of the violence that underlies the myths of the *hieros gamos* and its ritual development. According to Burkert, the sexualization of Nature began earlier and lies in the ritualized behavior seen among primates, who need to demonstrate power and rank. Power and rank determine who gets the choicest pieces of food and mating partners. That is to say, the worship of “phallic gods,” i.e. the gods worshipped under “patriarchy,” did not evolve after the worship of the Earth Mother, as Eliade would have it, but as a response to “ranking” within primitive communities, who were interested in sex and food for survival. According to Burkert, “among some primates, the male delimits his territory by facing outward and displaying his erect phallus. Rump-presentation [i.e. homosexual type behavior] as an invitation to mate is a gesture of submission inhibiting an aggressive response from the stronger partner. It is astounding how corresponding behavior recurs in human ritual: the function of the phallus is ‘apotropaic.’ The Babylonians made their boundary stones in the shape of a phallus; the Greeks marked their territory with herms.”³⁹⁶ That

³⁹² *Homo Necans*, 16.

³⁹³ Drury, *Shamanism*, 9.

³⁹⁴ Drury, *Shamanism*, 9.

³⁹⁵ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 62.

³⁹⁶ *Homo Necans*, 58. “Hermes” are small pillars, resembling a phallus, used as milestones or signs in Antiquity. Obviously, the etymology of the word is related to the god of travel, Hermes.

is to say, weaker males *temporarily* allowed themselves to be sexually dominated by stronger males in order to avoid being ripped apart. It was not a typical or generally accepted expression of natural masculine relationships. Burkert would say, therefore, that herms are symbols of powerful male dominance over weaker males, which reach all the way back to primate behavior, not to the beginning of the “patriarchal epoch.”

Against some of Eliade’s assertions, which are dependent on Jakob Bachofen’s ideas about the priority of matriarchal society, Burkert points out that “Bachofen’s ingenious but fantastic theory of a prehistoric matriarchy has hindered the understanding of these female deities. Female dominance is no more possible in Neolithic farming cultures than it is among Upper Paleolithic hunting societies.”³⁹⁷ As we saw, myths that involved the cult of Demeter or the Great Mother were not peaceful and gentle. Many of them contain covert references to infanticide or murder out of revenge. As a historian of religion, Eliade questionably assumes that through the change from, for example, matriarchal goddess worshipping societies of “hunters and gatherers” to patriarchal worshipers of phallic gods, religion became more violent. As Burkert and Girard have shown, such a matriarchal society probably never existed. Religion and culture did not begin as a peaceful matriarchal society and then evolve into a more violent patriarchal one, but was violent as well as patriarchal from the beginning. Burkert and Girard’s theories are, therefore, more in line with the traditional biblical account of the origin of human culture as a result of sin or un-mastered desire (e.g. the story of Cain and Abel). In fact, with the emphasis on God as a faithful and monogamous Father, the Judeo-Christian tradition appears to be an attempt to mitigate the real violent and oppressive effects of pagan patriarchy on both the lives of men and women.

Eliade also adheres to the popular idea that the experience of dismemberment by both the shaman and the alchemist is reminiscent of the myths of the “dying god,” whose “passion, death and resurrection” closely followed the agricultural cycle. Burkert notes that this is a ruse already contrived in ancient times to deflect attention from the real event that occurs in the Mysteries.³⁹⁸ That is, the myths of the “dying gods” are representations of extreme moments of communal crisis, which threatened to undo it, namely, rape, infanticide, mutilation and murder. Together with René Girard, Burkert believes that rituals of sacrifice represent both a crisis and their resolution for the benefit of a given community. Early rituals were a product of a community or *Männerbund*’s attempt to deal with the guilt of murdering a victim. According to Girard’s theory, however, the communal crisis was resolved through the unanimous participation in the

³⁹⁷ *Homo Necans*, 80.

³⁹⁸ *Homo Necans*, 260.

murder of the human victim, after which peace and unity were reconstituted. The restoration of new type of peace and unity, which could only be established after the death of the victim, was attributed to the victim as a sign of his divinity. The newfound peace and unity, which literally grew out of body of the victim, allowed civilization to take root. This is the origin of religion and of the gods, according to Girard.

As discussed, Burkert says that the early religious experience arose out of the shocking experiences of early hunting societies and was preserved, but also transferred to other modes of society. Eliade's romantic presupposition, however, concerns a much later phase of development, if at all. If Burkert's theories concerning the origin of secret societies are correct, then, later secret societies of smiths and metallurgists, but also more elegant secret societies, like the Freemasons and Rosicrucians, were probably developed along the lines of the early *Männerbund*, who were originally bound together by their mutual guilt as murderers. The same is true for the development of the Mysteries and, hence, alchemy. Alchemy, however, probably represents a privatization of this once communal process. Voss pointed out, "'theory and practice' were inextricably woven together;" the alchemical practices and writings were an esoteric way to transmit salvific *gnosis* pertaining to the achievement of immortality, like the "dying gods" in the Mysteries and myths. Nevertheless, this *gnosis* had little to do with agricultural cycles. Like those before them, their *gnosis* was founded on an animistic understanding of Nature, which consisted in the realization, embedded in myth and the practice of the Mysteries, that to be reborn as a god, one must necessarily suffer, i.e. be torn to shreds like baby Dionysos, and die.

4. Alchemy and the Temporalization of the Initiatory Processes of the Mysteries

a. A Growing Awareness

As seen above, the ancient alchemical vision and way of life fundamentally express the archetypal experience of the suffering, death and re-birth of the gods in the ancient Mysteries. Walter Burkert confirms the close association between the Mysteries and magic in *Ancient Mystery Cults*. "The tradition of magic and that of mysteries have coexisted for a long time, with multiple contacts and mutual interrelations, especially at the level of charismatic craftsmanship. The advent of Demeter at Eleusis has its curious parallel in Egyptian magical texts, and one of the last Eleusinian hierophants was an active, and successful, theurgist."³⁹⁹ In as much as alchemy provided a philosophical vision for understanding magic, the Mysteries provided Hermetic versions of alchemy with its conceptual scheme and vision of the world, based on a perpetual cycle of creation and destruction. Time in alchemy and magic are similar in their causal structure in that there is an attempt to control Time and Nature itself, through altering or speeding up the

³⁹⁹ Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987) 68.

otherwise lengthy and sluggish process of Nature. Although we must distinguish between material and spiritual alchemy, given the alchemists' belief in the unity of all matter, we should recognize that spiritual alchemy becomes temporalized or biologized, when the alchemist – within a pantheistic or monistic paradigm that has reversed the Platonic scale of emanation from above to from below -- begins to believe that he must put his own physical/material body through necessary tortures in order to achieve a higher spiritual state. Although most spiritual alchemists understood this language symbolically, with the intellectual collapse of the symbolic and transcendental realms into the macrocosmic Nature and, ultimately, the microcosmic individual, after the Reformation, a temporalized or biological interpretation could not be ruled out.

As Eliade pointed out, due to the connections that had already been made between the natural processes of time and ritual sacrifices, the idea arose that the human being could not only participate as a co-creator alongside of Nature, but could also intervene in the cosmic process of life itself. In the same way that the metallurgist facilitated the “birth of ores,” and the smith, through the mastery of fire, was able to fuse metals into a “sacred union,” the shaman, and sorcerer believed that they could further intervene into the processes of life by sacrificing a human victim into the fiery forges. Eliade claims that the ancient alchemists accepted these analogies. Based on a metallurgical analogy of the fusion of metals, they felt that, for example, the sacrifice of aborted babies would be the cause and the foundation of something “new.” According to Eliade, these presentiments were not initially clearly expressed, but slowly -- from the “first” celestial stone that fell from the heavens and united itself in a *hieros gamos* with the Earth --, there grew a clearer awareness amongst these early “masters of fire” that they themselves could replace the effects of time. As such, we see that already within ancient alchemy, with its connections to Presocratic and Stoic hylozoic or animistic thought-forms, there was a tendency to temporalize or biologize the alchemical processes. Although different in the Middle Ages, in Antiquity, this was possible given the belief in the unity of all matter, including the human being. Eliade says:

Here too, if we may repeat ourselves, lies the basis and justification of the alchemical operation, the *opus alchymicum* which haunted the philosophic imagination for more than two thousand years: the idea of the transmutation of man and the Cosmos by means of the Philosopher's Stone. On the mineral level of existence, the Stone was realizing this miracle: it eliminated the interval of time, which separated the present condition of an ‘imperfect’ (crude) metal from its final condition (when it would become gold). The Stone achieved transmutation almost instantaneously: it superseded Time.⁴⁰⁰

⁴⁰⁰ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 78.

b. The Ethics of the Ouroboros

From the above discussion of Hermes' roles and relations (especially those having to do with Dionysos), we have gained insight into the self-sacrificial nature of alchemy and magic, rooted in the philosophical framework of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. As we suggest, given its skeptical distance from pre-Christian modes of thought, medieval alchemy, which was mainly used in a proto-scientific sense -- did not express this later self-destructive tendency, which was possibly present in pre-Christian alchemy, albeit mitigated by the acceptance of some form of Platonism. Platonism and Neoplatonism posited an archetypal world of ideal forms, which allowed the alchemist to interpret the processes more "symbolically." Like the Mysteries and the practice of shamanism, ancient alchemy maintained an ethics of "creation and destruction."

In a monistic conception of reality, whether this is pantheism, animism or holism, in order to achieve a higher or purified version of the same, the Hermetic spiritual alchemist must be willing -- in some form -- to kill, destroy or dissolve himself. That is, *he must be willing to commit a form of suicide*, be this psychical or physical, with the assistance of Mercury, whom he perceives to be himself. In ancient and Renaissance forms, this was probably understood symbolically or ideally.

From the animistic perspective where "all is one," Mercurius is as much the beginning of the operation as the end result. Mercury-Hermes underlies not only the alchemical processes, but also the *prima materia*, or the chaotic underground of all there is and related to Dionysos. "As above, so below," Mercurius-Trismegistus or Hermes-Dionysos is as much the nature of the *cosmos* as the nature of the microcosmic alchemist, who on the one hand resides within the *cosmos* and at the same time tries to transcend it.⁴⁰¹ It was, therefore, the role of Mercurius to help the alchemist transcend time and himself.

In fact, the alchemical assistant's role is similar to that of the alchemical *Ouroboros*, or the "tail eater." In one of the most famous representations of the *Ouroboros*, the *Chrysopoeia of Clyopatra* or the "Goldmaking of Cleopatra," written by an Alexandrian alchemist, the serpent is light on one end and dark on the other end. Written inside of the symbol are the words, "*hen to pan*," "the One is All" or "All is One." Jack Lindsay refers to this document in *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, showing how destruction of one's own nature as "Nature," or

⁴⁰¹ Here, we are close to an analogical understanding of the relationship between Nietzsche and his "double," Dionysos-Zarathustra. Dionysos, who is the subterranean underground of all there is, is also the subterranean underground of Friedrich Nietzsche and is Friedrich Nietzsche. The figure of Zoroaster was already associated with alchemy in the seventeenth century document *Zoroaster's Cave*, an important image in Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, serving as a first important link to what we deem to be Nietzsche's "occult philosophy," discussed in our introductory remarks. See *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 243.

divine suicide, was in some sense accepted before the advent of Christianity.⁴⁰² This half-dark, half-light serpent destroys itself in order to re-create itself to a higher synthesis. Abraham explains, it “devours itself and spits itself out, kills itself and generates itself again.” For the ancients, the *Ouroboros* is the symbol of life, perfection, totality, the eternal return and the self-sufficient cycle of Nature. It also represents the descent of the spirit into the physical world and its return or ascent.⁴⁰³ For the Hermetic alchemist, Nature and, hence, the human person is fundamentally like the tail-eating snake: self-destructive, but also regenerative, perpetually dying but also rising again into a new creation.

Functionally, *ouroboristic* naturalism operates on *dialectic* between good and evil, because the world, symbolized by a circle, is a monadic Totality. The *Ouroboros* is structurally similar to the symbol of *yin* and *yang*, although the tail-eating serpent is a more primitive expression of this fundamental idea. In order to sustain itself, the *Ouroboros* devours its own tail, or must destroy itself. In alchemical language this is known as the fusion or the conjunction of opposites (*coniunctio oppositorum*) or even more euphemistically as the “chemical wedding,” where Mercurius functions as priest and “escort to the bridal chamber.” The imagery of the “chemical wedding” is central to the *opus alchymicum*, and concerns the reconciliation of opposites in order to create the Philosopher’s Stone. Images used to describe the union “range from the most primitive animal matings (dog and bitch, hen and cock, amours birds of prey, winged and wingless dragons or serpents) to the union of human lovers, red man and white woman and ultimately to the royal wedding of Sol and Luna as king and queen.”⁴⁰⁴ In Hermetic alchemy, authentic otherness is not recognized, since the marriage is an incestuous one, i.e. between sister and brother or mother and son.

In material alchemy, which might or might not be monistic, the *opus* of *solve et coagula* begins through a series of dissolutions (*solve*) of the material into the chaos of the *prima materia*. Dissolution occurs through the heating or dissolving of the lesser material, but in spiritual or Hermetic alchemy, which operates within the holistic paradigm; this could be interpreted as an old state or age through a symbolic or perhaps even real fire. Given the belief in the unity of matter, the symbolic understanding could be taken literally and temporalized. From the

⁴⁰² *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, 253-254. “First, however, the single page called her Goldmaking. The title is at the top. Three concentric circles enclose axioms. In the first ring we read. ‘One is the All and by it the All and in it the All and if it does not contain the All it is nothing.’ In the inner ring: ‘The Serpent is One, he who has the Venom with two compositions’, *synthemata*. That is, the effective force comes from the unity achieved out of the fusion of the two opposites. In the centre are the signs of mercury, silver and gold; the rayed sun-sign is that found also in Assyria and in the heretical Valentinian writings. Below on the left is the serpent *Ouroboros* making a circle with his tail in his mouth and enclosing the axiom, ‘One the All’. On the right is an alembic with two points; on its furnace is the word *phota*, flames, lights.”

⁴⁰³ Udo Becker, *Lexikon der Symbole* (Freiburg: Herder, 1998) 211.

⁴⁰⁴ *The Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 36.

dissolution into *prima materia*, the materials separate and the better ones rise to the top of the alembic. Materials like sulphur and mercury, but also states like hot and cold; dry and moist; fixed and volatile; active and receptive as well as conditions like spirit and body; form and matter; male and female but also good and evil are posited against each other. The repetition of this process should result in the material or the alchemist's progressive purification (*coagula*). In spiritual alchemy, the first phase of the fusion or conjoining of opposites (*coniunctio*) is the black phase (*nigredo*), signifying the darkened matter of the *prima materia* into which the alchemist psychically descends. In this melancholic or depressed state, the alchemist often speaks of himself in disparaging terms, like "mud" or "dung." It appears to be similar to the Christian mystics "dark night of the soul," although the understanding of God is totally different. The Christian mystic plunges into the "dark night," because he or she profoundly experiences the absence of God. The focus is on relationship or the experience of a lack of one, whereas the *nigredo* is an experience of the alchemist's mediocre self, which he wants to overcome through his own will power.

In Hermetic alchemical texts like the *Korē Kosmou*, references to the Mysteries of the "Chthonic Demeter" or "Demeter Melaine" are an allusion to the first phase of the self-divinizing process. In alchemical language, the *nigredo* is the stage where a supposed outmoded or degenerated form of being or age is "killed" so that it can be regenerated into something "new." According to Abraham, the *nigredo* is often seen as a "time of bloodshed and lamentation."⁴⁰⁵ Given its connections to the Mysteries, this supports our contention that actual violence, euphemistically spoken of as sacrifice, lurks behind alchemical language.

Conclusions and Comments

The connections between the *Ouroboros*, Zeus, Hades, Aion, Mercury-Hermes and Dionysos are striking. In a world where "All is One," these deities function similarly and are different names given to different aspects of the same process. As we saw in Hermetic alchemy, the transmutation of lead into gold had not so much to do with increasing one's material wealth as with one's own private initiatic transmutation into the prized "Philosopher's Stone," that is, into a god. Structurally, the process of self-divinization in magic and Hermetic alchemy are analogous to the Mystery Religions. The one who understands the *mechanism* of destroying and creating oneself, like a shaman, pagan priest, magician or alchemist *knows* that good can be pitted against evil in a *coniunctio oppositorum*, or fusion of opposites, to bring about a higher synthesis or "something new." A higher synthesis occurs through dialectic or reversals, well understood in

⁴⁰⁵ *The Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 135.

the world of the occult and symbolized by the *Ouroboros*. This is the world of magical causality, where the will takes priority over reason. Based on description in Homer and Greek tragedy, Burkert describes the complex path that led to “the center of the sacred experience,” whose “final goal is the sacrificial *stone*, the altar ‘set up’ long ago, which is to be sprinkled with blood. Usually a *fire is already ablaze* on top of it.” (Italics mine)⁴⁰⁶ Considering our discussion of the necessity of sacrifice or self-sacrifice for alchemical divinization, perhaps it is not so far fetched to see the “Philosopher’s Stone” as the altar stone?

⁴⁰⁶ *Homo Necans*, 3-4.

II. Hermetism and the Presocratic Tradition

A. The Hermetic Tradition

1. The Preservation of Marginalized Traditions

As discussed above, the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the Hermetic Tradition reflect an attempt in late Antiquity and Hellenism to syncretize all existing forms of knowledge into one great Tradition, under the umbrella of the legendary Egyptian priest Hermes Trismegistus. Until the work of Frances Yates, the *Corpus Hermeticum* was understood to fall within the larger framework of late Platonism and Neo-Platonism. Recently, Peter Kingsley has further contributed to a better understanding of ancient Hermetism by suggesting that it also preserved essential elements of the Pythagorean-Empedoclean tradition and its animistic worldview. This does not exclude the acceptance of certain elements of Platonism, Neoplatonism, Stoicism, Gnostic Judaism, etc. within the Hermetic texts. According to Kingsley, the animistic-magical worldview of Presocratic philosophers dominated until it was maligned, reversed and “rationalized” by Plato and Aristotle. In later Antiquity, the *Hermetica* served as a literary vehicle to gather and preserve these maligned ideas, and acted like a magnet for all sorts of alternative traditions.⁴⁰⁷ In his view, the Platonists were to the Presocratic Pythagorean tradition what the Protestant Reformers were to the Roman Catholic Church. Both later traditions tended to rationalize and “spiritualize” the older tradition, which led to the beginning of a new tradition – with elements of the old.⁴⁰⁸

Kingsley posits that the Hermetic Tradition was originally, primarily preserved through the pagan inhabitants of the Northern Mesopotamian town of Harran located close to the Turkish town of Urfa. In our discussion of the *Picatrix*, we saw that in the Hebrew Bible, Harran was the hometown of Abraham’s father, Terah (Gen 11:31), and well-known for idol worship. Initially, Harran successfully resisted forced Muslim conversion, but later developed its own brand of Hermetic Islam.⁴⁰⁹ The *Ghâyat al-Hakim* or the *Picatrix* expresses this pre-Christian and pre-Islamic tradition that Tamara Green claims, in *The City of the Moon God*, could have been written in the community of the “Brethren of Purity” (*Ikhwan al-Safa*). These Islamic Hermeticists professed a Harranian doctrine, which was promulgated by an extreme Ishma’ili faction.⁴¹⁰ Before forced Muslim conversion, the Harranites appropriated the name of “Sabians,” a group that was tolerated by Mohammad in the *Koran* as “believers,” along with Christians and Jews.⁴¹¹

⁴⁰⁷ Peter Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 80.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic*, 211.

⁴⁰⁹ Brian P. Copenhaver, “Introduction,” *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a new English translation with notes and introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, reprint 2000) xlv-xlvi.

⁴¹⁰ Tamara M. Green, *The City of the Moon God: Religious Traditions of Harran* in *Religions in the Graeco-Roman World* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992) 181, 186.

⁴¹¹ cf. *The Koran*, Suras: “The Cow”, “The Table”, “Pilgrimage” (In this passage, the status of Sabians, is ambiguous, because “true believers” seem to be distinguished from Jews, Christians, Sabians, Magi and pagans).

The Harranites “took Hermes as their prophet, whom they identified with the Quranic Idris and the biblical Enoch. Forced conversions intensified in the early ninth century, yet the Hermetic Sabi’ians held out until the middle of the eleventh century, producing several important scholars, of whom the greatest was Thabit ibn Qurrah in the ninth century.”⁴¹²

In the Middle Ages, most western European knowledge of these occult traditions were preserved and passed on by Muslims, who were associated with the abovementioned Shi’ite Ishma’ili tradition. This tradition was “well known for assimilating Greek and other pre-Islamic traditions into the schemes of prophesy and revelation.”⁴¹³ The Sufis, known as the mystical branch of Islam, were also transmitters of this tradition.⁴¹⁴ In a later article (2000), Kingsley explicitly says that after the Islamic incursion, the Hermetic tradition was kept alive through alchemical circles in Egypt. “And we can still trace the paths along which it passed, through the early Islamic world, into Persian Sufism. There were Sufis who were fully aware of this process of transmission; and their perception of the continuity was basically quite correct even down to the smallest details.”⁴¹⁵ It is interesting that Kingsley’s more spiritual book on Parmenides, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom*, was published by *The Golden Sufi Center* in Inverness, California. This group promotes Kingsley’s work on their website.

2. Turba Philosophorum

One of the most important pieces of evidence of the Arabic transmission of the alchemical Hermetic Tradition is the important, but fragmentary *Mushaf al-jama’a* or the *Tome of the Gathering*. This text was partially translated into Latin under the title, *Turba philosophorum* or the *Gathering of the Philosophers*. The Arabic original is a clear reworking of earlier Greek material within the new Islamic religious context.⁴¹⁶ Haage says that the “*Turba* first appears in manuscripts of the 12th century, a Latin edition was first printed in Basle in 1572, and the first German translation by Paul Hildenbrandt appeared at Frankfurt in 1597.”⁴¹⁷ This means that after the Reformation, the text was generally available. As Kingsley notes, “in both cases the title refers to a gathering of ancient philosophers under the presidency of Pythagoras.”⁴¹⁸ Only sparse fragments of the Arab document survive; however, in the Latin document, we meet once again the Presocratic philosopher Empedocles, who states that “air is an attenuated form of water.” He

⁴¹² Brian P. Copenhaver, “Introduction,” *Hermetica*, xlv.

⁴¹³ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 377.

⁴¹⁴ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 381; Brian P. Copenhaver, “Introduction,” *Hermetica*, xlv.

⁴¹⁵ Peter Kingsley, “An Introduction to the Hermetica: Approaching Ancient Esoteric Tradition,” *From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition*, ed. Roelof van den Broek and Cis van Heertum (Amsterdam: In de Pelikaan, 2000) 38.

⁴¹⁶ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 60.

⁴¹⁷ “Alchemy II, Antiquity-12th Century,” 29.

⁴¹⁸ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 56.

makes a cryptic speech wherein he locates the sun in the very center of the earth “(*solis autem punctus in medio rubei, qui est pullus*).”⁴¹⁹

Kingsley’s contention is not only that the Hermetic Tradition survived thanks to Arab Muslim intellectuals, a fact recognized by most scholars, but also that the Hermetic Tradition – and, hence, the Ishama’ili/Sufi Muslims -- were the curators of the Pythagorean-Empedoclean tradition, albeit embedded and disguised within the Neoplatonic framework of the *Hermetica*. Although modern scholarship criticizes the text as “degenerate,” according to Kingsley, this is due to its own Platonic prejudices, based on expectations that the *Hermetica* are trying to imitate mainstream Greek philosophical traditions and nothing else. Kingsley sees the matter differently; the document is a key to better understand the early Presocratic philosophy.

Empedocles’ cosmological speech in the *Turba* has a clear basic structure. After the opening statement that air is rarefied form of water we are presented with a scheme of water under the earth and the, at the earth’s center, of fire underneath the water. Plessser was at his least successful in dealing with this particular speech; Ruska has already pointed out that the doctrine of water inside the earth was a genuine item of Empedocles’ teaching, but he overlooked even that. In fact however we have not just one, or two, but three pieces of Empedoclean doctrine mentioned in succession. First the idea that *aer* is rarefied form of water, second the idea that there are large amounts of water under the earth, and third the idea that underneath this water there is a central fire. We find these ideas attributed to Empedocles in the *Placita*, in the Aristotelian *Problems*, in Plutarch, Seneca, and Philo of Alexandria.⁴²⁰

Kingsley further claims that the Latin *Turba*, with its Empedoclean cosmological speech, maintains broad parallels with another Greek-Egyptian alchemical work by a certain Egyptian Olympiodorus of Alexandria. This text “cites the views of Presocratics on cosmology within a specifically alchemical context. The work in question happens to be a commentary on an alchemical text by Zosimus of Panopolis; as such, it provides one further testimony to the close interchange of alchemical and philosophical traditions up and down the Nile, between Alexandria in the north and Panopolis or Akhmim in the south.”⁴²¹ That is to say, the Presocratic tradition of Empedocles was already connected to both Hermetism and alchemy in Antiquity. This explains why Presocratic philosophers like Empedocles were accepted as “living examples” by alchemists and magicians in the Renaissance, but also in the nineteenth century occult revival and beyond.⁴²²

⁴¹⁹ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 56-57.

⁴²⁰ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 64.

⁴²¹ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 60.

⁴²² Kingsley also refers to the “New Age” father Carl Jung’s intimate knowledge of alchemical literature, especially those texts attributed to Zosimus. This gives further credence to our contention discussed later in this work that not only Blavatsky’s Theosophical Society, but also Jung is a modern transmitter of the hermetic alchemical tradition. His work may provide a link between New Age and the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, which could be the subject of later research. Kingsley’s promotion of Jung also shows his own connections to contemporary esotericism.

3. The Generative Underworld Sun

As seen earlier, in the Latin version of the *Turba*, Empedocles says that the generative sun is located in the center of the Earth. Not only was this a Presocratic notion, but Kingsley says that “the idea of the sun growing out of the middle of the earth was fundamental to alchemical doctrine... this same basic idea of a fiery, generative point at the heart of matter can be traced back to Gnostic writings of the very first centuries AD. To this we can add that in Greek alchemical tradition the image of a point at the centre of a circle had for centuries been a common symbol used to denote the sun, the alchemical egg, and the generative, fiery principle of red sulphur. The manuscript reading is plainly correct, and Empedocles’ teaching in the *Turba* is clear: the fire at the centre of the earth gives birth to the visible sun.”⁴²³ According to Empedocles’ fragment (F) B52, “many fires burn beneath the earth,”⁴²⁴ and as Kingsley points out the “visible sun is his chief example of elemental fire in the world around us.”⁴²⁵ Kingsley claims that the doctrine of the subterranean sun is essential to understand Empedocles’ “cosmology” and the basic principles of alchemy, as we have shown to be practiced within the Hermetic holistic paradigm. Since the visible sun is a symbol of alchemical or philosophical gold, or the final stage of purification, the *rubedo*, the subterranean sun is a symbol of the beginning of the creative process or the *nigredo*. The alchemical notion of the *Sol Niger* or the “black sun” refers to the black phase, where everything is dissolved or “killed.” In this phase, the light of the visible sun is said to be extinguished or eclipsed so that the *cosmos* can later resurrect into a new form.⁴²⁶ The celestial sun represents the final phase of the purification process, where the world as we know it evolved up through the “fires that burn beneath the surface of the earth.” This idea has parallels in the Stoic idea of the *pur technikon*, discussed earlier. In their understanding, the primal fire gives birth to the *cosmos* and is connected to the doctrine of world conflagration, or *ekpurosis*, and the eternal return of the same.

Kingsley points out that the *Turba*’s alchemical account is in accordance with Empedocles’ own doctrine of the creation of the world by the “Mind,” whose thoughts rush through the whole cosmos.⁴²⁷ The idea that God is “Mind” is found in the existing fragments and other witnesses to his teachings, like Simplicius, Plutarch and Philo. This does not mean that Empedocles was an idealist, in the nineteenth century sense, but that the world of matter was conscious to varying degrees, the human being the most conscious on the visible scale.

⁴²³ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 57-58.

⁴²⁴ Empedocles, “B 52 = 227,” *Empédocle: Les Origines*, ed and trans. Jean Bollack (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1969) 88-89.

⁴²⁵ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 50. Cf. B22.1.

⁴²⁶ *The Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 186.

⁴²⁷ B 134 = F 26. See Robin Waterfield, *The First Philosophers: The Presocratics and the Sophists* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2000) 151.

Furthermore, Kingsley believes that the way Empedocles passes his knowledge on to Pausanias, from master to disciple, resonates with the esoteric practices of ancient magicians and alchemists, finding parallels in other ancient magical and hermetic texts.⁴²⁸

That leaves us with Empedocles' promise to his disciple to make his magical powers available to 'you alone' (μόνῳ σοί). This, quite obviously, has nothing to do with assumptions about 'a very limited audience' being capable of understanding his complex philosophical arguments. On the other hand, it has everything to do with the established tradition throughout the ancient world of transmitting esoteric and magical powers on a one-to-one basis from spiritual (as well as physical) 'father' to 'son'. The closest parallels to Empedocles' assurances that he will 'make all these things come true for you alone' – and they are the only real parallels in the whole surviving body of Graeco-Egyptian mysticism: the *magical papyri* (especially the famous Paris papyrus), the *Hermetica* and alchemical literature.⁴²⁹

From this, amongst the other evidence stated above, Kingsley posits that the Hermetic Tradition is an important transmitter of the magical-philosophy or philosophical magic of the Pythagorean-Empedoclean tradition. What we have seen is that these traditions are also related to the practice of alchemy, which seems to have been connected to the philosophy of Empedocles from the beginning. If this is true then it opens a new perspective for the interpretation of the hermetic material, its influence on Western thought and the transmission of Presocratic thought.

B. The Pythagorean-Empedoclean Tradition in Late Antiquity

As observed earlier, the Pythagorean-Empedoclean tradition shares the same type of ecstatic mindset as the Hermetic Tradition, one that is rooted in the ancient Greek shamanic tradition of the *iatromantis*. In both traditions, and as discussed earlier, the dichotomy between "philosophy and theology" or "theory and *praxis*" is a false one. Friedrich Nietzsche, writing as a classical philologist, noted in his Basle lectures on the Presocratics that mythical and scientific thinking went together in the person of Empedocles, making him difficult to understand. "He rides both steeds, jumping back and forth. Here and there allegory obviously takes the place of myth: thus he believes in all the gods, but he calls his own natural scientific aspects by these names."⁴³⁰

According to Kingsley:

The *Hermetica* present much the same kind of mixture of observation of the natural world combined with a guiding awareness of divine revelation we find in Empedocles: when we look closely at Empedocles' poetry, and at the *Hermetica*, it becomes clear that what was considered important by the authors in both cases, was an inner sense of revelation capable of pointing to the real nature and significance of things outwardly observed. The revelation -- observation

⁴²⁸ *The First Philosophers*, (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 8.59.5-13) 142.

⁴²⁹ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 221.

⁴³⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, trans. Greg Whitlock (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995) 115.

dichotomy is a false one; ...This comparison between the *Hermetica* and Empedocles is not inappropriate: we saw earlier that there are specific historical links, as well as purely formal analogies, between them.⁴³¹

1. Empedocles and Zoroastrian Iatromantism

The legacy of Empedoclean thought only exists in fragments of poems or of a single poem, dispersed and preserved through various writers' testimonies throughout Antiquity. More of Empedocles' work survives than other Presocratics, a witness to his influence and importance for later Greek thinkers. Whether these fragments belong to one great epic or to several (two) poems, *On Nature* and *Purifications*, is debated.⁴³² Tradition has it that *On Nature* was a private poem written to his disciple Pausanias, while *Purifications* was written to the population of Argacas concerning ritual sacrifice.⁴³³ Kingsley believes that Empedocles' cosmological account was strongly influenced by his experience on and knowledge of the volcanic island, Sicily, but also the myths as well as ecstatic and magical traditions of Asia Minor (e.g. Anatolian) and the Near East (e.g. Sumerian and Zoroastrian).⁴³⁴

It is difficult to be certain about what Empedocles actually taught. As a thinker, he was influenced to some extent by his predecessors Heraclitus of Ephesus (in Asia Minor), Parmenides of Elea (a city in southern Italy that was settled by peoples of Asia Minor) and Anaxagoras of Clazomenae (in Asia Minor). Scholarship also maintains that he was an important conveyor of Pythagorean doctrine. Pythagoras was born on the Greek island of Samos, but around 530 BC, he moved to Croton in Southern Italy. He would have been familiar with the thought and myths of nearby Miletus in Asia Minor and Anatolia, but also those of the Persians (Sumerian, Babylonian) and the traditions of the Zoroastrian *magi* who, before the first Persian war in 490 BC, traded with the peoples of Asia Minor.⁴³⁵ Kingsley contends that Pythagoras brought many of these more oriental traditions and ideas with him to Southern Italy.

Charles Kahn, in *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans: A Brief History*, adds that Pythagoras fits "the paradigm of the *theios anêr*, the 'divine man' who absorbs all forms of wisdom in order to become a sage, a seer, a teacher, and a benefactor of the human race."⁴³⁶ Although a contentious issues amongst scholars, this made Pythagoras an important conveyor of

⁴³¹ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 372-373.

⁴³² For example, see a recent translation by Brad Inwood, *The Poem of Empedocles*, trans. Brad Inwood (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 2001).

⁴³³ *The First Philosophers*, 133.

⁴³⁴ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 293. Walter Burkert attested this already in 1969. See also Charles H. Kahn, *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans: A Brief History* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2001) 17-18.

⁴³⁵ *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans*, 6. Kahn reports the sometimes fantastic accounts by Diogenes Laertius, Porphyry and Iamblichus. The later two claimed that Pythagoras studied with Egyptian priests, Hebrew masters, Arabs, Chaldeans, and finally with Zoroaster himself.

⁴³⁶ *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans*, 6.

the shamanic tradition of the *iatromantis*, whose practitioners were considered “divine.” For example, Pythagoras’ followers thought that he was an incarnation of the god Apollo, whose “supernatural status was confirmed by a golden thigh and the gift of bilocation.”⁴³⁷ Kingsley believes that Parmenides also participated in the iatromantic tradition. Based on a Greek inscription found in 1962, “Parmenides son of Pyres Ouliades Physikos,” Kingsley says that Parmenides was a priest of Apollo, whom the Pythagoreans worshiped. “‘*Physikos*’ was a title given to healers and later to alchemists and magicians.”⁴³⁸ Pythagorean thought, which Empedocles and Parmenides inherited, was an important synthesizer of myth and ideas that originated from the ancient Near East.⁴³⁹

Piers Vitebsky, in *The Shaman*, sees many shamanic elements in old Greek culture.⁴⁴⁰ Nevertheless, many scholars do not or do not want to see any possible connections with the shamanic tradition and the development of Greek philosophy. Most of these scholars see Greek philosophy as an unbroken line of development beginning with the Presocratics and achieving an apotheosis in the thought of Plato and Aristotle. That is to say, the association of early Greek philosophy with the practices of shamans would seem to undermine the respectability of their own profession. Ava Chitwood, in *Death by Philosophy: The Biographical Tradition in the Life and Death of Archaic Philosophers Empedocles, Heraclitus, and Democritus*, is illustrative of this line of thought. Chitwood gives an extremely good description of how these three early philosophers were viewed by ancient sources, primarily Diogenes Laertius, showing how they were easily connected with the practice of magic. Nevertheless, she is unable to make the connection between these Presocratic philosophers and the “shamanic elements in old Greek culture.” For her, entertaining the idea that western philosophy might have been borne out of the ecstasies of primitive witchdoctors discredits the entire western philosophical enterprise. Interpreting “mysticism” as a characteristic of Eastern thought alone, she says:

Of equal, if not greater concern, is the recent and quite disturbing tendency of some scholars to reshoulder West’s and Bernal’s burden of importing eastern beliefs and origins to western philosophers such as Empedocles. Empedocles is not a mystic, a magician, or, God help us, a shaman; to suggest that Empedocles is other than a philosopher is to discredit the western, Greek tradition of philosophical thought and speculation and to find the absolute worst in biographers like Diogenes Laertius.⁴⁴¹

⁴³⁷ *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans*, 5.

⁴³⁸ Peter Kingsley, *In the Dark Places of Wisdom* (Inverness: The Golden Sufi Center, 1999) 141-142.

⁴³⁹ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 225.

⁴⁴⁰ *Forge and the Crucible*, 149.

⁴⁴⁰ *De Sjamaan*, 51.

⁴⁴¹ Ava Chitwood, *Death by Philosophy: The Biographical Tradition in the Life and Death of Archaic Philosophers Empedocles, Heraclitus, and Democritus* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2004) 144.

An adherent of Chitwood's "disturbing tendency," what Chitwood interprets as derogatory nonsense, Kingsley takes as an important clue for further interpretation. Kingsley believes that the iatromantic tradition, i.e. the shamanic ability to descend into and re-ascend from the Underworld, a realm where one usually never returns, was first passed into Greece via Asia Minor by Zoroastrian *magi*. In Antiquity, the *magi* were known to be the first magicians and the term magician or *magus* is derived from the Zoroastrian priestly tradition. According to Georg Luck in *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds*: "The very word magic, which is derived from *magoi*, a Median tribe or caste recognized in ancient Iran as specialists in ritual and religious knowledge: Sometimes they are associated with the cult of fire. As we know from Apuleius' *Apology*, the Greeks and Romans saw in the *magoi* the priests of Zoroaster (Zarathustra) and Ormazd (Ahura Mazda), but these two divine or semidivine beings were also considered the inventors of magic."⁴⁴² At some time, the legend grew that Empedocles was even taught by Zoroastrian *magi*.⁴⁴³

Unable to see or unwilling to admit the connections between the shamanistic tradition, Greek Presocratics and Zoroastrian *magi*, Eliade, in *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, claims that although the Zoroastrian religion shows no broad structural signs of shamanism, he admits that there are elements of the religion that do, making it possible that Zoroaster might have had shamanistic experiences.⁴⁴⁴ In fact, legend tells us that Zoroaster spent ten years in a cave, before he had his first vision of Ahura Mazda,⁴⁴⁵ whom the Zoroastrians worshipped as the one supreme God. Spending a long time in a cave is typical of shamanic behavior, although not necessarily. Kingsley claims that Parmenides spent extended periods in a darkened cave, or a *phôleos*, a technique used to induce a shamanic vision.⁴⁴⁶ Fragment B 111 is the clearest evidence of Empedocles' shamanic background and, therefore, the ecstatic framework of early Greek philosophy:

All of the potions [remedies, magic charms] (φάρμακα) there are that ward off ills and old age you shall learn, since for you alone will I fulfil them all. You will halt the energy of the untiring winds, which blast the earth with their gusts and wither the fields, and again, if you want, you will bring back compensatory winds. After dark rain you will make dry heat, seasonable for men, and

⁴⁴² Georg Luck, *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985) 6.

⁴⁴³ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 227.

⁴⁴⁴ Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964) 399-400.

⁴⁴⁵ Piloo Nanavutty, "Introduction," *The Gathas of Zarathustra: Hymns of Praise of Wisdom*, trans. Piloo Nanavutty (Ahmedabad: Mapin Publishing, 1999) 20.

⁴⁴⁶ *In the Dark Places of Wisdom*, 77ff.

after the dry heat of summer, to nourish the trees, you will make streams, which flow through the aither. And you will bring out of Hades the energy of a man who has died.⁴⁴⁷

In B 111, Empedocles says that – like a *parhedros* – he will enter into an exclusive relationship with his disciple and transfer his magical knowledge, after which he will be able to descend and ascend into Hades, assuming the role of a psychopomp, or an escort to the realm of the netherworld and back. In *Shamanism*, Eliade states that “the shaman is also a magician and medicine man; he is believed to cure, like all doctors, and to perform miracles of the fakir type, like all magicians, whether primitive or modern. But beyond this, he is a psychopomp, and he may also be a priest, mystic and poet.”⁴⁴⁸ Interestingly enough, from the existing material, we gather that Empedocles was all of these things. When we put all of these elements together, we see how the Hermetic tradition is a carrier of an ecstatic religious experience developed by the early Greek Presocratics, but perhaps via the Persian (Zoroastrian) shamanic traditions, although this is certainly debatable.

2. The Enigmatic Teachings of Empedocles

a. A Riddle

In the beginning of his *magnum opus*, Kingsley attempts to solve an important riddle that Empedocles left behind. It is a riddle that has been, according to him, misinterpreted since Antiquity, but essential for understanding his original cosmology. For him, its misinterpretation by ancient writers is a sign that later more rational writers had in fact lost much of Empedocles’ thought. As a thinker, it is known that Empedocles was a *pluralist*, challenging the basic Parmenedian theory of universal unity. He held that not one, but four basic elements constitute the world. These elements, which he calls *roots*, are aither (αἰθήρ), later interpreted as air (αἴηρ), earth (γῆν), fire (πῦρ) and water (ὕδωρ),⁴⁴⁹ and are in perpetual mixture and separation. In turn, the elements or roots are moved and mixed by two forces, he calls Love (στοργή or φιλία) and Strife (νεῖκος). In another fragment, he produces a riddle that associates the physical elements with the names of gods: “brilliant Zeus, life giving Hera, Aidoneus, and Nestis, who soaks [the underground] human springs with her tears,”⁴⁵⁰ implying they have a consciousness of their own. Love is with Aphrodite,⁴⁵¹ but also Cypris or Harmony.

⁴⁴⁷ B 111 = F 4, *The First Philosophers*, 142.

⁴⁴⁸ *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, 4.

⁴⁴⁹ “Par Terre nous voyons Terre, Eau par Eau, Par Éther, Éther brillant, par Feu, Feu étincelant, Par Amour, Amour, Haine par Haine mauvaise.” Cf B 109 = 522, *Empédocle*, 190.

⁴⁵⁰ Cf. B6 = 150, *Empédocle* 64, 65 and F10 in *The First Philosophers*, 144.

⁴⁵¹ Cf. B 87 = 411, *Empédocle*, 132.

By calling the elements “roots,” he suggests their vitality⁴⁵² as well as points to their subterranean origin. According to Kingsley, whose analysis has been accepted by Waterfield,⁴⁵³ Aidoneus is another, more poetical, name for Hades⁴⁵⁴ and Nestis is the local Sicilian secret cult name used in the Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone.⁴⁵⁵ The identification of Nestis with Persephone is plausible, since Zeus and Hera as well as Hades and Persephone (Nestis) are married couples, maintaining the riddle’s poetic parallelism. In Antiquity, the riddle of the corresponding deity to the element was much debated, because Zeus became associated with fire. However, in the nineteenth century, scholars began to associate Aidoneus, or Hades with fire, given his association with the underground and the many subterranean fires that burn in his realm, especially in Sicily. The confusion with Zeus might have been due to the ancient reference dating from Roman times that Hades is the “terrestrial Zeus.”⁴⁵⁶ Kingsley devotes a considerable amount of his book to solving Empedocles’ riddle and supports the nineteenth century, albeit at that time not well argued, position of Erwin Rohde.⁴⁵⁷ Kingsley says, “Zeus is air, Hera earth, Hades fire, and Nestis water.”⁴⁵⁸ He claims that the association of Hades with the fire has nothing to do with later “rational” Greek thought, but brings us into the domain of poetry, myth, the Mysteries, esoteric tradition⁴⁵⁹ and, as argued, with alchemy.

b. Evolution from out of the Ground

In fragment B 62, Empedocles says, “But now hear the account that follows of how the shoots [or saplings, ὀρπηκας] of the wretched human race, men and women, were raised at night by fire as it separated. The tale is true and informative. First there arose from the earth whole-natured shapes with a portion of both water and heat, their arising forced by the urge of fire to reach its kin. Not yet did they display bodies fair with limbs, nor voice, nor again the human characteristic of speech.”⁴⁶⁰ Prefiguring modern evolutionary theory, according to Empedocles, original humanity shot up out of the ground like plants. However, without the sun to warm them, the first people did not have our features. Eventually, the elemental fire at the center of the earth, and presided over by Hades, ascended and became the sun. Therefore, “the source of daylight and

⁴⁵² *The First Philosophers*, 134.

⁴⁵³ *The First Philosophers*, 135.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 13.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 354.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 47.

⁴⁵⁷ Curt Paul Janz, *Friedrich Nietzsche Complete Biografie*, Vol. I, Dutch trans. by C. W. A. J. A. Walraven (Baarn: Tiron, 1999) 275. Rohde was at one time an intimate friend of Friedrich Nietzsche. One should not underestimate the influence of Rohde on Nietzsche, for it was from him that Nietzsche gained the insight that with the arrival of Dionysos in the West, a new and strange form of religious feeling and acting began to take root.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 47.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 48.

⁴⁶⁰ B 62 = F 31, *The First Philosophers*, 152-153.

illumination derives ultimately from the dark depths of the Underworld.”⁴⁶¹ For Empedocles, there is a powerful similarity between the sun and the Underworld, between light and dark, as two sides of the same coin.

The motif of the underworld sun is also found in many Near Eastern, Indo-European and Egyptian myths. For example in Sumerian legend, “it was thought that the sun passed through gates guarding the Underworld each day as it rose and set, even though it was described as residing in the ‘interior’ of heaven overnight.”⁴⁶² This means that the location of “heaven” was considered to be underground. In Egypt, the sun god Ra passed through the Underworld every night in his barque. Throughout the night, he “had to contend with his arch-enemy, the snake Apep, but in the last hours he himself entered a great snake from which he emerged rejuvenated, to be reborn at dawn.”⁴⁶³ The story reminds us of the alchemical *Ouroboros*, the cosmic snake who eats his own tail.

How would Empedocles have knowledge of the subterranean origins of the cosmos? As stated, according to Kingsley, Empedocles fell within the shamanic tradition of the *iatromantis*, whose profession necessitated regular voyages to the Underworld, where he had been initiated and received knowledge. Those who were able to complete this journey, returned with experiential knowledge as well as a divine status. Empedocles’ doctrine probably constitutes one of the oldest strata of Greek myth, one that was accepted by Parmenides, Empedocles’ shamanic predecessor,⁴⁶⁴ but also Pythagoras, who was also known to take trips to the Underworld and return alive.⁴⁶⁵ The idea that light originates in the darkness of the Underworld and that life is generated from death, since Hades is the realm of the dead, had important theological implications, which traditional Judaism and Christianity rejected.⁴⁶⁶ This paradoxical imagery of “light at the depths of darkness,” whose origin was volcanic, was taken up by alchemists from late antiquity to the Renaissance as well as in the alchemical Arabic *Mushaf* and Latin *Turba*, mentioned earlier.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶¹ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 51.

⁴⁶² Piers Vitebsky, “A Divine Realm,” *Epics of Early Civilization: Myths of the Ancient Near East* (London: Duncan Baird Publishers, 1998) 23.

⁴⁶³ *World Mythology: The Illustrated Guide*, 47.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 54. For example, in Parmenides’ epic where he meets the “goddess,” presumably Persephone, “he was taken by the daughters of the Sun down into the House of Night -- which by implication is the home both of the daughters of the Sun and of their father.”

⁴⁶⁵ *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans*, 10. Cf. 15n.

⁴⁶⁶ “We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen. We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light,”

⁴⁶⁷ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 55-56. Interestingly, this imagery found its way into early Islamic cosmology which “presented the sun as ‘created from the fire of the earth’, and related the heat of the sun to the heat of hell-fire, and could speak in one breath of ‘the fire of which the sun and the devils are made.’”

c. The World as *Pleon*.

As discussed, Empedocles taught that the world consists of four roots or elements (air, earth, fire, water). The two forces or drives (Love: *storge* or *philia* and Strife: *neikos*) bring about the mixing and separation of the elements or roots. *Storge* is a rare word used for “familial affection” between parents and children, or the instinctive affection that animals feel for their biological young. *Philia* means love, or friendship. In both cases, this kind of love implies a fundamental sympathy, based on *sameness*, either through biological relatedness or similar interests. Clara Elizabeth Millerd, in *On the Interpretation of Empedocles*, says that for Empedocles, Love and Strife “are two important elements of experience universalized. The poet himself tells us that Love is the same as she that is implanted in the human frame, who is the source of kindly feeling of men toward one another.”⁴⁶⁸ Waterfield says that “Love’s tendency is to unify things, that of strife to separate them; ... Thus while any static object in the world could be explained as a proportionate mixture of the elements, many processes in the world can be explained as some kind of balance between the action of love and strife.”⁴⁶⁹ Love is a unifying force and is creative, while Strife is a force of separation and is destructive; yet, both forces are needed for world harmonization. This process is extrapolated to a cosmic scale, where Empedocles believed that the world is subject to eternally repeated cosmic cycles, where either Love or Strife is dominant.⁴⁷⁰ In times of peace and unity, Love prevails, but in times of violence and war, the pendulum swings towards Strife. Although Love and Strife are opposed to each other, they need each other to maintain the order of *cosmos*.

Corpus Hermeticum (CH) XII, 15 and 18 mirror the Empedoclean tradition that proposes an infinite tension between Love and Strife. According to these texts, the destructive process of separation should not be seen as annihilation. Nothing is totally destroyed. Empedocles says this in fragment B 8 (Waterfield). “Listen now to a further point: no mortal thing has a beginning, nor does it end in death and obliteration; there is only a mixing and then a separating of what was mixed, but by mortal men these processes are named ‘beginnings’.”⁴⁷¹ Unlike the more static Platonic worldview, Empedocles saw reality as basically “energy” and “forces,” which perpetually constituted and reconstituted themselves under the influence of the above two mentioned principles, Love and Strife. This doctrine is reproduced in CH XI, 5, XII 8 and especially CH XII 20, where Hermes says, “And god, who is energy and power, surrounds

⁴⁶⁸ Clara Elizabeth Millerd, *On the Interpretation of Empedocles* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1980) 43.

⁴⁶⁹ *The First Philosophers*, 135-136.

⁴⁷⁰ *The First Philosophers*, 136.

⁴⁷¹ B 8 = F 13, *The First Philosophers*, 145.

everything and permeates everything, and understanding of god is nothing difficult, my child.” In fragment, B 17, Empedocles speaks about his cosmology:

A double tale I will tell. For at one time they grew [became] to be one alone, instead of many, and then again they divided into many instead of one. The birth of moral things is twofold, and twofold their departure [dispersement]. When the roots all meet the one is born and destroyed, and when they divide again the other is nourished and dispersed. The roots never cease from continuous alternation: Now are they brought together by love until all are one, Now all are born asunder by the hostility of strife, until they grow together as one and the totality [abundance, or insatiability, as in greediness or a desire to have more] (πλεον), is overcome [accomplishes itself] (εκτελεθουσι). Thus, in that they have learnt to become one from many and turn into many again when the one is divided, in this sense they come to be and have an impermanent life; but in that they never cease from continuous alternation, they are forever unchanging in cycle. ...

Fire and water and earth and the boundless height of aither, and, separate from them, deadly strife, alike on every side, and, among them love, equal in length and breadth. Look on her with your mind; do not use your eyes and sit bewildered. She is regarded even by mortals as inherent in their bodies, and thanks to her they can feel affection and perform deeds of unity; The names by which they call her are Joy and Aphrodite. No mortal man has seen her whirling among the roots, but I would have you attend to the true course of my account. The roots are all equal and just as old as one another, but each has a different domain and its own rightful place, and they rule in turn, one after the other, as time goes around. Nothing comes into existence or ceases to exist; there is only them. For if they were constantly perishing, they would no longer exist. What might increase in this totality? Where might such a thing come from? And how could it perish, since there is nothing that lacks them? No, they are just themselves, and by running through one another they become now this and now that, and remain forever the same. But under love we unite into a single ordered whole, which under strife once again becomes, instead of one, many, from which arise all that was and is and will be hereafter. From them trees sprang, and men and women, animals and birds and water-dwelling fish, and long-lived gods, highest in honour. Under strife they never cease from shooting up in frequent swirls.⁴⁷²

From the above, we see that according to Empedocles, the world or *cosmos* is a totality and is “all there is.” It is also a *pleon* (πλεον or πλειων), a “more,” as in “more than enough.” *Pleon* is related to the verbs πλεοναζω (*pleonazo*), which means “to be or become more,” “to become great,” “to be present in abundance,” “to grow” or “to increase.” But it can also mean, “to have more than is necessary,” “to have too much” [as in redundant], or “to increase.” It is also related to the verb πλεονεκτεω (*pleonekteo*), which has a more negative connotation. This verb can mean “to take advantage of,” “to outwit,” “to defraud,” or “to cheat someone through someone.” For example, a πλεονεκτης (*pleonektes*) is someone who is greedy, or covetous. And πλεονεξια (*pleonechia*) means “greediness, insatiableness, avarice, covetousness, or literally a desire to have more.”⁴⁷³ For Empedocles, in opposition to Plato, the totality of reality is a *Pleon*. It is an

⁴⁷² B 17 = F 20, *The First Philosophers*, 147-148.

⁴⁷³ Cf. ed. William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Walter Bauer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979, 2nd ed.) 667.

insatiable greedy mass of subterranean energy, which eternally desires to create and destroy itself again and again, under the direction of the two forces or drives.

Love (*storge/philia*) and Strife (*neikos*) are the perpetual mechanism of coming together and separating that the *Pleon* needs in order to overcome itself. They never rest and as *CH*, XI 12, says: “Just as you are no longer a living being if you are idle at your affairs, so, if god is idle, he is no longer god – though it is not right to say so.” This is not the same as the more static Platonic and Neoplatonic *plethora* or fullness, but implies a perpetual state of desire, although the Totality remains the same. The *Pleon*, or Totality, at its core *is* desire. It is an insatiable desire that eternally consumes and is consumed by itself.

From our interpretation of the *Pleon*, we can see how the alchemical *Ouroboros* became the perfect symbol of the *cosmos*, according to alchemists and Hermeticists, who were indebted to Empedocles. With the re-popularization of Presocratic philosophy in the Renaissance and successive hermetic revivals in the Enlightenment and Romanticism, the idea did not die. For example, the idea of the pleonic *Ouroboros* reasserts itself in the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche and his conception of the world as “the Will to Power and nothings besides” (WP, 1067). In *Will to Power*, 1066 (1888), Nietzsche writes something about his “new” world-conception, which is strangely reminiscent of the *Ouroboros*. He discusses this idea in relation to his doctrine of the Eternal Recurrence, a doctrine found in the Stoics, but perhaps also in Empedocles’ dialectical tension between Love and Strife, although this is more difficult to ascertain. Nietzsche considers this a “new” world-conception, shows that as the idea develops, it retains the fundamental structure of destruction and creation, or the sentiment that in order to create something “new,” one must first destroy.

The *new world-conception*. – The world exists; it is not something that becomes, not something that passes away. Or rather: it becomes, it passes away, but it has never begun to become and never ceased from passing away – it maintains itself in both. – **It lives on itself: its excrements are its food...** We need not worry for a moment about the hypothesis of a created world. The concept ‘create’ is today completely indefinable, unrealizable; merely a word, a rudimentary survival from the ages of superstition;

Lately one has thought several times to find a contradiction in the concept ‘temporal infinity of the world in the past’ (*regressus in infinitum*): **one has even found it, although at the cost of confusing the head with the tail...** (Bold mine).

3. Presocratic Divinity

a. Empedocles and the Hermetic *Korē Kosmou*

Kingsley gives other examples where the Pythagorean-Empedoclean tradition can be detected in what we today consider to be purely hermetic material. He claims that the Hermetic text *Korē Kosmou* displays strong affinities with Empedocles’ thought. We mentioned *Korē Kosmou*

earlier showing its connections to both alchemy and the cult of the chthonic “Demeter Melanie.” The text couples the practice of philosophy with magic and healing, anticipating “healing” as the sign of the philosopher-magician’s ultimate goal, which is self-divinization. As Abraham attests, “All metals were perceived to be potential gold, and the impurities which they contracted in the mines of the earth where they were formed were thought of as a state of disease or leprosy which could be cured by the perfect medicine or the philosopher’s stone. ... At the same time the ‘medicine’ is the universal panacea capable of curing man of all weaknesses and diseases, rejuvenating him and transforming him from earthly into illumined man.”⁴⁷⁴

According to the *Korē Kosmou*, divinized souls “enter into human bodies and become ‘just kings’, ‘true philosophers’, ‘authentic prophets’, and ‘genuine root-cutters’ (*rhizotomoi*).”⁴⁷⁵ First, Kingsley asserts that the word *rhizotomoi* is another word for healer. He notes that cutting roots, mentioned in the *Korē Kosmou*, is the necessary first step to prepare medicinal herbs for the practice of magic. Second, the list mentioned in the *Korē Kosmou* is very similar to a list that Empedocles gives enumerating those who are about to “shoot up” into gods in their next incarnation. “In the end as prophets, singers of hymns [poets] healers, and leaders they come among the men of this world, and then they spring up as gods, highest in honour.”⁴⁷⁶ Kingsley takes the association between divinization, healing and roots (i.e. plants) as a reference to Empedocles’ role as an herbalist and healer. An herbalist was a well-known role in the Greek world associated with *magia naturalis* and confirmed by the *Greek Magical Papyri*, which we showed earlier to be “technical *Hermetica*.” Hence, Kingsley believes that the *PGM* are another important transmitter of Empedoclean material. For Empedocles, healers (*ιητροι*) as well as prophets, poets and leaders (i.e. kings) were amongst the list of the highest type of humans. These had reached the final level of earthly incarnations, before “evolving” into divine status.⁴⁷⁷

Basing himself on G. Zuntz’ recognition of the similarities between Empedocles’ thought and the Hermetic *Korē Kosmou*, Kingsley believes we can decipher and supplement our present knowledge of Empedocles’ magic, but also his doctrine of reincarnation. Although modern scholarship seemed to place the text within the realm of Plato’s *Republic* and *Phaedo*, “Zuntz has shown that the Hermetic text differs on the most fundamental points from the Platonic myths, and that the details it preserves must have been derived from early Pythagorean tradition quite independently of Plato. Early Pythagorean and specifically Empedoclean ideas have been preserved -- and, naturally enough, further elaborated -- in one of the most typically Egyptian of

⁴⁷⁴ A *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 123.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 345.

⁴⁷⁶ B 146 = F 3, *The First Philosophers* 141.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 345.

the *Hermetica*.”⁴⁷⁸ If Kingsley’s assessment is correct, then, the *Korē Kosmou* and PGM are bearers of a similar tradition, namely, the Pythagorean-Empedoclean one.

b. Presocratic *Palingenesia* to Platonic *Metempsychosis*

The idea of reincarnation or *metempsychosis* (i.e. transmigration) has had a long history in the West. In fact, the term was first introduced as *palingenesia* or “re-generation” by Pythagoras and Empedocles.⁴⁷⁹ As far as we know, they developed their ideas independently from similar ideas in India, although it cannot be ruled out that Pythagoras might have had some contact with Indian sages before he traveled from Ionia to Italy. The term comes from the two Greek words, *παλιν* (*palin*), meaning “to go back,” “to return,” “again” or “once more,” and *γενεσις* (*genesis*), meaning “beginning,” “origin,” “descent,” “generation” or “existence.” Originally, the idea implied that the quality of one’s re-generation or re-birth in the “next life” was dependent upon one’s ethical conduct in “this” life.⁴⁸⁰ The Presocratic Heraclitus provides an important clue to the Pythagorean understanding of re-birth and the consciousness of all matter. He says that “Pythagoras may well have been the deepest in his learning of all men. And still he claimed to recollect details of former lives, being in one a cucumber and one time a sardine.”⁴⁸¹ According to contemporary Herodotus of Halicarnassus (484-425 BC), known as the “father of history,” a soul migrates for 3000 years through the bodies of animals until it becomes a human being.⁴⁸² Following the Presocratic scheme, he believed that humans evolved from the ground upwards. According to Kahn, for all ancient mystics like Empedocles, Pythagoras and the Orphics, “the highest reward was for the soul to join in the life of the gods, in partial or permanent escape from the cycle of rebirth.”⁴⁸³

As discussed, the Presocratic notion of the “evolution” of Being starts from the *fire* in the bowels of the earth, and eventually emerges to become the fire in the sky, i.e. the sun.⁴⁸⁴ From the hylozoic perspective, human beings spring up like plants from underneath the earth into existence, and the transmigration of human souls follows an ascending order from the earth towards the realm of aither and the gods.⁴⁸⁵ As discussed, those who were kings or leaders,

⁴⁷⁸ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 345-346.

⁴⁷⁹ Simon Blackburn, *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) 241

⁴⁸⁰ Ed. F. E. Peters, *Greek Philosophical Terms: A Historical Lexicon* (New York: New York University Press, 1967) 151. “That Pythagoras held such a doctrine is attested by his contemporary Xenophanes (fr. 7), and there is the later, more dubious testimony (D.L. viii, 4-5) that he remembered four of his own previous reincarnations. That the quality of the reincarnations is tied to an ethical scale is clear from Orphism and from Empedocles (frs. 115, 117, 127, 146, 147).”

⁴⁸¹ Heraclitus, *Fragments*, trans. Brooks Haxton (London: Penguin Classics, 2001) 13.

⁴⁸² Hans-Peter Müller, “Reinkarnation,” *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, achter band (Freiburg, Basel: Herder, 1999) 1019.

⁴⁸³ *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans: A Brief History*, 52.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic*, 51.

⁴⁸⁵ *The First Philosophers*, 150, see Aëtius, *Opinions* 5.18.1 Diels.

philosophers or poets, prophets, and root-cutters or healers, could ascend to the end-station, the realm of pure *aither*.

From the alchemical perspective, because “above is below,” the underground sun and celestial sun are mirror images of each other. Dionysos and Apollo are essentially the same. Kingsley states: “The Underworld is a place of paradox and inversion. In particular it is the place where polar opposites exist and merge, and especially the place where the paradox of destructive force being converted into creative power is realized at its greatest intensity.”⁴⁸⁶ For the Presocratic Empedocles, who lived on the volcanic island of Sicily, the paradoxical realm of the Underworld is a fiery place. Given his animistic worldview, close proximity to the volcanic eruptions, where plants seem to miraculously shoot up out of blackened lava rock, would have informed his thinking about how human life might “evolve” out of the same subterranean realms. In the ancient imagination, this realm could be easily associated with the Underworld, the alchemical furnace and the source of life. Following a particular logic, however, if one wanted to return to one’s divine ethereal origin and escape the cycle of re-birth, then, one would have to *return* to the “fiery womb” of Mother Earth and be transmuted through the alchemical process back into a divine substance.

This idea was taken up by the Orphics and concerned as much the regeneration of the human person as the *cosmos*.⁴⁸⁷ As mentioned, the Orphics were devoted to the murdered divine child Dionysos as well as to his mother, Persephone, or Kore.⁴⁸⁸ The Orphics claimed that the poet and musician Orpheus was their founder and had lived much earlier than Homer. Legend has it that Orpheus, so moved by the death of his wife, Eurydice, descended into Hades in order to ask Persephone to have her back. Persephone was so moved by his music that she granted his request, however, forbade him to look around during his ascent. Impatient, he looked back and Eurydice had to return to the realm of the dead. Orpheus’ death was similar to Dionysos’, significantly, the god whom the Orphics worshipped. Like Dionysos, he was shredded to bits, ironically, either for having opposed Dionysos’ orgies or for his embitterment towards women, a sentiment he acquired after Eurydice’s death.⁴⁸⁹

Empedocles and the Orphics were also connected to the Pythagoreans, who were said to follow Apollo. Both the Pythagoreans and the Orphics were said to share the same “way of

⁴⁸⁶ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic*, 77.

⁴⁸⁷ Ed. William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979, 2nd ed.) 606.

⁴⁸⁸ W. K. C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion: A Study of the Orphic Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952) 133-134.

⁴⁸⁹ *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature, and Art*, 438.

life.”⁴⁹⁰ The Orphics believed that humanity had a double-nature: the bloodthirstiness of the Titans and the divinity of Dionysos, whom the Titans had murdered and then cannibalized.⁴⁹¹ For the Orphics, the goal was to purge their souls of their Titanic nature, so that they could be released from the cycle of rebirth and return to the pure realm of *aither*, beyond the sublunary world of the impure *aer* or atmosphere. As is clear, *aither* is the highest level on the Presocratic scale of Being. However, in order to get there, one must return to the source of Life, the Underworld Fire, in order to be fully purged of one’s Titanic nature. The future “god” must be willing to be dismembered and consumed, like Dionysos, and then to be re-born out of his father’s “thigh.” Perhaps Pythagoras’ “golden thigh” is an allusion to this story.

Aither was the substance, which filled the pure outer reaches of Heaven, beyond the impure atmosphere (*aer*) which surrounds the earth and extends as far as the moon. It was in this pure region that the divinity dwelt, and the *aither* itself was supposed to be divine. In Euripides it appears now as the home of Zeus, now as Zeus himself (Eur., frs 487, 877, Nauck). Those then, who believed the soul to be immortal and divine, were naturally inclined to suppose it made of an imprisoned spark of *aither*, which when set free would fly off to rejoin its like. So Euripides speaks of the mind of the dead as ‘an immortal thing, plunging into the immortal *aither*’ (*Hel* 1016). More specifically, it is said to fly to the stars, or become a star, for the *aither* is the substance of which the stars, existing as they do in these pure outer regions are made. (Cp. Aristotle, *de caelo*, book I.)... There is also evidence (though it is mostly of Graeco-Roman date) for the belief that the Milky Way was the abode of souls.⁴⁹²

According to W. K. C. Guthrie in *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, “It lies with each of us to choose which part shall win in the struggle, and according as we let the divine [Dionysos] or the Titanic nature have the upper hand, so are our lives good or bad.” The Orphics believed that at death a soul was brought to Hades for judgment, where one was presented with either a punishment or a reward. Together with one’s previous earthly life, this period took about one thousand years. When the time of either purgation or enjoyment was complete, one prepared for another life on earth, where another attempt at divinity was offered. After the new earthly life had been determined, one was made to drink from the Lethe, whose waters dim recollection. Those who drank full remained in a state of forgetfulness and would most probably fall into the same bad Titanic patterns. Those, who drank a little or not at all, had a chance to remember and escape the cycle of re-birth or *palingenesia*.⁴⁹³

⁴⁹⁰ *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, 216ff.

⁴⁹¹ *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, 120. The Orphic version of the story claims that discovering the crime of his brothers, the Titans, Zeus “zapped” them with his Thunderbolt and *burned them alive*. From their ashes, humanity arose, containing the evil of the Titans and the “good” or “divinity” of Dionysos, whom they had consumed.

⁴⁹² *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, 185.

⁴⁹³ *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, 183.

This idea of salvific remembering was re-interpreted by Plato as well as Plotinus. Plato had encountered many Empedoclean, Pythagorean as well as Orphic ideas on his visit to Sicilian Pythagoreans in his youth, who were closely associated to Empedocles.⁴⁹⁴ According to Kingsley, in the hands of Plato, the more magical and poetic ideas of the Presocratics concerning cosmogonies and transmigration were reversed as well as abstracted and systematized. He integrated some of their ideas into his philosophy, but disguised them by simultaneously creating new myths of his own as well as mocking his sources through irony.

Plato was clearly indebted to Pythagoras, Empedocles and to the Orphics in the construction of his theory of *metempsychosis*. His theory of transmigration became the dominant western theory of the after-life, after the Presocratics and before the rise of Christianity.⁴⁹⁵ Even though we cannot know the exact order of Plato's *dialogues*, Plato began to play with Orphic ideas dealing with "immortality of the soul," "reincarnation" and "recollection" as opposed to "forgetfulness" in the judgment myth at the end of the *Gorgias*. In the *Meno*, through the voice of Socrates, Plato invoked the authority of "wise priests and priestesses," who taught a doctrine of "immortality and transmigration of the soul (81a-b). This could be a veiled reference to the Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone. According to their teaching, since the soul has seen and learned everything in its previous existence our learning in this life is really recollection."⁴⁹⁶

In *The Great Chain of Being*, Arthur O. Lovejoy contends that there are, in fact, two contradictory ideas concerning the nature of God running through the philosophy of Plato. The first idea concerns an understanding of an absolutely other-worldly God, the Good God of the *Republic*, where Plato lays out his theory of Ideas. This God is "self-sufficient, out of time, alien to the categories of ordinary human thought and experience, needing no world of lesser beings to supplement or enhance his own eternal self-contained perfection." The other idea of God is the dependent, this-worldly God of the *Timaeus*. The *Timaeus* introduces the idea of the Demiurge and the World-Soul. These two seemingly contradictory ideas were philosophically justified by claiming that they were but two aspects of the One. Lovejoy thinks that it is probable that these two ideas represent two distinct strains in Plato's philosophy.⁴⁹⁷

Although rarely studied today, Plato's abovementioned *Timaeus* had a great impact on the western religious imagination and the understanding of the transmigration of souls or *metempsychosis*. In *Timaeus* 41d, after the Demiurge made individual souls, he "assigned each soul to a star," an idea he must have received from Orphic doctrine. Before the Demiurge

⁴⁹⁴ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 79-132.

⁴⁹⁵ *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans: A Brief History*, 53.

⁴⁹⁶ *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans: A Brief History*, 51.

⁴⁹⁷ Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: a Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936, 1964) 48.

implanted a soul into a body, he drove it around through the universe in a carriage and explained to it all it would need to know. Once implanted in a body, it would be given innate capacities such as sense perception. These capacities could experience disturbances, but were also endowed with love or *eros*. As with Empedocles' *philia*, *eros* or sexual attraction could also experience its natural opposite, i.e. strife or repulsion. The movement of the soul from the celestial regions down to the sensible regions and the use of attraction and repulsion evince the reversal of the Presocratic ideas, especially those of Empedocles.

In the *Timaeus*, salvation consists in mastering emotions that allow one to lead a good life, which is an intelligent life. When one succeeds, one is allowed to return to one's companion star, where one can "live a life of happiness that agreed with his character." (*Timaeus* 41e - 42b)⁴⁹⁸ The one who is unable to master emotions and leads a passionate life will "return to Hades uninitiated and unintelligent." (*Timaeus*, 44c) Initiation into some sort of Mystery is necessary to achieve *gnosis* about one's true origin. This *gnosis* leads to salvation, whereupon one is allowed to return to one's "star." According to Kahn, although Plato uses Pythagorean ideas as a foundation, Plato's doctrine of *metempsychosis* is entirely his own attempt to transform the more mythical and magical Presocratic and Pythagorean doctrine into one of "innate ideas and *a priori* knowledge," in order to make it more rational and epistemic.⁴⁹⁹

c. One Bronze Sandal

In the above section, we saw how the Presocratic doctrine of *palingenesia* was reinterpreted and reversed by the Platonic school into *metempsychosis*. Now we will attempt to understand how the doctrine of *palingenesia* affected Empedocles' actual life. Kingsley sees connections between Empedocles' philosophy, Hermetism, the *Korē Kosmou*, the *Greek Magical Papyri*, especially the *Paris Magical Papyrus*, compiled by A. Dieterich in Leipzig in 1891. This later document mentions "one bronze sandal," an attribute associated with the Empedoclean legend. In this document, the "bronze sandal" is portrayed as a well-known magical symbol connected to

⁴⁹⁸ Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. Donald J. Zeyl (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2000) 29.

⁴⁹⁹ *Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans: A Brief History*, 51. "For the Pythagoreans recollection meant, first of all, remembering one's previous incarnations (as Pythagoras himself was reported to have done) and secondly, remembering the secret passwords and road markers communicated to the initiate for a safe passage in the realm of the dead. Plato has transformed this magical, ritualistic notion of recollection into an epistemology of innate ideas and *a priori* knowledge. The *Meno* remains silent on the content of such knowledge, but the *Phaedo* makes clear that the basis of recollection is prenatal acquaintance with eternal Forms. This experience of the disembodied soul, implied in the *Meno* and *Phaedo*, is fully portrayed only in the myth of the *Phaedrus*, which depicts a chariot journey of the soul beyond the visible heavens, in the company of the gods. The *Phaedrus* further develops the epistemic role of recollection in the acquisition of concepts (249b-c), and it adds a new explanation for the phenomena of love in terms of the recollection of Beauty itself (249d-251a). This philosophical theory of recollection, introduced in the *Meno* and completed in the *Phaedrus*, is entirely Plato's own creation. But he has built it upon a view of the eternal transmigrating soul that he inherited from the Pythagorean tradition. In this sense, in the *Meno* and *Phaedo* Plato has created a new Pythagorean philosophy."

underworld ritual and the magic of Hecate. In Orphic hymns, she is called the “controller of Tartarus,” a synonym for Hades. Hecate displays a similar function to that of Hermes and Mercurius. She is “mediator between this world and the next, and grants the magician access to the underworld,”⁵⁰⁰ bringing souls back from the dead, from Hades. Kingsley asserts that “bronze for the Greeks had a special affinity with the dead, the demonic and the underworld. This was true in particular for the early Pythagoreans; in connection with the mysteries of Persephone and Demeter; and in the context of oracles and prophecy. As for the bronze sandal, it points directly to Hecate and -- through her -- to the Mysteries of Persephone,”⁵⁰¹ whose cultic center was situated between Etna and Arcagas (Aggrigento), Empedocles’ hometown.

In a version of the legend passed on to us from Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, after Empedocles threw himself into the mouth of the volcano Etna, in Antiquity known to be an entry point into the Underworld, the mountain supposedly spewed out one bronze sandal.⁵⁰² Kingsley accuses Diogenes of discussing this aspect in order to repeat later criticisms of Empedocles. These criticisms were probably based on an earlier and original legend that Empedocles had *actually* thrown himself into the mouth of Etna to *confirm* that he had already become a god. It is impossible to tell, but perhaps Empedocles’ leap sparked off a series of “copy-cat” suicides, provoking more rational and critical philosophers to re-think the implications of earlier soteriology. Friedrich Nietzsche, brilliant philologist and Dionysian prophet, emphasized this aspect of Empedocles’ life in his Basle lectures more than one hundred years earlier. Like Kingsley, Nietzsche told his students that for Empedocles to confirm his divine status, “he plunges into [Mt] Aetna.”⁵⁰³ For the followers of Empedocles, who practiced a

⁵⁰⁰ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 238.

⁵⁰¹ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 239-240.

⁵⁰² Cf. T1, *The First Philosophers*, 140-141. Because the passage in Diogenes Laertius is so important, we quote it here in full: “There are different accounts of his death. After telling the story about a woman who stopped breathing and how famous Empedocles became for having restored her corpse to life, Heraclides tells how once Empedocles was performing a sacrifice near Peisianax’s farm, and he invited some of his friends, including Pausanias. After the feast, everyone else took themselves off to rest (either under the trees of the nearby farm or elsewhere), but Empedocles stayed in the place where he had reclined for the meal. When they got up the next day, he alone was nowhere to be found. They looked for him and questioned the slaves, who said that they had no idea where he was; but one of them said that in the middle of the night he had heard a supernaturally loud voice calling out Empedocles’ name, and then, when he had got out of bed, he had seen a light in the sky and torches shining, but nothing else. His friends were amazed at what had happened, and after Pausanias went home he organized a search party. Later, however, he stopped them from trying to interfere with events, suggested that prayer was the correct response to what had happened, and that they ought to sacrifice to Empedocles as though he had become a god. Hermippus, however, says that it was after Empedocles had cured a woman from Acragas called Pantheia, whom the doctors had declared to be a hopeless case, that he performed the sacrifice, and that there were almost eighty guests at the sacrificial feast. Hippobotus says that after he had got up from his couch he made his way to Mount Etna, where he leapt into the craters of fire and made himself disappear, because he wanted to confirm what people were saying about him -- that he had become a god. Later, though, according to Hippobotus, he was found out when one of his sandals was disgorged by the mountain, since he had regularly worn bronze sandals.”

⁵⁰³ *The Pre-Platonic Philosophers*, 112.

similar type of iatromantic magic, the single bronze sandal would have been their sign that he had actually accomplished his task.

Kingsley says that “what the motif of the bronze sandal has succeeded in doing is to plunge us into a web of correspondences linking the magical *papyri* themselves not only with the legend of Empedocles’ death but also with Empedocles’ life and his own ideas.”⁵⁰⁴ The world of the ancient shaman envisioned “rational philosophy,” “oracular prophecy,” “poetry,” “scientific observation,” “medicine,” “magic” and “hunting” together in order to procure the status of divinity. That is to say, all of these tools were applied by the poet-prophet-magician towards the practical goal of making himself a god. These “tools” were not mere spiritual instruments. As hylozoists, or more anachronistically as animists, spirit was imbued *in* matter. A material or physical act was a spiritual act and a spiritual act was already grounded in biology or temporality. Such an act could not be separated in the way that Modern idealism posits.

Kingsley suggests that as a Greek shaman connected to the Mysteries of Persephone and through this to the Mysteries of Dionysos, Empedocles had already gone through and survived a spiritual and ritual dismemberment and dissolution. Given the belief in the unity of matter as well as the unity between matter and spirit, Empedocles’ plunge into Etna could be interpreted as a biological confirmation of traditional shamanic belief and *praxis*, grounded in the experience of the Mysteries. As an initiate, Empedocles had already gone through the experience of initiation, where he had beheld the vision of Persephone. His leap into Etna could have been an attempt – as a radical hylozoist holist -- to practice what he preached. Perhaps the legend is in fact grounded in some sort of reality and his personal desire prove to both his disciples and critics that he had already achieved what he claimed to have achieved, namely, immortality? If so, *in the temporal body of the Presocratic Empedocles, the dichotomy between spiritual and material alchemy coincide.*

It is clear from Empedocles’ life example that he felt -- based on his philosophical and religious understanding of the nature of reality -- his temporal descent and dissolution into real subterranean fire of a volcano was necessary to ascend into the realms of aither and the sun. If true, then, he must have sincerely believed that his self-sacrifice or suicide into fire would not only immortalize him, but would also immortalize his life example, like alchemical gold. However, as sources show, Empedocles supposed “deifying act” was met with skepticism already in his day. The Presocratics represent a transitional phase between primitive modes of thought and formal Greek philosophy. Nevertheless, Kingsley accuses later writers as well as contemporary philosophers in the line of Chitwood, who were less familiar with the Mysteries of

⁵⁰⁴ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 239.

Persephone and the magic of Hecate, of either missing the point of his magical shamanic background or purposefully obfuscating it. We propose, however, that it is possible that later philosophers understood the background of Empedocles' philosophy; however, they rejected its suicidal implications. Their purposeful obfuscation and reversal was perhaps a "breaking mechanism" or even an attempt to pull back from the abyss.

C. Alchemy and the Magical *Regressus Ad Uterum*

As shown, even though the *Corpus Hermeticum* does not explicitly call for a "new age," it expresses an explicit yearning for the "old age" to pass away, because it was deteriorating, demented or *senectus*. Therefore, the yearning for the destruction of the present "old world" was already an ancient sentiment found in the more ancient Egyptian myth of Hathor, the Presocratic iatromantic philosophers like Heraclitus and Empedocles as well as in the Stoic doctrine of *ekpurosis* embedded within the Hermetic material. The *Asclepius* is merely cloaking this ancient magical idea in semi-religious language. At the time when the *Asclepius* was written, i.e. the second century AD, the "old age" meant the decadent present of *pagan* Antiquity. The *Asclepius* implicitly implied that as the decadent "old age" of rational Greek philosophical predominance apocalyptically passed away, the former, i.e. "old" magical Egyptian religion and its gods could *return* in a "new age" or new cosmic cycle. The idea of a cosmic cycle is also implicit in the Empedoclean doctrine of Love and Strife, but more explicit in the Stoic doctrine of *ekpurosis* and the eternal return of the same. When the Egyptian gods *return*, the cycle of the world will be complete, because Egypt was the source of magic, religion and philosophy.

As suggested, the return is a magical or an occult idea and can be expressed in several different ways. In the Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone, the *return* is represented in the doctrine of the *regressus ad uterum* and was later taken up by alchemy. The *regressus*, or "return to the womb" of the *opus alchymicum*, is an attempt to return to the origin of Creation. The *regressus* is also a synonym for the *coniunctio oppositorum*, but also for the *nigredo*, or return to the *prima materia* of the "black sun." For the people of Sicily, the subterranean primal sun could be reached through the mouth of the volcano Etna, and it appears that the great philosopher Empedocles understood this literally, not merely symbolically or figuratively. In magical/alchemical minds, the return to the "womb of creation" starts the process of self-divinization, ending in the Philosopher's Stone. Eliade explains:

According to certain writers, dissolution is the first operation; according to others it is calcinations, the reduction to the amorphous by Fire. However that may be, the result is the same: 'death'. This alchemical reduction to the *prima materia* may be interpreted in a great variety of ways: notably it may be equated with a regression to the pre-natal state, a *regressus ad*

uterum. There is support for this seminal symbolism in a codex studied by Carbonelli, in which it is written that before using gold in the *opus* ‘it is necessary to reduce it to sperm’. The *vas mirabile*, of which Mary the Prophetess proclaimed that the whole alchemical secret reside therein, is ‘a kind of matrix or uterus from which will be born the *filius philosophorum*, the miraculous Stone’ (Jung, *Psychologie und Alchemie*, p. 325).⁵⁰⁵

However, as Walter Burkert has shown, the womb of the Great Goddess and her daughter is not like other wombs. A return to the womb in the Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone is shrouded in death and points to the former habit of maiden sacrifice. Ancient and even later explanations for the myth of Persephone, a theory to which Eliade prescribed, said that Kore was an allegory for the grain and flowers that germinate in the spring after a long winter’s sleep under the earth. Burkert points out that this explanation is incongruent with the way corn or grain actually germinates in the Mediterranean, that is, in the autumn.⁵⁰⁶ Everything about the myth points to sacrifice and murder. “The role of Hades is ambivalent: is Kore carried away to marriage, to death, or to both at once? Death is the aspect that predominates.” To be carried off by Hades and to celebrate the sacred “marriage with Hades became common metaphors for death, especially of girls. At bottom, the myth does not speak of a cycle either: things will never be the same as they were before the rape.”⁵⁰⁷ The ancient explanation that the myth represents the agricultural cycle reveals how the process of mythologization functions. Mythologization conceals or rationalizes real violence and murder, a process that is continued in ancient alchemy.

Another version of the myth has Persephone, “the daughter of Zeus and Demeter, as a maiden playing in a group of girls the same age, ... The girls leave the house and gather flowers on a meadow – this flowery meadow was shown in various places, the most famous being the landscape by the *Lago di Pergus* near Enna in Sicily. The hymn locates the scene among the daughters of Oceanos at the edge of the world. As the girl bends down to pick a particularly beautiful flower, the earth opens up and the god of the underworld charges out with horses and chariot, grabs Persephone and carries her away. Once again, the spot where Hades drove back into the depths was shown in a number of places; among these the Kyane spring near Syracuse is of particular interest because ancient drowning sacrifices are attested there.”⁵⁰⁸ The event was celebrated, not far from Arcagas, in the rituals and sacrifices of the Mystery cult dedicated to the subterranean Queen. She was the Queen born out of incest, raped and murdered by her own father, since for radical monists Zeus and Hades are fundamentally the same. This was the shadowy queen whom the Presocratic philosophers worshipped. The ancient *hieros gamos* had

⁵⁰⁵ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 154.

⁵⁰⁶ *Greek Religion*, 160.

⁵⁰⁷ *Greek Religion*, 161.

⁵⁰⁸ *Greek Religion*, 160.

nothing to do with a fundamental respect for women, but with her violation and murder. A similar thing can be said for the “immortalization” of children like Dionysos and Demophöon. Like the mythical explanation of Kore’s disappearance, the “sacred marriage” of Dionysos and Ariadne, or the “sacred birth” of Dionysos, ancient alchemy attempts to cover up its own will to destruction in “flowery” language.

Conclusions and Comments

Eliade makes an important point in *The Forge*, “The *materia prima* should not be understood merely as a primordial condition of the substance but also as an inner experience of the alchemist. The reduction of matter to its original condition of absolute indifferentiation corresponds, on the plane of inner experience, to the regression to a pre-natal, embryonic state. The theme of rejuvenation and longevity by means of the *regressus ad uterum* is a leitmotif of Taoism. ... The alchemist also achieves this state by smelting of various ingredients in his furnace.”⁵⁰⁹ The *regressus ad uterum* is a return to the chaos of the *prima materia* of Nature or to the womb of the Great Mother, whether one calls her Isis, Demeter-Persephone or Gaia in order to be *born again* as a son of the underworld Sun, Osiris, Aion or Apollo-Dionysos. As gathered from our readings of the myth, this birth is really not a “joyful” one, but shrouded in subterfuge and violence.

The Hermetic alchemist attempts to translate the more communal experience of the Mysteries into the privacy of his “lab.” The privatization of the violence of the Mysteries represents a real development in thinking. Given the Hermetic alchemist’s belief in the unity of matter and spirit, he believed that his aggressive physical experiments would have an effect on his spiritual state. As Voss explained, with the advent of *cyclical causality*, a radically different way of looking at the world came into being. Although most spiritual Hermetic alchemists remain on the symbolic level, we suggest that the belief that “All is One,” combined with the reversal of Platonic emanation from above as well as the development of *cyclical causality*, the alchemist ran the risk of mistaking himself for the All, although not necessarily. This mistaken estimation of one’s microcosmic identity can then later develop into *panenanthropism*, where one collapses the macrocosmic All into the microcosmic ego. When Hermetic alchemists begin to take the *regressus* literally or biologically, then, a temporalization of spiritual or psychological alchemy can take place, potentially leading to the belief in necessary suicide. This is not absurd. Although perhaps only a legend, the possibility is as old as Empedocles. We contend that this possibility continued on in the thought and life of Giordano Bruno, an admirer of Empedocles, to whom we now turn.

⁵⁰⁹ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 119.

CHAPTER III

GIORDANO BRUNO: DIVINE MARTYR OF THE NEW AGE

Ah, dogs of Actaeon, ah proud ingrates!
Whom to the abode of my divinity I sent;
Without hope do ye return to me;
And, coming to the mother's side, ye bring
Back unto me a too unhappy boon;
Ye mangle me, and will that I live not.
Leave me, life, that I may mount up to my sun,
A double streamlet, mad, without my fount!
When shall this ponderous mass of me dissolve?
When shall it be, that taking myself hence,
And swiftly rising to the heights above,
Together with my heart I may abide,
And with my thoughts I may be deified?

Giordano Bruno, *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, I, IV, 23.

I. Giordano Bruno: The Magician-Psychologist

A. Bruno's Life and Death

1. Historical Background

Today, Giordano Bruno (1548-1600) is a rather obscure figure. On the seventeenth of February 1600, on the orders of the Inquisition, Bruno was burned at the stake on the Campo dei Fiori in Rome.⁵¹⁰ Often, he is portrayed as a martyr or hero of freedom, democracy, science and free thought. People perceive him to have taken a stand against dogmatic or traditional Christianity. What interests us is the fact that some scholars propose that Bruno intended to become the founder of a religion that would surpass Christianity, or at least the leader of another Reformation based on hermetic principles.⁵¹¹ Based on the Girardian theory of divinization or transfiguration as well as both Girard's and Burkert's contention that sacrifice is the origin of religion, we suggest that the way Bruno intended to become the founder of his own religion was to offer himself up as its original sacrifice.

Unfortunately, we cannot go into great biographical detail of Bruno's life. Bruno, sometimes referred to as the Nolan, was born in Nola, a small town close to the Calabrian city of

⁵¹⁰ Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1964) 349.

⁵¹¹ Karen Silvia de León-Jones, *Giordano Bruno & the Kabbalah: Prophets, Magicians, and Rabbis* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004) 16. De León-Jones follows both Ioan Couliano and Frances Yates' argument that "Bruno wished to found his own religious reformation."

Naples. At an early age, he entered a Dominican convent and, in 1572, was ordained a priest. Already in 1574, he was under suspicion of heresy and forced to flee his convent. From 1579 to his incarceration by the Venetian Inquisition in 1592, Bruno wandered throughout Europe, flirting with the religion and politics associated with the decadent French king, Henri III and, later, with the luminaries of the court of the Protestant Queen Elizabeth I. His loyalties to religious ideas other than his own were never too deep and he became, probably, the only human in history to be excommunicated from three major church denominations (Roman Catholic, Calvinist and Lutheran). Although condemned in Italy, in April 1591, he accepted an offer by the nobleman, Giovanni Mocenigo, to return. Mocenigo later betrayed him to the Venetian Inquisition.⁵¹²

His Venetian trial lasted from May through July 1592. Perceiving a possibility to go free, it seemed as though Bruno made an attempt to recant his former heretical views and ask forgiveness.⁵¹³ However, through the intervention of the newly elected pope Clement VIII (1592-1605), Bruno was extradited to the dungeons of the Roman Inquisition.⁵¹⁴ At the time, with “no following and few sympathizers,” he posed no serious threat to the Church or to the papacy, but his relationship with powerful Protestants did not work in his favour. Edward A. Gosselin and Lawrence S. Lerner suggest that Bruno’s real enemies were the Spanish, who opposed his endorsement of the creation of a magical hermetic kingdom,⁵¹⁵ with the help of France and England,⁵¹⁶ Spain’s political rivals. In 1599, the Jesuit Robert Bellarmine presented the former Dominican Bruno with eight heretical propositions gathered from his most important writings, which he was required to refute.

Unfortunately, the original trial proceedings were lost after they were confiscated on the orders of Napoleon and, then, accidentally sold to a pulp factory.⁵¹⁷ In 1940, the Prefect of the Vatican Archives, Angelo Mercati, found a summary of the trial in the personal archives of Pius IX. In 1942, he published the summary with a long introduction.⁵¹⁸ Given the lack of historical evidence, it is impossible to reconstruct the Roman trial; however, Frances Yates proposed that

⁵¹² For more biographical information, see: Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 190ff; Michele Ciliberto, “Bruno, Giordano (Filippo),” *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006) 206-213; Luigi Firpo, *Le procès de Giordano Bruno*, I (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2000). For original editions of Bruno’s works, see: Ed. F. Fiorentino et al., *Opera latine conscripta* (Naples: Morano, 1879-1891); Ed. G. Aquileccia, *Dialoghi italiani. Dialoghi metafisici e dialoghi morali nuovamente ristampati con note da G. Gentile*, 3rd ed. (Roman and Florence: Sansoni, 1958). There are no recent critical editions of Bruno’s work.

⁵¹³ Arthur D. Imerti, “Introduction,” *Giordano Bruno’s, The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964) 62.

⁵¹⁴ J. N. D. Kelly, *The Oxford Dictionary of Popes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 276.

⁵¹⁵ Edward A. Gosselin and Lawrence S. Lerner, “Introduction,” *Giordano Bruno’s, The Ash Wednesday Supper* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1995) 22.

⁵¹⁶ See Giordano Bruno, *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, trans. Edward A. Gosselin and Lawrence S. Lerner (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1995) 161.

⁵¹⁷ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 349.

⁵¹⁸ Information on the trial of Giordano Bruno can be accessed at: Vatican Secret Archives, “Summary of the Trial Against Giordano Bruno, Rome 1597,” THE HOLY SEE, <http://asv.vatican.va/en/doc/1597.htm>.

the propositions mostly concerned Bruno's philosophical presuppositions and those theological doctrines that were dependent upon them. Contrary to popular opinion, it was not a trial about "science," but dealt with Bruno's pantheism (i.e. God is the infinite universe), his assertion that the stars are beings and that infinite worlds like ours exist, containing beings far superior to ours. The trial also concerned his theories on the divinity of Jesus, the nature of the Holy Trinity and the doctrine of transubstantiation, but did not concern his theory of heliocentricity.⁵¹⁹ Particularly provocative in *Lo Spaccio de la bestia trionfante* or *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, would have been his suggestion that Jesus was a second-rate magician, while the *magus* Bruno was his superior.⁵²⁰ Oskar Kristeller confirms Yates estimations that Bruno's acceptance of the Copernican system played only a very small role in his condemnation, whereas the charges of "alleged blasphemy and violations of Church discipline," played the greater.⁵²¹ In Rome as in Venice, initially, Bruno seemed prepared to reject his former teachings; however, after rotting 8 eight years in a dungeon, he changed his mind and refused to recant. Having alienated his former patrons, he probably realized that death might be the quickest release. No one should be forced on the threat of death to assent to a particular conception of God. Nevertheless, Bruno's refusal was interpreted as obstinacy, and he was turned over to secular authorities for execution.⁵²²

2. A Superior Magician?

After his sentencing, Bruno was reported to have said: "You perhaps pronounce sentence against me with a fear greater than that with which I receive it."⁵²³ We are not in a position to judge Bruno; however, the question arises why Bruno thought that the Inquisition should be more fearful of their sentence than he was of receiving it? Was it because Bruno had already intuited the "divinizing aspect" of the scapegoat mechanism, discussed in the Girard section of the Introduction? Did Bruno know that by executing him, the Inquisition was reversing the roles of the persecuted and persecutors that would make Bruno into a martyr, whose death structurally mimicked Jesus' own passion and death? Thanks to the theories of René Girard and Walter

⁵¹⁹ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 350-355. For example, Jesus was not the second person of the Holy Trinity, while he did consider the *anima mundi* to be the Third Person. He believed that the Christians stole the Egyptian ankh as a sacred symbol.

⁵²⁰ Giordano Bruno, *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, trans. Arthur D. Imerti (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964) 255, 257.

⁵²¹ Paul Oskar Kristeller, *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964) 129.

⁵²² *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance*, 129. Kristeller eloquently says: "The idea that a man should be punished and executed for holding opinions considered wrong by his religious or political authorities is intolerable for any thoughtful person who takes human dignity and liberty seriously, although the deplorable treatment given to Bruno, and the wrong idea underlying it, was by no means peculiar to Bruno's church or to his century, as some historians would have us believe. His death made of Bruno a martyr, not so much of modern science, as was thought for a long time, but rather of his convictions and of philosophical liberty."

⁵²³ As quoted in "Introduction," Giordano Bruno's, *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, 64.

Burkert on the violent origins of religion and the pagan gods, our better understanding of the nature of divinization in myth allows us to propose that Bruno's desire for death, coupled with his desire to become a "god," might have led to a carefully planned self-divinizing suicide. At least, this possibility must be considered.

As a sorcerer (*pharmakeus*) Bruno thought that he was Jesus' superior, meaning that he saw Jesus as both a rival and as a model magician. The Inquisition, in contrast, saw themselves as defenders of the Christian faith and, by virtue of this, the unique divinity of Jesus. They, of course, rejected any claims that Jesus' power was derived from magic. Still, from our perspective, we might say, albeit anachronistically, that they were unable to fully perceive the absolute non-violent essence of Jesus' divinity, as discussed in the Introduction.⁵²⁴ Therefore, by their willingness to defend Jesus' divinity with violence, they made themselves appear hypocritical, in the same way that Jesus' crucifixion made the Sadducees and Pharisees appear hypocritical. Because Christians worship God, who was unjustly condemned to a violent death, their violent condemnation of Bruno undermined their credibility as defenders of that same non-violent faith they had been entrusted to (non-violently) defend. In a sense, as earthly representatives of Jesus' kingdom, their violent or worldly reaction unwittingly made Jesus' declaration to Pilate rebound back onto themselves: "My kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight that I might not be handed over to the Jews..." (Jn 18:36).

Should Bruno have had any desire for revenge and should he have fully understood the ironic position in which his persecutors had placed themselves, we propose that he might have used it against them. That is, he might have intuited the possibility to surpass both his model and rival Jesus by subtly provoking the Inquisition to kill him, making him into the martyr-hero of his own cause. Could this be the origin of his estimation that he was less afraid of receiving the death sentence than the Inquisition was of giving it? When he perceived that there was no peaceful way out of the Inquisition prison, no longer having any powerful patrons to bail him out, we propose that Bruno seized the opportunity presented to him and decided that the time was right to "forge" himself into a god. In this chapter, we will attempt to show how he might have done this and how it ultimately fits into the Hermetic line of self-divinization that has antecedents in the legend of Empedocles.

3. Magical Binding

Bruno believed that "everything seeks its likes and flees its opposites. Everything is caused by the sufficient interior principle by which it is naturally stirred and not by an exterior

⁵²⁴ René Girard, *The Girard Reader*, ed. James G. Williams (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996) 189-193.

principle...”⁵²⁵ Like the Stoics, this interior principle is the *anima mundi*, which he sometimes equates with Love. “Love” is of course not the biblical principle of *agape*, but the principle of erotic sexual desire or sympathetic attraction. As we saw with Ficino, Renaissance magic and astrology, the spiritual principle or *pneuma*, which the Hermetic *magus* associated with Love, was located in the heavens; however, for Bruno like the Stoics, it is located in the corporality of all things.⁵²⁶ The *magus* must therefore be able to prepare and modify matter, through its spiritual principle, i.e. *eros* or desire, so as “to render it susceptible to the desired influence” and *bind* it. Since the *magus* is as much “Nature” as everything else, to procure his desired effect, he must draw from one area the power of the innate world-soul into other material objects. This could of course even be from the *magus* himself. The late Ioan Couliano in *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* explains:

Like a hunter, the lover and the magician -- who is in love with nature, with Diana, Giordano Bruno would say -- cast their nets and put out their phantasmic bait and traps in order to take possession of their precious game. It goes without saying that the quality and dimensions of the game vary. The lover uses his talents to gain control of the pneumatic mechanism of the beloved. As for the magician, he can either directly influence objects, individuals, and human society or invoke the presence of powerful invisible beings, demons and heroes from whom he hopes to profit. In order to do so he must gather knowledge of the nets and bait that he must put out in order to gain the desired result. This procedure is called by Bruno to “bind” (*vincire*) and its processes bear the generic name of -- “chains” (*vincula*). The doctrine of the identity of love and magic, already outlined by Ficino, is only carried to its logical conclusions in Bruno.⁵²⁷

Bonding is related to the Latin word, *vinculum*, meaning a “chain” or a “bond.” The word is derived from the verb *vincire*, “to enchain” or “to bind.” That is, the magician attempts, through his vast knowledge of Nature (human nature included), to bind or subsume the lesser wills of others to his own. He does this by subtly manipulating their desires through the use and control of images (e.g. of a visual, verbal or sensual origin) he suggests to the imagination. Alfonso Ingegno explains that “in order to put the binding process into action, [the *magus*] requires knowledge of the infinite variety of subjective and objective factors (beginning with the diversity of physical constitutions) in relation to which the *vinculum* must be prepared in advance in order

⁵²⁵ *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, 156.

⁵²⁶ Cf. Giordano Bruno, “On Magic,” *Cause, Principle and Unity and Essays on Magic*, trans. Richard J. Blackwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 110-111. “For nature gives not only existence to each species, but also the desire in each individual to preserve itself in its present state. Thus, it implants in each thing an internal spirit, or sense, if you prefer that word, by which as from an internal dictate it recognizes and avoids great dangers. This can be seen not only in the examples given above, but also in all things in which, even if they seem to be defective or dead, there still resides a spirit striving with all its power to conserve the present condition.”

⁵²⁷ Ioan P. Couliano, *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, trans. Margaret Cook (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987) 88.

to be effective.”⁵²⁸ As a careful observer of human behavior, a proficient *magus* should know when and how to bind the desires of his victims. This is made clear in *De vinculis in genere* or *A General Account of Bonding* (1588): “Therefore the moment for bonding must be predicted ahead of time, with careful and antecedent deliberation, and the opportunity must be quickly seized when it presents itself, such that he who can bind will act and bind as soon as possible.”⁵²⁹ Once a *magus* has “caught” or lured his prey into subjecting their will to his by changing or manipulating the images, he can change or manipulate the desires of those subjected to his will and control them.

Traditionally, the *magus* begins his work by following the advice, written on the walls of the entrance hall to the Delphic Oracle, to “know thyself.” By knowing himself, or going into himself, he comes to know the *cosmos* Itself. Since he is a fully conscious *microcosm* of the *macrocosm*, he stands in a sympathetic relation to his subject, who is probably less conscious of the potential snares of demons and other demonic magicians, who want to ensnare him. In order to satisfy the many expectations of his prey or victim and create the perfect illusion of freedom, the manipulator or magical operator must have a complete knowledge of his subject and his desires. The more the manipulator knows about his subject, the greater his ability to create effective *vinculum* on his victim and control him. According to Couliano, Bruno assumes that:

No one can escape the magic circle: everyone is either manipulated or a manipulator. Having attained extraordinary domination over his own phantasy, and having also got rid of the ballast of vanity that made him vulnerable to the praise or blame of others, the manipulator, in order to use his techniques, applies himself to knowing and fathoming through intuition the characteristics, reactions, and emotions of the subject to be bound to him. Like a spy wanting to procure material for future erotic blackmail, the magician must collect all the indices that permit him to file his subject under some classification or other.⁵³⁰

Bruno’s magician is a subtle magician, so subtle that his victims are unaware that he is one. They must remain unaware that they have in fact agreed to subject their wills to his in order for binding to work. “The light of day” or reason as well as the awareness that one has been bound are sure antidotes to Bruno’s magic. To show that we are not speaking about an antiquated problem, Couliano further emphasizes that “the magician of [Bruno’s] *De vinculis* is the prototype of the impersonal systems of mass media, indirect censorship, global manipulation, and the brain trusts that exercise their occult control over the western masses. He is not, doubtless, the type followed by Soviet propaganda, for he by no means lacks subtlety. On the contrary, Bruno’s magician is

⁵²⁸ Alfonso Ingegno, “Introduction,” Giordano Bruno’s, *Cause, Principle and Unity: and Essays on Magic*, trans. Richard J. Blackwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) xxviii.

⁵²⁹ Giordano Bruno, *Cause, Principle and Unity and Essays on Magic*, trans. Richard J. Blackwell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 153-154.

⁵³⁰ *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, 97.

altogether aware that, to gain the following of the masses, like the loyalty of an individual, it is necessary to take account of all the complexity of the subjects' expectations, to create the total illusion of giving *unicuique suum*.”⁵³¹ The more the desires of the populace become homogenized or “MacDonaldized,” the easier it is for leaders to control their desires and bind them. Hence, as we will see, Bruno’s erotic magic is a perfect means to manipulate both crowds and individuals. He learns how to bind or enchain the masses’ -- whom he, before Nietzsche, refers to as the herd -- desires to his own (or to the *magus*-politician’s) in order to use them to achieve the object of his desire: unchallenged power and influence over society. Couliano says:

In its frankness, indeed the cynicism of the analysis of its contents, it might be compared to Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, especially the subject matter of the two works is connected: Bruno deals with the psychological manipulation in general, Machiavelli with political manipulation. But how colorless and ridiculous the Machiavellian prince-adventurer now seems, compared to Bruno’s magician-psychologist!⁵³²

Finally, as a magician-psychologist, he had eight years to keenly observe the strengths and weaknesses of his opponents. When the *kairos* arrived, by subtly provoking the Inquisition, we propose that he could have fulfilled several levels of objectives to establish his own religion. On the first level, to outsiders, his death would appear to be structurally similar to Jesus’ death, a death that founded traditional Christianity. As suggested, such a death would make Bruno’s persecutors appear like Jesus’ persecutors. By executing Bruno, as Jesus’ earthly representatives, the Inquisition failed to be better than Jesus’ persecutors, making Bruno appear like a martyr of a religion superior to Jesus’. On the second level, on the level of occult practice, we propose that through his violent death by fire at the stake, as a Hermetic *magus* and alchemist, he would have instigated a temporal *opus alchymicum* on himself. In his own mind, by being reduced to the ashes of the *prima materia*, he would have achieved union with the “One” in a manner fitting for an alchemical god, whom we will show to be “Aion,” discussed earlier. Bruno’s reading of ancient myths, but also the philosophy and legends of Presocratic philosophers like Empedocles as well as other suicidal Presocratic philosophers like Anaxagoras, who willingly starved himself to death, and even Socrates, who willingly drank Hemlock and achieved philosophical immortality, would have provided him with ample models to imitate.

⁵³¹ *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, 90.

⁵³² *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, 89.

B. Bruno's Thinking

1. Copernicus, forerunner of the Divine Bruno

Bruno was a monistic thinker, who rejected traditional Christian theism, the traditional medieval Ptolemaic cosmology as well as the dominant scholastic philosophy of his day, based on the Aristotelian Scale of Being with its hierarchies and distinctions. Bruno followed Nicholas Copernicus' (1473-1543) now accepted scientific theory of a heliocentric universe, which he expounded in *De revolutionibus orbium cœlestium* or *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres* (1543).⁵³³ His acceptance of Copernicus' science was, however, more superficial than is often admitted. Although Bruno extolled Copernicus, he was also capable of deriding him in the same breath. In *La cena de la cenere* or *The Ash Wednesday Supper* (1584/5), Bruno claimed that the astronomer, i.e. Copernicus, is like a blind fortuneteller. He needs an authentic interpreter, or a natural philosopher, who Bruno declared to be himself.⁵³⁴ In *The Cosmology of Giordano Bruno*, Paul Henri Michel explains that Bruno, through the mouthpiece of Theophilus (God lover), sets Copernicus up as the forerunner of the divine Giordano Bruno.⁵³⁵ Just as John the Baptist was the necessary, yet, marginally influential forerunner of Jesus of Nazareth, Copernicus is the forerunner of Bruno. Those who do not agree with Bruno are considered ignorant herd animals.⁵³⁶ Unlike Copernicus, Bruno does not see himself as a "scientist," or the promoter of a new scientific theory, but as the founder of a new Hermetic solar religion that appears to be justified by the new heliocentric science of the day.

In *De la causa, principio e uno* or *Cause, Principle and Unity*, Bruno concluded that "All is one."⁵³⁷ For Bruno, the *cosmos* is fundamentally one totality of living or animated matter and is itself God.⁵³⁸ Drawing on the Empedoclean and Stoic tradition as well as Lucretius, Bruno

⁵³³ Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Late Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy*, vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1963, 1993) 283.

⁵³⁴ *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, 87

⁵³⁵ Paul Henri Michel, *The Cosmology of Giordano Bruno*, trans. Dr R. E. W. Maddison (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973) 183.

⁵³⁶ *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, 87. "Who then will be so rude and discourteous toward the labors of this man as to forget how much he accomplished, and not to consider that he precede the rising of the sun of the ancient and true philosophy, for so many centuries entombed in the dark caverns of blind, spiteful, arrogant, and envious ignorance? Who, marking what he could not do, would place him among the common herd who are moved and guided by, and throw themselves headlong after, the voice of a brutish and ignoble fancy sounding at their ears? Who would not rather count him among those who, with happy genius, have been able to raise themselves and stand erect, most faithfully guided by the eye of Divine Intelligence? And now, what shall I say of the Nolan? *Perhaps it is not appropriate for me to praise him since he is as close to me as I am to myself.* [But] certainly, no reasonable man will blame me for praising him, since it is not only fitting but sometimes also necessary, as the lucid and learned Tansillo said so well." (Italics mine)

⁵³⁷ Giordano Bruno, *Cause, Principle and Unity: and Essays on Magic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 8, 10.

⁵³⁸ Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 60-63; *The Cosmology of Giordano Bruno*, 250-268.

intellectually collapsed God into the *cosmos*.⁵³⁹ Lucretius was an Epicurean philosopher who died around 55 BC. He denied any anthropocentric teleology of divine providence governing the universe, proposing a wholly natural philosophy, believing that “the wise man ... does not fear death ... nor the gods.”⁵⁴⁰

2. Presocratic and Hermetic Philosophy

a. Subterranean Emanation and Infinite Worlds

Bruno is also known for his theory of infinite worlds. Bruno developed his theory by pantheistically reinterpreting the ideas of Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa (1404-1464), who taught within a fully theistic context that the world has no definite centre or circumference.⁵⁴¹ Bruno took Cusa’s ideas and situated them within his own philosophical worldview, that of Renaissance hylozoic (i.e. animistic) monism. Since there was no center to the universe and since Being was one, he assumed that it was also indifferent and impersonal.⁵⁴² In *De la causa*, Bruno accepts the Empedoclean and Hermetic doctrine that the Totality is never annihilated, it only changes its form.⁵⁴³ As a totality of living matter, the divine *cosmos* is moved by a divine, life-creating principle, the *anima mundi*, which has been reduced to love or erotic desire. As we saw, this Platonic/Stoic idea had already been re-introduced by Ficino, but again had roots in Presocratic philosophy, especially the Empedoclean “*Pleon*.”⁵⁴⁴ Humanity, as a divine microcosm of the divine macrocosm, was not subject to the illusion of generation and corruption, but continued to progress *en masse*, as did the universe, into impersonal infinity.⁵⁴⁵ According to Bruno, “there is no difference between the earth and other planets. In the infinite universe, change figures as a fundamental structure of being at every level: man, like the worlds, is moved by a continual ‘transmutation’.”⁵⁴⁶ Therefore, it is clear that Bruno rejected the Platonic world of ideal forms, along with its scale of Being.

Bruno also rejected the traditional limited Aristotelian cosmology, positing an infinite universe filled with an infinite number of diverse peoples and worlds. This is not something he

⁵³⁹ Frederick Albert Lange, *The History of Materialism and Criticism of its Present Importance*, trans. Ernest Chester Thomas (New York: The Humanities Press, 1950) 130.

⁵⁴⁰ Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Greece and Rome*, vol. 1 (New York: Image Books, 1993) 406.

⁵⁴¹ *A History of Philosophy: Late Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy*, vol. 3, 239. For Cusa, God “can be called the center of the world in view of the fact that He is everywhere or omnipresent and the circumference of the world in that He is nowhere, that is, by local presence.”

⁵⁴² Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: a Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936, 1964) 120.

⁵⁴³ *Cause, Principle and Unity*, 58. “From this we may conclude (in spite of our adversaries) that nothing is ever annihilated and loses its being, except for the external and material accidental form.”

⁵⁴⁴ *The Cosmology of Giordano Bruno*, 110.

⁵⁴⁵ “Introduction,” Giordano Bruno’s, *Cause, Principle and Unity: and Essays on Magic*, x

⁵⁴⁶ “Bruno, Giordano (Filippo),” *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, 208.

deduced from Copernicus' *De revolutionibus*, but from his re-thinking of Presocratic⁵⁴⁷ and especially Empedoclean cosmology as well as the cosmology of Lucretius,⁵⁴⁸ who was himself indebted to Empedocles. In his debate with Oxford divines (ca. 1584), Bruno clearly stated his preference for Presocratic philosophers, like Pythagoras and Anaxagoras, who he believed were superior to the Aristotle of the schoolmen.⁵⁴⁹ In *La Cena*, he associates the ideas of the Chaldeans (Zoroastrians), the Egyptians, the Orphic and the Presocratic philosophers with each other and sees himself as carrying on their line.⁵⁵⁰ As we recall, Kingsley has shown that many of these philosophical presuppositions are embedded within the *Hermetica*. Combining Presocratic animism with Ficino's "psychologizing" tendencies of the elementary forces, Bruno attempted to reverse the Platonic "reversal" and return to a more magical and primitive understanding of religion that included his own innovations in order to establish a new type of magical Hermetic civilization. Alfonso Ingegno says that it is his "universal animism [...]" that suggested to Bruno the schema according to which the whole of nature should operate and on the basis of which every type of magical operation should be modeled."⁵⁵¹

As noted, for the iatromantis Empedocles, the "evolution" of Being starts from the *fire* in the bowels of the earth. Like plants, human beings spring up from underneath the earth, and the transmigration (as *palingenesia*) of human souls follows an ascending order from beneath the ground towards the realm of aether, the sun and, ultimately, the gods.⁵⁵² Although somewhat indebted to Copernicus' theories on a heliocentric universe,⁵⁵³ Bruno's postulations on an infinite universe were implicit in his reversal of the Platonic and Aristotelian scale of Being,⁵⁵⁴ and, through this, in his acceptance of Empedoclean emanation from matter. However, we should remember that although evolution begins out of "matter," according to Hermetic doctrine, matter is merely an extension or projection of the Divine Mind.

⁵⁴⁷ *The Cosmology of Giordano Bruno*, 42.

⁵⁴⁸ *Eight Philosophers of the Italian Renaissance*, 136; *The History of Materialism*, 232.

⁵⁴⁹ "Introduction," Giordano Bruno's, *The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*, 7.

⁵⁵⁰ *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, 94-95. As Bruno's Teofilo expounds: "Well, Master Prudenizio, if this vulgar opinion of yours is as true as it is old, certainly it was false when it was new! Before this philosophy which suits your brain arose, there existed the philosophy of the Chaldeans, of the Egyptians, of the magi, of the Orphists, of the Pythagoreans and of others who spring readily to mind [and] who better suit our head; from them first rebelled frivolous and empty logicians and mathematicians who were not so much enemies of Antiquity as strangers to the Truth. Let us put aside, then, the question of the old and the new, seeing that there is no new thing which cannot be old and there is no old thing which cannot be new, as your Aristotle rightly noted."

⁵⁵¹ "Introduction," Giordano Bruno's, *Cause, Principle and Unity: and Essays on Magic*, xxiii.

⁵⁵² See "Aëtius, *Opinions* 5.18.1 Diels," *The First Philosophers: The Presocratics and the Sophists*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 2000) 150.

⁵⁵³ *A History of Philosophy: Late Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy*, vol. 3, 283.

⁵⁵⁴ *The Great Chain of Being*, 116-117.

Although divinity, through the world-soul, is present in each particle of matter,⁵⁵⁵ unlike the rest of humanity, the human *magus* represents the pinnacle of divinity and divine consciousness. The role of the *magus*, within the impersonal infinity, is to distinguish himself from the herd and progress, through ascendant metempsychosis, into ever higher worlds. Bruno's cosmological doctrine of infinite worlds is a key to understanding his religious doctrine, because after his reversal of the Platonic scale, the "worlds" provide a special "place" to where the *magus* can ascend or progress in the next level of re-birth. He no longer needs the Platonic spheres, but can advance to a planet or star. As we will see, this idea was taken over by many New Age practitioners and constitutes the most popular understanding of "reincarnation."

b. Aion Again

i. The Aim of Bruno's Magic

Bruno also accepted the Hermetic view expounded in *Corpus Hermeticum* XII that the essence of the universe is Mind and Will. Hence, Mind in humans is God. This is why "contemplation" will be essential to Bruno's form of self-divinization. In this understanding of Reality, not all beings that look like humans possess "Mind." As the *CH*, XII, 1 asserts, "Among humans, therefore, some are gods and their humanity is near to divinity." This means that those who do not possess "Mind," although they appear to be human, are not fully so. Although in the Hermetic/Brunian understanding of reality, every particle is divine, those without "Mind" are less than human (therefore, on a lower level of divinity and on par with the sacrificial herd). Hence, in the Hermetic worldview, ignorance is the greatest vice and those who are unable to have a gnostic experience or vision of salvation, discussed earlier, are not "divinized" (*CH*, XII, 4), because they lack *gnosis* or higher consciousness. From this perspective, because lower un-divinized humanity is an "intellectual construct," its destruction can be "rationalized" as "good," when a new construct is deemed necessary by the "Divine Mind," whose conscious earthly mediator is the Hermetic *magus*. In *CH* XII, 8-9, this line of reasoning continues:

I heard him say that all things are one, especially (the) intellectual bodies; that we live in power and in energy and in eternity [i.e. Aion]; also, that the mind of eternity [i.e. Aion] is good and that its soul is good as well. This being so, there is nothing dimensional among intellectual beings, and thus, since mind rules all and is the soul of god, mind can do as it wishes. ... You will find that mind, the soul of god, truly prevails over all, over fate and law and all else. And nothing is

⁵⁵⁵ *Cause, Principle and Unity*, 45. "The world soul, therefore, is the formal constitutive principle of the universe and all it contains. I say that if life is found in all things, the soul is necessarily the form of all things, that form presides everywhere over matter and governs the composites, determines the composition and cohesion of the parts. That is why it seems that such form is no less enduring than matter. I conceive this form in such a way that there is only one for all things. But according to the diversity of the dispositions of matter and the capacity of the material principles, both active and passive, it happens to produce different configurations and realize different potentialities, bringing forth sometimes non-sensitive life, sometimes sensitive but not intellectual life, sometimes seeming to suppress or restrain all outside signs of life, because of the incapacity or some other characteristic of matter."

impossible for mind, neither setting a human soul above fate nor, if it happens that a soul is careless, setting it beneath fate. These were the finest things that the good demon said about such matters.

Such assumptions, that dimension is an illusion, that Mind is omnipotent and not subject to the rules or laws of Nature, etc. led later Hermetic *magi*, who were no longer under the influence of Platonic realism, to assume that the objective world is merely a projection of his own imagination and divine will. Because only the Totality, i.e. the *cosmos*, remains the same and uncorrupted, while its limited and contingent parts are “transfigured” through re-absorption, it is in the limited and contingent *magus*’ interest to assume himself equal to the Divine Mind or Eternity. Since the Brunian *magus* considers himself to be a part of *the* Divine Mind or uncorrupted primal man, and no longer a degenerated “individual,” like Lucretius, there is no reason to fear death, but only (as stated in *CH XI*, 20, the need to become Eternity [i.e. Aion]. For the Brunian *magus*, those who are too humble to consider themselves eternal are subjected to fate.

As discussed earlier, the spirituality of the Hermetic *magus* and alchemist was to realize himself Aion and see himself within or even as the Divine Mind. As “masters of time,” who believed that they had the power within themselves to speed up the slow processes of Nature, alchemists chose Aion as their preferred alchemical assistant to help them complete the *opus alchymicum* and win the Philosopher’s Stone. However, in the late Renaissance and early Modernity, with the reacceptance of ancient holism and a changing understanding of causality, i.e. from linear to cyclical, at some point, they came to believe that their “assistant” was a projection of their own imagination and will. They become aware that they were themselves Aion or Mercurius. Yates says that she believes that this, i.e. to realize oneself Aion, “having the divine powers within him,” is the experience to which Bruno’s magic is aimed.⁵⁵⁶ If this is so, Bruno is not merely a *magus*, but he is, as suggested, also an alchemist. Given his rejection of both Platonic realism and the Aristotelian cosmology, he was a peculiar type of psychological alchemist, which when combined with Hermetic idealism and Presocratic terrestrial emanation, leads to the temporalization of alchemy. From the following passage in *Gli eroici furori* or *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, we detect the alchemical logic in Bruno’s manner of contemplation:

He (the enthusiast) becomes a god by intellectual contact with the divine object, and he has no thought for other than divine things, and shows himself insensible and impassive towards those things which are commonly felt, and about which others are mostly tormented; he fears nothing, and for love of the divine he despises other pleasures and gives no thought to this life. It is not a fury of black bile, which sends him drifting outside of judgment, reason, and acts of prudence,; but it is aglow kindled by the intellectual sun in the soul, and a divine impetus which lends its

⁵⁵⁶ Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, 199.

wings, with which, drawing nearer and nearer to the intellectual sun, and ridding itself of the rust of human cares, it becomes a gold tried and pure, has the perception of divine and internal harmony, and its thoughts and acts accord with the symmetry of the law, innate in all things.⁵⁵⁷

ii. The Collapse

Because we agree with Yates that Bruno's magic is aimed at becoming Aion, which he hopes to achieve through a process of psychological alchemy, we propose that the following text, found in *Corpus Hermeticum* XI, 2ff, would be a key text in developing his panenanthropic interpretation of "becoming Aion." As discussed, in the ancient Hermetic conception, because mankind originated from the primal man's decent into matter or Nature, the Hermetic *magus*/alchemist perceived himself to participate in the one primal man. The goal was to re-ascend the Platonic scale and attain a vision of man before the "fall," so to speak. This text would have allowed the ancient and Renaissance alchemist to think about the *cosmos* as a hypostasized entity, albeit mitigated by the Platonic belief in a separate realm of ideal forms. In this important passage, "Aion, cosmos, time, becoming" exist in "God," the Divine Mind, like a stack of concentric circles. Therefore, the goal of the ancient Hermetic *magus*/alchemist must be to mount the levels of consciousness and realize himself as the primal man Aion, who stands "before" God and contains the *cosmos* within himself. That is to say, as "equal" to Aion, the ancient Hermetic *magus* believed himself to contain the macrocosmic powers or energy of Eternity, meaning the past, present and future, within his microcosmic self. The danger to consider oneself as the equivalent of or as the one primal man, which appears to be a possibility present in Tat's immature enthusiasm with his first vision of the Mind of God, was quickly addressed by the Master in XIII, 21. Now we will present *CH*, XI, 2ff:

"God, eternity [i.e. Aion], cosmos, time, becoming. [...]

[Aion], therefore, is in god, the cosmos in [Aion], time in the cosmos, and becoming in time. And while [Aion] has stood still in god's presence, the cosmos moves in [Aion], time passes in the cosmos, but becomes to be in time. [3] The source of all things is god; [Aion] is their essence; the cosmos is their matter. [Aion] is the power of god, and the cosmos is [Aion's] work, but the cosmos has never come into being; it comes to be forever from [Aion]. Therefore, nothing in the cosmos will ever be corrupted (for [Aion] is incorruptible), nor will it pass away since [Aion] encloses the cosmos. [...] [Aion] establishes an order, putting immortality and permanence into matter.

In [4], "The becoming of that matter depends from [Aion], just as [Aion] depends from god. [...] And god is the soul of [Aion]; [Aion] is the soul of the cosmos; heaven is the soul of the earth. God is in mind, but mind is in soul, and soul is in matter, yet all these exist through eternity [Aion]...

⁵⁵⁷ Giordano Bruno, *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, Part I, trans. L. Williams (London: George Redway, 1887) 71-72.

[5] “[Aion] holds all this together, either through necessity or providence or nature or whatever else anyone believes or will believe. This universe is god producing his energy, but god’s energy is an insuperable power, not comparable to anything human or divine... What else might he do <but> make? God is not idle, else everything would be idle, for each and every thing is full of god. Nowhere in the cosmos nor in any other thing is there idleness. Said of the one who makes or of one who comes into being, idleness is an empty word...”

The Hermetic *magus*/alchemist, who does not limit himself, as perhaps Bruno did not – could therefore intellectually collapse the entirety of the macrocosmos into his microcosmic ego, because he believes that he himself *is* or is equivalent to Aion/God, wherein the totality of the *cosmos* or “world moves.” That is to say, the Hermetic Brunian *magus* possibly imagined that the rest of the world fit into his mind like a set of Russian Matryoshka or Babushka dolls. Since he is or imagined himself to be Aion and not reborn in Aion, he also imagined that he was, literally, the “source of all things.” Because his individual ego “encloses the *cosmos*,” he began to believe that it was through the power of his imagination and will that the All came into being and is coming into being. In some way, the Hermetic Brunian *magus* made himself equivalent to the soul of the *cosmos* or to the *anima mundi*, directing it from “inside” on earth, holding “all this together.” Since he mistook himself for the world-soul, he also believed himself to permeate all things, even other human beings, “from the inside,” directing them according to his “will.”

Unlike the God of the Old Testament, Aion never rests or is idle, but is *omniformis*, forever changing his form into something else. It is the Hermetic Brunian *magus*’ goal to have *omniformis* experiences while in his particular earthly “form,” which will allow him to realize himself “perfect.” This is because *cosmos*, according to CH, XI, 16, which is God, is omniform. The Being who would have only one form, would be considered to be less than the *cosmos*, hence, less than God. As the *Corpus* says: “What if he has one form? In this respect, he will be less than the *cosmos*.”

If what Yates says is correct, that the goal of Brunian magic was to realize himself Aion, containing the whole of universal “energy and insuperable power” within himself, and if he perceived that he has accomplished his mission, then, Bruno very possibly mentally collapsed the universe into his individual ego, and became the first panenanthropic Hermetic magician and alchemist. The source of the desire to collapse the entire *cosmos* into the individual human ego, we believe, is Hermetic, although this possibility was mitigated or prevented when it was understood within a more Platonic (i.e. symbolic) scheme of reality. Nevertheless, Hermetic or Aionic magic/alchemy, interpreted with the Brunian sense is, we believe, the source of the panenanthropic predisposition, mentioned earlier. Because Bruno’s writings were popular throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, they probably helped to disseminate his

version of the potentially panenanthropic Hermetic worldview amongst European intellectuals, that became more sophisticated in contemporary esoteric holism.

c. God as Erotic Love

Like the *magus* in Antiquity, Bruno the magician is able to save or redeem himself, because he knows “the laws of Nature.” Since God is Nature, by knowing these laws, Bruno believes to know God as God is in himself. In fact, since he considers himself equivalent to Aion, it is he who makes or is the source of the laws of Nature. As stated, for Bruno, the most basic “law of Nature” is “erotic attraction” or sexual desire. Therefore, the alchemical *magus* must be a master of time as well as desire. According to Ingegno, it is “Love” or *Eros* that guides and seduces Bruno to ever higher levels of contemplation, wherein he realizes that “he can translate everything into the species of his intellect, in a seemingly endless process of actualization.”⁵⁵⁸

Bruno assumes that what drives the *magus* must be what drives the entire *cosmos* and vice versa. Since God or the *cosmos*, according to Hermetic doctrine is energy, will and power that permeates everything, this too must be the nature of the human being (Cf. *CH* XII, 20). Bruno subsumes all of this under the title of “Love,” which he understands as *eros* or sexual desire, calling it heroic or divine.⁵⁵⁹ If we recall, this understanding of reality is similar to Empedocles’s “*Pleon*.” Furthermore, Love is the power that is able to transform the lover into the beloved, or into “God.” Ingegno says: “Once again, this is the myth of metamorphosis, that metamorphosis of all things which made possible on the operational level the recognition of the unity which underlies all things and their development. The action which one exercises on oneself (thus making oneself somehow one’s own object) is aimed at transforming oneself into a subject of an ever higher form.”⁵⁶⁰ Magical contemplation of the divine is, therefore, for Bruno the ability to transfigure oneself into one’s object of contemplation through the power of imagination and will.

As the nature of human desire or *Eros* is an infinite striving to transcend itself, Bruno postulates that the nature of the universe must also be infinite expansion. Since Bruno assumes that the nature of the divine *cosmos* is perpetual expansion, and the human being is an image of the *cosmos*, whose nature is infinite, unquenchable desire, the nature of God must be infinite desire or *eros*. Although Homer does not mention him, in Hesiod, Eros is the best among the gods, seducing both gods and men. Although he is the god of love, for Hesiod, he is a “power which forms the world by inner union of the separated elements,” similar to Empedocles’

⁵⁵⁸ “Introduction,” Giordano Bruno’s, *Cause, Principle and Unity: and Essays on Magic*, xxi.

⁵⁵⁹ *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, Part I, 73.

⁵⁶⁰ “Introduction,” Giordano Bruno’s, *Cause, Principle and Unity: and Essays on Magic*, xxvix.

thinking.⁵⁶¹ Therefore, the attempt to make oneself equal to God/Aion/Eros is an attempt to express the nature of the *cosmos* in and through oneself. However, this is an attempt that can never be fully realized, because the *cosmos*, like human desire, is ever transcending itself. Ingegno says:

Hence Bruno outlines in *De immenso* the contemplation worthy of the perfect human being, he takes inspiration from the image, which he has of the divinity. The divinity is a matter which creates all and becomes all; thus, the perfect human being is one who, by elevating himself to the infinite in contemplation of the divine, actualizing in the infinite his cognitive potency, is capable of assimilating everything because he knows how to transform himself into it. The excellence of the *magnum miraculum* which is man is not taken for granted at the outset but rather constitutes a point of arrival and a final achievement. It coincides with the process of human deification, made possible by man's capacity to become, in some sense, *omniformis*, like divinity.⁵⁶²

3. The Power to Imagine the Infinite

Against Aristotle, Bruno does not conclude that infinite human desire is a merely a product of imagination, but sees the power of imagination to imagine the infinite as corresponding to the very nature of reality and God Itself.⁵⁶³ Since the human being is the microtheos of the macrotheos, and the macrotheos is One, human desire or *eros* projects the divine essence. Similarly, in Hermetism, to rest or be content with what one has means to be less than divine and, hence, less than human (Cf. *CH*, X, 5; XI, 12). Bruno believed that if one is content with oneself or rests, then, one is ignorant and, hence, remains on the level of animals. Bruno says "that ignorance is the mother of sensual felicity and beatitude, and this same is the garden of paradise of the animals... Hence it appears that heroic love is a torment, because it does not enjoy the present, as does animal love, but is of the future and the absent; and, on the contrary, it feels ambition, emulation, suspicion and dread." Those who claim to be content or happy with a particular situation are foolish,⁵⁶⁴ reminding us of Faust's bargain with Mephistopheles.

The search for wisdom is a search for God and is an infinite search, which mirrors the Infinite and Eternal God as the *cosmos*. The infinite longing for knowledge and divinity is something that the individual discovers within himself over and over again, leading eventually to subsequent re-births to ever higher planets and stars. Bruno says that "we feel a presentiment of it and seek it through an irresistible and hopeless movement, insatiable as we are of an inexhaustible goodness, both present and absent, whose nature is to overwhelm us and yet leave

⁵⁶¹ Oskar Seyffert, *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature, and Art* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1995) 225. "Unlike later conceptions of Eros, which see him as one of the youngest gods born of Aphrodite by either Ares or Hermes, Hesiod sees him as one of the first gods. Together with Earth and Tartarus, otherwise known as Hades, he is a child of Chaos."

⁵⁶² "Introduction," Giordano Bruno's, *Cause, Principle and Unity: and Essays on Magic*, xxviii.

⁵⁶³ *The Cosmology of Giordano Bruno*, 161.

⁵⁶⁴ *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, Part I, 56.

us unsatisfied.” He believes that “we project this internal infinite out of ourselves. Our mind demands limitlessness in the sequence of numbers, in space, in the universe.”⁵⁶⁵ Because divinity rests in each particle of matter and most consciously in the human microcosm, it can be reasoned that this insatiableness or infinite desire is the nature of divinity itself.⁵⁶⁶

Since Bruno’s God is the Infinite All who creates and becomes All, so too the “human god,” who is the All, must attempt to elevate himself to the level of the Infinite and become *omniformis*. That is to say, he must become a *perfectly realized human being*, who experiences “heaven on earth,” knowing God as God knows himself. In contemplating himself as the perfectly realized human being or primal man, he contemplates the All. Again, the contemplation of himself corresponds to the contemplation of the Divine, into whose *omniformis* and infinite nature he aspires to transform himself. Contemplation of the *cosmos* occurs through hermetic out-of-body experiences, or astral travel, (*CH I* or *Poimandres*) where the *magus* commands his soul to “go higher than every height and lower than every depth” (Cf. *CH*, XI 19-20). In *CH XI*, 19, the Divine Mind tells Hermes to command his soul to travel to India, and should he wish to “break through the universe itself and look upon the things outside (if, indeed, there is anything outside the cosmos),” it is within his power as one who has “become Aion.” He has “conceived that nothing is impossible to [him] ... able to understand everything, all art, all learning, the temper of every living thing.”⁵⁶⁷ In *La cena*, his own astral travel, procured through “out-of body experiences” extolled in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, is “proof” of his position. Not only has Bruno ascended through the imaginary “ten spheres,” an allusion to the Hermetic Gnostic eighth and ninth spheres discussed earlier – which he has surpassed –, but he has even walked on the moon. He is the new Messiah, who parallels Jesus with his ability to reveal the nature of the entire universe. He opens the eyes of the “moles” to see his truth, loosens the tongues of the dumb to promulgate his doctrine, and strengthens the limbs of the spiritually lame to ascend to the stars. He repudiates the Ptolemaic idea of heavenly spheres, because he himself has seen, through the power of his own reason, that the *cosmos* is One, divine and populated with hundreds of thousands of superior divine beings, with whom his followers can come in contact.⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁵ *The Cosmology of Giordano Bruno*, 160.

⁵⁶⁶ *Cause, Principle and Unity*, 91. “So that this world, this being, this truth, this universe, this infinity, this immensity is found entire in each of its parts: it is the *ubique* [everywhere] itself. Thus everything in the universe, in relation to the universe, exists everywhere according to its capacity, whatever its relation might be with other particular bodies; for it is above, below, right, left and so on, in keeping with all local differences, since, in the totality of the infinite, there are all these differences and none of them.”

⁵⁶⁷ Trans. Brian P. Copenhaver, *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a new English translation with notes and introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, reprint 2000) 41.

⁵⁶⁸ *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, 90-91.

From Bruno's panentheistic perspective, it is his own ego that is ever destroying and creating the *cosmos* into infinitely newer and higher configurations. In this sense, Bruno's scheme of self-divinization prefigures the schemes of psychological alchemy, which we will discuss in the context of Carl Jung and Friedrich Nietzsche. Ingegno says that "this metaphysical view not only implies that there exists no spiritual world which is separated from its corporeal support, but also implies that reality is unique, and this has important consequences for the psychological possibility of magical action."⁵⁶⁹ As the divine primal man, "having all authority over the cosmos" (*CH*, I, 14) and knowing the "laws" of Nature, which are ultimately mental (imagination and will), he is capable of manipulating Nature, i.e. his own and the others' desire, which he transmits in and through his books. Through his readers' assent to his doctrine, they bind themselves to his will. Thereafter, even after his particular death, through his ideas, he is still able to continue to subject or subsume the wills of subsequent generations to his own will in an effort to create his magical religion and state. In this sense, he is immortalized through his ideas, which he transmits through his writings, and lives on. Bruno's understanding of reality eventually leads to the belief that the (individual) human imagination is in fact creating the universe. In contemporary esoteric terms this is understood as the "law of manifestation," or the belief that we, through the power of our imagination and will, create our own reality.⁵⁷⁰

C. A Transvaluation of Values: Inverting the Traditional Order

1. From Vice to Virtue

a. The Magical Revaluation of Melancholy as a Sign of Genius

Bruno's works were written in order to establish a foundation upon which his concept of the new Hermetic world religion and government could stand and where the magical action, i.e. binding and loosing, of the magical politico-operator would be effective. Like Pico, Bruno felt that Ficino's magical reforms did not go far enough to help him develop his personality into a *perfectly realized human being*, i.e. Aion, who could effectively rule his magical kingdom. Yates says that both Ficino's and Bruno's ultimate goal was to develop a solar personality, "for Apollo is the patron of magic and divination, and this personality is the prophet and leader of a revival of magical religion."⁵⁷¹ As a pious, albeit heterodox Christian, Ficino believed that he needed to expel the influences of Saturn, which were connected to his melancholic disposition. Ficino's magic was elegant and he sought to avoid brutal or demonic forces. Bruno, on the other hand,

⁵⁶⁹ "Introduction," Giordano Bruno's, *Cause, Principle and Unity: and Essays on Magic*, xxviii.

⁵⁷⁰ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998) 230. As Hanegraaff says: "More important in the present context is the view of 'creating our own reality' as the general 'natural law' underlying all manifestation. Seth, as we saw, teaches that we create reality as naturally as we breathe. We live our lives in 'dreams' of our own making, which reflect our unconscious beliefs. By changing our beliefs, we automatically change our reality."

⁵⁷¹ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 221.

wanted to attract the brutal forces to himself and conjoin them with his melancholic disposition. The alchemical conjunction of opposites, e.g. weak with brutal natures, would lead to the attainment of the Philosopher's Stone.

In the Middle Ages, melancholy was deemed a negative psychological predisposition. Not only because *melancholia* was one of the eight or seven deadly sins or vices,⁵⁷² depending on whether one came from Eastern or Western Christianity respectively, but also because the Galenic theory of medicine and psychology deemed it a negative "humor." The Galenic theory was developed by Claudius Galenus (130- 200 AD), who connected the "humors," or fluids contained within the body, i.e. sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic and melancholic, to the Empedoclean idea of the four elements, i.e. air, fire, water and earth.⁵⁷³ The humors were thought to determine a person's basic "mood" or state of mind. As Yates explains in *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, both the four humors and their respective elements were locked into astrological determination by the four planets: Jupiter, Mars, Moon and Saturn. Sanguine people were connected to the air and to Jupiter. They were considered active and successful. Those who were choleric were connected to fire and to Mars. They were irritable and fighters. Those who were phlegmatic were connected to water and to the Moon. They were thought to be tranquil. Finally, people, who were disposed to melancholy, were connected to the earth and to Saturn. They "were sad, poor, unsuccessful, condemned to the most servile and despised occupations."⁵⁷⁴ Melancholy, therefore, was located at the lowest point on the psychological scale, and was considered to be connected to the least attractive planet, Saturn.⁵⁷⁵

In the Renaissance, the Galenic theory underwent a revaluation based on the acceptance of a text by Pseudo-Aristotle called *Problemata physica*. There, the author "discusses melancholy as the humour of heroes and great men," namely, Hercules, all of the poets, Plato and Empedocles. At this point, it becomes attractive to be a melancholic as well as to exercise the occupations that had to do with counting money, like banking and commerce.⁵⁷⁶ Yates says:

⁵⁷² Cf. John Cassian, The Monastic Institutes, *The Eight Deadly Sins*, trans. Father Jerome Bertram of the Oxford Oratory (London: The Saint Austin Press, 1999).

⁵⁷³ *The First Philosophers*, 134.

⁵⁷⁴ Frances A. Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge, 1979) 59. Originally, the Italian god Saturnus ("the sower") resembled Dionysos, and was the god of seedtime and harvest. Later, he was identified with the Greek god, Kronos, the father of Zeus. Kronos was the youngest son of Uranus and Gaia, the heavens and the earth. He murdered and dismembered Uranus in order to become the sovereign of the world. Except for Zeus, he swallowed his own children in order to avoid a prophecy by his sister and wife, Rhea, that one day his children would overthrow him as he had overthrown his father.

⁵⁷⁵ *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature, and Art*, 559.

⁵⁷⁶ We should note that the ideas of "infinite progress" and the revaluation of "making money" is the basis of our modern consumer society. Perhaps more research could be done in the line of Max Weber on the influence of Hermetism on Protestantism and its influence in the development of modern capitalism.

The argument is very detailed and medical but the main point is that the heroic frenzy, or madness, or furor, which according to Plato is the source of all inspiration, when combined with the black bile of the melancholy temperament produces great men; it is the temperament of genius.⁵⁷⁷

In his *De occulta philosophia* (1531-1533), Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa von Nettesheim (1486-1535 or 1536) uses the *Problemata physica* to reverse of the negative medieval estimation of *melancholia* into that of “inspired melancholy.” *De occulta philosophia* became one of the most popular manuals of natural magic in the late Renaissance, whose main thrust seems to be a step-by-step theory on how to progressively free oneself from negative, i.e. demonic influences, which block one from divine contemplation and living a truly religious life.⁵⁷⁸ As it did for Bruno, Ficino’s understanding of *pneuma* in *De vita coelitus comparanda* served as the theoretical basis for practicing his version of natural magic. However, unlike Ficino, who believed that he had been born under a negative saturnine influence, which he felt needed to be negated through the use of opposite attracting talismans, Agrippa honed in on pseudo-Aristotle’s lead and portrayed the effects of Saturn positively.⁵⁷⁹

According to Agrippa, *melancholia* was not to be seen as a state of depressed inactivity that needed to be blocked or counter-acted with talismans, but a state of intense visionary trance, necessary for inspired work. Agrippa elaborated three stages of inspired melancholy through which the Renaissance *magus* aspired to ascend. The first stage attracts “lower demons” and is the stage of the artist, corresponding to the soul capacity of imagination (*imaginatio*). The second stage attracts “middle demons” and is the stage of the philosopher, physician or seer, corresponding to the soul capacity of reason (*ratio*). The third state attracts “higher demons” and is the stage of the saint, corresponding to the soul capacity of the intellect (*mens*). According to Agrippa, these “saints” are more like fortune-tellers, who are able to receive knowledge of eternal things and “future events. They are able to show us for instance approaching prodigies, wonders, a prophet to come, or the emergence of a new religion, just as the Sibyl prophesied Jesus Christ long before he appeared.”⁵⁸⁰

⁵⁷⁷ *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, 61.

⁵⁷⁸ Michaela Valente, “Agrippa,” *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006) 7-8.

⁵⁷⁹ *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, 62. Yates explains that: “The *humor melancholicus*, when it takes fire and glows, generates the frenzy (*furor*) which leads us to wisdom and revelation, especially when it is combined with a heavenly influence, above all with that of Saturn ... Therefore Aristotle says in the *Problemata* that through melancholy some men have become divine beings, foretelling the future like Sibyls... while others have become poets... and he says further that all men who have been distinguished in any branch of knowledge have been generally melancholics. Moreover, this *humor melancholicus* has such power that they say it attracts certain demons into our bodies, through whose presence and activity men fall into ecstasies and pronounce many wonderful things ... This occurs in three different forms corresponding to the threefold capacity of our soul, namely the imagination (*imaginatio*), the rational (*ratio*), and the mental (*mens*).”

⁵⁸⁰ *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, 63.

Bruno, influenced by Agrippa's revaluation of Saturn into inspired melancholy, alchemically mixed and conjoined Ficino's elegant forces, with more barbarous ones. Yates believes that he did this in order to absorb more subterranean magical power or energy.⁵⁸¹ Although Bruno rejected medieval astrology, he insisted that the stars were divine beings, which contained both good and evil *energies*. In *Lo spaccio de la bestia trionfante*, since the influences of the stars were ambivalent, i.e. either positive or negative, one could create a magical personality by drawing down virtuous energies from the stars or beings, while filtering out their potential vices. "Salvation is achieved in the cosmological setting, the 'triumphant beast' of the sum of the vices, the bad influences coming from the stars, is cast out by their good opposites, and the divine virtues or powers predominate in the reformed personality." Yates says that this explains the paradoxical title of the *Spaccio*. Since the Zodiac also comes in animal forms, these animals or "beasts" represent the vices, which are to be expelled from the divine personality of the *magus* in a similar way that the twelve vices were to be expelled by the initiate in the Gnostic *Discourse on the Eighth and the Ninth*, mentioned earlier. However, since the animals or beasts also represent their opposite virtues, the bestial virtues are allowed to remain triumphant. "The 'Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast' thus has a double meaning; the beast is expelled on one level and triumphs on another."⁵⁸²

Bruno developed his theory based on his understanding of the function of Zeus' animal transformations and the role of satyrs in myths. Satyrs were considered to be the wonton spirits of the woodland, who were represented as humans with goat-like ears and tails. They were considered to be the companions of Dionysos, but also human tricksters. Although sometimes depicted as old and debauched, when depicted as youthful beings, it was thought that the "fire of genius" had purged them of all that was "coarse and ugly in form" and all that was "mean or revolting in expression."⁵⁸³ Bruno was also inspired by the stories of Zeus' transfigurations into various animal forms, which he used to trick friends and foes. His snake form, used to seduce and rape his daughter Persephone, is a good example of his ability to transform himself in order to get what he wanted. Bruno says:

This transmutation is shown where Jove, according to the diversity of the affections and the behaviour of those towards inferior things, invests himself with divers figures, entering into the form of beasts; and so also the other gods transmigrate into base and alien forms. And, on the contrary, through the knowledge of their own nobility, they re-take their own divine form.⁵⁸⁴

⁵⁸¹ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 333.

⁵⁸² *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 222-223.

⁵⁸³ *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature, and Art*, 560.

⁵⁸⁴ *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, Part I, 89.

By leading his personality or psyche back to its more “animal” or “barbarian” origin, Bruno believed that the refined, yet, decadent personality could be “re-energized.” We should not forget that the first law in alchemical thinking is “as above, so below.” However, in focusing on the subterranean powers of Saturn, i.e. on the “below,” Bruno is beginning to invert the alchemical doctrine, into “as below, so above.” For Bruno, based on his assent to Hermetic monism, there is no fundamental difference between Hades and his brother Zeus. The story of Persephone’s rape by her father Zeus and her rape and abduction by her uncle Hades, illustrates a fundamental similarity in the gods’ behaviors and psychic predispositions. Bruno’s *return* to the basal energy level of the animal or beast follows an alchemical logic discussed earlier. By orchestrating a *coniunctio oppositorum* between what he perceived to be the “weak Christian” and the “bestial barbarian,” in his opinion, a more “harmonious” and sturdy breed of humanity could be developed. For Bruno, decadent Christians needed to return to the “origin,” in this case the animal “origin of the species” to “spark off” a new and higher synthesis of the same. Bruno’s *return* to the so-called *philosophia perennis* of Egyptian magic and his proposed descent into the barbaric underground of humanity is his “psychological” re-interpretation of the shamanic experience of death and rebirth, which was more formally developed in the Mystery Religions.

b. Sublimation

For Bruno, once the consequences of his new religious philosophy had been worked out, the way to healing the divisions between Nature and divinity as well as the religions (i.e. Protestants and Roman Catholics) could be found. Civilization could then be reconceived according to a more natural foundation. According to Bruno, higher transformations or metamorphoses in civilizations occur when one distances oneself from the animal condition, and realizes one’s divinity through art or science. For him, art and science were in fact *sublimations* of one’s original animal condition.

Sublimation is an alchemical term connected to process of distillation, or the heating and cooling of a substance, as in the distillation of alcohol. As the heated substance cools off, the purified vapors or moisture can be trapped in a separate beaker. Therefore, sublimation is the process of purification that a more base material must go through in order to achieve the Philosopher’s Stone. According to Abraham, “distillation and sublimation” are “the process of purification and clarification whereby the volatile spirit is extracted from the impure matter or body. This process of refinement is achieved by rapid vaporization through applied heat, followed by cooling and condensation. Synesius wrote: ‘Thus when our stone is in the vessel, and that it mounts up on high in fume, this is called *Sublimation*, and when it falls down from on

high, *Distillation*, and Descension' (*The True Book*, 171)."⁵⁸⁵ Sublimation is also a synonym for the self-divinizing effects of the *opus alchymicum* that necessarily begins with the *coniunctio* or the *nigredo*. If we recall, this is the initial phase of the *opus*, where the artist or Hermetic alchemist attempts to psychically return to the chaos of the *prima materia*, the black sun or the creative *pur technikon*, reducing his present psychic state to ashes. Distillation is, therefore, analogous to the descent of the soul (or personality or mood) into the fiery furnaces of subterranean depths, which purifies it, while sublimation is analogous to the soul's (or personality or mood) ascent. This is a potentially painful process because the beads that form on the side of vessel are understood to be sweat or tears. Abraham explains that metaphysically speaking:

The descent of the soul into dense matter is seen as a part of the necessary experience which leads to the ascent into full 'philosophical' consciousness. The paradox that the way down is the way up ... is stated by Sendivogius in 'A Dialogue of the Allchymist and Sulphur': 'For what has not descended never can /Ascend to heaven's bright Meridian' (AP, 531).⁵⁸⁶

Since Bruno considered Christianity as a highly deteriorated form of the religion of "Hermes," in his view, the cycle must be at its lowest point. He proposed to "heat" it even hotter with the fires of war or revolution, which were still burning from the Reformation. This would supposedly "purify" what was still left from its more degenerate doctrines.

Since Bruno believed that the All is divine, and the objective world was a projection of his (or Aion's) will and imagination, it follows that he also believed that there is nothing real or objective that existed other than his "self." For him, the traditional Christian was under the illusion that one could enter into a relationship with a real, yet, transcendent *Someone* and forego the intellectual and cognitive processes of sublimation. Bruno was convinced that it was only by separating oneself from the lower levels of existence, in the sense that more banal sediments are separated from purer vapors, that one becomes a god or Aion. He believed that through a combined intellectual and physical effort, "man had been able to distance himself from the animal conditions (symbolized in the myth of a terrestrial paradise) and bring himself gradually closer to God through science and the arts."⁵⁸⁷ In order to get a higher pagan condition, in the same way that one opposed a cooler substance with heat during the process of distillation, one must oppose the "weakened" Christian state to the brute animal condition in order to revitalize what he perceived to be the deteriorating state. The process would supposedly bring about "higher" civilizations out of the vapors of the old.

⁵⁸⁵ *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 55.

⁵⁸⁶ *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 56.

⁵⁸⁷ "Introduction," Giordano Bruno's, *Cause, Principle and Unity: and Essays on Magic*, xxi.

Revealing a more negative Gnostic-type attitude towards matter, Bruno believed that Christ deceived his followers by promising them transformation, or transfiguration (i.e. to become sons of God), by entering into a relationship *with* Him through the earthly bread and wine of the Eucharist. Bruno promised divinization by transmitting secret or “coded” information from his books to his chosen disciples who, unlike the herd, would read and understand them. We suggest that Bruno’s books, poems and dialogues, etc. are to be understood as talismanic images, which the Brunian follower must imprint upon his magical memory in the same way that the Renaissance *magus* printed the talismanic pictures of the heavens onto his memory. Yates points out in *The Art of Memory*, as early as the fifth century BC, the Presocratic Simonides of Ceos (ca. 556 – 468 BC) had already developed a theory that associated poetry to painting. This was “later succinctly summed up by Horace in his famous phrase *ut pictura poesis*. ‘Simonides,’ says Plutarch, ‘called painting silent poetry and poetry painting that speaks; for the actions which painters depict as they are being performed, words describe after they are done.’”⁵⁸⁸

The verbal images developed by Bruno helped his “disciples” to go through the processes of psychological sublimation themselves. Yates says that the basic Hermetic experience is the attempt to reflect the universe, which the Hermetic *magus* ultimately believes is God, in his own mind. As we have intimated, this is a similar process that the Hermetic alchemist must go through in order to recognize himself as “Aion.” Yates asserts that the Brunian contemplation is executed by imprinting “the archetypal, or magically activated, images on the memory. By using magical or talismanic images as memory-images, the *Magus* hoped to acquire universal knowledge, and also powers, obtaining through the magical organization of the imagination a magically powerful personality, tuned in, as it were, to the powers of the cosmos.”⁵⁸⁹ Although the Renaissance and the Brunian “experiences” are structurally similar, Bruno chooses to activate more brutal or barbaric images than Ficino. Furthermore, this is no longer an ascent upwards through the spheres culminating in the Hermetic vision of the primal man, understood as “rebirth in Aion.” (See CH, XIII). This was a self-divinizing vision, which was understood as “rebirth as Aion.” As “christ-Aion,” Bruno promises self-divinization through sublimation, that is, through alchemical destruction of oneself, by separating oneself from one’s more lowly earthly condition. Initially, one experiences that one has risen to new intellectual heights. Later, one will be re-born to higher planetary spheres or stars. If one does not advance or accept the process of sublimation, then, one risks returning to the brute animal condition, whose ultimate destiny is dust.⁵⁹⁰

⁵⁸⁸ Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Pimlico, 1966, 1992) 42.

⁵⁸⁹ Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, 192.

⁵⁹⁰ “Introduction,” Giordano Bruno’s, *Cause, Principle and Unity: and Essays on Magic*, xxi.

2. Beginning with the Heavens

Unlike Ficino and Pico, who as microcosmos of the macrocosmos focused on themselves in order to change the world around them, Bruno proposed to focus on the *world* in order to change himself. Paradoxically, this happened due to the reversal of the Platonic scale as well as the alchemical doctrine, “as above, so below.” The alchemical law prioritized the “above;” therefore, in the traditional order of things, the *magus* felt that by changing himself, he was already changing the *cosmos*, because he participated in the Totality, not as the Totality. By changing a part of the *cosmos*, the *cosmos* as a totality was changed. As a microcosm of the macrocosm, by contemplating himself, he contemplated the *cosmos*, etc. For Bruno, the ancient procedure that focused on the self did not go far enough or only achieved marginal results; therefore, we propose that he orchestrated a psychological cosmic reversal based on his own radical monistic and solipsistic interpretation of the Hermetic and alchemical process of self-divinization.⁵⁹¹

By forcing the whole of society to return to “Egyptian” religion and ethics, where divinity was believed to be found in the All, his reform would start with a reform of the heavens.⁵⁹² Yates says that in the *Spaccio* “Bruno explains that the gods represent the ‘virtues and powers of the soul’, and that, since ‘in every man... there is a world, a universe’, the reform of the heavens is the reform, or the production, of a personality.”⁵⁹³ Therefore, Bruno’s reform of his personality and society proceeds in a *reverse order* to the traditional esoteric method and constitutes an inversion of the “law of correspondences” or the traditional microcosmos/macrocosmos analogy. Since he has already considered himself equivalent to the *cosmos*/God, the reformation of the *cosmos* or Nature itself creates dramatic and more rapid results. Such a strategy could only be possible through his Hermetic and developing panenanthropic worldview, where he had considered himself as the primal man Aion and intellectually collapsed the *cosmos* into his ego.

In Bruno’s conception, the changing of the heavens would lead to the reform of his personality and eventually to the whole of mankind – although it is not clear whether Bruno considered the concept of objective humanity outside of the primal man as an illusion or a projection of his own infinite imagination.⁵⁹⁴ In order to reform both the world and the personality, which he perceives to constitute a unity, one must first perform a psychological *coniunctio oppositorum* and bring both down to a bestial or primal level in order to strengthen

⁵⁹¹ It is possible that Bruno’s experience of the “Copernican Revolution,” which he might have intuited before his reading of Copernicus, might have given him the impression that *he* had actually changed the heavens, providing him with a strange sort of “proof.”

⁵⁹² *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 215.

⁵⁹³ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 220.

⁵⁹⁴ In later thinking, it becomes explicit that the objective world and, hence, humankind is an illusion.

both. Yates says that this openly “barbaric” and “arcane” character is played out in Bruno’s *Cantus circaeus*, which is the basis of his magical reform movement.⁵⁹⁵

3. Bruno’s Magical Kingdom of God

a. Circe’s Song

Around 1582, Bruno wrote *Cantus circaeus* or *The Circean Melody*. This is a poem dedicated to Circe, who is like Hecate, the goddess of magic. Circe is the daughter of the more ancient sun god, Helios, and the ocean nymph, Perseis. Helios was the all-seeing sun god, who rose from the earth every morning and then re-descended into the sea. Later, he became fused with Apollo, the “heavenly” sun god of prophecy and the Roman god Sol, who was important in Roman state religion and Mithraism.⁵⁹⁶ Helios represents the powers of the underworld sun, discussed in our previous chapter. Jack Lindsay states that later Helios also became associated with the alchemical god, Aion, the *Ouroboros* and Mithras. “Aion became merged with Mithras as the god of Time, and we see the snake twining round his body; sometimes the snake bites its own tail. As Helios-Mithras he became a high god by the 2nd century AD, but still had his underworld aspect.”⁵⁹⁷ Helios’ underworld aspect is related to an idea in Egyptian mythology, similar to ideas discussed in Presocratic philosophy, that the sun is generated from the subterranean depths of the earth. Helios’ fusion with Apollo masks his more original chthonic aspect, but also Apollo’s.

Circe, however, is best known through Homer’s *Odyssey*. This epic work is often interpreted as a story about life’s journey and as a search for the treasures of the soul. In the story, Circe turns Odysseus’ men into pigs with human spirits (Cf. *Odyssey*, books 9-10).⁵⁹⁸ It should be noted that pigs were a favorite sacrificial animal in the Eleusinian Mysteries of Demeter and Persephone. The pig was also associated with the Orphics, who were worshippers of Dionysos.⁵⁹⁹ As the progeny of the “sun” and the “sea,” Circe represents the key to the powers of the underworld sun, or the primal creative fire, which is a symbol of the *magus*’ untapped potential. According to Ioan Couliano, for Bruno, Circe represents the terrible side of the goddess Diana, a symbol of divine Nature, whom the *magus* chooses to worship and adore. The dark or shadow side of Circe, whom he extols in *Cantus circaeus*, is the shadow side of Bruno. Couliano elucidates:

Circe binds, Diana unties; Circe blinds, Diana cures [...] Whereas Diana represents the universe in its unity, Circe is the mistress of magical process, whose purpose is, precisely, to reunite the

⁵⁹⁵ Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, 201.

⁵⁹⁶ The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature, and Art, 275.

⁵⁹⁷ Jack Lindsay, *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (London: Frederick Muller, 1970) 263-264.

⁵⁹⁸ Homer, *The Odyssey*, trans. George Chapman (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 2000) 581-617.

⁵⁹⁹ Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of the Greek Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1903, 1991) 150ff.

parts of the world, to place them in relationship to each other. Without Circe, there would be no Diana: the remedy would not exist without the poison.⁶⁰⁰

In the story, through the assistance of Hermes, Odysseus protects himself from Circe's spell, and is, then, able to conquer her in bed. After mastering her sexually, he convinces her to turn his men back into human beings. Odysseus and his men enjoy a year of pleasure with her, until he is reminded that he must continue on his journey. Before departing, Circe tells him that he must first descend into the Underworld, visit Hades and consult the blind prophet Teiresias. Teiresias had been favoured by Persephone, with an unimpaired intellect and memory.⁶⁰¹ At first, Odysseus is reluctant to make the subterranean journey, but Circe gives instructions on how to prepare. Initially, he should offer libations of wine, honey and flour, and end with "secret rites to Teiresias." These include blood sacrifices of animals (*Odyssey*, 10.640-680).⁶⁰² After a successful shamanic like descent and ascent, which is a sign of Odysseus' own divinity, Circe warns him of further dangers. This information will assist him to reach his final destination.

In *Greek Religion*, Walter Burkert says that the type of sacrifice that Odysseus performed was usually either offered before a battle or in honour of dead men. For the ritual, a pit was dug in the ground and the blood of the sacrificial animal was allowed to drip down. Burkert says that flow of blood was felt to somehow temporarily restore the dead to life, which implies that Odysseus men were murdered not turned to pigs. This type of ritual also played an important role in the later development of the Mysteries of Mithraism, popular amongst Roman soldiers. In the *Mithraeum*, an underground sanctuary, the ritual slaying of a bull, took place. The sacrificed animal's blood was allowed to drip below on to an initiate standing in a pit, or a *taurobolium*, signifying his death and rebirth. It also symbolized the initiate's fundamental sympathy with the slain animal, as he might become the slain one in battle. According to William Brashear, "The initiand's path through symbolic death to rebirth took place in darkness (Simonini 94-95). For this purpose the *Mithraea* (*spelaeum*, *specus*, *spelunca*, *crypta* are the various words used for designating them) were fashioned wherever possible out of naturally occurring caves or rock outcroppings."⁶⁰³ As discussed, the cave symbolized the return to the womb of "Mother Earth," or death. Being doused in bull's blood in a subterranean realm supposedly gave the initiate courage to overcome the fear of death. According to Burkert, the blood was also a part of a necromantic ritual to establish contact with the dead:

⁶⁰⁰ *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, 84.

⁶⁰¹ *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature, and Art*, 615.

⁶⁰² *The Odyssey*, 616.

⁶⁰³ William M. Brashear, *A Mithraic Catechism from Egypt* (Wien: Verlag Adolf Holzhausens Nfg., 1992) 22.

The idea then arises that the downward flowing blood reaches the dead ‘satiating with blood’, *haimakouria*. In the earliest and definitive literary text describing such a sacrifice, this has become a conjuring up of the dead man: Odysseus, on the instructions of the enchantress Circe, digs out a square pit (*bothros*) at the edge of the world, and after a threefold libation and a prayer to Hades and Persephone, he slaughters a ram and a black sheep, causing the blood to flow into the pit; whereupon the souls (*psychai*) gather to drink the blood and so to awake to brief consciousness. The sacrificed animals are burned next to the pit.⁶⁰⁴

What we have here is the “poetization” of early Greek shamanic rituals. According to Burkert, Homer and Hesiod are the backbone of Greek mythical religion.⁶⁰⁵ This passage in Homer’s *Odyssey* transmits a magical ritual involving a devotion to the goddess Circe. According to Susan Greenwood, Circe symbolizes the woman enchantress, who is able seduce men through her charms. Those who were unable to “master” her, she destroyed. Therefore, she also represents the gate of darkness and the abysmal depths. As the goddess of “solar darkness,” she instructs in magic and enlightens those she favors to the secrets of the Underworld.⁶⁰⁶ The one, who calls upon Circe, imitates the hero Odysseus. We should keep this in mind when considering Bruno’s religious ambitions.

b. A New Hermetic Religion and Government

From 1583 to 1585, Bruno traveled to England, where he debated with the professors of Oxford University on the new Copernican science and wrote several books. In these books, he deals with his worldview and his vision of establishing a new religion as well as a new type of world government.⁶⁰⁷ These were meant to replace the crumbling unity of Europe after the ravages or “low ebb” of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation. His new religion would be an Egyptianized version of Christianity. His new government would be like the Roman Empire. In this sense, his aspirations were not much different from most Renaissance tyrants in Italy. The temporal power of the Roman Church, however, stood in his way. Jacob Burckhardt, in his *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, points out that most men of the Renaissance set out to imitate Antiquity in all respects. “As to the imitation of antiquity, the influence of which on moral and more especially on political, questions we shall often refer to, the example was set by the rulers themselves, who, both in their conception of the State and in their personal conduct,

⁶⁰⁴ Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, trans. John Raffan (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985) 60.

⁶⁰⁵ *Greek Religion*, 122.

⁶⁰⁶ Susan Greenwood, *De Encyclopedie van Magie & Hekserij: Een geïllustreerd historisch verslag van spirituele werelden*, trans. Ineke Willems (Utrecht: Veltman Uitgevers, 2002) 65.

⁶⁰⁷ Although some have already been mentioned above, elements of his “plans” can be found in: *La cena de la ceneri* (*The Ash Wednesday Supper*), *De la causa, principio e uno* (*Cause, Principle and Unity*), *De l’infinito, universo e mondi* (*The Infinite, the Universe, and the Worlds*), *Lo spaccio de la bestia trionfante* (*The Expulsion of the Triumphant Beast*), *Cabala del cavallo pegaseo* (*The Cabala of Pegasus*) and *Gli eroici furori* (*The Heroic Enthusiasts or Furies*).

took the old Roman Empire avowedly as their model.”⁶⁰⁸ The new ideal of the Roman tyrant and despot took its toll on the ordinary life of the citizen, which was basically miserable. However, art and scholarship flourished. Amidst corruption, stagnation, violence, but also the cultivation of beauty in all its plastic forms, like the men of Antiquity, the men of the Renaissance began again to speculate on the nature of freedom, necessity, good and evil. Burckhardt expresses beautifully how the increase of pre-Christian determinism and fatalism led to the increase of occult practices:

Since they did so under violent and lawless political circumstances, in which evil seemed often to win a splendid and lasting victory, their belief in God began to waver, and their view of the government of the world became fatalistic. And when their passionate natures refused to rest in the sense of uncertainty, they made a shift to help themselves out with ancient, Oriental, or mediaeval superstition. They took to astrology and magic.

Finally, these intellectual giants, these representatives of the Renaissance show, in respect to religion, a quality, which is common in youthful natures. Distinguishing keenly between good and evil, they yet are conscious of no sin. Every disturbance of their inward harmony they feel themselves able to make good out of the plastic resource so their own nature, and therefore they feel no repentance. The need of salvation becomes felt more and more dimly, while the ambitions and the intellectual activity of the present either shut out altogether every thought of a world to come, or else caused it to assume a poetic instead of a dogmatic form.⁶⁰⁹

According to Nuccio Ordine, in *Spaccio*, like the Renaissance tyrants mentioned above, Bruno saw religion as purely instrumental. “The Egyptian, Roman or Catholic religions in themselves do not possess any element that makes one better than the other, but their superiority is gauged by their contribution to the preservation of the political community. ... ‘The fact that Bruno should have become a Calvinist in Switzerland, ‘politically’ pro-Catholic in France, and a Lutheran in Germany basically shows his profound disinterest in the single solutions of dogmatic religion. Bruno accepts as a matter of fact the existence of particular creeds within certain countries, and submits to them without hesitation.”⁶¹⁰ In ancient Rome, religion was a form of education that *had to subordinate itself to political power* so that a “balanced society” could be achieved. “Bruno regards the experience of the ‘Roman people’ as a positive exemplum of such a state of affairs, wherein the laws of the state and those of religion merge in order to encourage the progress of civilization.”⁶¹¹ Although his end aims were peaceful, the means were less so, as he believed that “fear of punishment” was the best means to hold society together.⁶¹²

Before his trip to England, in 1582, Bruno wrote *De umbris idearum* (*The Shadow of Ideas*). According to Yates, it is a hermetic book of strong solar magic, similar to the lament of

⁶⁰⁸ Jacob Burckhardt, *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, trans. S. G. C. Middlemore (New York: Random House, 2002) 42.

⁶⁰⁹ *The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy*, 346.

⁶¹⁰ Nuccio Ordine, *Giordano Bruno and the Philosophy of the Ass* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996) 102-103.

⁶¹¹ *Giordano Bruno and the Philosophy of the Ass*, 98-99.

⁶¹² “Introduction,” *Giordano Bruno’s The Ash Wednesday Supper*, 37.

Asclepius 26, discussed earlier. In this book, Bruno reverses the negative judgment of St. Augustine, who claimed that *Asclepius* 26 was a mournful prophecy of the eventual suppression of the false Egyptian religion by Christianity.⁶¹³ Similar to his methodology to uncover the philosophy of the Presocratics, he takes the negative statements of Augustine concerning Hermes and the *Asclepius* and inverts them and applies them in the positive sense. That is, he inverts St. Augustine's judgment of the *Asclepius*. Although *Asclepius* 26 is actually a lament of the overthrow of Egyptian magical religion by Greek rational philosophy, Bruno turns this into a lament of the overthrow of magical religion by traditional Christianity. Although *Asclepius* 26 posits a *return* of the ancient Egyptian gods after decadent Greek religion had run its course, Bruno posits a return to the ancient magical religion, after what he considers to be the "decadent" Christian religion had run its course. Bruno's *return* to the "primordial origin" will bring about a new and higher synthesis, a new religion of the world and even a new world empire based on Hermetic magic.

Nevertheless, Bruno still saw value in religious façade of Christianity as a tool that the *magus* could use to control the masses; however, he did not believe that Jesus should have any special position, or right to a special status within his new "Hermetic Christianity." As we saw, Bruno considered himself superior to Jesus, believing Jesus to be, in some sense, a "christ amongst the christs." Bruno's attitude towards Jesus can be detected in the New Age doctrine of the Ascended Masters, where Jesus is a "master amongst masters," which we will discuss later.

c. The Brunian Religion of the Goddess

As discussed, *Cantus circaeus* was the theoretical basis of the magical reform, where the *magus* learns to solicit the powers of "solar darkness." *Lo spaccio de la bestia trionfante* announces Bruno's intentions for the new world government and religion, while *De la causa, principio e uno* provides its metaphysical framework. As we will see, *La cena de le ceneri* elaborates how this new one world religion and government will function. And in *Gli eroici furori*, Bruno provides the ethical framework and method of how the *god-magus* can contemplate or worship the Divinity within the new metaphysical and politico-religious system. Annie Besant, former leader of the Theosophical Society and New Age Mother calls him "Theosophy's Apostle." The fact that she gave an exposition on his philosophy, pointing out that *De la causa* and *Del infinito*

⁶¹³ Saint Augustine, "De Civitate Dei," *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. II, ed. Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, trans. Rev. Marcus Dods (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprint 1997) 6, 23; 18, 23. According to St. Augustine in 6, 23, although Hermes predicts the Christian overthrow of paganism, when he does this, "he speaks as one who is a friend to these same mockeries of the demons, and does not clearly express the name of Christ. On the contrary, he deplores, as if it had already taken place, the future abolition of those things by the observance of which there was a resemblance of heaven, -- he bears witness to Christianity by a kind of mournful prophecy."

universo e mondi were the “foundations of the whole edifice of our philosophy” and “*Gli Heroici Furori*,” contained “the application of his philosophy to conduct and the description of his ideal,” shows Bruno’s enduring influence in early twentieth century esoteric circles, right into the New Age Movement.⁶¹⁴ In the least, it shows how the *corpus* of his work was interpreted by esotericists, even if it was not how he might have intended it.

During Bruno’s travels to England, he also became a member of the strange cult of Diana that associated the goddess of hunting with the virgin Queen of England as well as with the less virginal goddess of erotic love, Venus.⁶¹⁵ In *La cena*, Bruno presented his messianic mission to reconcile Europe. He promised a “vast, mystical universal empire” to Elizabeth, the Queen of England. She will be a universal ruler and a vision of natural divinity.⁶¹⁶ In the *Eroici*, he called her “Amphitrite,” and in *De la causa*, the “celestial Elizabeth.”⁶¹⁷ Only a few years later, Edmund Spenser would write his *Fairie Queene* (1590) promoting similar ideas and associating the monarch with the planetary god Mercury or Hermes. Faivre says that in the *Fairie Queene*, Elizabeth is Gloriana, “who revives in the very bosom of Protestantism the Medieval notion of a World-Emperor who will restore the Golden Age by repairing the ravages caused by Adam’s Fall.”⁶¹⁸

In *La cena*, using imagery of a spiritualized Mount Olympus, Bruno hoped that both France and England would join forces and become “one.” According to Bruno, his Mount Olympus exists on a higher and invisible spiritual plane in both England and France. He sketches a picture of the island of Great Britain and continental France actually encompassing one gigantic unified mountain range, extending below the sea. The highest point on the island of Britain is the summit. Like the celestial twins Castor and Pollux, or the Dioscuri, gods of “bravery and dexterity in fight,”⁶¹⁹ the countries were not two but one.

Since Casaubon had not yet proven that the *Corpus Hermeticum* had been written in the second century after Jesus Christ, Bruno believed that when these countries would join forces, they could revalue “degenerate” Christianity back to the original source of divine revelation to be found in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, not in the Hebrew Bible. For him, Judaism had been derived from Hermetic teachings and then diluted. By basing itself upon Judaism, Christianity made a

⁶¹⁴ Annie Besant, *Giordano Bruno: Theosophy’s Apostle in the Sixteenth Century and The Story of Giordano Bruno* (Adyar: The Theosophist Office, 1913) 11.

⁶¹⁵ *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, 82.

⁶¹⁶ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 289.

⁶¹⁷ *Cause, Principle and Unity*, 33.

⁶¹⁸ Antoine Faivre, *The Eternal Hermes: from Greek God to Alchemical Magus*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin (Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1995) 41.

⁶¹⁹ *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature, and Art*, 194.

mistake and diluted the perennial Egyptian teachings even further.⁶²⁰ Seeing that Bruno's messianic twins, France and England, were modeled upon the warlike Dioscuri, we should not assume that the unity of the rest of Europe would be achieved by peaceful means. That is to say, Bruno was not offering a more peaceful solution to the religious wars, but was subtly encouraging others to escalate the violence and sacrifice themselves for his ideal. Once the Brunian "peace" was enforced through an even greater cataclysmic violence, a Hermetic "Christianity" could be established upon which everyone would have to agree. The center and unifying ritual of this religion would be the Hermetic Eucharist, to which the title of the book refers.⁶²¹

"Ash Wednesday" is, of course, the beginning of the Christian Lenten period, pointing towards Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross. In the way that Ash Wednesday points towards Easter in the traditional Christian liturgical calendar, Bruno's writings point towards his own death and hoped for "re-birth," which will eventually establish the Brunian religion and state. On top of his imaginary Mt. Olympus, Bruno proposed the institution of a new sacrificial system that began with his body, in the same way that Jesus' body instituted the Christian religion, together with its liturgical system. He said that "if this summit reaches the tranquil zone of air, it proves that this is one of those highest mountains and is perhaps in the region of the happiest living creatures. Alexander of Aphrodisias argues that Mount Olympus displays, in the ashes of the sacrifices, the condition both of a very high mountain and of the air lying above the extremes and limbs of the earth."⁶²² Gosselin and Lerner say that Bruno's connection between "sacrifices" and the "happiest living creatures" is an allusion to the nectar and ambrosia, which was consumed on the mountain of the gods in Greek mythology. Given the fact that Bruno saw no real difference between the pagan and Christian sacrifice, they believe that he is really alluding to the traditional Christian Eucharist, where the bread and wine is "true food and drink." From the imaginary sacrifice on Mt. Olympus, Bruno created the basis for the rituals of his new religion:

As the universe is universally animated by God, so too is the sacrament. By taking the sacrament, men can share in the same animistic forces which cause the universe to move. Thus Bruno interprets the Eucharist in its relationship to the Copernican theory. If the earth moves (because it is an ensouled being), then the Eucharist is alive, animated by the impressed force of God's *spiritus*. All men of good will can accept this definition of the Eucharist, and, if they do, the various confessional formulations of the Sacrament are transcended. Men are thereby united on a higher plane.⁶²³

⁶²⁰ "Introduction," Giordano Bruno's *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, 50.

⁶²¹ "Introduction," Giordano Bruno's *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, 35.

⁶²² *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, 161.

⁶²³ "Introduction," Giordano Bruno's *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, 49.

Connected to the new sacrifices he announced in *La cena*, in his *Eroici*, Bruno prophesized “the imminent return of the Egyptian religion through the revolution of the ‘great year of the world’.”⁶²⁴ As stated, since things always happen in contraries, a “return to the same” would begin through a biologized conjunction of opposites. In the opinion of the Bruno, science, customs and culture had reached a low point, meaning that the beginning of a new cycle or new era was about to begin. According to Bruno, the new era “is that space of time in which, through the most diverse customs and effects, and by the most opposite and contrary means, it returns to the same again.” As with the sun, the end of one season is the beginning of the new. Bruno said, “Therefore, now that we have been in the dregs of the sciences, which have brought forth the dregs of opinions, which are the cause of the dregs of customs and of works, we may certainly expect to return to the better condition.”⁶²⁵ That is to say, a reversal was on the horizon. In the new age, a re-vamped Egyptian religion and empire would return, under the mantle of the virgin Queen Elizabeth I. Yates confirms Bruno’s vision for political reform:

Since the states of the world go by contraries; when it is in a very bad state it may expect to return to a good state. When it is in a very good state, as once in Egypt, the fall into darkness is to be expected... The implication is that the world being now at its lowest ebb of ‘opinions’ and ‘works’, the nadir of that fall into darkness prophesied in the Lament, it may now expect to return back into such light and splendour as Egypt enjoyed in the days of Hermes Trismegistus when men consorted with gods and demons and were most religious.⁶²⁶

D. Tommaso Campanella’s Hermetic New Age in *Città del Sole*

1. A Short Background

Although we might consider that Bruno’s idea to create a new world religion and government out of the ashes of the old exaggerated, the idea did not die and continued to have a life of its own. As we will see, the New World Order is not so much a “New Age concept,” but an age-old hermetic one. Although certainly a hermetic dream, reaching back to Antiquity, we have shown that Bruno was the first to promote it in modern times. After Bruno’s death, the idea was developed further and reinterpreted by Tommaso Campanella (1568-1639) in his late Renaissance classic, *La Città del Sole* or *The City of the Sun*.⁶²⁷ The title is an allusion to Heliopolis, the city where Helios, the subterranean sun god, reigns. The Latin translation, completed around 1613, was first published in Germany as *Civitas Solis* (1623). It was later published in Paris in 1637.

⁶²⁴ Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, 279.

⁶²⁵ *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, Part II, I, 2.

⁶²⁶ Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, 279.

⁶²⁷ Tommaso Campanella, *La Città del Sole: Dialogo Poetico/The City of the Sun: A Poetical Dialogue*, trans. Daniel J. Donno (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981).

The original Italian version of the text was written in 1602, but did not appear in print until the beginning of the 20th century.⁶²⁸

Campanella's *Città del Sole* is a communistic utopia, where the inhabitants, known as Solarians, have supposedly come to a knowledge of God through pure reason. The book is a poetical dialogue between a knight of the Order of Hospitalers of Saint John in Jerusalem and a sailor who had sailed to the "new world" with Columbus. According to Campanella, they are like Christians in many ways. They say their prayers to God in heaven, directing them upwards toward the sky, while facing each of the four cardinal points. Their altar is shaped like a solar disk and constructed in such a way that the sun shines on it during rituals.⁶²⁹ Although they live in an unknown territory, they know all of the ancient astronomers as well as Copernicus, whom they admire. They are interested in the astronomers' opinions, because they are interested in how the world came into existence and how it will end. The sailor from Genoa says:

And if so, when; what the stars are made of, and who inhabits them. They believe that what Christ said about the signs from the stars, the sun and the moon is true, though fools deny it; but the end of things will come upon them like a thief in the night. Therefore these people await the renewal of the world and perhaps its end. They claim that it is difficult to determine whether the world was created out of nothing or out of the wreck of other worlds or out of chaos; but they believe it likely – indeed, certain – that it was created. They are enemies of Aristotle and call him a pedant.⁶³⁰

By discussing the various theories concerning the creation of the world as a facet of the beliefs of the Solarians, whether *ex nihilo* by a transcendent Creator or by some kind of Platonic demiurge, Campanella plays it safe. In any case, the Solarians (like Campanella) are apocalyptic in their religious outlook, and despite inhabiting a supposedly perfect society, they await the immanent destruction and renewal of the world. Although they honour the sun, moon and stars, they only worship God, who is located somewhere up in the sky. Although they consider the sun to be the father and the earth the mother, still, they also consider the earth to be a great beast (*Oroboros*?), and humans "live within it as worms live within us." The sailor says that given their belief in the immortality of the soul, they believe that upon death, the good souls join the company of good spirits and bad souls join the company of bad spirits. They are not sure, but think that it is reasonable that the good will go up into the sky, while the bad will go somewhere underground.⁶³¹ Surprisingly, even though they have not been introduced to Christianity, they

⁶²⁸ Daniel J. Donno, "Introduction," Tommaso Campanella's *La Città del Sole: Dialogo Poetico/The City of the Sun: A Poetical Dialogue*, trans. Daniel J. Donno (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981) 19.

⁶²⁹ *Città del Sole*, 107.

⁶³⁰ *Città del Sole*, 109.

⁶³¹ *Città del Sole*, 113.

worship God in a Triune form. They are however unable to distinguish between the theological persons. “They do know, however, that in God there is procession and relation as between Self and Self; and therefore they believe that all things are composed of power, wisdom and insofar as they have being.” In a very real sense, these Solarians resemble many Enlightenment Deists. According to the sailor, it is because they have not yet been introduced to the Christian revelation.⁶³² However, it is obvious that Campanella believes that the Christian revelation is not necessary to create a so-called perfect society.

Although the Solarians live in a perfect society, where everyone, even females, is equal, still, society is very hierarchical and regulated by specialized priests. Deviating from the norms is harshly punished. According to the sailor, the Solarians believe that all ills in society were born with the inception of private property. This includes the development of marriage and the responsibility for children.⁶³³ According to this logic, when men and women started to get married and jointly care for their children, self-love developed and social problems arose.

Instead of offering positions to family members and children, people are given positions based on merit. They are forbidden to give gifts to each other and everything is held in common and no one lacks anything.⁶³⁴ Men and women perform the same tasks, although men are given the heavier chores.⁶³⁵ Everything is regulated: from the type of clothing that they wear to the type and amount of food that they eat, which is strictly determined according to their body type and weight.⁶³⁶ That is to say, when they get too fat, they are forced to diet. As in a monastery, they eat together in silence in a communal refectory. Someone reads a passage or text aloud during the meals. It is a capital offense for women to use cosmetics or wear high heels, and everyone is forced to exercise. The sailor says that there is no jealousy among them, because “for no necessity to their pleasure is lacking, and the rules governing procreation are religiously observed for public, not for private ends.”⁶³⁷

Like animals, children are bred by matching physically complimentary couples.⁶³⁸ If a man or woman should fall in love, when they are deemed physically unsuitable for each other,

⁶³² *Città del Sole*, 115.

⁶³³ *Città del Sole*, 39. “They claim that property comes into existence when men have separate homes with their children and wives. From this self-love is born; for in order to increase the wealth or dignity of his offspring or leave him heir to his goods, every man becomes publicly rapacious if he is strong and fearless, or avaricious, deceitful, and hypocritical if he is weak. When self-love is destroyed, only concern for the community remains.”

⁶³⁴ *Città del Sole*, 39.

⁶³⁵ *Città del Sole*, 49.

⁶³⁶ *Città del Sole*, 48-51.

⁶³⁷ *Città del Sole*, 61.

⁶³⁸ *Città del Sole*, 57. “The officials, all of whom are priests, and the learned do not try to procreate without first submitting to numerous conditions and restrictions stretching over many days. The reason for this is that those who are much given to speculation tend to be deficient in animal spirits and fail to bestow their intellectual powers upon their progeny because they are always thinking of other matters. Thus they produce offspring of poor quality. As a

they are not allowed to have intercourse during fertile times. Only when the woman is already pregnant (by another more suitable man) or sterile would intercourse be permitted by the Council of Procreation, whose governance falls under the rule of the prince “Love.” The Council determines who is allowed to procreate with whom.⁶³⁹ Young people are “evaluated” by allowing them to wrestle in the nude. Based on the quality and size of their sexual organs, the Council matches couples for optimal breeding. Then, “every third night, after they have all bathed, the young people are paired off for intercourse. Tall handsome girls are not matched with any but tall brave men, while fat girls are matched with thin men and thin girls with fat ones, so as to avoid extremes in their offspring.” The boys and girls may only have sex after properly digesting their food and not before saying their prayers, where they ask God for a “good issue.” The time and place of procreation is determined astrologically.⁶⁴⁰ Men and women can have special relationships, but these must be limited to platonic friendships, when their physical compatibility is negatively evaluated by the Council of Procreation. In this way, all social ills are believed to be avoided. In short, Campanella is saying that he believes that the “perfect society” can be attained without Christianity. Nevertheless, it is attained at a terrible cost, paradoxically, by sacrificing personal freedom, intimacy and loving relationships.

In *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, Yates compares Campanella’s *Città* to Bruno’s, *Lo spaccio della bestia trionfante* (1584) and *La cena de le ceneri* (1584), discussed earlier.⁶⁴¹ Yates claims that all of these works were meant to be a “glorification of the magical religion of the Egyptians.”⁶⁴² Although Campanella was younger than Bruno, it is important to remember that he wrote his utopian book only two years after his compatriot was burned at the stake, and while he himself was languishing in a prison for instigating a Calabrian revolt against Spanish tyranny. In fact, Campanella had even spent time in the same Roman Inquisition prison as Bruno, albeit in a different dungeon, for teaching the heretical doctrine of the world-soul or *anima mundi*.⁶⁴³

Yates also claims that the goal of Campanella’s magic was a *one world government* and *one world religion* of solar worship, by which the bloody religious battles of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation would be put to an end. He believed that with the advent of a new

consequence, they take care to mate with energetic, spirited, handsome women. Men who have a flighty, capricious disposition are matched with women who are fat, even-tempered, and gentle.”

⁶³⁹ *Città del Sole*, 63.

⁶⁴⁰ *Città del Sole*, 55. “At the proper time, the matron goes around and opens the cell doors. The exact hour this must be done is determined by the Astrologer and the Physician, who always endeavor to choose a time when Mercury and Venus are oriental to the Sun in a benefic house and are seen by Jupiter, Saturn, and Mars with benefic aspect.”

⁶⁴¹ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 373.

⁶⁴² *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 211.

⁶⁴³ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 363-364.

millennium, the sun was approaching closer to the earth. Whereas some interpreted the societal upheaval, created by the Reformation, as a sign of the “end,” Campanella saw the sun’s imminent approach to earth as the astrological sign pointing towards the end of one cosmic cycle and the beginning of another. Since the sun is the most powerful of all celestial bodies, according to Hermetic doctrine, in the way that the soul is the center of the human being, the sun is the center of the divine *cosmos*. Those who benefit from its energy, benefit from the divine essence (Cf. *CH*, XVI, 7-9). As *CH* XII is a talismanic image of how Aion/Eternity fits into God, and the *cosmos* fits into Aion, etc., *CH* XVI, 18, develops a similar concentric scheme: “The father of all is god; their craftsman is the sun; and the cosmos is the instrument of craftsmanship.”⁶⁴⁴ Although it can be debated whether Aion and the Demiurge or the Craftsmen are two separate entities, and are “brothers,”⁶⁴⁵ we propose that here, God = God the father; Aion/Demiurge = the Sun, etc. Because Campanella believed that the sun was a manifestation of God, he also believed that it determined not only the fate of the universe, but also the fate of all religions, including Christianity. Hence, Christianity as it had been known up to that point would “pass away,” while a new form of solar Christianity would take its place, an idea that was translated into the New Age anticipation of the “Age of Aquarius.” In a sense, both Bruno and Campanella should be seen as modern transmitters of the Hermetic tradition of solar worship. Walker elaborates on how Campanella understood the solar cycle:

The main factor in these religious changes is the approach of the sun towards the earth. When it was at its most distant point, the seat of religion was with peoples living near the equator, the sun being far enough away to rarefy and purify their spirits without burning them. As it approached nearer it made their spirits smoky, and religion passed to Egypt, where the same thing happened, the smoky period producing the worship of beasts. Thence, as the temperate region crept northwards and westwards, religion went successively to the Babylonians, Jews, Persians, Greeks, Romans, French, Germans, Spanish and now to the New World. If religions themselves are astrologically determined, it is perhaps reasonable to order the details of religious devotions in accordance with the planets.⁶⁴⁶

Around the same time, in letters to Galileo (1632), which Yates claims are suggestive of Bruno’s *La cena*, Campanella emphasizes the “newness” of his world vision: “Queste novità di verità antiche di novi mondi, nove stelle, novi sistemi... son principio di secol novo.”⁶⁴⁷ In the thought of the hermetic *magus* Campanella, the philosophical connection between the New Age and the

⁶⁴⁴ As an aside, this parallel relationship shows how Aion was understood to correspond to the sun god, Helios/Apollo, in late Antiquity.

⁶⁴⁵ See Copenhaver, “Notes,” *Hermetica*, 108.

⁶⁴⁶ D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic: from Ficino to Campanella* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1958) 217.

⁶⁴⁷ Tommaso Campanella, *Lettere*, ed. Spanpanato, as quoted in *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 383.

New World Order, finds concrete expression. However, given Campanella's involvement in bloody revolts, he also believed that catastrophic violence would be needed in order to end the violence and establish "peace" – according to his precepts.⁶⁴⁸ Together with the pope, who would become the spiritual head of Campanella's new "Solar Catholicism," a universal Hermetic monarchy would be established, where "One alone would reign and thus universal peace and justice would be secured."⁶⁴⁹

In Campanella's vision, there must an organized world state under One ruler, who will be either himself both temporal and spiritual head, as in a papal theocracy, or the Spanish, or the French, Monarchy working in unison with the Pope as the spiritual head of the world state. Campanella needs such a world state for the full expansion of his City of the Sun, for the universal establishment of the magical reform in which a priesthood of Catholic Magi keep the City in permanent happiness, health and virtue, and the religion of the City is in perfect accord with its scientific view of the world, that is to say with natural magic.⁶⁵⁰

Campanella displays nostalgia for a united Catholic Christianity, before the Reformation. He, however, had little regard for traditional Christian dogma, even though in his own mind he was a pious Christian. Like Bruno, for Campanella, Christianity was a useful tool to control the masses. Therefore, he consciously underplayed the significance of Jesus' suffering on the Cross, while emphasizing *Christus triumphans*.⁶⁵¹ His goal was the transformation of the Catholic Church into an all powerful "Egyptian" theocracy, "so powerful that it regulated by scientific magic the celestial influences and through them the whole life of the people."⁶⁵² Campanella believed that the new age of magical Hermetism and natural religion was perfectly compatible with his interpretation of Christianity, where Christ would be revered as a great *magus*, and Campanella would be chosen as its new Messiah. It would be governed by the stars, and especially the worship of the sun, an image of the magician himself.⁶⁵³ After the initial purifying violence, he would establish his City of the Sun and the new age of peace and tranquility would be inaugurated.⁶⁵⁴ Yates says:

Calabria must prepare the New Age by throwing off the Spanish tyranny and establishing a republic embodying the new religion and ethic. Campanella is the Messiah of the new age,

⁶⁴⁸ John M. Headley, *Tommaso Campanella and the Transformation of the World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) 336.

⁶⁴⁹ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 385.

⁶⁵⁰ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 386.

⁶⁵¹ *Tommaso Campanella and the Transformation of the World*, 320.

⁶⁵² *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 378, 387.

⁶⁵³ See, for example, *CH XI*, 15: "Eternity [Aion], therefore, is an image of god; the cosmos is an image of eternity [Aion]; and the sun is an image of the cosmos. The human is an image of sun." "Death is not the destruction of things that have been combined but the dissolution of the union. They say that change is death because the body is dissolved and life passes on to the unseen."

⁶⁵⁴ *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 366.

designated both by astrological prediction and by religious prophecy to lead the world into another era. The part of Christianity in this new era will remain important. Christianity has had its prophets, its thaumaturges, its experts in the art of divination, its miracle workers. Christ was a great and inspired magus and legislator. Therefore a *rapprochement* can be made between Catholic mysteries and the religion of natural magic. Hence Christian sources and prophecies, particularly those of St. Catherine, St. Brigit, and St. Vincent Ferrer, are cited by Campanella, also Savonarola, the Abbot Joachim, Petrarch, and Dante. Above all the Sibyls are the prophetesses to whom Campanella most frequently appeals, and he sees them in the Lactantian setting.⁶⁵⁵

2. Announcement of the New Age

It has been suggested that Sir Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516) was an inspiration for the *Città del Sole*. More's *Utopia* was more like a form of rationalistic Christian communism, having less to do with formal magic. Furthermore, by giving it the title *U-topia* (not a place), More implicitly acknowledged its unrealizability on this side of the Eschaton. Campanella's vision, in contrast, is not utopian, but temporal. It is meant to be realized somewhere in Europe. Yates claims that, although most so-called utopian literature drew upon Plato's *Republic* for inspiration, Bruno and Campanella drew especially on the hermetic text the *Picatrix* and its magical city, Adocentyn, discussed earlier. Adocentyn was the solar city on the mountain of the moon, where the Thrice Great Hermes was said to have built a temple to the Sun. The inhabitants were "tamed" by magical talismans.⁶⁵⁶ Yates states:

If we relate (as I suggested in an earlier chapter) the hermetic City of Adocentyn and the Temple of the Sun in *Picatrix* to the account of the 'natural' Egyptian religion, and the lament for its decay in the *Asclepius*, we find there, among the prophecies of the future restoration of the Egyptian religion and laws the words, 'The gods who exercise dominion over the earth will be restored one day and installed in a City at the extreme limit of Egypt, a City which we be founded towards the setting sun, and into which will hasten, by land and sea, the whole race of mortal men.' Here, surely, in that foundation text for Renaissance magic, the *Asclepius*, is a prophecy of Campanella's universal City of the Sun.⁶⁵⁷

As *active* participants in the Mind of God or even as the Mind of God, they believed themselves to be divine agents, who were to bring about the new age, through their talismanic writings. The rest of humanity was merely a passive herd. Due to its own ignorance, it was unable to prevent its impending annihilation back into the loving fire of Mother Nature. In order to launch the new age, the Renaissance *magi* had to follow the apocalyptic program set out in *Asclepius* 26. Creation and destruction were their right as "Aion." They themselves would consume the world with their own divine fire, and bring about the destruction of the "old world" so that a "new world" could be created out of its ashes. From their perspective, God (i.e. the World or the Divine

⁶⁵⁵ Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, 364.

⁶⁵⁶ Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, 370.

⁶⁵⁷ Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, 370-371.

Mind) is probably in effect the sum total of all minds, but directed by the most conscious minds, i.e. the Aionic *magi* themselves. The morality of initiating a project of apocalyptic destruction was not questioned, since destruction was merely one side of the *natural processes* of “creation.” In the animistic scheme of the *Corpus*, destruction was a fated aspect of the world’s Destiny, over and over again. As the new Copernican science based on heliocentricity had overturned and *reversed* the old Ptolemaic science, their “new” religion would overturn and *reverse* the “old” religion, that of traditional Christianity. Their willingness to call it “Christianity” was merely a propaganda tool to get the “herds,” i.e. the unconscious masses, to follow.

3. The Idea Lives On

The idea of a magical world empire was not confined to Italy. As discussed, in England the strange cult of Diana positioned Queen Elizabeth I as the androgynous “Protestant Saviour” of Europe.⁶⁵⁸ Before Elizabeth, the “Empire of Charles V had aroused visions of World Empire for the House of Hapsburg.”⁶⁵⁹ Other royal houses had similar ambitions. Yates speculates that John Dee (author of *Monas Hieroglyphica*, 1564) traveled to Prague to somehow link the empire of Elizabeth I with that of Rudolf II, against the Spanish Hapsburgs and the Jesuits.⁶⁶⁰ Dee left Prague, unable to convince Rudolf to go against his Spanish relatives; however, she believes that his missionary activities produced a strange harvest. In *The Art of Memory*, Yates speculates that Bruno’s political and religious ideas were perhaps the origin of both Rosicrucianism and Freemasonry, although no direct connection between the two types of secret societies and their establishment has ever been proven.⁶⁶¹

It has been shown that the so-called ‘Rosicrucian manifestos’, published in Germany in the early seventeenth century, are heavily influenced by Dee’s philosophy, and that one of them contains a version of the *Monas hieroglyphica*. The Rosicrucian Manifestos call for a universal reformation of the whole wide world through Magic and Cabala. The mythical Christian Red Cross (Christian Rosencreuz), the opening of whose magical tomb is a signal for the general reformation, may perhaps, in one of his aspects, be a teutonised memory of John Dee and his Christian Cabala, confirming earlier suspicions that ‘Christian Cabala’ and ‘Rosicrucianism’ may be synonymous.⁶⁶²

Not only in the courts of Elizabeth I and Rudolf, but the Hermetic aspirations of *one world empire* can also be seen in the court of the French king, Henri III d’Alençon (1574-1589), son of Henri II and Catherine de Medici. For example, Bruno dedicated his *De umbris idearum* (1582)

⁶⁵⁸ *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, 142.

⁶⁵⁹ *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, 144.

⁶⁶⁰ *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, 104.

⁶⁶¹ *The Art of Memory*, 294.

⁶⁶² *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* 105.

to Henri, and was sent on missionary activities by the French king.⁶⁶³ The Queen Mother, known for her patronage of the arts was also an ardent supporter of magicians and astrologers, orchestrated festivals in France in the great Florentine Renaissance style.⁶⁶⁴

When in the *Ballet comique de la reine* of 1581, the product of the festival tradition which she founded, Catherine saw Jupiter and Mercury descending from heaven in response to the incantatory music and singing, it is doubtful, great artist though she was, whether she saw this as a purely artistic representation. More probably, for her, such a performance was in the nature of an extended and complicated talisman, an arrangement of the planetary gods in a favourable order, invoked by favourable incantations, resulting, not only in a marvelous work of art, but in a magical action by which something was done, by which the favour of the heavens was actually drawn down in the aid of the French Monarchy and for the pacification of the wars of religion.⁶⁶⁵

In the French court, the hermetic dream was revived by Louis XIV (1638-1715), the Sun King. The rule of the “Most Christian Sun King” is, by many accounts, one of the best examples of an “enlightened despot.” Like the Italian Renaissance tyrants before him, Louis did not seem to think that his dictatorial rule was in contradiction to the basic precepts of his own interpretation of Christianity. For example, he commissioned the Apollo Gallery in the Louvre to announce his worldwide messianic reign of power and glory that would begin in France. The Gallery was recently opened to the public. All of the talismanic and Hermetic gods are there to escort “Apollo incarnate,” i.e. Louis, through the celestial spheres. At the far end of the gallery is Neptune (or, Poseidon) and his ill-gotten wife, Amphitrite. As we will see, she is Bruno’s symbol of the *cosmos* beyond the *cosmos* or visible world, revealing a probable influence of Bruno’s *Eroici*. The planetary geniuses (decans or demons), Bacchus (or, Dionysos) and Ariadne; Night or Diana pulled by a chariot of stags; Morpheus (a reference to melancholy) is depicted as a dark-red god of dreams. Morpheus was under the authority of Hermes and honored at the seats of dream oracles and the health spas of Asclepius;⁶⁶⁶ Ceres (or Persephone) implores the sun, or Apollo, and finally the crowning of the Sibyls. They announce the messianic reign of the Sun King Louis, “son” of Apollo. In the same way that Christian Hermeticists believed the Sibyls had announced the birth of Christ before the event, on the Gallery ceiling, they announce the birth of Louis. Both Louis and the main designer of the gallery, Le Brun, were profoundly influenced by Campanella’s hermetic book *Città del Sole* and its propagation of a universal harmony, orchestrated by “Christian” solar priests. The Gallery’s guide book states:

⁶⁶³ Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, 192.

⁶⁶⁴ The Civilization of the Renaissance in Italy, 281-282.

⁶⁶⁵ Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition, 176.

⁶⁶⁶ The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature and Art, 201. “According to Hesiod Dreams are the children of Night, and brothers and sisters of Death and Sleep.”

Le Brun, après avoir prévu d'orner les frontons de la Cour carrée de figuration du zodiaque, commence à la galerie d'Apollon d'exprimer en images cette harmonie universelle de la terre et des astres. Comme le soleil est à la fois le centre et le reflet de l'harmonie cosmique, le roi-soleil est le centre, le maître spirituel et liturgique de son royaume, lui qui est né un dimanche, et dont l'horoscope a été -- coïncidence -- écrit par Tommaso Campanella, auteur contesté de *La Cité du Soleil*. Cette iconologie sera développée avec ardeur à Versailles, dans les salons des planètes, l'appartement des bains ou lors de la commande des statues du parterre d'eau. Elle guide aussi le décor des navires et des galères royales, sculptées d'allégories.⁶⁶⁷

⁶⁶⁷ Geneviève Bresc-Bautier, *L'Album de la galerie d'Apollon au Louvre* (Paris: Gallimard Musée du Louvre, 2004) 18.

II. Suicidal philosophy

A. Actaeon: Hunter, Lover, Magician

1. Another Interpretation of Bruno's Death

In the previous sections, we discussed how Bruno viewed Reality, including his ambition to create a new solar religion and society, which continued to live on in Campanella's *Città del Sole*. Now that we have discussed his cosmological, religious and political vision, we are now in the position to discuss how he hoped to establish it. Therefore, we must once again approach the question of Bruno's death. According to Girard and Burkert, the first religions and, hence, civilizations were established through sacrificial rituals, which were developed as a cover-up for a founding murder, but also as a means to regulate potentially annihilatory violence. Should Bruno have intuited the sacrificial scapegoat mechanism, is it not possible that he also intuited that he would need an original sacrifice upon which to found his new solar religion and civilization?

Initially, it looked as if Bruno wanted to be freed and was willing to give into the Inquisition's demands. In Venice, it did not look as if Bruno was in the position to offer himself as a willing sacrifice for his Hermetic ideals. The situation changed, however, when Bruno was extradited to Rome. In Rome, Bruno's case did not seem to have a priority and the Inquisition seemed to forget him for almost eight years. In an attempt to expedite pending cases, Robert Bellarmine took Bruno on. In Rome, he now refused to recant the propositions he had been prepared to refute in Venice. Eight years is a long time to reflect, and Bruno's attitude appeared to have changed.

Given Bruno's own personal disposition, his refusal to recant might also be interpreted as exhibiting a healthy dose of *ressentiment*. This is what the master of resentment, Friedrich Nietzsche, claimed in *Beyond Good and Evil*. He says that Bruno is a refined "vengeance-seeker" and a "brewer of poison." (*BGE*, II, "The Free Spirit", 25)⁶⁶⁸ In Greek, the term for poison is *pharmakon*, which can also mean a "magic charm" or a "remedy." Therefore, a *pharmakeus*, or a sorcerer, is also an expert in preparing *pharmakon*. As a gifted classical philologist and philosopher, we suspect that Nietzsche had some insight into the nature of Bruno's "profession." Based on Nietzsche's estimation that Bruno was a "vengeance-seeker"

⁶⁶⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1973, 1990) 56. "How poisonous, how cunning, how bad every protracted war makes one when it cannot be waged with open force! How *personal* a protracted fear makes one, a protracted keeping watch for enemies, for possible enemies! These outcasts of society, long persecuted and sorely hunted – also the enforced recluses, the Spinozas and Giordano Brunos – in the end always become refined vengeance-seekers and brewers of poison, even if they do so under the most spiritual masquerade and perhaps without being themselves aware of it. ... The martyrdom of the philosopher, his 'sacrifice for truth,' brings to light what there has been in him of agitator and actor; and if one has hitherto regarded him only with artistic curiosity, in the case of many a philosopher it is easy to understand the dangerous desire to see him for once in his degeneration (degenerated into 'martyr', into stage- and platform-ranter)."

and “brewer of *pharmakon*,” we are in the position to propose another possibility put forward by Ioan Couliano, mentioned above.

Couliano suggests that, in the end, Bruno might have wanted the Inquisition to condemn him to be burned at the stake, and calls him the prototype of the *leader of a new religion*.⁶⁶⁹ Bruno orchestrated his own death, as “a final act of a process” to become the priest and original sacrifice of his own religion. His offering of himself as a *holocaust*, or literally a “burnt sacrifice,” would become the “spark” needed to set off his new world order, where his new world religion and government would be the center piece. If this is true, his refusal to recant was not a sign of obstinacy or madness, but would have been an act of revenge towards the religion he wanted to re-value.⁶⁷⁰ Both Nietzsche and Couliano’s suggestions make sense in light of Girard’s theories on divinization. This implies that Bruno intuited the scapegoat mechanism and manipulated it to become the first sacrificial victim, i.e. a *pharmakos*, of his new religion as well as its high priest and founder. This decision was perhaps made easier with his rediscovery of Presocratic philosophy, especially that of Empedocles, and through this his more temporal interpretation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and its goal to become the primal man, or Aion. Such an ambivalent role reminds us of the Orphic Dionysos Zagreus, the hunter who is hunted,⁶⁷¹ but also the “render” who is himself rent.⁶⁷² Like the god Dionysos, Bruno sees himself as the destroyer, who must himself be destroyed.

2. The Goddesses: Diana and Amphitrite

The basis of Couliano’s argumentation rests on his reading of Ovid’s Actaeon Myth in *Gli eroici furori*.⁶⁷³ In *Eroici*, Bruno is “in love” with Nature, whom he calls Diana or Artemis, the goddess of hunting and woodlands, but also the daughter of Zeus and the twin sister of Apollo. Diana is the ambivalent virgin goddess of the chase, simultaneously protecting the animals she kills. She is the protective goddess of childbirth, but can also bring sickness and death to women.⁶⁷⁴ Later,

⁶⁶⁹ *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, 78.

⁶⁷⁰ *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, 78. Couliano says: “It is not impossible that Bruno envisaged being burned at the stake as the final act of a process, which had developed within himself long before: the rejection of his humanity, the transition to a state of divinity. ... If he sought to be the apostle of a new religion, Bruno no doubt accomplished that wish. His name influenced the spirit and the voice of many a freemason, freethinker, revolutionary, materialist, or anarchist of the nineteenth century... Unfortunately, all those who transformed him into the champion of their social and political cause misunderstood his work and his personality, only recalling his martyrdom in the struggle against the Church. Bruno, indeed, has become the prophet of a religion of which he would never have approved, whose ideals were, on the contrary, diametrically opposed to his own. He, the most antidemocratic of thinkers, winds up as a symbol of democracy!”

⁶⁷¹ Carl Kerényi, *Dionysos: Archetypal Image of Indestructible Life*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976) 82.

⁶⁷² Walter F. Otto, *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, trans. Robert B. Palmer (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1965) 191-192.

⁶⁷³ *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, 90-120.

⁶⁷⁴ Ed. Roy Willis, *World Mythology: The Illustrated Guide* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1993) 139.

she became associated with Artemis, as Helios was associated with Apollo, but also as Persephone, the Queen of the Underworld, was associated with her mother Demeter. As Jane Harrison says in *Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, although Demeter and Kore, or Persephone, are depicted as two distinct personalities, they represent two aspects of one divinity.⁶⁷⁵ As Diana's brother Apollo was associated with the sun, she was associated with the moon. In this sense, she resembled Selene, the goddess of the moon, and sister of Helios, but also Circe, mentioned above. She was also associated with the subterranean goddess of night and magic, Hecate,⁶⁷⁶ the sister of Leto, Apollo's mother. We have already discussed Hecate's role with respect to Empedocles' legend. She haunted crossroads and was accompanied by the dogs of the Styx. Her assistance was invoked by hunters, magicians and at all sacrifices.⁶⁷⁷ The myriad level of developing associations of one god with all the others, in a sense, was a narrative way to express the developing idea in Antiquity that all of reality was "One," *Hen to Pan*.

Bruno makes a further association linking Diana to the sea goddess, Amphitrite. As we recall, Bruno wanted to associate this Greek goddess with the universal monarch, the virgin Queen Elizabeth. He says that beyond Diana, who represents visible Nature, lays Amphitrite. Amphitrite was a lesser-known divinity with no separate worship. She was the wife of Poseidon, who carried her off, after seeing her dance on the island of Naxos.⁶⁷⁸ The story is an allusion to the better known story of Poseidon's brother, Hades, who carried off Persephone. Bruno's association of Diana with Amphitrite constitutes an innovation. In a coded way, Bruno is saying that he, like the Presocratics, participates in the Mysteries that celebrate the chthonic powers of the Underworld and death. Bruno says that Amphitrite is "the source of all numbers, of all species, of all reasons, which is the monad, the real essence of the being of all, and if he does not see it in its essence, in absolute light, he sees it in its seed, which is like unto it, which is its image; for from the monad, which is the divinity, proceeds this monad which is nature, the universe, the world, where it is beheld and reflected, as the sun is in the moon by means of which it is illuminated."⁶⁷⁹ For Bruno, "As below, so above."

Diana is an image of Amphitrite as Bruno, the microtheos of the macrotheos, is an image of Diana. Since Amphitrite is beyond visible nature, she is the equivalent of the chaotic *prima materia* and the origin of all there is. Although Amphitrite is the origin of numbers and causes, "Diana is 'that one who is the same entity, that entity which is comprehensible nature, in which

⁶⁷⁵ Jane Ellen Harrison, *Prolegomena to the Study of the Greek Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1903, 1991) 272.

⁶⁷⁶ *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature, and Art*, 572-573.

⁶⁷⁷ *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature, and Art*, 271.

⁶⁷⁸ *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature, and Art*, 29.

⁶⁷⁹ *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, Part II, 68.

burns the sun and the splendour of the higher nature, according to which, unity is both the generated and the generating, the producer and produced.”⁶⁸⁰ This means that in his magical kingdom, the *magus*-priest is to the “universal monarch” what Diana is to Amphitrite. Both are worshipped, but the “monarch” is only accessible via the mediation of the priest-*magus*, in the same way that “Amphitrite” is only accessible via Diana. The subterranean sun supposedly burns in Diana-Bruno, and is where unity is generated.

3. The Brunian Mysteries of Diana

a. Stag Hunting

In Antiquity, it was well-known that Diana’s favourite animal was the stag or deer, which she held sacred. During the month of *Artemisios* (March-April), the festival of Diana was celebrated with stag hunting, probably replacing an earlier tradition of human sacrifice.⁶⁸¹ Comparison with the Ovid’s version of the myth in *Metamorphoses* will give us a good idea of how Bruno envisioned divinization. In *Metamorphoses* or “Transfigurations,” Ovid tells the story of the young hunter Actaeon who, as a devotee of Diana/Artemis, stumbled upon the virgin goddess bathing in a spring. Enraged and as a punishment for his indiscretion, Diana turns him into one of her favorite *sacred* stags. Actaeon’s hunting dogs mistake their master for prey and pursue him. When they finally catch him in the chase, they shred him to bits and devour him. From a Girardian perspective, the dogs correspond to the mimetic frenzy of the lynch mob. In Ovid’s version, the poet questions the goddess’s sense of justice;⁶⁸² however, in Bruno’s version, no such questions arise. He re-interprets Actaeon’s dogs as the hunter’s thoughts and his murder as a willing suicide.⁶⁸³ For Bruno, to become the sacrificial animal of the deity is the preferred way that the *magus* unites with his object of desire: *Deus sive Natura*. The hunter, who pursues divine wisdom or *gnosis*, realizes that the only way to grasp the object, which he has turned into his

⁶⁸⁰ *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, Part II, 69.

⁶⁸¹ *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature, and Art*, 71-72. “A relic of this yearly custom observed at Sparta, of flogging the boys till they bled, at the altar of a deity not unknown elsewhere and named *Artemis Orthia* (the upright) and probably from her still posture in the antiquated wooden image.”

⁶⁸² Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 57-58. “He fled where often he’d followed in pursuit, Fled his own folk, for shame! He longed to shout ‘I am Actaeon, look, I am your master!’ Words failed his will; their baying filled the sky. Blackhair bit first, a wound deep in his haunch; Next Killer; Climber fastened on his shoulder. These started late but cut across the hills and gained a lead. They held their master down till the whole pack, united, sank their teeth into his flesh. He gave a wailing scream, not human, yet a sound no stag could voice... But his friends with their glad usual shouts cheered on the pack, not knowing what they did, and looked around to find Actaeon; each louder than the rest calling Actaeon, as though he were not there; And blamed his absence and his sloth that missed the excitement of the kill. Hearing his name he turned his head. Would that he were indeed Absent! But he was there. Would that he watched, not felt, the hounds’ (his hounds’) fierce savagery! Now they are all around him, tearing deep their master’s flesh, the stag that is no stag; And not until so many countless wounds had drained away his lifeblood, was the wrath, it’s said, of chaste Diana satisfied. As the tale spread views varied; some believed Diana’s violence unjust; some praised it, as proper to her chaste virginity. Both sides found reason for their point of view.”

⁶⁸³ *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, 93.

prey, is to become the prey himself.⁶⁸⁴ Instead of recoiling from his fate, he recognizes the sameness of his identity with divine Nature. Like Empedocles, he willingly plunges into the process of chaotic fragmentation and re-absorption into the nothingness of the One. Since he has made himself equal to Eternity or Aion, he has nothing to fear. He has himself become the One. He is not only the master of time and desire, but also the master of the sacred primal fire. He is willing to destroy himself without fear for the cost to his personal identity, because he believes that individual identity is an illusion. To recognize this is to become “the One” or Aion, in the Brunian, not necessarily the ancient, sense.

b. Myths of Fragmentation and Rememberment

The myth of Actaeon greatly resembles several other myths and legends, involving the death of the god, whose body was ripped apart. In myth, as Girard points out, it appears that the trauma of the horrendous death of the god leads to the establishment of a new religion. For example, in the Orphic version of the myth of Dionysos Zagreus, the divine child was shred to pieces by his uncles, the Titans. In several versions of the death of Orpheus, he was dismembered by Dionysian Maenads for either having opposed Dionysian orgies or as a punishment for his hatred towards women. After losing Eurydice back to Persephone and Hades, Orpheus was said to have become a misogynist.⁶⁸⁵ In Euripides’ *The Bacchae*, king Pentheus’ death is eerily similar to both Dionysos and Orpheus’ deaths. In the tragedy, although Pentheus’ mother was the leader of the Dionysian Bacchantes or Maenads, he opposed the introduction of Dionysian worship in his kingdom. Dionysos tricks Pentheus into dressing like a woman in order to spy on the roving band of wild women, including his mother, Agave. His intrusion simultaneously provokes his mother and her fierce companions to mistakenly attack the king in a savage feeding frenzy.⁶⁸⁶

The story of Pentheus’ fate resembles yet another story about the prophet Tiresias, whom Circe encouraged Odysseus to consult in the Underworld. In *Metamorphoses*, Ovid tells one version of how Tiresias lost his physical sight, but gained prophetic sight. In another version of the story, like Actaeon, Tiresias was blinded after viewing the bathing Athena. However, upon

⁶⁸⁴ *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, 90ff.

⁶⁸⁵ *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature, and Art*, 438.

⁶⁸⁶ Euripides, “The Bacchae,” *Ten Plays*, trans. Paul Roche (New York, Signet Classic, 1998) 441. “His mother as priestess of the bloodbath was the first to fall upon him./ He snatched the headdress from his hair to let Agave./ wretched woman, see who it was and so not murder him./ He touched her on the cheek and cried:/ ‘Mother, it is I, your child, your Pentheus, born to you in Echion’s house./ Have mercy on me, Mother, and because of my mistakes do not kill your son – your son./ She was foaming at the mouth. Her dilated eyeballs rolled./ Her mind was gone – possessed by Bacchus / She could not hear her son./ Gripping his left hand and forearm/ And purchasing her foot against the doomed man’s ribs./ She dragged his arm off at the shoulder.../ It was not her strength that did it but the god’s power seething in her hands./ Ino, active on the other side, was ripping at his flesh,/ While Autonoe now, and the whole rapid pack, were on him./ There was a single universal howl: the moans of Pentheus – so long as he had breath –/ Mixed with their impassioned yells./ One woman carried off an arm, another a foot, boot and all./ They shredded his limbs – clawed them clean./ Not a finger but it dripped with crimson as they tossed the flesh of Pentheus like a ball.

the request of his mother, he was awarded prophetic sight and the ability to talk with animals by the goddess who blinded him.⁶⁸⁷ Ovid's version of Tiresias' story comes ominously after the legends of "Diana and Actaeon" and "Semele and the Birth of Bacchus," the other name for Dionysos.⁶⁸⁸ Couliano, therefore, believes that the *Eroici* hinges on the Actaeon story, and should be understood as a talismanic picture of dismemberment and transfiguration to be engraved into the magician's memory.⁶⁸⁹ In contrast to Ovid's interpretation, where Actaeon wishes that he were absent and not feeling the dogs tearing through his flesh,⁶⁹⁰ Bruno re-interprets Actaeon's suffering and *metamorphosis* into a stag as his deep inner desire. For "love transforms and changes into the thing that is loved":

See then, Actaeon hunted by his own dogs – pursued by his own thoughts – runs and directs these novel paces, invigorated so as to proceed divinely and 'more easily,' that is, with greater facility and with refreshed vigour 'towards the denser places,' to the deserts and the region of things incomprehensible. From being such as he first was, a common ordinary man, he becomes rare and heroic, his habits and ideas are strange, and he leads an unusual life. Here his great dogs 'give him death,' and thus ends his life according to the mad, sensual, blind, and fantastic world, and he begins to live intellectually; he lives the life of the gods, fed on ambrosia and drunk with nectar.⁶⁹¹

c. Fed to the Dogs: A Hermetic God Must Suffer

For Bruno, in the instant where Actaeon is ripped apart by his own dogs, not only has he reached, but he has also transgressed the limits of his intellectual possibilities. Therefore, he must suffer for it. The goddess turns him into the object of his lower quest, the stag, making him into a sacrificial victim of his own desire. "The great hunter saw,' he understood as much as was possible, and became the hunted. He went out for prey, and this hunter became himself the prey, by the operation of the intellect converting the things learned into itself."⁶⁹² The myth, according to Bruno, implies that Actaeon is allowed to share in the divine life of Diana, to look upon her as a creature of pure Nature, as her *sacred stag*; however, in return, he must also become her *sacrificial victim*. As Couliano puts it: "It is a matter of a hidden ritual of transition from one existential state to another, symbolized by the image of devouring, of dismemberment: 'Thus it is

⁶⁸⁷ *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature, and Art*, 614.

⁶⁸⁸ Cf. *Metamorphoses*, 51ff.

⁶⁸⁹ *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, 74-75. Couliano reproduces his own translation of Bruno's Sonnet from *Eroici furori*, I. "Young Actaeon, when destiny directs his hesitant and rash deeds, sets free his mastiffs and his greyhounds in the woods, on the scent of game. He sees in the water the most beautiful bust and face it has ever been granted a mortal or even a god to see, made of purple and alabaster and fine gold; and thus the great hunter in turns becomes the game. The large and numerous dogs quickly devoured the stag who used to go with long, light leaps to inaccessible places. Just so am I, who in my thoughts take aim at prey high up, but they turn against me, killing me with their cruel and greedy bites."

⁶⁹⁰ See *Metamorphoses*, 57-58.

⁶⁹¹ *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, Part I, 94.

⁶⁹² *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, Part I, 92.

that *large and numerous dogs put him to death*: thus it is that his life in the mad, sensual, blind, and phantasmic world ends, and he begins to live intellectually, to live the life of a god, to nourish himself on ambrosia and becomes intoxicated on nectar' (II, p. 352)."⁶⁹³ Karen Silvia de León-Jones, in *Giordano Bruno and the Kabbalah: Prophets, Magicians, and Rabbis*, says:

Death brought about by Actaeon's dogs, liberates him from his mortal and terrestrial form. Through death, his dogs, which are emblematic of thought, liberate his intellect for the contemplation and comprehension of the Infinite. At the very least, the furor is a kidnapping of the soul outside of the body, so that it can explore the Infinite and discover that it is within all beings and things. Only the mystical death, the separation from the world and worldly concerns, allows for the revelation to take place. Death frees the intellect from the darkness of the world, form the 'selva oscura,' and brings enlightenment."⁶⁹⁴

Couliano states that all of the elements in Bruno's poem are symbolic. Although in the Renaissance, dogs represented the senses, De León-Jones says that Actaeon's dogs represent "the 'operation of the will' that acts upon the intellect."⁶⁹⁵ However, the dogs also remind us of an earlier allusion to the dogs that accompany a similar goddess of magic and hunting, Hecate. His dogs are themselves portals to this subterranean knowledge. By tearing him up, the vicious dogs "initiate" him -- and all of his would be disciples -- into his Brunian Mysteries of Diana. That is to say, as Nature, the magician *actually desires* to be dismembered and devoured by Nature "herself" in order to become one with the Divinity, which he already is. As with Empedocles, Hecate initiates the magician into the subterranean mysteries. Actaeon, therefore, represents the magician and his spiritual journey towards divinity, which for the Aionic panentheist must become temporalized.

The experience of being "shred to pieces" mentally prepares him for having the same "divinizing" experience as the poet shaman, Orpheus, but also the Orphic god Dionysos Zagreus, who was simultaneously known as a hunter as well the hunted, the victim and the victimizer. The poem's self-divinizing scheme of destruction and creation brings us into the realm of Mystery Religions, but also into the realm of alchemy, whose goal is the attainment of salvific *gnosis* achieved through the *necessary suffering* of the initiate/chemist. By both mentally and, later, temporally or biologically experiencing the excruciating processes himself, his consciousness is activated on *omniformis* levels, helping him to recognize his own innate oneness with the Divinity.⁶⁹⁶ Bruno says that through his voyeuristic form of contemplation, Actaeon is

⁶⁹³ *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, 75.

⁶⁹⁴ *Giordano Bruno & the Kabbalah*, 99.

⁶⁹⁵ *Giordano Bruno & the Kabbalah*, 98.

⁶⁹⁶ *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, Part II, 66. To get a feel for his *pathos* of *Eroici*, we quote a long segment: "But yet, to no one does it seem possible to see the sun, the universal Apollo, the absolute light through supreme and most excellent species; but only its shadow, its Diana, the world, the universe, nature, which is in things light which is in the opacity

transformed into the object of his desire, the Divinity or Nature itself. He becomes “one” with the god by being consumed and absorbed into the “womb” of Mother Nature. Ingegno, however, says that:

The contemplation of the divinity which is realized in this work through the medium of nature is certainly destined by definition never to attain its final goal, the actual possession of the infinite. However, it is justified in that the ‘enthusiast’ encounters no upper limit to his contemplative ascent. Thus, *The Heroic Frenzies* concludes with one final philosophico-religious illumination: a vision of the kingdom of God and paradise, in which the human is transformed into the divine, in a metamorphosis to which not everyone can have access.⁶⁹⁷

At the pinnacle of Bruno’s contemplation, upon catching a glimpse of the Infinite, which he associates with the goddess Diana or Nature, he realizes the limitless possibilities of his own intellect. However, in his limited human form, he cannot sustain such a vision and must retreat back into himself. He claims that this is a torturous and fragmentary experience he associates with Actaeon’s fate. Since “All is One,” like Bruno’s Actaeon, he must willingly accept his dismemberment and absorption back into Nature in order to achieve union with his beloved, Diana or Nature, which is himself. Given the infinitely expanding essence of divinity and desire, Bruno’s form of self-divinization is an intellectual process that must be re-enacted over and over again, striving towards ever higher levels of contemplation and consciousness of his own divinity. This means that the *magus*, who realizes himself “god,” must, like the ancient Stoics, positively affirm the eternal process of fragmentation and re-memberment in order for his will to be in harmony with the processes of the world, or the *Ouroboros*, the tail-eating serpent. His retreat back into himself brings him into contact with Love or Eros, who propels him to reach, yet again, outside of himself, *ad infinitum*.⁶⁹⁸ Ingegno says that:

of matter, that is to say, so far as it shines in the darkness. Many then wander amongst the aforesaid paths of this deserted wood, very few are those who find the fountain of Diana. Many are content to hunt for wild beasts and things less elevated, and the greater number do not understand why, having spread their nets to the wind, they find their hands full of flies. Rare, I say, are the Actaeons to whom fate has granted the power of contemplating the nude Diana and who, entranced with the beautiful disposition of the body of nature, and let by those two lights, the twin splendour of Divine goodness and beauty become transformed into stags; for they are no longer hunters, but that which is hunted. For the ultimate and final end of this sport, is to arrive at the acquisition of that fugitive and wild body, so that the thief becomes the things stolen, the hunter becomes the thing hunted; in all other kinds of sport, for special things, the hunter possesses himself of those things, absorbing them with the mouth of his own intelligence; but in that Divine and universal One, he comes to understand to such an extent, that he becomes of necessity included absorbed, united. Whence, from common, ordinary, civil, and popular, he becomes wild, like a stag, an inhabitant of the woods; he lives god-like under that grandeur of the forest; he lives in the simple chambers of the cavernous mountains, whence he beholds the great rivers; he vegetates intact and pure from ordinary greed, where the speech of the Divine converses more freely, to which so many men have aspired who longed to taste the Divine life while upon earth, and who with one voice have said: *Ecce elongavi fugiens, et mansi in solitudine*. Thus the dogs – thoughts of Divine things, devour Actaeon, making him dead to the vulgar and the crowd, loosened from the knots of perturbation of the senses, free from the fleshly prison of matter, whence they no longer see their Diana as through a hole or window, but having thrown down the walls to the earth, the eye opens to the view of the whole horizon. So that he sees all as One.”

⁶⁹⁷ “Introduction,” Giordano Bruno’s, *Cause, Principle and Unity: and Essays on Magic*, xxi.

⁶⁹⁸ This reminds us of Nietzsche’s *Amor Fati*.

The process thus becomes an agonizing experience for the enthusiast because the more he retreats into himself, the more he is constrained by the magical force of love to come out of himself, to transform himself and live in the other [which is himself], in a never-ending succession. In this way, the two opposites, act and potency, reveal not only their own coincidence by also the coincidence between intellect and love. Therefore, knowledge and love coincide with their object in the infinite; the intellect is transformed into the intelligible, the other into the object of love. Knowledge and love are thus revealed as the two cosmic forces which are apparently separate in nature but which spring from the same potency and source.⁶⁹⁹

In fact, even here in his Actaeon Myth, we can see how Bruno has somehow mentally reversed the Hermetic understanding of the microcosm/macrocosm analogy. If we recall, *CH*, I, 12ff. recounts the myth of the creation of mankind through the copulation of the archetypal primal man and feminine “Nature.” It is the primal man, who was identified early on as Aion/Eternity, who attempting to “break through the circumference of the circles to observe the rule of the one given power of the fire,” he “stooped to look the cosmic framework,” and displayed himself to lower Nature in water (*CH*, I, 13). In a sense, Bruno’s Actaeon acts like the primal man and looks upon Nature, or Diana, bathing her pool of water. That is to say, for Bruno Actaeon is the primal man, who had to suffer for his indiscretion. Whereas in the *Corpus*, it is humanity that must suffer through its contact with matter or Nature, in Bruno, it is Actaeon.

Since there is no “higher” mental level to achieve “on earth” than Bruno has supposedly achieved in mental contemplation, and the process must include *omniformis* experiences, the next level of experience would have to be temporal or biological. By attempting to perform the *solve et coagula* on his physical or biological self, he would show that he was the ultimate alchemist and in control of the alchemical processes of destruction and creation on himself. We propose that through the experience of dissolution by real fire at the stake, the temporal alchemist would confirm his estimation of himself as Aion, who has no reason to fear dissolution or corruption. Although his particular, i.e. limited and contingent, identity as “Giordano Bruno” would undergo infinite transfigurations, as Aion, he considered himself imperishable.

4. Dead Man Alive

In Antiquity, Actaeon never had a cult or a following, as did the god Dionysos; therefore, the “god” Actaeon is entirely Bruno’s creation. Bruno is Actaeon. However, like Dionysos, by allowing himself to be *dismembered and devoured* by the Divinity, he achieves divine status and becomes the centerpiece of his new religion and “Mysteries.” In reality, Bruno is poeticizing the shamanic experience of initiation, described in previous chapters. He takes the shamanic experience and method and reframes it within his re-interpretation of Hermetic philosophy,

⁶⁹⁹ “Introduction,” Giordano Bruno’s, *Cause, Principle and Unity: and Essays on Magic*, xxii.

providing it with a seemingly, yet, peculiar intellectual dignity. Through the traumatic shamanic-like experience, Bruno believes that he will be transformed into a god. According to Bruno:

This, then, is how he is dead alive, or living dying; whence he says, ‘In a living death a dead life I live.’ He is not dead, because he lives in the object; not alive, because he is dead in himself; deprived of death, because he gives birth to thoughts; deprived of life, because he does not grow or feel in himself. He is now most dejected through meditating on the high intelligence, and the perceived feebleness of power; and most elated by the aspiration of heroic lining, which passes far beyond his limits, and is most exalted by the intellectual appetite; which has not for its fashion or aim to add number to number, is most dejected by the violence done to him by the sensual opposite which drags him down towards hell.⁷⁰⁰

In *Eroici*, a spiritual manual for Hermetic Brunianity, it is clear that Bruno no longer considers himself an ordinary mortal, who is subject to corruption and passions. He is “living dead man,” or a god, who has transcended sensual life. By going through the experience of Dionysian dismemberment, he believes that he is no longer subject to pain, which in pagan Antiquity was a sign of divinity. Bruno expounds, “Love, ‘Turn elsewhere thy bow,’ and wherefore should he try to kill him who is already dead, that is, he, who has no more life nor sense about other things, so that he cannot be stabbed or pierced or become exposed to other species. And this lament proceeds from him, who having tasted of the highest unity, desires to be in all things severed and withdrawn from the multitude.”⁷⁰¹ Divinity is not given or received as grace, but taken as an act of heroism or *stolen*, like Actaeon quickly stole a peek of the naked Diana bathing. Unlike Jesus, who showed human weakness and agony on the Cross, Bruno claims that he has transcended the human condition and is indifferent to human weakness and pain. Couliano confirms this:

Actaeon is no longer a man, he has become a god. That is why the continuation of his social existence among men who are no longer his like is a paradox. That is why the symbols of *coincidentia oppositorum* abound in Bruno’s work: because he actually envisages the possibility of existence of a man who, emptied of his humanity, can fill himself with divinity without thereby exiling himself completely from his terrestrial abode. Like the subject who loses his subjectness, he is dead; but like him, he regains existence insofar as and only insofar as, he is loved by the object who becomes thus transformed into himself. In the traumatic process undergone by Actaeon when he surprises the naked Diana bathing in the spring, the goddess really gives herself, lets herself be possessed, but in the only way possible: by changing Actaeon into a stag, a familiar animal, someone who has left the level of his old existence to attain a form of existence in which he can enjoy his companion, the naked goddess.⁷⁰²

⁷⁰⁰ *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, Part I, 62.

⁷⁰¹ *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, Part II, 46.

⁷⁰² *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, 77.

B. Talismanic Mimetic Modeling

1. The Suicidal Moth

Other than Bruno's re-interpretation of the Actaeon Myth, there is other evidence to support the hypothesis that Bruno desired or actively sought death through suicide. Directly following the Actaeon section, in *Eorici* I, 5, Bruno develops another suicidal talismanic text that concerns the desire of the moth or butterfly to destroy itself. Although Couliano does not deal with this dialogue, it supports Couliano's contention that death at the stake would have constituted the final act in a process to found his own religion. In this piece, Bruno identifies with the moth that is attracted to the flame. He begins the section with two provocatively interconnected questions: "What is the meaning of that butterfly which flutters round the flame, and almost burns itself? And what means that legend, '*Hostis non hostis*'?"⁷⁰³ The meaning of the sentence could be translated as: "The enemy, who is not an enemy," but also, "The stranger, who is not a stranger."

However, when we recall in Girard's theory how the sacrificial scapegoat is selected in mythical accounts of divine *metamorphoses*, then, we must also consider the following possibility. Bruno perhaps intuited that in many myths the "enemy stranger" was often made into a "god" after his murder or sacrifice. Moreover, given the intensity of the Reformation debates on the Eucharistic sacrifice and the doctrine of transubstantiation, we should not totally exclude the possibility that Bruno might have intended a *double entendre* by his usage of the word, *hostis*. This word is similar to *hostia*, or a "sacrificial victim." In this case, Bruno's question could also mean, "The sacrificial victim, who is not a sacrificial victim?"⁷⁰⁴ Given Bruno's poetic nature, it is possible that Bruno intended all of these meanings. This possibility is strengthened by the fact that in *La cena*, he intended to establish a better Hermetic Eucharist out of the ashes of his body.

According to Bruno's character Tansillo, the moth becomes fascinated by the splendour of the flame and goes willingly to meet its death. Tansillo later confirms that the moth knowingly destroys itself: "So sweet, so grateful, so divine, as these hard bonds, this death of mine, to which by fate, by will, by nature I incline." And if one thinks that should the moth understand its destiny, it would avoid its own destruction, Bruno refutes them. For the heroic enthusiast:

It is no less pleasing to perish in the flames of amorous ardour than to be drawn to the contemplation of the beauty of that rare splendour, under which, by natural inclination, by voluntary election, and by disposition of fate, he labours, serves, and dies more gaily, more resolutely, and more courageously than under whatsoever other pleasure which may offer itself to the heart, liberty which may be conceded to the spirit, and life which may be discovered in the soul.⁷⁰⁵

⁷⁰³ *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, 128-129.

⁷⁰⁴ Ed. Sir William Smith and Sir John Lockwood, *Chambers Murray Latin-English Dictionary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976) 315.

⁷⁰⁵ *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, I, 130.

2. Suicidal “Patron Saints”

After the figure of the suicidal moth, the character Cicada questions Tansillo whether one should “desire to bear shocks in order to prove” one’s strength. Bruno provides examples of other semi-historic and legendary heroes, probably taken from Livy’s (59 BC- 17 AD) *Ab urbe condita*,⁷⁰⁶ his patriotic *annales* of the founding of the city of Rome. Bruno sets up these suicidal heroes as new mimetic models, or perhaps as “hermetic saints, whose lives his disciples should emulate.

You say ‘to bear;’ and this is a part of firmness, but it is not the whole of that virtue, which consists in bearing strongly, as I say, or in not feeling as Epicurus said. Now this loss of feeling is caused by being entirely absorbed in the cultivation of virtue, or of real good and felicity, in such wise that Regulus did not feel the chest, Lucretia the dagger, Socrates the poison, Anaxagoras the mortar Scaevola the fire, Cocles the abyss, and other worthies felt not those things which would torment and fill with terror the vulgar crowd.⁷⁰⁷

a. Regulus and Lucretia

First he mentions the death of the Roman soldier, Marcus Atilius Regulus, whose legend has him returning to Carthage after the First Punic Wars (250 BC) to face torture and death, rather than convince the Romans to surrender. Next on the list of Bruno’s immortals is the Roman noblewoman Lucretia. Livy tells her story in Book One, chapters 57-58. After a night of drinking and carousing with the last Etruscan king’s son, Sextus Targuinius Superbus, Lucretia’s husband Collatinus enthusiastically brags about his wife’s beauty. He and the prince ride off to confirm the boast, where they find Lucretia chastely spinning. However, Sextus “was seized by the evil desire to debauch her, spurred on as he was by her beauty and redoubtable chastity.” The prince later returns in stealth and rapes her. Totally distraught, she calls for her father and husband to tell them about the crime. They impress upon her that since “her mind was not willing,” she herself is absolved from any guilt. Still, she drives a dagger into her own breast to inflame them to avenge her death. Urged on by Brutus, the three incite the mobs to overturn the monarchy and establish the first Roman Republic, which banishes the royal family.⁷⁰⁸

Although story of Lucretia resurged in popularity amongst Renaissance artists, in traditional Christian circles, her example was not universally extolled. For example, near the beginning of St. Augustine’s *The City of God*, I, 19, he addresses the difference between Lucretia and Christian women. It is well known that Augustine used Livy and other Roman historians to develop his arguments and “recontextualize the episodes of Roman history” to present the

⁷⁰⁶ Andrew Lintott, “Roman Historians,” *The Oxford History of the Classical World*, eds. John Boardman, Jasper Griffin, Oswyn Murray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 636. Of Livy’s 142 books, only thirty-five are extant.

⁷⁰⁷ *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, I, 150.

⁷⁰⁸ Livy, *The Rise of Rome: Books 1-5*, trans. T. J. Luce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 66-68.

traditional Christian case.⁷⁰⁹ Even before questioning the double-standards of pagan gods in their punishment of the city of Troy, while ignoring Romulus' murder of his own brother (Cf. *The City of God*, III, 6), he deals with the story of Lucretia. The fact that Lucretia's death was considered to be (at least in Livy's legendary account) the "spark" that ignited the establishment the Roman Republic, and Augustine deals with it in the beginning of his *The City of God*, implies that Augustine understood or strongly intuited that the mythical accounts of Lucretia's suicidal scapegoating of herself was considered to be a founding sacrifice of the Republic. By introducing *The City of God* with the same example as Livy introduces his *The Founding of the City*, he wants to challenge Livy's popular account of how cities should be founded and sacrificial scapegoating as a method of building civilizations.

St. Augustine's argument rests on the contention that despite being blameless from any guilt of sexual sin, Lucretia implicated herself in the crime of murder, when she slew herself. "This crime was committed by Lucretia; that Lucretia so celebrated and lauded slew the innocent, chaste, outraged Lucretia. Pronounce sentence. But if you cannot, because there does not appear any one whom you can punish, why do you extol with such unmeasured laudation her who slew an innocent and chaste woman?"⁷¹⁰ St. Augustine wonders why so many people would be so enthusiastic about her death. Why would the innocent victim be required to suffer the ultimate penalty, i.e. death, while the true criminal was merely banished? Augustine contrasts Lucretia with Christian women in order to show the difference between the manner in which pagan and Christian cities or civilizations are founded. Unlike Lucretia, the Christian women "declined to avenge upon themselves the guilt of others and so add crimes of their own to those crimes in which they had no share. For this they would have done had their shame driven them to homicide, as the lust of their enemies had driven them to adultery. Within their own souls, in the witness of their own conscience, they enjoy the glory of chastity. In the sight of God, too, they are esteemed pure, and this contents them. ..." ⁷¹¹ Although they too were violated, they did not seek revenge on others or themselves and remained truly pure.

b. Cocles and Scaevola

After Lucretia, Bruno lists the philosophers Socrates and Anaxagoras. After being imprisoned for impiety and corrupting the youth, Socrates willingly drank poison. Anaxagoras willingly starved himself to death, becoming perhaps the first famous hunger striker. Last on the list are the young

⁷⁰⁹ Sabine MacCormack, "Classical Authors," *Augustine through the Ages: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, O.S. A. (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999) 205.

⁷¹⁰ Saint Augustine, "The City of God," *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. II, ed. Rev. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, trans. Rev. Marcus Dods (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, reprint 1997) 13.

⁷¹¹ *The City of God*, 14.

Horatius Cocles and Gaius Mucius Scaevola. Both supposedly faced death while defending Rome against the Etruscans.

In Book 2, chapter 10, Livy provides the account of Cocles, who single-handedly fought off the Etruscan army from a major bridge across the Tiber. As his comrades begin to flee, he rallied them to destroy the bridge in order to halt the Etruscan advance. Livy develops a dramatic scene where Cocles stares down the enemy army: “Then his defiant gaze swept menacingly over the assembled Etruscan leadership, he challenged them by name and taunted them as a group: Pawns of arrogant kings and careless of their own liberty, they had come to attack that of others.” After a bit more fighting, once the connection to land had been destroyed, under a rain of spears, he jumped into the Tiber and supposedly swam to safety, although other accounts point towards his death. The people of Rome immortalized Cocles by awarding him with a statue and land.⁷¹²

In Book 2, chapter 12, Livy presents the legend of Scaevola, or “lefty,” as another example of courage in the face of death. The youth, fed up with the siege of Rome by the Etruscan army, snuck into the Etruscan camp to kill the king, Porsenna. He was caught, however, after killing the wrong man. Livy puts the following rousing speech into Scaevola’s mouth. “I am Gaius Mucius, a citizen of Rome. I came here as an enemy to kill my enemy, and I am as ready to die as I am to kill.”⁷¹³ According to Livy, the king was so struck with fear that he ordered Mucius to be cast into the flames burning on the sacrificial altar. To show his fearlessness in the face of death, the youth placed his right hand into the fire. Showing no visible signs of pain, he replied: “Look upon me ... and realize what a paltry thing the body is for those who seek great glory.” Mucius’ fearlessness impressed the king so greatly that he released him.

From Livy’s story, it is important to highlight the fact that the Etruscans intended to use Gaius Mucius as a human sacrifice, probably to the god of war. Secondly, the potential victim did not protest his destiny, but rather accepted it and attempted to show the king that he – as well as scores of other Roman youth – were *willing to die* as holocausts. Although the figure Scaevola might have existed, Livy most probably wrote many of these suicidal accounts in order to spur the Roman citizens on to sacrifice themselves for the Roman dictatorship, after the fall of the Republic. In *Eroici*, Tansillo suggests that the divinity or heroic status of these figures is attributed to their ability to “bear” blows and face physical torments with divine indifference. They are ready to die, to kill others or to kill themselves for their cause. Bruno’s “heroes” are the new mimetic models to imitate in his new universal Mystery Religion.

⁷¹² *The Rise of Rome*, 81.

⁷¹³ *The Rise of Rome*, 83-84.

c. Ab Aetna!

Directly after presenting these suicidal heroes, Tansillo then makes another clear allusion to Empedocles, “Look at this other who bears the device of an anvil and a hammer, round which is the legend ‘Ab Aetna!’”⁷¹⁴ Without mentioning his name, Bruno compares Empedocles to the smith god, Vulcan, whose forge was said to be Etna. However, Bruno’s Tansillo claims that he, i.e. Bruno, is a better smith than Vulcan, meaning a better philosopher than Empedocles. He will be able to bear his martyrdom and create a harmony out of it – even before he is dead! Bruno then says that Love, perceiving the divinity “near us, in us and with us,” – an allusion to Bruno’s Hermetic Eucharist -- punishes the aspiring god for his shortcomings. In the same way that Vulcan hits heated metal with his hammer, the fire and blows that the enthusiast endures – from his own self-punishment -- is a necessary part of the purifying process. Besides Vulcan, there is another god in every man. The goal of the *magus* is to discover who he is.⁷¹⁵ The method of discovery is of course an alchemical one. As in sublimation, in order to separate the pure vapors or gold from banal impurities, Bruno’s heroic enthusiast must go through the process of distillation, or *solve et coagula*, in order to become conscious of the manifestation of god that he already is. Bruno himself says:

Thus the soul striving to recover its natural beauty seeks to purify itself, to heal itself, and to reform itself, and to this end it uses fire, because, being like gold, mixed with earth and crude, with a certain rigour it tries to liberate itself from defilement, and this result is obtained when the intellect, the real smith of Jove, puts itself to the work and causes an active exercise of the intellectual powers.⁷¹⁶

Like the Presocratics and Stoics, for Bruno, fire is indicative of the divine, which he calls “Love.” Love is One. Union with Love or fire through contemplation is the object of his quest. “He (the enthusiast) becomes a god by intellectual contact with the divine object.”⁷¹⁷ Because “love converts the thing loved into the lover, so amongst the elements fire is active and potent to convert all the others, simple and composite, into itself.”⁷¹⁸ It is for this reason, according to him, that the heroic enthusiast, who is himself converted into flames, can say to love fire and death:

⁷¹⁴ *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, Part I, 151. Bruno then dedicates a sonnet to his hero: “Not now to my Sicilian mount I turn,/Where thou dost forge the thunderbolts of Jove,/Here, rugged Vulcan will I stay;/Here, where a prouder giant moves,/Who burns and rages against Heaven in vain,/Soliciting new cares and divers trails./ Here is a better smith and Mongibello/A better anvil, better forge and hammer;/ For here behold a bosom full of sighs,/Which blows the furnace and the fire revives./The soul nor yields nor bends to these rough blows,/But bears exulting this long martyrdom,/And makes a harmony from those sharp pangs.”

⁷¹⁵ *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, Part II, 152. “I say there is this smith Vulcan, and as there is no man that has not a god within him, so there is no lover that has not a god within him, and no lover within whom this god is not. Most certainly there is a god in every man, but what god it is in each one is not so easy to know.”

⁷¹⁶ *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, Part II, 153.

⁷¹⁷ *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, Part I, 71.

⁷¹⁸ *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, Part I, 44.

With such a fire and such a noble noose,
 Beauty enkindles me, and pureness binds,
 So that in flames and servitude I take delight,
 Liberty takes flight and dreads the ice.
 Such is the heat, that though I burn yet am I not destroyed,
 The tie is such, the world with me gives praise.
 Fear cannot freeze, nor pain unshackle me;
 For soothing is the ardour, sweet the smart.
 So high the light that burns me I discern,
 And of so rich a thread the noose contrived
 That, thought being born, the longing dies.
 And since, within my heart shines such pure flames,
 And so supreme a tie compels my will.
 Let my shade serve, and let my ashes burn.⁷¹⁹

This line is carried on throughout the poem. Later, in *Eroici*, Part II, Bruno continues to hold Empedocles up as an example to be followed, but also to be transcended. While discussing the ascent of the soul towards the intellect, he presents perfection, the goal of contemplation, as a return to the origin. “Thus everything has an impetus towards its beginning retrogressively and progressively towards its end and perfection, as Empedocles well said ...” With our knowledge of the alchemical process as well as the importance of Empedocles for alchemists, we believe that Bruno is describing the path of a *coniunctio oppositorum* in and even on himself. Bruno is proposing something perfectly logical for a temporal alchemist in the Empedoclean tradition: those who want to go forwards, must go backwards or return to the subterranean “origin” of the *pur technikon*. Those who want to re-create themselves, like Empedocles, must be willing to destroy themselves, preferably by “divine” fire. Bruno elaborates this idea in a sonnet. He says that his understanding of the necessity of human desire to grasp for divinity, the nature of the world as thought as well as the necessity of Nature to return its source is not different from what the great Presocratic taught.

The sun must turn and reach his starting-point,
 Each wandering light must towards its source,
 That which is earth to earth itself reverts,
 The rivers from the sea to sea return,
 And thither, whence desires have life and grow
 Must they aspire as to revered divinity,
 So every thought born of my lady fair
 Comes back perforce to her, my goddess dear.⁷²⁰

⁷¹⁹ *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, Part I, 75.

⁷²⁰ *The Heroic Enthusiasts*, Part II, 32.

These passages leave few doubts as to how Bruno understood the nature of self-divinization as a temporal form of suicidal self-sacrifice. Bruno considered himself to be the greatest magician; it is through a supposedly greater sacrifice that Bruno hoped to surpass his model and rival, Jesus, but also Empedocles, whose philosophy he claims to have exceeded. Before Nietzsche's Zarathustra or Byron's Manfred, Bruno became perhaps the first modern magician. As in *La cena de le ceneri*, he stood alone in "the ashes of the sacrifices" on the summit of his phantasmic mount Olympus.⁷²¹ Bruno did not have to incite lynch mobs to reach a "mimetic crisis." As a solipsistic *magus*, with no one to count on but himself, he was aware of his "subjects' expectations."⁷²² Is it not possible that as a Hermetic alchemist and *pharmakeus*, or sorcerer, he intuited how the scapegoat mechanism transfigures the *pharmakos*, the scapegoat, through a so-called "conjunction of opposites" into the Philosopher's Stone? In the thick of the Reformation and Counter-Reformation, he perceived that there was sufficient mimetic rivalry going round to absorb it all onto himself. Is it not possible that Bruno, the *pharmakeus* (sorcerer), that "brewer of *pharmakon*," made himself into a *pharmakos* (scapegoat)? Perhaps we should give credit where credit is due. Could it be that in an attempt to imitate the death of his model/rival Jesus, he orchestrated his own death to look like a murder, making himself the priest of his own sacrifice? We cannot entirely rule out this possibility. Like his other model and now also rival, Empedocles, by "descending" into the alchemical flames of the stake, he believed that he could ascend into the realm of the gods. Out of his ashes arose the myth of the "hero" Bruno, against the so-called intellectual tyranny of the Roman Catholic Church, and later, against all traditional forms of Christianity itself. As Kingsley has shown, the drive to transcend one's models and produce an original spirituality is a drive that is inherent within the Hermetic Tradition itself.

C. Bruno: Hero of Anti-Christianity

1. Developing Enlightenment Legend

The confusion about the exact nature of Bruno's condemnation, in a time of social chaos, is indicative of how Bruno has been perceived and received throughout Modernity. Although from our perspective, we condemn Bruno's execution, it is important to note how societal judgment on the acceptability of Bruno's thought was progressively reversed and affirmed. Paul Henri Michel elucidates the Brunian enigma:

One of the privileges, if indeed it can be regarded as such, that Bruno shares with many great men, but which he possesses to an unusual degree, is to be at once famous and unknown, renowned and obscure... The legend first of all appears as a pious fiction for only those who approved of the severity of the Holy Office, or who, at least, were bent on justifying it, dared to

⁷²¹ *The Ash Wednesday Supper*, 161.

⁷²² *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance*, 90.

raise their voices. Thus, an enlightened person such as Marin Mersenne, an avowed anti-Aristotelian and open to all scientific innovations, saw Bruno as “the most dangerous thinker... of deists, atheists or free-thinkers’. This opinion prevailed without any counterbalance throughout the whole of the seventeenth century; ...

It is remarkable that the new legend bases its authority on the same facts as the first one, as well as on the same errors. As for the facts, (by which we mean those relating to biography), the new legend confines itself to presenting them in a fresh light and giving them another meaning: that which was only sound justice becomes martyrdom... Numerous political and partisan manifestations provide the pretext for exalting his genius as much as his character, and, naturally, seeing that he was the victim of obscurantism and ignorance, his profound learning. He has been credited with attainments to which he never made any claim, nor ever possessed. Certain apologists even go so far as to make him a mathematician, whereas he himself on every possible occasion proclaimed himself to be an enemy of mathematics and any mathematization of physics.⁷²³

According to Louis Dupré, in the seventeenth century, many of Bruno’s ideas were accepted by Baruch Spinoza (1632-1677) and his worldview is reflected in Spinoza’s famous monistic axiom *Deus siva Natura*, God or Nature. Since the Enlightenment, Protestant intellectuals like Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716), whose theory of monadology Bruno anticipates, as well as later thinkers like Friedrich Jacobi (1743-1819) and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) proclaimed him a prophet. Their uncharacteristically uncritical endorsement helped to popularize the historically anachronistic idea that Bruno was the defender of “science,” “progress” and “democracy,”⁷²⁴ although he was himself an anti-scientific, reactionary totalitarian.

Although some mechanistic Christian philosophers, like René Descartes (1596-1650), and scientists, like Isaac Newton (1643-1727), rejected Bruno’s pantheism, later mechanistic philosophers, like Denis Diderot (1712-1784), accepted Bruno’s ideas, proclaiming Nature to be an entirely self-sufficient and self-moving system. According to Dupré, the fusion between Bruno’s philosophy and mechanistic science meant that nature began to take on a transcendence of its own. When this occurred, many “philosophers, often unwittingly, began to reintroduce Bruno’s theories. French materialists were heavily influenced by Spinoza, who himself had rationally developed Bruno’s intuition of a self-supporting [and infinite] cosmos. German idealism, also under the influence of Spinoza, revived interest in the Italian ‘pantheist’. Schelling wrote a philosophical dialogue entitled ‘Bruno’, and Hegel devoted many pages to him. But German philosophers, unlike the French, fully acknowledged the religious quality of Bruno’s thought.”⁷²⁵ By the nineteenth century, Bruno’s ideas had become, albeit covertly, well integrated into European intellectual life that looked less to traditional Christianity for its inspiration and

⁷²³ *The Cosmology of Giordano Bruno*, 9-11.

⁷²⁴ *The Great Chain of Being*, 249; *A History of Philosophy: Late Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy*, vol. 3, 262.

⁷²⁵ Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 63-64.

increasingly towards the more exotic “East.” The idea that Bruno was the champion against intellectual tyranny, especially against traditional Christianity, took hold and was perpetuated.

2. The Romantic Bruno

In the nineteenth century, Ernst Haeckel, fiercely anti-Christian and the main protagonist of Darwinism in nineteenth century Germany, was also the founder of the *Monistenbund*. This was a supposedly scientific religion that promoted the Presocratic and Brunian worship of the *cosmos*, which he positioned to supersede Christianity.⁷²⁶ Other nineteenth century anti-Catholic revolutionary groups like the Italian *Risorgimento* of Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-1882) and Giuseppe Mazzini (1805-1872), both Carbonari⁷²⁷ and Freemasons, took Bruno as a martyr model.⁷²⁸ Mazzini is an important, albeit ignored source for New Age. Not only was he a high ranking Freemason, an important carrier of hermetic doctrine, he was also a close friend of Helena Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical Society, whose theories are at the basis of the New Age Movement. K. Paul Johnson, in *The Masters Revealed: Madame Blavatsky and the Myth of the Great White Lodge*, even suggests that Mazzini might have been a model for Blavatsky’s “Ascended Master” Morya.⁷²⁹ Mazzini’s ideal was the establishment of a “Third Rome,” which would dialectically spring out of the ashes of the first, pagan Rome and the second, Christian Rome. He believed that it was Italy’s mission to be a messianic people for the world, by “taking the lead in setting up a new order for mankind.”⁷³⁰ Because Rome was the origin of the old unity, both pagan and Christian, it would be the origin of the new unity. Gaetano Salvemini says that for Mazzini the new Roman Republic:

must destroy two obstacles: the Papacy and Austria. For Mazzini, Rome is not only the ‘true capital of Italy,’ without which national unity is impossible: she is ‘the seat of the Papacy: of that Institution which is the source of all arbitrary power in Europe; which holds the human soul in bondage, and prohibits progress of humanity, indeed, setting religion in opposition to progress. Freedom from Rome means freedom for the world. ... ‘From Rome alone can the word of modern unity go forth, because from Rome alone can issue the absolute destruction of the old unity.’⁷³¹

Mazzini’s world would be a world where subjected peoples would live in liberty and freedom, although initially this liberty and freedom must be transitioned through dictatorship. His involvement in revolutionary politics of the nineteenth century shows that the revolutionaries’

⁷²⁶ Daniel Gasman, *Haeckel’s Monism and the Birth of Fascist Ideology* (New York: Peter Lang, 1998) 62.

⁷²⁷ The word is taken from the Italian, meaning “charcoal burners.” The Carbonari were a secret group with Masonic associations, which was founded in the nineteenth century in order to unify Italy and form a Republic.

⁷²⁸ Robert Paris, “Bakounine en Italie ou le Socialisme Italien face à ses Origines,” *Bakounine : Combats & Débats* (Paris : Institut d’Études Slaves, 1979) 155 – 165.

⁷²⁹ K. Paul Johnson, *The Masters Revealed: Madame Blavatsky and the Myth of the Great White Lodge* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) 38ff.

⁷³⁰ Gaetano Salvemini, *Mazzini*, trans. I. M. Rawson (New York: Collier Books, 1962) 67.

⁷³¹ *Mazzini*, 68-69.

ideas were not merely political, but were also spiritual and religious in nature. As Rome was the centre of the Roman Empire and the centre of Catholic Christianity, Mazzini's Rome would be the centre of a New World Religion and New World Order. Léon Poliakov explains in *The Aryan Myth: a History of Racist and Nationalistic Ideas in Europe*, says Mazzini “dreams of establishing a *Third Rome* which was to be the centre of a universal religion. He wanted to ‘mould for Italy a crown of regenerated peoples; to make Rome the head of the world, the word of God among the races of mankind’. Thus Rome was to be restored as a universal temple at the service of all mankind from which this faithful heir of Dante and Machiavelli wished to exclude the temporal power of the Holy See.”⁷³² His ideal was of course more akin to Bruno's world empire, the hermetic *Città del Sole* of Tommaso Campanella or *Adocentyn* of the *Picatrix*, where people were programmed by magic talismans to live in “democracy.” It is therefore possible that the original New Age Movement's ideal of the New World Order, Religion and Government, which we will discuss in the final chapter, is a highly mutated version of these revolutionary nineteenth century ideals, which were derived from Bruno, but whose origin is Hermetic.

In fact, Bruno's contemporary influence on the New Age movement can be directly linked to Annie Besant (1847-1933), the successor of Helena Blavatsky (1831-1891) at the Theosophical Society. In her *Esoteric Christianity: 'The Lesser Mysteries'* (1908), Besant calls Bruno a Pythagorean thinker and an apostle and martyr of both theosophy and science.⁷³³ She attempts to position Christianity as a stepping stone to higher Mysteries, quoting regularly from his *Eroici furori*. In 1911, she also gave a lecture at the Sorbonne, entitled: *Giordano Bruno: Theosophy's Apostle in the Sixteenth Century*. As noted earlier, in that lecture, Besant clearly states that Bruno is the intellectual “father” of Theosophy and the new thought. She says that this includes “the Immanence of God, the Life Universal animating all bodies; the eternity of the Spirit, since by his very nature he is part of the Life Universal.” Besant perpetuates the occult myth that Bruno was condemned by the Roman Catholic Church for his advanced scientific outlook, which she equates with “occultism.”⁷³⁴

As the “hero” of Theosophy, Besant brings together all of the mythological elements needed to sacralize Bruno, according to Girard's hypothesis. In her melodramatic biography of

⁷³² Léon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth: a History of Racist and Nationalistic Ideas in Europe*, trans. Edmund Howard (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1974) 67.

⁷³³ Annie Besant, *Esoteric Christianity: the "Lesser Mysteries"* (Wheaton: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1987) 77.

⁷³⁴ *Giordano Bruno: Theosophy's Apostle in the Sixteenth Century* and *The Story of Giordano Bruno*, 9-10. According to Besant, “he loved science, he preached science with all his fiery energy and ineffable enthusiasm; he was the apostle of science, its fervid defender, and he became its martyr. For him, science meant Occultism, the study of the divine Mind in Nature, the study of divine Ideas embodied in material objects. By studying objects, then, it was possible to read the language of Nature, and to learn therein the thoughts of God.”

his life (1913), she emphasizes his vulnerability, necessary for his selection as a scapegoat, and vividly portrays the mimetic frenzy of the crowd.⁷³⁵ Besant dramatizes how Bruno nobly walked up to the stake in the Campo dei Fiori and, like Scaevola, bore the torture of the flames, apparently showing no sign of emotion or suffering, although this does not concur with the eye-witness accounts. As we saw, for Bruno, indifference to pain was a sign of divinity.⁷³⁶ She says that Bruno is not gone as long as men honour courage. Using the alchemical and transfiguratory imagery of the Phoenix, in a possible allusion to *La cena*, she says that out of his scattered ashes, the seeds of truth were blown across Europe,⁷³⁷ positioning him as the ideal mimetic model of modern alchemical self-divinization. She provides him with an epitaph that would suit any mythological hero or god: “To know how to die in one century is to live for all centuries to come.”⁷³⁸ As the scapegoat of traditional Christianity, Bruno became the martyr and spiritual founder of the anti-traditional Christian Theosophical Society and, hence, to some extent of New Age, “because he *knew* how to die.”

In Besant’s opinion, Bruno’s religion was not like traditional dogmatic Christianity, “arid and sterile, a mere set of categories,” but “inspired.” Because of this, she claims that Bruno became the inheritor of “true Christianity,” a Christianity that her Theosophical Society represents. Besant says because traditional Christianity rejected his immanent worldview and understanding of God, it declared “war” on science and, hence, on occultism. This is a “war” that Besant and her disciples in the Theosophical Society claimed to have taken upon themselves.⁷³⁹ K Paul Johnson has pointed out that this “war” was proclaimed before Besant, by her master, Helena Blavatsky. Although the TS had several public objectives, amongst others “to form a nucleus of universal brotherhood,” underlying these was another agenda. Johnson says that “the Masonic and Rosicrucian Masters behind the formation of the TS aimed at promoting HPB [Helena Petrovna Blavatsky] as a nineteenth-century successor to Cagliostro. The main interest

⁷³⁵ *Giordano Bruno: Theosophy’s Apostle in the Sixteenth Century and The Story of Giordano Bruno*, 51. “The bright eyes are bleared when the unused sunlight touches them; the strong limbs are bent and weak as those of an old man.” “To the Campo dei Fiori they take him through a howling, fanatic crowd, composed in great part of pilgrims...”

⁷³⁶ *Giordano Bruno: Theosophy’s Apostle in the Sixteenth Century and The Story of Giordano Bruno*, 52. In true hagiographic style, she says, “But no cry escapes from him; to the end he is as serene as though he felt no agony, and the last glimpse the crowd catches of his face ere he flames sear it, shows it calmly proud as ever; and now the smoke and fire surround him and Giordano Bruno is gone for evermore.”

⁷³⁷ *Giordano Bruno: Theosophy’s Apostle in the Sixteenth Century and The Story of Giordano Bruno*, 9-10.

⁷³⁸ *Giordano Bruno: Theosophy’s Apostle in the Sixteenth Century and The Story of Giordano Bruno*, 52.

⁷³⁹ *Giordano Bruno: Theosophy’s Apostle in the Sixteenth Century and The Story of Giordano Bruno*, 10. “The Church imprisoned the Messenger; then burned his body to ashes, and scattered the ashes to the winds, which carried them as seeds of truth over Europe. But the thesis rejected by the sixteenth century is being eagerly accepted by the twentieth. The message stifled by the smoke of his martyrdom is ringing through Europe to-day. His voice died in his throat, but it is now echoing around us, for ‘to know how to die in one century is to live for all centuries to come’. Vainly did the Vatican place his books on the Index. His thoughts have winged their way to immortality, and they are spreading over the modern world; they are *Theosophy*.”

was in reviving Western occultism and opposing dogmatic Christianity.”⁷⁴⁰ This is a goal that they shared with none other than Bruno. Given the influence of the Theosophical Society in the development of contemporary esotericism and, therefore, New Age, it is a “war” that appears to continue today.

Bruno’s death is fascinating, not only because it strangely imitated the trial and passion of Jesus Christ, but it also imitated the death of the shamanic Presocratic philosopher, Empedocles. However, Bruno did not become the founder of the kind of religion that he envisioned, but something more like the “patron saint” of every modern solipsist that has opposed Christianity since the Enlightenment. Through Bruno’s death, these movements positioned Christianity as the enemy of science and Bruno as its martyr-hero.

Conclusions and Comments

Giordano Bruno was a monistic thinker, who we suggest was the first modern “Panentheist.” The process toward panentheism began, of course, when he rejected the Platonic world of ideal forms, reversed the Platonic emanation in favour of Presocratic emanation from matter, collapsing God into the *cosmos*. This allowed him to later collapse the *cosmos* into his individual ego, when he considered himself equal to “Aion,” who contains the *cosmos* within himself. Bruno’s cosmology of infinite worlds is designed to accommodate his “progressive” understanding of the divinity. His reversal of the Neoplatonic scheme of emanation, from above to below, to a more Presocratic notion of “progressive evolution” -- from below to ever higher levels of existence, worlds and stars -- is the ethical backbone of his project to found a new religion and government. These would be achieved through the “occult dialectic” of death and rebirth, destruction and creation, the *coniunctio* of alchemy, or “the going down in order to go up” of the Mystery Religions.

Since the Brunian magus *believes* that the All is divine and is aware of his own divinity, thereafter, the *magus*/alchemist begins to believe that he *is* the One Conscious Being in the universe. This probably happens over an extended period of time. At first, he merely toys with the idea. However, as the Brunian *magus* successively retreats into himself and isolates himself, cutting himself off from relationships and contacts outside of himself, he to some extent, begins to live inside himself. He becomes increasingly indifferent to emotion, pain and suffering, which would leave him vulnerable to “binding” by other powerful *magi*. Now totally disconnected from “earthly” reality and relationships, contemplating only himself, believing it to be a contemplation

⁷⁴⁰ *The Masters Revealed*, 7.

of the divine *cosmos* as it supposedly is in itself, it becomes possible for him to begin to conceive of the objective world as a projection of his imagination and will.

Ironically, through the series of mental reversals, he begins to understand the occult dialectic, no longer as symbolic of a spiritual journey, but as a biological technique or a “program of Nature.” Just as the microcosm descends to a lower level in order to ascend to a superior one, so too must the macrocosmic state and religion descend to its nadir, before a cultural renaissance could be launched. Just as the initiate must descend into the *taurobolium* and imagine his own gruesome demise in order to overcome his fear of death in battle, so too must Bruno’s initiate be willing to plunge himself into the literary alchemical forges. Just like Empedocles was dissolved into alchemical forges of Etna in order to ascend into the realm of the gods, so too must Bruno be dissolved into the flames, etc. Since he potentially considered himself to be the primal man, he must therefore also incarnate the Gnostic myth of his suffering in and through matter.

From the perspective of spiritual alchemy, one contemplates these examples and applies them symbolically or spiritually to one’s own spiritual condition. However, in Bruno’s psychological version, since the state and religion are *objective mental or psychological projections* of the *magus/chemist’s* mind -- which he now supposes to be *the Mind of God* -- and not a passive mental image within his inner or subjective disposition or mood, one cannot achieve a reversal of the objective state by merely thinking about it interiorly. In this more psychological understanding of the world and, hence, alchemy, the image has already been projected outside of oneself and appears really as an “object,” although the adept estimates that it is not real per se. Therefore, for a Hermetic *magus/chemist*, a superior religion or state cannot be achieved through a symbolic or spiritual dialectic, but requires a psychologically projected temporal one. Even though the *magus* or alchemist would reason that the old religion and state were projections of his will or psyche, since his is the only will or psyche, the projection or dream becomes “objectified;” therefore, an “objective” reversal needs to be “projected.” That is to say, in Bruno’s inverted scheme in order to change the state, which he believes is an objectified mental projection, he would have to project the destruction of the state, or bring it into a temporal state of chaos in order to project, or create, a new one. In order to change the religion, then, one would have to temporally dissolve the religion, etc. As Aion, or the god of Time and Desire, he believes that this is his right.

The Brunian *magus/chemist’s* assent to the proposition that the world is merely a projection of his own mind tears down all social and psychological barriers that have been erected to prevent him from destroying it as well as himself. Since he believes that the present culture, religion and state are his “old dreams,” the *magus/chemist* also believes that he has the right to

destroy the old culture, religion and state by negating it with its dialectically opposite “dream.” Since he denies any form of transcendence, symbols also lose all transcendent value and are collapsed into the object. Because the traditional microcosmos/macrocosmos order has been reversed, ironically, the Brunian *magus*/alchemist must begin the *opus alchymicum* on the physical object, or on the objective world itself, even though he believes that there is no real objective value that can be attached to it. Since he is under the strong impression that the world *is* his own psychic creation, and he has demolished all barriers, laws or taboos to protect himself and his world from his own destructive powers, then, there is also nothing to stop him from thinking that he too must be temporally or biologically destroyed in order to re-create himself and his world anew. The verbal talismanic images he has created through his dialogues and poetry, especially, in *Eroici*, provide the suicidal scheme which the *magus* can follow both psychologically and temporally.

We propose that Bruno’s rejection of Renaissance Platonism and the collapsing of the *cosmos* into his ego, through his acceptance of the Hermetic scheme of self-divinization, which required him to consider himself equal to Aion, allowed the Panenanthropic disposition to develop. Furthermore his reversal of Platonic emanation, led to his reversal or inversion of the traditional alchemical doctrine of “as above, so below” as well as the microcosm/macrocosm analogy, which in turn led to the possible temporal interpretation of the alchemical processes on both a human and cosmic scale. The panenanthropic disposition is clearly observable in New Age thinkers like Shirley MacLaine, who we will discuss later.

CHAPTER IV

REPLACING RELIGION WITH RELIGION

And must we not love evil if we are to break away from the obsession with virtue that makes us sick and forbids us the joys of life? ... Religion can be replaced only by religion. ... Only the wise are ethical from sheer intellectual presumption, the rest of us need the eternal truth of myth. ... 2000 years of Christianity can only be replaced by something equivalent. ... I think we must give it time to infiltrate into people from many centres, to revivify among intellectuals a feeling for symbol and myth, ever so gently to transform Christ back into the soothsaying god of the vine, which he was, and in this way absorb those ecstatic instinctual forces of Christianity for the one purpose of making the cult and the sacred myth what they once were -- a drunken feast of joy where man regained the ethos and holiness of an animal.

Carl Gustav Jung, *Letter to Sigmund Freud*, 11 February 1910

I. The Holographic Worldview

A. The Nature of “God”

1. Introduction

Most religions and religious worldviews are concerned with some form of human redemption or salvation. This usually includes some notion of life-after-death, whether this be a belief in the bodily resurrection, as in traditional monotheistic religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam; or some form of reincarnation and/or means to eventually escape from the cycle of re-birth, as in Hinduism and Buddhism, e.g. *Moksha* or *Nirvana* respectively. As a religious approach to the world, esotericism is no different. B. J. Gibbons points out that the original western occult position, which he sometimes uses as a synonym for esotericism, is the redemption of Nature,⁷⁴¹ meaning the Totality of all there is. The understanding of the redemption of Nature in traditional Christian circles was also closely related to the redemption of the human person. This was derived from their reading of the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Romans 8: 18-23, where Paul linked the redemption of the human body with the redemption of the whole Creation. In the theology of the Early Church and Middle Ages, the doctrine of correspondences, or the belief that in the human person is a microcosm of the greater macrocosm (or universe), was accepted, but understood in such a way that the macrocosm was not equated with God. Nevertheless, in the Renaissance, with the popularization of heterodox Christian Hermetism but also to a certain extent Platonism, the tension between God and the world began to break down. Nature came to be seen as the Totality of all there is, hence, divine in itself. Since the human person was the microcosm, he too must be divine. As above, so below.

⁷⁴¹ B. J. Gibbons, *Spirituality and the Occult: From the Renaissance to the Modern Age* (London: Routledge, 2001) 26.

In the previous chapters, we have tried to show how the increasing divinization of Nature and, therefore, the human person was related to the acceptance of Hermetic animism, or “holism,” in intellectual circles that were looking for a way beyond the religious impasse they had perceived with Scholasticism and Aristotelianism. Bit by bit, the Platonic Chain of Being came to be conceived of as the Totality of Reality as well as a biological “program of nature, which was being carried out gradually and exceedingly slowly in the cosmic history.”⁷⁴² With the development of Hermetic animism, the microcosmic/macroc cosmic analogy also began to be understood as a series of psychological correspondences. With the uncovering and distinguishing of Presocratic philosophy embedded within the *Hermetica* and negatively within Platonic and Aristotelian writings, the reversal of Platonic emanation became possible. Since most alchemists saw themselves as the “masters of time,” whose job it was to redeem Nature including themselves, they began to think that perhaps they could speed up the natural process of time. Although traditional esotericism started with the individual human, in the new context, by reversing the order, one could start with the *cosmos* itself. Cosmic redemption and individual salvation were no longer seen as grace, but as a result of *microtheotic* human effort and “positive thinking and willing.” As below, so above.

As discussed in the previous chapter, although this process started earlier, it perhaps reached its climax with Giordano Bruno. His reading of the *Asclepius*, coupled with his frustration with the state of Christian religion during the Reformation, led him to believe that a return to Hermetic/Presocratic animism would bring about a new and better state of affairs. As we saw, Bruno’s aim was the creation of a new world religion and government, an Egyptianized Christianity that would replace traditional, dogmatic Judeo-Christianity. Although Bruno’s ideas were innovative, the type of city upon which his new civilization was modeled was most probably the Hermetic city of the sun in the *Asclepius*, or perhaps Adocentyn in the *Picatrix*, where Hermetic solar priests controlled their subjects’ desires through the use of magical talismans. Bruno’s Hermetic dream was later revised to make it more palatable to a wider group of European powers. A more utopian version can be found in Tommaso Campanella’s *Città del Sole*.

Furthermore, as from the seventeenth century, many of Bruno’s ideas were accepted and re-interpreted within the “mainstream” western philosophical tradition. The main disseminator of Darwinism in Germany, the scientist Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919), equated Bruno with Copernican science. He attempted to establish Monistic Religion, i.e. the *Monistenbund*, where the ideas of Bruno and Empedocles were central. Many of his ideas were accepted by influential nineteenth

⁷⁴² Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: a Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964) 244.

century intellectuals, like Mazzini and Garibaldi. Leaders of the Theosophical Society also accepted his ideas. Indirectly, they were disseminated by its illustrious members, amongst others, W. B. Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, Alfred Orage, Thomas Edison, Rudolf Steiner, etc. Annie Besant even wrote a pamphlet and gave lectures on his philosophy. In the twentieth century, the Hermetic connection continued, albeit in a more nuanced fashion. For example, the late George Trevelyan (1906-1996), a prominent New Ager and disciple of Alice Bailey, claimed that:

We are recovering the vision of the mystics of all ages, the ageless, ancient wisdom both of the Orient and of our Western mystery traditions. The so-called Hermetic Wisdom, deriving from the Egyptian initiate, Hermes Trismegistus, laid down as first principle that the universe is mind, not mechanism, and that everything manifests the law of correspondences – as above, so below; as in the macrocosm, so in the microcosm. The human being is the microcosm reflecting the macrocosm; in essence a droplet of divinity and therefore immortal and imperishable.⁷⁴³

In this chapter, we will explore New Age's or contemporary esotericism's developing psychologization of Reality and the growing tendency towards panenanthropism and the temporalization of spiritual alchemy. In the second section, we will show how this tendency was influenced by Carl Gustav Jung, and through him, Friedrich Nietzsche. We will try to show how Nietzsche represents the apex of this tendency, which Jung then attempted to mitigate through his symbolic interpretation of Hermetic psychological alchemy post Bruno.

2. A Conscious Organism

In Chapter One, we showed that the New Age worldview or paradigm of Reality is called "Holism." According to New Age holism, this Reality is both one and mental. Sometimes the totality of this mental reality is understood as "divine energy," which belies holism's connection to antique Hermetic animism. Holism is also a form of panpsychism, i.e. the belief that everything is an evolving form of "consciousness." The *holistic worldview* sees the world and the self as already always divine and moving towards ever-higher levels of consciousness and unity.⁷⁴⁴ Trevelyan states:

We are entering a momentous decade when change faces us on every level, in our society, our own consciousness and in the very structure of the Earth itself. Thus it is of profound importance to grasp the holistic world picture. That wonderful word 'holistic' includes both holiness and wholeness. The whole is holy. Healing is the restoring of harmony to the living whole. The emerging new age vision is imbued with the concept of the oneness of all life. The universe itself is seen as a vast continuum of consciousness, of creative thought of God. Humanity is in essence a spiritual being in a cosmos spiritual in its nature and origin. In both scientific and mystical

⁷⁴³ George Trevelyan, *Summons to a High Crusade* (The Park, Forres: The Findhorn Press, 1986) 75-76.

⁷⁴⁴ See Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998) 113ff and the chapter entitled, "The Nature of Reality."

knowledge, this conviction of oneness replaces the old materialism and brings a wider interpretation of evolution.⁷⁴⁵

Trevelyan attempted to develop the traditional doctrine of correspondences and the Hermetic/Stoic view that the *cosmos* is God's body: "The whole of humanity is a living organism and each of us is a cell of that organism. Realize that that thought was not possible until this generation. You are a part of the life – the brain – of Gaia, the goddess of Earth."⁷⁴⁶ Trevelyan pushed his metaphors to such literal level that he could state that the planets are organs within the solar system. "We are the microcosm; the Earth is the macrocosm. The mere fact that we can breathe and have a bloodstream and endocrine glands means that the macrocosm does too. The entire solar system is also a living organism with the sun as its heart and each of the planets as an endocrine gland."⁷⁴⁷ Of course, Trevelyan is merely continuing a trend of the sacralization of "Living Nature," which became popular amongst many nineteenth century writers, amongst others, Goethe, Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg) and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling (1775-1854).⁷⁴⁸ Kocku von Stuckrad in *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* says that "like Leibniz before him, Schelling conceives of nature and the cosmos as a single large organism. In his work, *Erster Entwurf eines Systems der Naturphilosophie* ('First Sketch of a System of Philosophy of Nature', 1799), he calls the individual organism 'the concentrated, reduced image of the universal organism' (*Gesammelte Werke* [GW]: III, 198)."⁷⁴⁹

3. The "Science" of Holography

Furthermore, Holism has become more appealing to the broader public with the discovery of holograms. Holography has been popularly assumed to give scientific credence to the holistic worldview. In some ways, we could say that the holistic worldview is a holographic worldview. Holography should be seen as a contemporary interpretation or expression of the traditional microcosm/macrocosm analogy. According to the *Webster's New World Dictionary*, "Holography is a method of making three-dimensional photographs without a camera by splitting a laser beam into two beams and recording on a photographic plate the minute interference patterns made by one beam going from the laser to the plate" and vice versa.⁷⁵⁰ Because objects

⁷⁴⁵ *Summons to a High Crusade*, 65-66.

⁷⁴⁶ *Summons to a High Crusade*, 37.

⁷⁴⁷ *Summons to a High Crusade*, 28. His concentric scheme of the structure of the universe reminds of *Corpus Hermeticum*, XII, 2, where "[Aion], therefore, is in god, the cosmos in [Aion], time in the cosmos, and becoming in time."

⁷⁴⁸ Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*, trans. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke (London: Equinox Publishing, 2005) 104-105.

⁷⁴⁹ Von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*, 107.

⁷⁵⁰ ed. Victoria Neufeldt, "Holography," *Webster's New World Dictionary of American English*, Third College Edition (Cleveland: Webster's New World, 1988) 644.

can be converted to frequency patterns and the reverse, some contemporary esotericists make the assumption that the science of holography reveals that beneath the manifestation of objects lies a “deeper structure” of Nature that is related to invisible holographic frequency waves, which is then understood as “energy.”

Some assume that the “holographic blur,” which occurs during the manufacturing of the hologram, is the confirmation or “scientific proof” of the microtheos of the macrotheos thesis. For example, after a holographic image is fragmented, “*each* fragment appears to contain all of the information needed to reconstitute the complete object... In other words: the whole is present in each of the parts.”⁷⁵¹ Since the whole of the hologram is contained in each fragment, then, it is assumed that all of reality is, therefore, contained within each fragment of matter. Just like each fragment of the hologram can be understood to be the source of the hologram, each and every individual is the “source” of all reality and its psychic “creator.” Hanegraaff says that, according to this theory, Reality “must therefore be pictured as a radical singularity containing the potential for all creation. All realities in all dimensions are relatively illusionary creations ‘read out’ of this singularity, which seems similar to the holographic frequency domain. Each single human mind is the central locus or center of this process of reality-creation, and therefore its very own center of the universe, so to speak... indeed each mind must on these premises be pictured as containing all the information of the whole.”⁷⁵² As a contemporary radical interpretation of the law of correspondences, we propose that the holographic worldview, understood mentally or psychologically, strengthens the tendency to assent to Hermetic panentheism.⁷⁵³ According to Trevelyan:

Now look at the Earth holographically. You know that when a holographic plate is shattered, every fragment contains the whole three-dimensional picture. When Professor Carl Pribram was lecturing once in America, he suddenly stammered and checked in the reading of his paper as the thought hit him -- “My God, what if the whole universe is a hologram!” And indeed it is, it follows that every human mind is a tiny bit of the shattered plate. This reminds us of the myth of Osiris, the god who was cut up into a thousand pieces, to be set together by the goddess Isis. However, while the holographic plate is inert, we human beings, a little lower than the angels and crowned with glory and honour, have the unique task of carrying the divine gift of free will in order that we may become in time co-creators with God. We are that part of nature which can become consciously creative and therefore can, to some small degree, re-create the photograph in the cosmic hologram.⁷⁵⁴

⁷⁵¹ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 140.

⁷⁵² *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 151.

⁷⁵³ At the end of the Renaissance, coupled with his assent to pantheism and as a result of his attempt to literally “make himself equal to Aion,” we contend that panentheism was already evident in Bruno.

⁷⁵⁴ *Summons to a High Crusade*, 74-75.

4. Divine Energy

In earlier chapters, we saw that a mental understanding of God can also be found in the *Corpus Hermeticum*. For example, *CH* XII, 1 states: “Mind, O Tat, comes from the very essence of god In humans this mind is god.”⁷⁵⁵ As shown earlier, the *Corpus Hermeticum* also equates God with “Mind,” “Soul,” “Energy,” “Consciousness” and “Power.”⁷⁵⁶ And, *CH*, XII, 20 says: “God, who is Energy and Power, surrounds everything and permeates everything.”

According to Hermetic doctrine, Mind projects itself out like rays of energy. This is explained in *CH* X, 22: “Energies are like rays from god, natural forces like rays from the cosmos, arts and learning like rays from mankind. Energies work through the cosmos and upon mankind through the natural rays of the cosmos, but natural forces work through the elements, and humans work through the arts and through learning.” More a feature of the Hermetic than the Eastern tradition, New Age claims that because God *is* the universe, God *is* this energy.⁷⁵⁷ Hanegraaff says, “The idea of God as universal energy, permeating the universe, naturally implies that everything participates in God’s being... and human beings are divine in essence...”⁷⁵⁸

In some sense, the understanding of God as “energy” and “rays” also helped Renaissance Hermeticists to begin their work of the “psychologization” of Reality. As explained, Ficino already began to transform the ancient and medieval understanding of demons into energies or natural powers. Although we cannot really know whether ancient Hermeticists were pantheists or panentheists, ancient Hermetic monism did associate “energies” with gods, demons and even humans. God, according to Hermetic animism, is mind and energy permeating the *cosmos* and is the *cosmos*. There is, therefore, nothing beyond this. Theoretically, not even humans are distinguished from gods or demons, who are just other or higher manifestations of divine energy.⁷⁵⁹

⁷⁵⁵ Brian P. Copenhaver, trans. *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a new English translation with notes and introduction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, reprint 2000) 43. “Among humans, therefore, some are gods and their humanity is near to divinity. For the good demon has said that gods are immortal <humans> and humans are mortal gods.” Or, *CH* X, 16, says, “The mind [...] is divine by nature.”

⁷⁵⁶ In *CH* XI, “Mind to Hermes” says: “But the energy of God is mind and soul; the energy of eternity [i.e. Aion] is permanence and immortality; of the cosmos, recurrence and counter-recurrence; of time, increase and decrease; of becoming, quality and <and quantity>. Eternity [i.e. Aion], therefore, is in God, the Cosmos in Eternity [i.e. Aion], time in the Cosmos, and becoming in Time.”

⁷⁵⁷ It is not without consequence that the Theosopher and New Age Mother Alice Bailey wrote a five volume work entitled: *Rays and Initiation: A Treatise on the Seven Rays* (New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1971).

⁷⁵⁸ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 204.

⁷⁵⁹ For example, *CH* XII, 21 says: “Look at matter, completely full of life, and a great god moving along with all beings good and fair – gods and demons and humans.” Tat responds: “But these are energies father.” Hermes Trismegistus says: “If they are entirely energies my child, by whom are they energized? By <anyone> other <than god>? Or do you not know that, just as the parts of the cosmos are heaven, water, earth and air, likewise the limbs <of god> are life, immortality, {fate}, necessity, providence, nature, soul and mind, and that the permanence of them all is called the good? In what comes to be and has come to be, there is nothing where god is not, nothing beyond him.”

Although all already participate in Nature as Divine, the goal is to realize this within oneself. Trevelyan says that “we are ... recovering the knowledge – the conviction, in a sense – that life is a vast unity: that the universe is not a mechanism but an affair of mind, and it works as one huge harmony.” Since higher consciousness is the goal of God Itself, it must also be the goal of individual humans. Trevelyan claimed that this greater God-consciousness initially happens with particular individuals and will be eventually extrapolated to the rest of humanity. Once a *critical mass* has been achieved, this will “jump-start” what other New Age theorists like Alice Bailey called “sparking” the New Age.⁷⁶⁰ “Enlightenment will suddenly spread as a chain-reaction throughout society.” This will occur through “morphic resonance,” or will be transmitted by psychic vibrations to other less enlightened individuals like in the 100th monkey scenario.⁷⁶¹

The numbers cited vary. The scientist David Bohm believed that only 10 people would be a sufficient catalyst. George Trevelyan was a bit less optimistic and believed that when 50 million persons concentrate on “Peace” for only one hour, then, a chain reaction could be launched.⁷⁶² Trevelyan even claimed that human salvation lies in accepting a holistic or monistic worldview and “learning how to THINK WHOLENESS.”⁷⁶³ Alice Bailey felt that if enough people read the “prayer” *The Great Invocation*, which is structured more like a magical incantation to the “Spiritual Hierarchies,” change could be forced.⁷⁶⁴ As the Lucis Trust website says, *The Great Invocation* is a “world prayer” and an “instrument of power to aid the Plan of God to find full expression on earth.” By saying it regularly, “divine energies can be released and brought into activity,” because “men and women have the power through focused united invocation to affect world events.”⁷⁶⁵ Benjamin Creme, a disciple of Bailey, says that *The Great Invocation* was originally written in an ancient priestly language or formula, some “seven mystic phrases long.” Although powerful when said alone and in English, it is even more powerful when

⁷⁶⁰ *Summons to a High Crusade*, 15. “We stand on a threshold where human consciousness can take a quantum leap out of self-consciousness into all consciousness, God consciousness. This has at all periods happened with some individuals. We have to remember that the phenomenon of the mystics, the initiates, the Illuminati is one that the intellectual mind cannot understand: but its appearance in history has set what is happening now.”

⁷⁶¹ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 351. According to Hanegraaff, the idea of the “Hundredth Monkey Phenomenon” was discussed in Lyall Watson’s, *Lifetide* (1979). In a 1958 study of wild macaques on a small Japanese island, primatologists observed how one female monkey started washing potatoes in order to clean them, and subsequently taught the other monkeys on the island her discovery. Remarkably, after the 100th monkey had learned the procedure, monkeys all over the globe spontaneously started to wash their vegetables. It seemed as though that the *critical mass* of 100 Monkey’s on one island allowed for their new awareness to jump some threshold of consciousness to other monkeys on other islands, etc. The idea is that this procedure could be transferred to humans. At least that is the supposition. “Morphic Resonance” is a theory developed by Rupert Sheldrake that New Agers often couple with the 100th Monkey scenario. Once the critical mass is reached, somehow consciousness is transported over the consciousness threshold by sound waves.

⁷⁶² *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 352.

⁷⁶³ Richard Kyle, *The New Age Movement in American Culture* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995) 105.

⁷⁶⁴ *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*, 130.

⁷⁶⁵ The text of the invocation can be found at: Alice Bailey & Djwhal Khul, “Invocation”, LUCIS TRUST, www.lucistrust.org/invocation/.

said in a triangular formation.⁷⁶⁶ Creme explains that the group of three is to be understood as a “transmission group,” who transmits the message of the *Invocation* to the Masters in the higher realms. “Transmitting” with a larger group allows them to amass energy and become “potentized” by the Masters. He says:

It would not be simply one plus one plus one. It would be one plus one plus one plus a factor of potentization by the circulation of energy around the centers of all three of us. When you have a group of more than three, there are multiple numbers of such triangles which then create other geometrical formations. It is an enormously complicated science – complicated geometrical formations utilizing the centers of the individuals in the group.⁷⁶⁷

5. The Higher Self

In New Age and contemporary esotericism, God is actually the Higher Self, while individual consciousness is the “lower self.”⁷⁶⁸ The terms “God” or “Energy” are used to express how psychical correspondences or thoughts, radiate out like “rays” from the Higher Self. Holographically speaking, the “Higher Self” is contained within each fragment of matter and more consciously within each individual, and could be seen as a modern interpretation of the *anima mundi*. According to Hanegraaff, in contemporary thought, the Higher Self can be seen as an “interface” between the Universal Divine Mind and the lower personality self, or the “ego-self.” Gibbons states that “the Self is the ‘objective phenomenon of which the ego is the subject’.” It is symbolized in various forms, Christ and the Buddha being two of the most important, the Self is ‘the archetype of the God-Image’.”⁷⁶⁹ The soul part of the person is equal to the lower self and is a “fragment personality” of the Divine Mind. The “linking” function between universal and particular is, however, often collapsed, whereby the “fragment personality” is actually the unconscious side of the Divine Mind itself. The Higher Self is something like the sum total of presupposed incarnated lives, revealing structural similarities to the Hermetic understanding of the primal man or Aion.

In contemporary esoteric thinking, each individual life of the fragmentary personality is considered to be a dream devised by the Higher Self for the edification or self-realization of the lower self. This “dream-life” is understood as reincarnation. Reincarnation, coupled with the belief in self-divinization, holds an important position in the complex of New Age beliefs, because it functions 1.) as the so-called vehicle for evolutionary learning, and 2.) is considered to be an ethical and soteriological replacement for traditional Christianity.

⁷⁶⁶ Benjamin Creme, *Transmission: A Meditation for the New Age* (London: Tara Press, 1992) 17.

⁷⁶⁷ *Transmission*, 37.

⁷⁶⁸ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “New Age Religion,” *Religions in the Modern World*, ed. Linda Woodhead (London: Routledge, 2002) 259.

⁷⁶⁹ *Spirituality and the Occult*, 109-110.

Theoretically, the Higher Self is perfect and perfectly aware; however, the various lower “selves” are imperfect and in a process of coming to awareness. Hanegraaff observes that since the Higher Self is already perfect and fully aware, one wonders what is the point of the whole process. That is, why could not the Higher Self be incarnated just as it is, since it is already perfect? However, according to influential New Age sources like “Seth,” an “energy essence personality” channeled by science-fiction writer Jane Roberts (1929-1984),⁷⁷⁰ “the essence of this soul is conscious energy seeking to express itself. Each human being is a tiny part of such a greater soul or entity, and is therefore referred to as a ‘fragment personality.’”⁷⁷¹ That is, the Higher Self, no longer in the Hegelian sense, is trying to become conscious of itself, but now only wants to *express itself* through the lower selves. It is now the lower selves who must become conscious of the fact that they are, holographically speaking, the Higher Self, who is “expressing itself” through the lower selves’ search for consciousness. Since many New Agers claim that actual physical existence is an illusion of divine co-creating minds, the material world is a fabrication of our dreams or nightmares, depending on one’s perspective. According to the theories of Seth, “We live our own lives of ‘dreams’ of our own making, which reflect our unconscious beliefs. By changing our beliefs, we automatically change our reality.”⁷⁷² That is, humans can through the power of their will simply decide to dream themselves out of their own self-imposed nightmares if they choose.

B. Divine Lives

1. The Meaning of Reincarnation

a. Vehicle of Spiritual Evolution

For most contemporary esotericists, realizing oneself to be God is a learning process, which can also occur through successive evolutionary reincarnations. As we saw earlier, in *CH X, 22*, “human learning” is equated with the divine rays or energies. Therefore, “learning” is the vehicle needed to evolve to higher spheres or stars or planets, somewhere in the universe. Theoretically, and based on Bruno, infinite evolutionary expansion of consciousness is the goal of both individual and cosmic life. If one learns, then, one evolves. Given the fact that there is no conclusive scientific evidence for human evolution on earth, exotic planets provide a “place” where more evolved beings can “go.” It is for this reason that Hanegraaff has called the New Age idea of reincarnation “Progressive Spiritual Evolution.”⁷⁷³

⁷⁷⁰ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 37.

⁷⁷¹ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 214.

⁷⁷² *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 230.

⁷⁷³ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 471.

Hanegraaff says that the idea of reincarnation to other planets ‘began to develop in the eighteenth century, when the doctrine of “‘higher worlds’ came to be associated with the planets.” Influential thinkers such as Immanuel Kant, Emanuel Swedenborg, but also Goethe promulgated the idea so that, by the nineteenth century, it was widely accepted in esoteric and theosophical circles.⁷⁷⁴ However, already in the eighteenth century, Bruno’s ideas had been broadly accepted by Protestant intellectuals, who promoted him as the prophet of “science” and martyr of “free thought.”⁷⁷⁵ The idea that superior beings may infinitely evolve to other planets probably has its origin in Brunian Hermetism, discussed earlier.

Before the lower self is “re-incarnated,” the Higher Self chooses the lives or “dreams” that the fragmentary lower self will have back on earth. When it “wakes up”, so to speak, full consciousness is regained. Thereafter, it can “die” so that it can dream up another experience for itself in its next life. The Higher Self -- whose energy is probably fully realized -- remains the same. For this reason, theoretically, time is also an illusion. For Seth, the Higher Self or Soul, “remains totally aware during its ‘incarnations’ of its fragment personalities, even though these incarnations are themselves also illusions or dreams. In other words, the soul is able to dream many simultaneous dreams while being fully awake at the same time.”⁷⁷⁶ Because time is an illusion, various “incarnations” may happen all at once or not at all. Hanegraaff says:

Neither is it possible that the different fragments follow each other in sequential time order (i.e. in linear reincarnations): from the soul’s perspective, all incarnations happen at the same time, or rather, out of time altogether... Nothing then prevents different fragment personalities coming from the same soul to *meet* each other in their shared, intersubjective reality. In other words, there need not be a one-to-one relation between a human individual and his/her Higher Self. Many individual persons living at the same time may be part of one and the same soul.⁷⁷⁷

b. The Amorality of Spiritual Evolution

Furthermore, unlike traditional Buddhism or Hinduism, most western esotericists do not believe that one can be sent to a lower plane of evolutionary development through immoral behavior. To some extent this idea might be derived from *Corpus Hermeticum* X, 22, which says: “My child, one who gives thanks to god must pray to acquire a good mind. The soul can then pass over into something greater but not into any lesser thing.” That is to say, those who have aligned their lower self with the Higher Self and -- in their opinion -- have attained “Mind” are guaranteed to progress. Unlike most other human beings, they will not be reabsorbed back into the amorphous Totality of the One. In fact, being morally reprobate might even *help them* to expand

⁷⁷⁴ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 475.

⁷⁷⁵ Louis Dupré, *Passage to Modernity: An Essay in the Hermeneutics of Nature and Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993) 61-62, 64, 77.

⁷⁷⁶ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 215.

⁷⁷⁷ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 215.

consciousness. From this we can deduce that Hermetic reincarnation does not really emphasize the importance of moral behavior for spiritual advancement, as does traditional Hinduism and Buddhism. In the contemporary western esoteric context, spiritual evolution or advancement is more contingent upon one's ability to acquire *gnosis*, sometimes understood as "awareness" or "consciousness." One's level of knowledge or awareness supposedly determines to what degree one will be affected by fate. This idea might also have its origin in ancient Hermetism. For example, *CH XII*, 5ff, states:

"Everything is an act of fate, my child, and outside of it nothing exists among bodily entities. Neither good nor evil comes to be by chance. ... Yet those who possess reason, whom (as we have said) mind commands, are not affected as the others are. Since they have been freed from vice [i.e. ignorance], they are not affected as a consequence of being evil."

"Again, father, what do you mean? The adulterer is not evil? The murderer is not evil? And all the rest of them?"

"One who has reason will not be affected *because* he has committed adultery, my child, but *as if* he had done so, nor will be affected *because* he has murdered but *as if* he had murdered."

When the belief in reincarnation is reduced to a cosmic "learning process," where "enlightened beings" always evolve to a higher level of consciousness, regardless of whether they follow the rules of traditional morality or not, morality takes a second seat. Murder and adultery make no intrinsic existential difference. The fully realized human being, who realizes that he is "one" with the Higher Self, can commit murder, incest, adultery, etc. as a form of expanding conscious experience so that the Higher Self can "express" Itself. If we recall, according to the Hermetic understanding of God, discussed in context of Bruno's desire to make himself equal to Aion or Eternity, it is important to become *omniformis*. In the new psychologized situation, one's conscious experience must become omniform in order to make oneself equal to "God," who is basically a conglomeration of the totality of psychical experiences. Although we cannot say that this is how it was understood in Antiquity, in contemporary terms, those who have only one form or type of experience, or do not realize all of the forms of possible psychical experience within themselves, are less than God/Aion or the *cosmos* (Cf. *CH XI*, 16). They are "less human," will not evolve, and are doomed to re-configuration.

However, "the one who has reason will not be affected," by immoral deeds, *because* he has done them, but only "*as if* he had murdered." That is to say, since reality is primarily mental and reducible to psychical correspondences, which are understood as energies or rays, murder is only the *experience* of murder and not really the objective spilling of someone else's lifeblood. Since "God" is understood as the totality of *omniformis* possible psychical experiences, then, an enlightened person, who has realized that he is equal to Eternity/Aion, might *need to* commit

murder, adultery, pedophilia, incest, etc. in order to realize the omniform nature of potential psychical experiences within himself as the “divine ego.” Of course, and perhaps like Bruno, the ultimate experience would be the experience of the murder of oneself. Hence, instead of reasoning that some deeds, regardless of one’s intentions, can create bad *karma* and detrimentally influence one’s next re-incarnation, it might be reasoned that certain evil deeds might in fact expand one’s psychical experiences, which would positively influence the realization of “higher consciousness” and, hence, the next re-incarnation.

From this short explanation we perceive that “progressive spiritual evolution” is a system of “psychological salvation.” The solipsistic psycho-chemist is his own savior by accumulating psychical experiences that help him to “expand consciousness.” Although not all would agree, theoretically, deeds have no objective or intrinsic moral or ethical value. “Rules” are for lower consciousnesses. There are no intrinsically evil deeds, because everything is determined by the subjective intention of the doer, who has been “pre-programmed” by the Higher Self. Theoretically, in the mind of the supposedly enlightened being, murder, incest, adultery, abortion, child abuse or pedophilia can receive a positive interpretation, *if* the person through the specific experience is able to expand consciousness and “develop.” That is, an evil deed is “good,” when an individual is able to “learn from it.”

2. Realizing God

a. The Impression of Reincarnation

Clearly, the traditional idea of reincarnation presupposes the existence of a stable individual identity, but in fact, for most contemporary esotericists no such thing can exist. The only thing that *really exists* is the Higher Self, objective physical or material existence is an illusion. According to most theorists, at death, the limited ego consciousness disintegrates with the physical body and is rejoined with or becomes aware of the Higher Self. At this point, the Higher Self chooses the next experience that the lower self needs to become more fully aware that it is already “psychically one” with the Higher Self. Each successive human personality is a composite of a greater spiritual identity, which logically must eventually be equated with the Higher Self. However, according to the theory, at death, one is already one with and aware of the Higher Self, which makes the whole process a bit redundant. One’s own personal experience of Reality is, therefore, a “dream” devised by the Divine Mind or the Higher Self to help the lower self learn that it is already what it is, i.e. the Higher Self.

Although reincarnation is the vehicle that New Agers need in order to ascend to higher spheres, planets or stars in the next life, as shown, theoretically, a next life, planets or stars are illusions. Hence, if objective reality is an illusion, then, theoretically, reincarnation is also an

illusion. Since the lower self is radically one with the Divine Mind, but only conscious of it at death, then, reincarnation is an illusion created by the Divine Mind as a “vehicle” to express Itself. And, since reality and reincarnation are illusions, similarly evolution is also only a chimera that the Higher Self somehow needs to entertain itself. The seeker is only given the impression that he or she has been reincarnated. The popular idea, that one “chooses one’s life” or subsequent reincarnation, is similarly an illusion. Furthermore, individual human life, as it is experienced by the so-called lower self, is also an illusion. Similarly, the all important “learning processes,” with the goal of a “higher life” are also illusions.⁷⁷⁸ As suggested, real objective evolution and reincarnation imply a stable identity, but it is clear, in contemporary esoteric thinking, not only is the identity unstable, but it does not exist as such. Therefore, there is a huge gap between popular practice (i.e. reincarnation therapists, for example) and theory (i.e. how it is explained by the more philosophical expositors of the movement). Hanegraaff points out:

On closer analysis, it even appears doubtful whether the New Age perspective is rendered correctly by concluding that the Higher Self ‘transmigrates’ from one human body to the next, by way of successive incarnations. The theories suggest that it does not ‘incarnate’ at all, but only creates a succession of lives, or ‘realities’ for itself, in order to further its own spiritual evolution. And even this formulation may be too imprecise: properly speaking, the Higher Self does not create a succession of lives/realities, but creates only the illusion of such a succession.⁷⁷⁹

b. Training Intuition

As illustrated, theoretically, the lower self is only vaguely aware of this relationship and must achieve higher awareness through the development of *personal intuition*. Intuition by the limited personality (i.e. ego-self) must be trained in order to come into contact with the universal divine personality that lies deeper (or higher) within the person. The way that one trains one’s intuition to achieve “union” with one’s Higher Self is structurally similar to how one trains one’s intuition to communicate with “higher entities,” “Ascended Masters,” a “*parhedros*,” the “alchemical Mercurius,” the “primal man,” “Aion,” a “spirit guide” or psychic “*Doppelgänger*.” Hanegraaff says, “In fact, the relation between the personality and its Higher Self is, according to New Age thinking, quite similar to that between a human person and a spiritual entity. In learning to trust one’s intuition and act on it, what one actually does is to open oneself to the inner guidance of one’s Higher Self.”⁷⁸⁰ As with the alchemical Mercurius, the lower self needs to see itself in contact with a “higher being,” but in reality this contact is contact with the Higher Self. Once one *realizes* this, then, one has made a major step towards realizing one’s own divinity or actualizing

⁷⁷⁸ The tautology makes one ask why the Higher Self would need to become conscious of something of which it is already conscious?!

⁷⁷⁹ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 267.

⁷⁸⁰ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 212.

one's magical personality. Because New Age is basically evolutionary, the theory implies that more highly evolved individuals in the present day are better able to align themselves with their Higher Self than individuals in previous ages.⁷⁸¹ Supposedly, more highly evolved individuals will go on to even higher levels in the next life. By developing one's powers of intuition, which might also lead to channeling experiences, i.e. contact with other "higher" entities, one comes to realize that "we are not who we think we are."⁷⁸²

c. Self-Spirituality and Spiritual Alchemy

The question now arises, how does one procure these illusory "learning experiences" that expand consciousness and promote spiritual evolution? Because there is no real separation between the "I" and all there is, New Age "Self-Spirituality," as presented by Paul Heelas, is the necessary framework needed to experience divine consciousness. Self-Spirituality is important to develop the "self," or through its improvement, one improves the world and through the improvement of the world, one improves oneself, etc.

Although New Age should not be equated with ancient Gnosticism, it is a form of neo-Gnosticism in that human transfiguration into divinity -- because God is Consciousness -- is achieved through awareness, knowledge or "higher consciousness." Humans can come to this knowledge by going through a process that evokes an "experience of God," which is structurally similar to the Hermetic ascent. Given Hermetism's connections to Presocratic iatromantism, it might also imitate the shamanic ecstatic experience and the initiate's experience of descent and ascent in the Mystery Religions. The structure of the rites of initiation of the Mystery Religions, but also the alchemical processes -- as they have been *imagined* since the Enlightenment -- serve as a good basis for this training. Bruno's Actaeon as well as the experience of the divine child Dionysos, who was dismembered, consumed and then re-born, is perhaps the prototypical one. In *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structures of Alchemy*, Mircea Eliade has shown that the experience induced by spiritual alchemy follows a similar structure to the experience induced by the Mystery Religions.⁷⁸³ Therefore, the experience of "being shred to bits" in the Mysteries can be replicated through the techniques of spiritual alchemy. Eliade explains:

We are of course quite ignorant of the exact nature of the crucial experience which for the alchemist was equivalent to obtaining the Philosopher's Stone or the Elixir. Excessively prolix in all that concerns the preliminaries and various phases of the opus, alchemical literature makes only cryptic and, for the most part, incomprehensible allusions to the *Mysterium magnum*. But if we are right in insisting on the interdependent relationships between mineralogical symbolism,

⁷⁸¹ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 211.

⁷⁸² *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 212.

⁷⁸³ Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structures of Alchemy*, trans. Stephen Corrin (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978, 2nd edition) 143.

metallurgical rites, the magic of fire and the beliefs in the artificial transmutation of metals into gold by operations which replace those of Nature and time; if we take into account the close connection between Chinese alchemy and neo-Taoist techniques, between Indian alchemy and tantrism; if, in short, the Alexandrian alchemists did, as seems probable, project onto mineral substances the initiatory spectacles of the Mysteries -- it becomes possible to penetrate into the nature of alchemical experience. [...] The Western Alchemist by endeavouring to 'kill' the ingredients, to reduce them to the *materia prima*, provokes a *sympatheia* between the 'pathetic situations' of the substance and his innermost being. In other words, he realizes, as it were, some initiatory experiences, which, as the course of the opus proceeds, forge for him a new personality, comparable to the one which is achieved after successfully undergoing the ordeals of initiation.⁷⁸⁴

That is to say, according to the nineteenth century "spiritual interpretation of alchemy" model, Eliade like Jung believes that all western alchemists were primarily interested in spiritual or psychological experiments and less with material ones. He encourages the idea that alchemy is primarily an initiatory activity that leads to mystical religious experiences. To a great extent, due to the influence of Jung and Eliade, today, spiritual or psychological alchemy is a popular technique used to create or structure one's own self-divinizing experience. This experience will supposedly lead to the creation of a new, more powerful, divine personality through a reconfiguration of the old. If one survives the ordeal of initiation, one actually does feel stronger and more powerful.⁷⁸⁵

C. Contemporary Panenanthropism

Following a general historical trend -- having its roots in Brunian Hermeticism --, the microcosm/macrocosm analogy has been gradually reduced to a series of psychological correspondences. As discussed above, these are sometimes euphemistically referred to as energy, rays, vibrations or waves.⁷⁸⁶ If New Age holism, as Hanegraaff asserts, is the dominant paradigm of Reality in the West, then, we contend that the logical conclusion of New Age's radical holographic idealism might eventually lead to radical solipsism or panenanthropism in some susceptible individuals. Since Reality is seen as both radically one and fundamentally mental or psychological, human beings with a weak sense of objective reality, with possible "visions of grandeur," may too easily assume that they are, in fact, Aion or the One Divine Mind and not merely a part of It.

⁷⁸⁴ *The Forge and the Crucible*, 160.

⁷⁸⁵ Because reality is considered to be psychic, first, a symbolic or psychical destruction of the individual, ego, personality, etc. is entertained. This is synonymous with the ritual descent into Hades or the subterranean depths of the underworld. The initial step, of course, corresponds to the *nigredo*, where the alchemist dissolves the material -- in this case his own ego -- into the chaos of the *prima materia*. The experience of death or murder, e.g. the death of Dionysos, could be interpreted as a conjunction of opposites, necessary to expand consciousness towards omniform psychical understanding.

⁷⁸⁶ Antoine Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition: Studies in Western Esotericism*, trans. Christine Rhone (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000) xxi.

A “Prayer for the New Age”, promoted by Benjamin Creme, is a good example of the development of New Age or contemporary esoteric panenanthropic spirituality. Creme was a disciple of Alice Bailey. He has dedicated his life and organization, *Share International*, to the preparation of the recognition of “Maitreya,” the Coming World Teacher. Creme believes that Maitreya gave this “prayer” to human kind to use as a tool, or incantation, to realize that “man and God are One” and that the “I” is the “Divine Principle behind all creation.” The believer is encouraged to say the prayer everyday, until he “realizes” it within himself:

I am the creator of the universe.
I am the father and mother of the universe.
Everything came from me.
Everything shall return to me.
Mind, spirit and body are my temples.
For the Self to realize in them My supreme Being and Becoming.⁷⁸⁷

The prayer, of course, encourages the practitioner to see oneself as the “Creator of the Universe.” Although one might question whether one could really believe oneself to be *the* “Creative I,” popular writings by some esoteric authors has led to a tacit acceptance of “panenanthropism” as just another psychic possibility, although admittedly this is not widespread. For example, in the late 1980’s, panenanthropic statements made in the widely disseminated books -- over 20 million sold --⁷⁸⁸ of the actress Shirley MacLaine served to broaden the appeal of the position. MacLaine proclaimed that she was, in fact, God.⁷⁸⁹ Although her pronouncement, “I am God,” seemed shocking to some, she was merely vocalizing the assumptions of New Age “Holism” or the holographic worldview in a less nuanced way than more shrewd theorists. In her autobiographical writings, MacLaine claimed that not only she, but also everyone is the center of the universe.⁷⁹⁰ The following passage from MacLaine’s book, *It’s all in the Playing*, reveals the extreme solipsism of the “holistic-holographic worldview” and the logical consequences of assent to the belief that the totality of all there is, is radically “One.” We now quote the passage in full, because of its illustrative value. The passage concerns a discussion with her friends on New Year’s and her insights into herself:

I began saying that since I realized I created my own reality in every way, I must therefore admit that, in essence, *I was the only person alive in my universe*. I could feel the instant shock waves undulate around the table. I went on to express my feeling of total responsibility *and power* for

⁷⁸⁷ Ed. Benjamin Creme, *Maitreya’s Teachings: The Laws of Life* (London: Share International Foundation, 2005) 245.

⁷⁸⁸ “Terms of Enjoyment,” *READER’S DIGEST*, October 2005, www.rd.com/content/shirley-maclaine-enjoys-life-at-71/.

⁷⁸⁹ See Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, reprint 1999) 2.

⁷⁹⁰ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 231.

all events that occur in the world because the world is happening only in my reality. *And* human beings feeling pain, terror, depression, panic, and so forth, were really only aspects of pain, terror, depression, panic, and so on, in *me*. If they were all characters in my reality, my dream, then of course they were only reflections of myself.

I was beginning to understand what the great masters had meant when they had said ‘you are the universe’. If we each create our own reality, then, of course we are everything that exists within it. Our reality is a reflection of us. Now that truth can be very humorous. I could legitimately say that I created the Statue of Liberty, chocolate chip cookies, the Beatles, terrorism, and the Vietnam War. I couldn’t really say for sure whether anyone else in the world had actually experienced those things separately from me because these people existed as individuals only in my dream. I knew *I* had created the reality of the evening news at night. It was in my reality. But whether anyone else was experiencing the news *separately* from me was unclear, because *they* existed in my reality too. And if they reacted to world events, then I was creating them to react so I would have something to interact with, thereby enabling myself to know me better.

My purpose in mentioning this on New Year’s Eve was to project a hope that if I changed *my* conception of reality for the better in the coming year, I would in effect be contributing to the advancement of the world. Therefore, my New Year’s resolution was to improve myself -- which would in turn improve the world I lived in.

Most of the faces around the table looked scandalized, I created the Declaration of Independence and Marilyn Monroe and the fifty-five miles per hour speed limit? If I changed my reality, it would change the world? I had clearly gone too far. The discussion that ensued was a microcosm of the world itself. And while the others expressed their objections, *I felt I was creating them to object*, so that I could look at some things I hadn’t resolved myself. In other words I was *them*. *They were me*. And all because I was creating them as characters in my play. The classic question was asked: If what I was proposing was true, would it also be true that I did nothing for others, everything for myself?

And the answer was, essentially, yes. If I fed a starving child, and was honest about my motivation, I would have to say that I did it for myself, because it made me feel better. [...] How do we change the world? By changing ourselves.⁷⁹¹

Hanegraaff points out that most New Agers do not accept the full import of MacLaine’s assertions; still, they are the natural or logical consequence of accepting the idea that we make or choose our own reality based on our “dreams” or beliefs. When the *holographic worldview* is extrapolated to the totality of all there is, as an expression of the Divine Mind or Higher Self, that is, that each individual consciousness is not merely a fragment of Higher Consciousness, but is the Higher Consciousness, then, “each individual can be regarded as the creative source of the universe.”⁷⁹²

Although MacLaine expresses the traditional esoteric assumption that in order to change the world, one must start with the individual “self,” there is nothing to hinder a person, who has a panenanthropic disposition, like Bruno, to invert the order and decide to start with the world. All one has to do is to invert the traditional alchemical dictum, “As above, so below” to “As below, so above.” Because the objective material universe is deemed an illusion, there is nothing to stop

⁷⁹¹ Shirley MacLaine, *It’s All in the Playing* (New York: Bantam, 1988) 171-173.

⁷⁹² *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 231.

such a personality from reversing the traditional microcosm-/macrocosm analogy into “by changing the world, I change myself,” for changing myself only brings about slow results. Theoretically, any one individual, who feels that his ego is “one” with the Higher Self, or *is* Aion, in whom the *cosmos* subsists, might assume that he has the right to “change” the created world according to his desire or will, because he assumes that he *is* the “Creative I.”

II. The Continuing Psychologization of Reality

A. The Development of Jungian Mysteries

1. Jung's Influence on Contemporary Esotericism

As discussed, contemporary society is marked by the increasing belief in the psychological or mental nature of Reality, a reality that is concentrated on the “self.” The psychological or mental paradigm has provided the basis for a burgeoning psychological industry, which has encroached upon and to some extent replaced certain areas of religious life that were once dominated by traditional Christian spirituality. This is not meant to condemn psychology as such, but only to note its spiritual importance for a growing number of people. According to Hanegraaff, New Age's drive for spiritual growth is “characterized as an ongoing individual psychotherapy in which each of us is his/her own therapist and unlimited freedom for creativity is the promised goal. Reincarnation is a necessary and integral part of this process.”⁷⁹³ In the nineteenth century, the development of modern scientific psychology also strongly influenced the development of contemporary esotericism and occultism. Hanegraaff stresses that:

While psychology could be used as an argument against Christianity and against religion generally, by arguing that God or the gods are merely projections of the human psyche, it also proved possible to present Western-esoteric worldviews in terms of a new psychological terminology. Most influential in this respect was the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), whose spiritual perspective was deeply rooted in the esoteric and occult currents of the German Romantic *Naturphilosophie*, but whose theories could be used to present that spirituality as a ‘scientific’ psychology.⁷⁹⁴

Although not all psychologists are Jungian, nor are they “New Agers,” according to Hanegraaff, together with the teachings of Alice Bailey, which she derived from her association with Blavatsky's Theosophical Society, Jung's psychoanalytic theories became the building blocks of New Age beliefs.⁷⁹⁵ B. J. Gibbons points out that Jung's “psychology was an attempt to solve the [religious] crisis [in the West] by formulating the basis of what might be regarded as a secular spirituality. To achieve this, he drew on the centuries-old tradition of Western Gnosticism. Just as Swedenborg reformed the occult philosophy and made it palatable to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sensibilities, so Jung also reformed esoteric thought, giving it a renewed lease of life in the twentieth century.”⁷⁹⁶ Christine Maillard says that Jung attempted to “bring about a

⁷⁹³ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 235.

⁷⁹⁴ “New Age Religion,” *Religions in the Modern World*, 258.

⁷⁹⁵ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 496ff.

⁷⁹⁶ Alice Bailey & Djwhal Khul, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/externalisation/exte1011.html; Alice Bailey & Djwhal Khul, *The Destiny of Nations*; www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/destiny/dest1065.html; *Spirituality and the Occult*, 111.

meeting between the Hermetic world view and that of the scientific revolutions of his time.”⁷⁹⁷ Von Stuckrad says that Jung greatly contributed to the contemporary esoteric understanding of the soul, and Jung’s work “represents a direct link between the German Romantic philosophy of nature and the present-day ‘New Age’ movement, in that he sacralized the psyche and simultaneously psychologized the sacred.”⁷⁹⁸ Olav Hammer claims, in *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age*, that the incorporation of Jungianism into the contemporary esotericism and New Age is not surprising, given the fact that “there are good reasons for regarding Jung himself as an esotericist, as well as someone who adapted esoteric motifs to the requirements of a psychologizing and scientific epoch.”⁷⁹⁹

For Jung, the goal of humanity is a process that he calls “Individuation,” even though it is a process that only a few can or will achieve. As we will see, Individuation is Jung’s terminology for the process of self-divinization. Originally, Jungian Individuation was an elitist occupation, which could only take place in Küsnacht. As Bayreuth was to be Richard Wagner’s cultic center of his neo-pagan Germanic Mystery Religion, and the only place where the dramatic opera *Parsifal* could be performed – although no one paid much attention to this --, Jung wanted to make Küsnacht-Zurich his city of the sun on the Swiss mountains of the Moon. In this sense, he followed a Hermetic model. Noll says that Jung adopted the model of “a philosopher-genius who offered mysteries that could only be experienced at that one place.”⁸⁰⁰ Of course, the mysteries that Jung offered were those of Jungian psychoanalysis. Noll argues that the individuated person, according to Jung, is the person who after going through the “initiatory mystery of analysis,” dies to his lower ego in order to be reborn as a “genius,” or the “one who could directly perceive the universal in the particulars of life.”⁸⁰¹ Christine Maillard says that “the process, which Jung style ‘individuation’ or ‘self-becoming’ (*Selbstwerdung*), is a modern equivalent of the initiatic path, and Jung himself called it ‘mystical.’”⁸⁰² Maillard believes that the process of Individuation, as Jung envisioned it, as well as the importance he attributes to the imagination, most clearly reveals Jung’s anchoring in the western esoteric or hermetic tradition:

Jung conceived of a *creative imagination*, a mediating faculty between man and the sense-world (the divine world of the Hermetic tradition). He developed the therapeutic method of ‘active imagination’, which posits that the patient, through creative work on the symbols brought up by his unconscious, can work the transmutation of the latter’s contents, thus increasing his

⁷⁹⁷ Christine Maillard, “Jung,” *The Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism* (Leiden: Brill, 2006) 650.

⁷⁹⁸ *Western Esotericism: A Brief History*, 137.

⁷⁹⁹ Olav Hammer, *Claiming Knowledge: Strategies of Epistemology from Theosophy to the New Age* (Leiden: Brill, 2004) 68.

⁸⁰⁰ Richard Noll, *The Jung Cult: Origins of a Charismatic Movement* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1994) 278.

⁸⁰¹ *The Jung Cult*, 269.

⁸⁰² “Jung,” *The Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, 650.

consciousness and arriving at a cure. The cure of neurosis, defined as the ‘suffering of a soul which has not found its destination’, is presented as a process of initiation, in the course of which the subject stops identifying himself unilaterally with conscious positions and comes little by little to integrate unconscious elements.⁸⁰³

Hammer stresses that even though Jung and Jungianism were foundational for the development of contemporary esoteric theories, the relationship between Jung and contemporary esotericism/New Age is not straight-forward. First of all, although the occult fascinated him, Jung always personally denied any connections with Gnosticism or the occult. Given the fact that he took great efforts to present his brand of psychology as scientific, open acknowledgement of occult connections would have undermined his credibility as a serious scientist. Second, most contemporary esotericists and New Agers have only selectively received Jung’s thought and works, using Jungian terminology, e.g. “collective unconscious,” “Individuation,” “archetype,” etc. in a different and more popular sense than he used them. Third, whereas most New Agers are egalitarians, who support democratic ideals, Jung was an elitist, who believed that only a small minority of intellectuals would fully understand and accept his teachings on Individuation. The fact that most contemporary esotericists and New Agers indeed use these terms in a far broader sense than his original meaning supports his estimation that not all would understand or accept his full teachings. Furthermore, most New Agers are fascinated with eastern religion and attempt to integrate it into their personally constructed religious system. Although a student of eastern religion, Jung was critical of westerners who attempted to adopt eastern religious practices and remained himself mainly within the western, i.e. hermetic, tradition. Finally, Jung was more realistic about the dark and destructive capacities of the human psyche than most New Agers, who are often overly optimistic about creative human potential. Nevertheless, Hammer believes that “the tendency to identify ‘occult’ practices with psychological processes such as individuation is also a legacy of Jung’s work. Jung’s emphasis on the primacy and irreducibility of religious experience is also in line with New Age views.”⁸⁰⁴ That is to say, Jung provided a framework and vocabulary with which to practice contemporary Self-Spirituality, even though this might not be equivalent to Jung’s own spirituality or original teachings.

Because of Jung’s influential role in the development or popularization of the contemporary psychologization of Reality, in this section we would like to focus on Jung and his understanding of divinity and the process of divinization. We would like to show how Jung’s process of Individuation is related to his reception and reinterpretation of the Hermetic tradition as well as the process of self-divinization in spiritual alchemy. We will show how it, therefore,

⁸⁰³ “Jung,” *The Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, 650.

⁸⁰⁴ *Claiming Knowledge*, 69-70.

displays a self-destructive or self-sacrificial aspect that persists in contemporary esotericism and New Age. This will become clearer when we look at Jung's reception of the thought of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900). Later, Jung and Jung's experience of near insanity would serve as a model for Individuation, which became his psychological re-interpretation of the traditional process of alchemical self-divinization with a Nietzschean flavor.

2. Jung's Experiences of Divinity

a. Initial Phantasms

Because Jungian psychology has influenced the development of New Age self-religion, we would like to discuss the nature of Jung's own religious experiences. As a young man, Jung was an avid student of the occult and parapsychological phenomena. Although Jung's father, Paul, was a Reformed minister in the Zwinglian tradition, Jung's mother and maternal grandparents all displayed talents for clairvoyance and mediumship.⁸⁰⁵ Jung's paternal grandfather, Karl, was a prominent Rosicrucian Freemason, one of the most occult forms of Freemasonry.⁸⁰⁶ In 1902, the younger Carl finished his doctoral dissertation, "On the Psychology and Pathology of So-Called Occult Phenomena." The bulk of the material was taken from encounters with his cousin, Hélène Preiswerk, a somnambulant trance medium, resembling New Age channelers.⁸⁰⁷ It was Hélène's ability, "when in a mediumistic state, to ascend to a level far superior to that of her waking state" that convinced him of the existence of the "unconscious." He believed it confirmed Sigmund Freud's (1856-1939) theory that dreams were often suppressed wishes, and pointed him in the direction of his own later theories of the "collective unconscious."⁸⁰⁸

In 1913, Jung began to have dreams associated with death and murder, which corresponded to his break with and betrayal of Freud (1912-1914). Many have interpreted his dreams as a death wish for Freud. Realizing that these dreams indicated a mental imbalance, instead of repressing them, he decided to confront them by "regressing" to his childhood. He did this by building and destroying small stone houses on the shores of Lake Zurich. Although we cannot be sure that his decision to create and destroy toy houses on the shores of Lake Zurich had anything to do with his reading of Heraclitus, he eventually turned his building and destroying game into a technique that allowed him to enter into trance visions. In one significant recurring vision, he saw himself in the role of the "god of the vine," or Dionysos. In this vision, he handed out bunches of grapes -- as Jesus handed out fish and bread -- to admiring crowds in a frozen artic-like landscape. This meant that he saw himself as the new Messiah, whose fertile teachings

⁸⁰⁵ Frank McLynn, *Carl Gustav Jung: a Biography* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1996) 7.

⁸⁰⁶ Richard Noll, *The Aryan Christ: The Secret Life of Carl Jung* (New York: Random House, 1997) 8.

⁸⁰⁷ *The Jung Cult*, 144.

⁸⁰⁸ *Carl Gustav Jung: a Biography*, 43.

would replace what he perceived to be the dry teachings of petrified and frozen Christianity. In 1914, he began to have visitations from Elijah the prophet and Salome, the adulterous wife of King Herod, who provoked the beheading of John the Baptist.⁸⁰⁹ Finally, according to biographer Frank McLynn:

The next fantasy figure to emerge from the unconscious was Philemon, a sort of fusion of Elijah and Salome. Where Elijah and Salome were wholly human, Philemon was a composite being, a mythological creature recalling centaurs, mermaids and the Minotaur. One aspect of him was an old man ‘of Egypto-Hellenistic atmosphere with Gnostic colourations.’ But he also had the wings of a kingfisher, the horns of a bull, and was lame in one foot. He first appeared to Jung while in flight, holding a bunch of four keys, one ready to open a lock.⁸¹⁰

Given the fact that Philemon was of Egypto-Hellenistic origin and held four “keys,” Jung had a vision that easily fit within the hermetic trance-tradition. Daniel Gasman explains, in *Haeckel’s Monism and the Birth of Fascist Ideology*, that the emblematic “key” is a semiotic device that typically points to Hermeticism when connected to Mysteries and magic.⁸¹¹ The fact that Jung later associated Philemon with the Egyptian *ka*, a nature spirit or demon, supports this contention.⁸¹² Jung also referred to him as his “spirit guide” or “inner master” -- terms often used by shaman. Jung believed that Philemon would lead him out of the mental darkness of his limited psyche into the light of Individuation. According to his own descriptions, Philemon appeared to him as half man and half animal. Nevill Drury explains that in the context of “the magical claims of human animal transformation,” “the shaman projects consciousness into an animal form on an imaginal level.” For the shaman, the level of the imagination does not mean less real, but another plane of consciousness. The shaman uses his projection of an altered state of consciousness onto or into the animal or some other object in order to embark upon his spirit journey. Drury says, however, that “this type of magical transformation is not without its dangers.”⁸¹³ The shaman’s voyage is fraught with danger, because he is required to fight and kill evil spirits – also in the forms of animals – in order to heal others and/or himself. His ability to “kill” evil spirits and come out of the spiritual conflict renders him capable to help others.

⁸⁰⁹ *Carl Gustav Jung: a Biography*, 236-237.

⁸¹⁰ *Carl Gustav Jung: a Biography*, 238.

⁸¹¹ *Haeckel’s Monism and the Birth of Fascist Ideology*, 68. “For ‘magic’ practice and belief is, of course, an integral component of Hermeticism and the use of the emblematic ‘key’ punctuates obsessively the writings and even the titles of hermetic works from *The Key to the Enigmas of the World*, and P. D. Ouspensky’s, *Tertium Organum: The Third Canon of Thought. A Key to the* seventeenth and eighteenth century such as Jakob Boehme’s *The Key*, Basilus Valentinus’ *Twelve Keys*, and Emanuel Swedenborg’s *Secret Hieroglyphical Key*, right through to the works of Haeckel’s nineteenth century contemporaries such as Eliphas Lévi’s *The Key to the Great Mysteries*, Mme Blavatsky’s *The Key to Theosophy*.”

⁸¹² *Carl Gustav Jung: a Biography*, 239.

⁸¹³ Nevill Drury, *Shamanism* (Shaftesbury, Dorset: Element Books, 1996) 42.

b. Shamanic Parallels

According to Piers Vitebsky in *The Shaman*, shamanic election and initiation is seen as a type of death, similar to the psychic death of the self or limited ego consciousness.⁸¹⁴ Therefore, the appearance of Philemon as half animal is significant, because 1.) his appearance adheres to a traditional shamanic structure 2.) it represented Jung's "shadow side," which he claimed needed to be integrated and, 3.) shows that Jung perceived "integration" to be a kind of *ego-sacrifice*. Since Jung's experiences are presented as a *model* for Individuation, the one who aspires to the more elitist brand of Jungian-type divinity is encouraged to cultivate temporary mental imbalance, understood as a kind of mental death or sacrifice, which is similar to the creative type of imbalance induced by shamans. Obviously the cultivation of such experiences does not apply to the vast majority of those interested in Jungian psychology, who use the term "Individuation." For most of these, Individuation means something like becoming an equilibrated person and does not necessarily have sacrificial connotations. As we will show, however, this was not the case for the original meaning of Individuation.

The ability to succumb to mental imbalance and then emerge out of it would have supported Jung's claim to have been "individuated." Since the process is an elitist one, only a few are expected to come out of it as a "fully realized personality," i.e. or as Aion. The rest, who actually attempt to go through the process, might come out of it in a worse condition than they were before. Shamanic insanity is not a "typical" form of mental imbalance, but one that is purposefully induced as a part of the process of "psychological" initiation. Mircea Eliade, a close friend of Jung, has made this clear in his work *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*:

Shamanic initiation proper includes not only an ecstatic experience but, as we shall soon see, a course of theoretical and practical instruction too complicated to be within the grasp of a neurotic. Whether they still are or are not subject to real attacks of epilepsy or hysteria, shamans, sorcerers, and medicine men in general cannot be regarded as merely sick; their psychopathic experience has a theoretical content. For if they have cured themselves and are able to cure others, it is, among other things, because they know the mechanism, or rather, the *theory* of illness.⁸¹⁵

In Jung's more Romantic mind-set, madness was considered to be a sign of genius, but as we have seen, it was also a sign of divine election amongst shamanic peoples. Indeed, in Siberia, a part of the shamanic initiation includes suffering from a particular type of "shamanic illness," where it appears as if the shaman has gone mad. A great suffering is perceived as a sign of a great shaman. For example, the elected individual might run around naked, spend weeks in a tree, a

⁸¹⁴ Piers Vitebsky, *De Sjamaan: Reizen van de Ziel, Trance, Extase en Genezing van Siberië tot de Amazone* (Kerkdriel: Libero Nederland, 2001) 64.

⁸¹⁵ Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, trans. Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964) 31.

cave or lay motionless on the ground for an extended period of time. The shamanic initiate claims to be chased by spirits and is required to master them. Inability to learn how to control spirits during this initiation process might cost him his life. Even though the shaman learns how to master the spirit world, it is universally accepted that he must live a life of suffering as compensation for the knowledge he received on his subterranean and ethereal journeys.⁸¹⁶ Nevill Drury says that:

Whatever the specific role, the shaman is one who universally commands awe and respect: he or she is a person who can journey to other worlds and return with revelations from the gods. Shamanism is thus a visionary tradition, an ancient practice of utilizing altered states of consciousness to contact the spirits of the natural world. This is where it begins to touch on our modern lives. ...⁸¹⁷

If we recall, Jung saw Philemon as a “spirit guide” or “inner master.” We propose that the Jungian process of “dying to one’s ego” is similar to the initiatory processes that a shaman must go through in order to become acknowledged as an intermediary between the natural and supernatural realms. For shamans, the help of a spirit guide is essential to coming out of the shamanic trance psychically intact and even stronger. The use of a shamanic spirit guide is structurally similar to the use of the assistant required to begin a magical operation, i.e. a *parhedros*, or alchemical operations, i.e. the alchemical assistant. Hermes or Mercurius, who can also be revealed as a “Philemon” or a “Zarathustra,” is experienced either as a “daimon,” “god” or “personal genius.” Initially, the assistant or spirit guide appears to be outside of oneself, but at the end of the magical or alchemical operation, it becomes evident that the “god” was always oneself. In other words, the spirit guide is the alter ego or *Doppelgänger* of the hermetic alchemist. In Jungian terminology, the spirit guide is perceived as the “number two personality” or “shadow.” It is considered to be the manifestation of the dark or evil side of one’s personality, as it is perceived by the initiate himself. The initiate is not required to reject the evil, i.e. “confess and sin no more,” but to accept and integrate it. As we saw earlier in the context of the Hermetic creation myth, the primal man’s “shadow” covered the earth, which was considered to be degenerated matter. (*CH*, I, 14)

c. Concluding Phantasms

Jung’s final series of phantasms began in 1916, resulting in his confrontation with the Alexandrian Gnostic, Basilides (ca. 145 AD). Basilides was an inspired Gnostic leader from Alexandria, the city that gave birth to Neoplatonism, Hermetism and alchemy. These were topics

⁸¹⁶ Vitebsky, *De Shamaan*, 56-57.

⁸¹⁷ Drury, *Shamanism*, 6.

to which Jung devoted much of his energy throughout his entire life. The phantasms corresponded to his increased intellectual interest in Alexandrian Gnosticism during the same period. Despite the fact that he had been actively studying Alexandrian Gnosticism at the time, he claimed that his experiences were not his own, but part of a more universal primordial phenomenon.⁸¹⁸ After embarking upon another inner voyage, he claimed to have had an experience that James Webb, in *The Occult Establishment*, believes “indicates that he had accepted the role of occult teacher rather than analyst of a more conventional pattern.”⁸¹⁹ According to Jung’s own account, the experience began on a Sunday afternoon, when he and his family were visited by a crowd of ghosts, crying out to him in a chorus: “‘We have come back from Jerusalem where we found not what we sought.’ That is the beginning of the *Septem Sermones*.”⁸²⁰ The text that was to follow was apparently written in a semi-automatic fashion in the course of three days and titled: “*The Seven Sermons to the Dead* written by Basilides in Alexandria, the City where the East toucheth the West.” Shortly thereafter, he wrote about having “out-of-body-experiences,” in hermetic thinking, a sign one has become conscious of one’s own divinity (Cf. *Poimandres*).

3. Constructing a Replacement Religion

a. Psychological Alchemy

As a pastor’s son from the Reformation tradition, Jung was fully aware of traditional Christianity’s soteriological claims; however, like many other cultural Christians in his day, he had ceased to believe them. Throughout his life, Jung continued to discuss what he considered to be the downfall of Christianity and the need for its replacement with a new religion and a new ideal of God. In fact, even before his initiatory experiences mentioned above and his definitive break with Sigmund Freud, Jung was already contemplating the content of a new powerful religion needed to replace Christianity. In a letter written to Freud in 1910, Jung expressed a thought that he would often repeat: “Religion can be replaced only by religion.” His later experiences as an intermediary between the spirit realm (i.e. now understood as the collective unconscious), and mundane existence was a sign of his election to found it. In the letter, Jung embraced evil and implied -- a common theme in the nineteenth century -- that traditional Christianity is a degenerated form of the Dionysian Mystery Religion.

And must we not love evil if we are to break away from the obsession with virtue that makes us sick and forbids us the joys of life? ... Religion can be replaced only by religion. ... Only the

⁸¹⁸ C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*, ed. Aniela Jaffé, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Random House, 1961, 1962, 1963) 191-193.

⁸¹⁹ James Webb, *The Occult Establishment* (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1976) 386.

⁸²⁰ *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*, 191.

wise are ethical from sheer intellectual presumption, the rest of us need the eternal truth of myth. ... 2000 years of Christianity can only be replaced by something equivalent. ... I think we must give it time to infiltrate into people from many centres, to revivify among intellectuals a feeling for symbol and myth, ever so gently to transform Christ back into the soothsaying god of the vine, which he was, and in this way absorb those ecstatic instinctual forces of Christianity for the one purpose of making the cult and the sacred myth what they once were -- a drunken feast of joy where man regained the ethos and holiness of an animal.⁸²¹

According to Jung, two thousand years of Christian influence on the psyche could only be substituted by something as equally powerful. As we will later explore, Jung looked not only to the ancient Hermetic tradition, but also to Friedrich Nietzsche's understanding of the Dionysian in order to help him create the type of powerful religion he thought should replace traditional Christianity. Together with Nietzsche's understanding of the Dionysian, Jung believed that a form of psychological alchemy, not traditional Christian doctrine, could be developed as a substitute. As we showed, this assumption had already started to develop during the Reformation. According to Jung's biographer, Jung believed that "alchemy, a more complete explanation of reality than Christianity, would have balanced Christ with an Antichrist -- which [for him], of course, was the true meaning of the appearance of that personage in so much eschatological literature. Christ [i.e. meaning Jesus], lacking the dimension of evil, was inferior as a symbol of the Self to the lapis or Philosopher's Stone."⁸²² In his autobiographical work, *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*, Jung claimed that alchemy was really a method of religious philosophy. By translating spiritual alchemy into psychology, he was able to develop his psychological replacement religion with a spiritual language based on Hermetic and alchemical insights. He says:

An essential aspect of my work is that it soon began to touch on the question of one's view of the world [i.e. worldview], and on the relations between psychology and religion. I went into these matters in detail first in 'Psychology and Religion' (1938) and then, as a direct offshoot of this, in *Paracelsica* (1942). The second essay in this book 'Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon,' is of particular importance from this point of view. The writings of Paracelsus contain a wealth of original ideas, including clear formulations of questions posed by the alchemists, though these are set forth in late and baroque dress. Through Paracelsus I was finally led to discuss the nature of alchemy in relation to religion and psychology -- or, to put it another way, of alchemy as a form of religious philosophy. This I did in *Psychology and Alchemy* (1944). This I had at least reached the ground which underlay my own experiences of the years 1913 to 1917; for the process through which I had passed at that time corresponded to the process of alchemical transformation discussed in that book.⁸²³

⁸²¹ Carl Gustav Jung, "Freud/Jung Letters (293-4, letter 178J)," *Encountering Jung on Evil*, ed. Murray Stein (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) 25-26.

⁸²² *Carl Gustav Jung: a Biography*, 477.

⁸²³ *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*, 209.

Eventually, Jung became the champion of the psychological interpretation of alchemy. Jung would have gotten material for his new interpretation based on the spiritual and Hermetic interpretation of alchemy forwarded by Mary Anne Atwood in her popular: *Suggestive Inquiry into the Hermetic Mystery* (1850). Atwood derided material alchemy and believed that “true” alchemists were primarily interested in their own spiritual advancement. She probably developed the “spiritual interpretation” as a reaction to the dominance of nineteenth century materialism and positivism. Lawrence Principe says that Jung built upon Atwood’s view by subsuming all alchemy under the psychological category. He claimed that material alchemy was not actually concerned “with physical (chemical) processes at all but rather about psychological developments occurring within the practitioner. The metaphorical language and strange phenomena filling alchemical tomes actually record hallucinatory ‘irruptions of the unconscious’ which are ‘projected’ from the alchemist’s psyche onto the contents of his flasks.” Principe says that although recent studies have undermined Jung’s theories on the subject, his ideas have greatly influenced – albeit detrimentally – the understanding of alchemy “even among otherwise sober historians of science.”⁸²⁴

Furthermore, there are potentially psycho-alchemical elements in Nietzsche’s own thinking that would have attracted Jung, although he felt the need to adapt it in order to make it more practicable. That is to say, Nietzsche’s gruesome last years and death, coupled with his inability to “heal himself” from insanity, would have forced Jung to re-think the implications of Nietzsche’s philosophy and provide an alternative. Jung took a step towards the edge of the abyss, but unlike Nietzsche, he prudently recoiled.

b. The Love of Evil

Connected to his belief that a form of “psychological alchemy” would be an appropriate religious substitute for traditional Christianity, Jung also believed that one of the main philosophical problems with traditional Christianity was that it did not allow for an “evil principle” within God. He admired and agreed with Jacob Böhme (1575-1624) and Paracelsus, or Theophrastus Bombast von Hohenheim’s (1493-1541) Gnostic understanding of the nature of God as containing both a good and evil principle.

Böhme believed that God is essentially “One;” however, transcendence is a psychological condition of the mind he “calls the *Ungrund* (a conception not far removed from Eckhart’s *Abgrund* or Abyss).” Glenn Alexander Magee, in *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, says that Böhme believed that “God is moved by the desire to reveal Himself to Himself, but this self-

⁸²⁴ Lawrence Principe, “Alchemy I: Introduction,” *The Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*, ed. Wouter J. Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2006) 14.

revelation is psychologically impossible unless an *other* stands opposed to Him,” which he calls *Wiederwärtigkeit*. This “other” is not an absolute Other. “Instead, God in creation ‘others Himself’, corporealizes Himself, a process that reaches its consummation with Christ.”⁸²⁵ Both Böhme and Paracelsus,⁸²⁶ whose name harks back to the ancient pagan Celsus, claimed that Nature arose from the Great Abyss of God. They believed that “‘CHAOS is God himself’.”⁸²⁷ “The process by which the world is built up is one of differentiation, that is, of the production of distinctions and oppositions. We come to know only in terms of oppositions. For example, we come to know joy in its opposition sorrow, health in its opposition to sickness. Similarly, we come to know good only in opposition to evil, and God only in opposition to Satan.”⁸²⁸ Still reeling from the Reformation, Böhme took these basically magical ideas and made them more acceptable to especially Lutheran Pietists, who had not always distanced themselves from the hermetic tradition. Kokcu van Stuckrad says that although orthodox Lutherans decried Böhme as a heretic, his insistence on the need for personal spiritual experience and the development of an “inner vision” to complete God’s action in the human person “fell on fertile soil among pietistic and spiritualistic Protestant circles. It therefore came about that the theosophical movement also flourished in the American colonies, where its doctrines mingled with an ascetic form of Protestantism. As a potent influence on the American history of religion, it can be regarded as a precursor of the New Age movement.”⁸²⁹

Furthermore, Böhme’s influence on German Idealism and English Romantic poets is inestimable.⁸³⁰ Magee shows how Hegel’s philosophy was strongly influenced by Böhme. In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (1805), Hegel compared Böhme to the English scientist Francis Bacon (1561-1626). In contrast to Bacon, who he claimed was the leader of “the external, sensuous method in Philosophy,” he called Böhme the *philosophicus teutonicus*, or the founder of the peculiar character of Germany philosophy, “of whom we have no reason to be ashamed.”⁸³¹ This is to say that Hegel shared many of Böhme’s philosophical viewpoints. Magee proposes that, through the influence of Böhme, Hegel’s philosophy is more Hermetic than traditional, since it deviates from the traditional understanding of philosophy as the ongoing pursuit of wisdom, an idea that is in fact contested by Kingsley and other scholars of Hermetism.

⁸²⁵ Glenn Alexander Magee, *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001) 38.

⁸²⁶ Carlos Gilly, “Das Bekenntnis zur Gnosis von Paracelsus bis auf die Schüler Jacob Böhmcs,” *From Poimandres to Jacob Böhme: Gnosis, Hermetism and the Christian Tradition*, ed. Roelof van den Broek and Cis van Heertum (Amsterdam: In de Pelikaan, 2000) 386ff.

⁸²⁷ B. J. Gibbons, *Spirituality and the Occult: from the Renaissance to the Modern Age* (London: Routledge, 2001) 21.

⁸²⁸ Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy: Late Medieval and Renaissance Philosophy*, vol. 3 (New York: Doubleday, 1963, 1993) 267.

⁸²⁹ *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*, 98.

⁸³⁰ *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, 36ff.

⁸³¹ *Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition*, 48-49.

Hegel's claim to have attained wisdom is completely contrary to the original Greek conception of philosophy as the love of wisdom, that is, the ongoing pursuit rather than the final possession of wisdom. His claim is, however, fully consistent with the ambitions of the Hermetic tradition, ... 'Hermeticism' denotes a broad tradition of thought that grew out of the 'writings of Hermes' and was expanded and developed through the infusion of various other traditions. Thus, alchemy, Kabbalism, Lullism, and the mysticism of Eckhart and Cusa – to name just a few examples – became intertwined with the Hermetic doctrines. (Indeed, Hermeticism is used by some authors simply to mean alchemy.) Hermeticism is also sometimes called theosophy, or esotericism; less precisely, it is often characterized as mysticism, or occultism.⁸³²

Like Böhme, Jung rejected the traditional Platonic and Christian understanding of evil as a *privatio boni*.⁸³³ As a holist, for Jung, evil is the necessary opposite of the Totality, which must be balanced with the good. According to Murray Stein, "evil is for Jung most primarily a category of conscious thought, a judgment of the ego, and is therefore dependent for its existence upon consciousness."⁸³⁴ Even so, Jung was not a naïve idealist; he "stressed the reality of the psyche: what happens in the mind is every bit as real as any external event."⁸³⁵ In fact, Jung's understanding of evil is similar to the theosophical doctrine of *phantasmata*. According to *The Dictionary of the Esoteric*, "Phantasms" or "*Phantasmata*" are "an occult term for the thought forms that arise in the imagination and which, in an altered state of consciousness, seem to have a separate existence."⁸³⁶ Thought-forms are "mental images that form on the astral plane as a result of willed intent. The ability to 'hold pictures in the imagination' has a magical application, because occultists believe it is possible to transfer consciousness to thought-forms and use them as 'magical bodies' on the inner or subtle planes. Thought-forms can also personify the collective will of a magical group"⁸³⁷ and, therefore, have a historical basis. For Jung, as for theosophers from the Hermetic Tradition, evil is basically a psychic reality that has accumulated on the astral level. In theosophy, the "astral" refers to a sphere or an area between everyday physical reality and spiritual reality. The concept of the astral would have provided Jung with a starting point from which to re-conceive the traditional esoteric doctrine in psychological terms. His doctrine of the collective unconscious is a good example of this. Arthur Versluis in *Wisdom's Children: a*

⁸³² Hegel and the Hermetic Tradition, 1.

⁸³³ Carl Gustav Jung, "Good and Evil in Analytical Psychology," *Jung on Evil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) 91. In this way, traditional Christianity evil has no actual existence. This is, of course, the way that traditional Christianity actually avoids dualism. In traditional Christianity, dualism is a heretical principle, which suggests that evil is a separate reality both opposite and equal to the Good. For traditional Christians, evil is not necessary, and will one day be vanquished.

⁸³⁴ Murray Stein, "Introduction," *Jung on Evil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) 7.

⁸³⁵ *Spirituality and the Occult*, 107.

⁸³⁶ Nevill Drury, *The Dictionary of the Esoteric* (London: Watkins Publishing, 2002), 249. The dictionary goes on to say that it is believed that the "initiates of Eleusis, after consuming a psychedelic ergot beverage, had visionary encounters with Persephone, and that these hallucinatory experiences were part of the process of spiritual rebirth."

⁸³⁷ *The Dictionary of the Esoteric*, 307.

Christian Esoteric Tradition explains the meaning of the term for Böhmean theosophers that would have appealed to Jung and which he might have sought to explain in psychological terms.

The astral refers to what we may call the realm of the collective psyche – which is not to say unconscious, since it is precisely consciousness under consideration. The astral is the collective or individual psychic atmosphere in which people live. Thus, an individual may have a tendency toward melancholy, or toward lust, for instance. These tendencies are “phantasies,” meaning obsessive thoughts that develop in spiral around us in our mental atmosphere or ambit. The same tendencies also produce societal institutions or sects, which are essentially collective versions of what also governs individuals.⁸³⁸

B. The Development of the Collective Unconscious

1. The God Self

a. The Collective Unconscious: The Self, Primal *Anthropos*, Cosmic Adam and The Christ.

Like most contemporary esotericists today, Jung’s understanding of God was the Self, or the Higher Self. McLynn says that for Jung:

The God-image is a symbol of the Self, and of psychic wholeness. Although it is not really possible to differentiate God from the unconscious, it is most likely that the God-image does not coincide with the conscious as such, but with a special content of it, namely the archetype of the Self. The God-image is a reflection of the Self is an *imago dei*. Another way of looking at it is that Jungian psychology simply demystifies the tenets of Christianity. So God = Unconscious, Christ = Self, Incarnation = integration of consciousness, salvation or redemption = individuation, and the crucifixion = the realization of the quaternity or wholeness.⁸³⁹

In an article written in 1927 entitled, “The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche,” Jung says that the collective unconscious is the source of “ancestral heritage of possibilities of representation. It is not individual, but common to all men, and perhaps even to animals, and is the true basis of the individual psyche.”⁸⁴⁰ Because “it” is the basis of the individual psyche and supposedly contains all mythological images, “the whole of mythology could be taken as a sort of projection of the collective unconscious.” According to Jung, the collective biological and historical basis of the unconscious explains the similarity of many ancient myths from varying civilizations and epochs in history.⁸⁴¹ Therefore, the collective unconscious is equivalent to a primordial, collective memory of humanity that manifests itself in symbols, metaphors and myths, and “is the deposit of the psychic functioning of the whole human race.”⁸⁴² Jung says that:

⁸³⁸ Arthur Versluis, *Wisdom’s Children: a Christian Esoteric Tradition* (Albany: State University of New York, 1999) 208-209.

⁸³⁹ *Carl Gustav Jung: a Biography*, 411.

⁸⁴⁰ Carl Gustav Jung, “The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche,” *The Portable Jung*, ed. Joseph Campbell, trans. R. F. C. Hull (New York: Penguin Books, USA, 1976) 38.

⁸⁴¹ “The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche,” 39.

⁸⁴² Lucy Huskinson, *Nietzsche and Jung: The Whole Self in the Union of Opposites* (Hove: Brunner-Routledge, 2004) 43.

From the living fountain of instinct flows everything that is creative; hence, the unconscious is not merely conditioned by history, but is the very source of creative impulse. It is like Nature herself – prodigiously conservative, and yet transcending her own historical conditions in her acts of creation. ...

The collective unconscious contains the whole spiritual heritage of mankind's evolution, born anew in the brain structure of every individual. His conscious mind is an ephemeral phenomenon that accomplishes all provisional adaptations and orientations, for which reason one can best compare its function to orientation in space. The unconscious on the other hand, is the source of the instinctual forces of the psyche and of the forms or categories that regulate them, namely the archetypes. All the most powerful ideas in history go back to the archetypes. This is particularly true of religious ideas, but the central concepts of science, philosophy, and ethics are no exception to this rule. In their present form they are variants of archetypal ideas, created by consciously applying and adapting these ideas to reality. For it is the function of consciousness not only to recognize and assimilate the external world through the gateway of the senses, but to translate into visible reality the world within us.⁸⁴³

The microcosmic human is linked to the divine macrocosm through the collective unconscious, which is a transpersonal reality that is “a common substratum [of psyches] transcending all differences in culture and consciousness.” Its description as a “substratum of psychic reality” closely aligns it with the occult understanding of the astral, mentioned above. B. J. Gibbons in *Spirituality and the Occult: from the Renaissance to the Modern Age* explains that “The collective unconscious links us together, and Jung tells us that ‘In some way or other we are part of an all-embracing psychic life, of a single ‘greatest man’ to quote Swedenborg.’ He describes the collective unconscious as ‘a collective human being combining the characteristics of both sexes, transcending youth and age, birth and death’. The collective unconscious corresponds to the primordial cosmic man of occult thought, Adam Kadmon. The cosmic man unites individual human beings to God; similarly, at its deepest level, the collective unconscious links man to God.”⁸⁴⁴ In Edward F. Edinger's *The Aion Lectures*, his commentary on Jung's *Aion*, he confirms this. For Jung, the cosmic primal man (*Anthropos/Aion*), as it was understood in Gnostic and Hermetic myths, is indeed the archetype of the Self. Aion is the primal *Anthropos*, but he is also related to the ithyphallic Hermes Kyllenios,⁸⁴⁵ who, given his aroused sexual nature, is related to the ithyphallic Dionysos. This connection will become relevant in Jung's interpretation and reception of Nietzsche. For Jung, therefore, the collective unconscious was the collective psychological equivalent of the Hermetic primal man, whom we discussed in earlier chapters and whom Hermes Trismegistus called “Poimandres,” the “Mind of Sovereignty.” Jung's identification of the Higher Self and the collective unconscious with the Hermetic primal

⁸⁴³ Jung, “The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche,” 44-45.

⁸⁴⁴ *Spirituality and the Occult*, 109.

⁸⁴⁵ Edward F. Edinger, *The Aion Lectures: Exploring the Self in G. G. Jung's Aion*, ed. Deborah A. Wesley (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1996) 150.

man reveals that the source of the contemporary understanding of God, or better the “god-image,” is Hermetic.

i. Association of the Primal Man with “Christ” in Some Early Forms of Protestantism

As discussed, in the Hermetic traditions, the “unbounded being” Poimandres, mentioned in *CH, I*, was not only equated with the Divine Mind, but also with Aion. Nevertheless, in early Protestant Hermetic traditions, which continued to practice both Kabbalah and alchemy after the Reformation, a change occurred that would shape the Hermetic tradition to come. This prepared the soil for the New Age understanding of “Christ” as an expression of the totality of cosmic energy and an understanding of Jesus as a “christ” amongst “christs.” As the son of a Reformed minister, whose paternal grandfather was an influential Rosicrucian Freemason and whose mother practiced a form of modern necromancy, Jung stood squarely within this Protestant esoteric tradition. These esoteric Protestants came to associate the “unbounded being” or the primal man with Jesus Christ or with the Divine *Logos*, about whom the evangelist John spoke in his Gospel (Cf. John 1:1ff). Although the *Logos* in the *Poimandres* and in the Gospel are not expressing the same idea, C. H. Dodd has shown that they were developed in similar intellectual milieus and, therefore, display striking similarities and can be easily confused.⁸⁴⁶ Although other earlier Christian Hermeticists, like Ficino or Pico, might have thought that they were the same, they were careful not explicitly express this, realizing that traditional Christianity would consider such an equation as heretical. The fear of censorship or excommunication after the Reformation was less strong, allowing such an identification to develop.

In *The Sacrificial Body and the Day of Doom: Alchemy and Apocalyptic Discourse in the Protestant Reformation*, Urszula Szulakowska discusses the conflation of Jesus Christ and the idea of the “Son of Man” with the Hermetic “unbounded being” (*Poimandres*) in the writings of early Protestant theosophers, amongst others, Robert Fludd, Heinrich Khunrath and John Dee.⁸⁴⁷ Their acceptance of the idea that the mirror image of macrocosmic Man is the individual microcosmic man was derived from their reading of *CH, I* (Ficino’s *Poimandres*) as well as Paracelsian theosophy,⁸⁴⁸ which was itself a particular interpretation of Hermetism. It was not derived from their reading of, for example, the ancient Church Fathers. Szulakowska suggests the acceptance of the Paracelsian alchemical scheme within Protestant Christianity contributed to the processes of secularization and Modernity, a thought which deserves further research. Although Paracelsus’ (1493-1541) ideas were readily received by many Protestants, especially

⁸⁴⁶ C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960) 52-53.

⁸⁴⁷ Urszula Szulakowska, *The Sacrificial Body and the Day of Doom: Alchemy and Apocalyptic Discourse in the Protestant Reformation* (Leiden: Brill, 2006) 14.

⁸⁴⁸ *The Sacrificial Body and the Day of Doom*, 14-15.

within the Radical Reformation, Szulakowska points out that the acceptance of Paracelsian alchemy was highly contentious amongst both Protestant and Roman Catholic theologians alike.

Although alchemical symbols and theory seemed to have been common currency in medieval and Renaissance urban discourse, the dominating concepts of Paracelsian alchemy bore seditious implications against the authority of the institutionalized Church. ... It was clear to many Renaissance scholars, such as Thomas Erastus (1523-1583) and Marin Mersenne (1588-1648) that the Paracelsian alchemists were transmitting unorthodox theosophical views which had been developed outside the doctrinal framework of the Christian Church. These beliefs continued to be expressed in the terms of Christian soteriology by the Paracelsians, for they considered themselves to be true disciples of Jesus Christ.⁸⁴⁹

Although Paracelsus claimed – a popular contention at the time – to have rejected pagan philosophy, ironically, through his acceptance of Hermetic philosophy and medicine, he brought paganism in through the more radical Protestant's backdoor. Given the confused and dangerous social, political and religious situation of the day, it is unclear whether this was a conscious or an unconscious effort on his part. As discussed, also Bruno had been influenced by the ideas of Paracelsus, but his interpretation of Paracelsian alchemy was a clearly more conscious effort to oppose traditional Christianity. Jung and other modern esotericists, like Annie Besant and Alice Bailey, remain within the tradition of Protestant esotericism, albeit a highly secularized version of it. Nevertheless, through the influence of Paracelsus, we are able to see the connections between Bruno's panentheistic collapse of the *cosmos* into his individual ego as well as the beginning of the "worship" of the Cosmic Man, *Poimandres* or Aion, amongst more mystically minded Protestants, as "the Christ." This is because they began to equate "Aion" with the traditional understanding of Jesus' divine nature as the *Logos tou Theou* or the Word of God and as the incarnation of "The Son of Man."

We can only speculate that this more Hermetic understanding of Jesus, as a syncretism between the Jewish Messiah and the Gnostic aionic primal man, was progressively transmitted through Freemasonry, who continued to carry the Hermetic – and perhaps also Brunian -- torch. As we have shown, all of the main formulators of the New Age understanding of God as a less personal "Christ Principle," which is equivalent to the Mind of God or the Higher Self, were in some way or another also connected to Freemasonry in some form.

ii. Adam Kadmon

As discussed, in the Renaissance, Hermetic magic and Jewish Kabbalah came to be associated with each other, perhaps due to the fact that both were developed in separate, but similar intellectual milieus. After the Reformation, a more secularized version of Kabbalah also

⁸⁴⁹ *The Sacrificial Body and the Day of Doom*, 5-6.

continued to be transmitted, in a highly syncretized version, by Masonic secret societies.⁸⁵⁰ In both the Jewish and Christian the Kabbalistic tradition, the “Cosmic Man” was known as *Adam Kadmon* or the Supernal Human Being, who as a being of light reflected within himself the totality of reality. In *The Dictionary of Jewish Lore and Legend*, Alan Unterman says that “Adam Kadmon is a transcendent manifestation of God Himself, a personalized structure made out of the Sephirot,” who was formed at the beginning of the process of emanation, as it is understood by heterodox Kabbalism. The tradition claims that it was this “being,” whom the prophet Ezekiel saw in his throne vision (Ez. 1: 26-28). The first Adam or human person was made in the image and after the likeness of this glorious human likeness, who Ezekiel encountered.⁸⁵¹ Unterman explains that “all worlds are reflected in the primordial man and, at a more hidden level, in his human counterpart, who may use Adam Kadmon as a focus of contemplation for his own spiritual nature.”⁸⁵²

Szulakowska says that the belief in the primal man or “the image of the ‘Son of Man’ (*Anthropos*)” entered Judaism in the second century BC, appearing initially as a nameless, man-like person described in Daniel, who subsequently became a messianic character in the account of Enoch.” Following the theories of Reitzenstein and Bousset, Szulakowska believes that the idea of the Son of Man/*Anthropos* had been incorporated into Jewish thought through Persian influence. Thereafter, it was re-interpreted in the books of Daniel (See Dan 10:1ff) and Ezekiel, mentioned above, although this has been questioned by Dodd.⁸⁵³

In the Gospels, Jesus associates himself with the “Son of Man.” For example, in the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus heals a paralytic and is criticized by the scribes for also forgiving his sins. “And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, ‘This man is blaspheming.’ But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, ‘Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins’ – he then said to the paralytic – ‘Rise, pick up your bed and go home.’” (Mt 9:3-6. See also Mark 2:1ff; Lk 5: 17ff) In the Gospel of John, Jesus says that people should not labor for perishable food, but the food of eternal life, which the Son of Man, namely Jesus, will give them. (Jn 6: 27) For this assertion, Jesus was accused of blasphemy. However, instead of backing down, Jesus upped the ante, saying:

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will

⁸⁵⁰ See Arthur Edward Waite, *Some Deeper Aspects of Masonic Symbolism* (Montana: Kessinger Publishing).

⁸⁵¹ Alan Unterman, *Dictionary of Jewish Lore and Legend* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991) 12.

⁸⁵² *Dictionary of Jewish Lore and Legend*, 12.

⁸⁵³ *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 43.

raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is true food, and my blood is true drink. Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him... (Jn 6:53-58)

Clearly, in Jesus' own time, the identity of the "Son of Man" was a matter of intense debate. For example, in Matthew 16:13, Jesus asks his disciples: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" After healing a blind man, in John 9:35ff, Jesus asks him, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, 'And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?' Jesus said to him, 'You have seen him, and 'it is he who is speaking to you.'" What Jesus himself actually meant by this is still a matter of debate today. However, if Dodd is right, Jesus' understanding was not derived from a Persian or Zoroastrian belief in a heavenly man, but is in some sense:

One who incorporates in Himself the people of God, or humanity in its ideal aspect. But while the concept employed is substantially identical with that of the heavenly Man as known over a wide range of Hellenistic thought, the reality to which the concept is applied is different. The Hellenistic Ἀνθρώπος is a metaphysical abstraction. ... In the Fourth Gospel, on the other hand, there is never any doubt that the evangelist is speaking of a real person, that is, of a concrete, historical individual of the human race, 'Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Joseph' (i. 45). He labours, grows weary, thirsts, feels joy and sorry, weeps, suffers, and dies. His relations with other men are such as can be expressed in terms of love, trust and obedience, and that not in any symbolic or sublimated sense, but as men love, trust and obey one who is their master and teacher (xiii. 13.)⁸⁵⁴

René Girard basically confirms Dodd's more ethical understanding of the Son of Man, mentioned above. Girard sees Jesus' appropriation of the title, Son of Man, as connected to a text in Ezekiel (33:1-11).⁸⁵⁵ According to Girard, Jesus is the watchman selected to give warning to Israel. "Refusing the kingdom means refusing the knowledge that Jesus bears – refusing the knowledge of violence and all its works. In the eyes of those who reject it, this knowledge is ill-omened; it is the worst of all forms of violence. That is indeed how things must look from the perspective of the sacrificial community." For them, Jesus is a subversive and blasphemous force that seeks to overturn the most sacred of traditions, namely, sacrifice.⁸⁵⁶ As Girard goes on to say, "Violence is unable to bear the presence of a being that owes it nothing – that pays it no homage and threatens its kingship in the only way possible. What violence does not and cannot comprehend is that, in getting rid of Jesus by the usual means, it falls into a trap that could only be laid by

⁸⁵⁴ *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, 248-249.

⁸⁵⁵ "The Word of the Lord came to me: 'Son of man, speak to your people and say to them, If I bring the sword upon a land, and the people of the land take a man from among them, and make him their watchman, and if he sees the sword coming upon the land and blows the trumpet and warns the people, then if anyone who hears the sound of the trumpet does not take warning, and the sword comes and takes him away, his blood shall be upon his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet and did not take warning: his blood shall be upon himself. But if he had taken warning, he would have saved his life.'"

⁸⁵⁶ *Things Hidden*, 207-208.

innocence of such a kind because it is not really a trap: there is nothing hidden.”⁸⁵⁷ In other words, Jesus message is radically anti-esoteric and, hence, anti-sacrificial. For Girard, Jesus as the Son of Man means that he is the only one who has and can totally reject violence and its works, because he is God.

The epithet ‘Son of Man’ also corresponds, quite clearly, to the fact that Jesus alone has fulfilled a calling that belongs to all mankind. If the fulfillment, on earth, passes inevitably through the death of Jesus, this is not because the Father demands this death, for strange sacrificial motives. Neither the son nor the Father should be questioned about the cause of this event, but all mankind, and mankind alone. The very fact that mankind has never really managed to understand what is involved reveals clearly that the misunderstanding of the founding murder is still being perpetuated, as is our inability to hear the Word of God.

That is indeed why people are constrained to invent an irrational requirement of sacrifice that absolves them of responsibility. According to this argument, the Father of Jesus is still a God of violence, despite what Jesus explicitly says. Indeed he comes to be the God of unequalled violence, since he not only requires the blood of the victim who is closest to him, most precious and dear to him, but he also envisages taking revenge upon the whole of mankind for a death that he both required and anticipated.⁸⁵⁸

Nevertheless, given the traditional Christian association of the “Man/*Antropos*” in Daniel’s vision with Jesus Christ, the similarities in the concepts in *Poimandres* and the Fourth Gospel as well as Jesus’ identification of himself as the “Son of Man,” for those Protestant Hermeticists, who believed that Hermes had lived during the days of Moses, the perhaps too facile association of and misidentification of Jesus with the Hermetic “primal man,” i.e. *Poimandres/Aion*, became a distinct possibility. Although some Roman Catholics were influenced by Hermetism after the Reformation,⁸⁵⁹ it is important to note that in no sense did this misidentification persist or gain ground within the Roman Catholic Tradition, or within Eastern and Oriental Traditions.

The confluence of various esoteric traditions in the Renaissance, i.e. pagan Gnosticism, Hermetism and Jewish Kabbalah, etc. which had also probably mutually influenced each other in Antiquity, led to the development of, for lack of a better term, Hermetic Protestantism, after the chaos of the Reformation. Arthur Versluis in *Wisdom’s Children: A Christian Esoteric Tradition*, has attempted to call this heterodox form of Hermetic Christianity “Protestant Mysticism.”⁸⁶⁰ As noted earlier, this form of Protestant mystical esotericism was the same confluence that led to the development of Bruno’s particular, more panentheistic interpretation of the Hermetic Tradition. Without a mediating teaching authority, or *Magisterium*, to rule in contentious doctrinal issues,

⁸⁵⁷ *Things Hidden*, 209.

⁸⁵⁸ *Things Hidden*, 213.

⁸⁵⁹ For example the great universal Jesuit scholar, Athanasius Kircher might be an example of this.

⁸⁶⁰ See Arthur Versluis, *Wisdom’s Children: A Christian Esoteric Tradition* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

any group could teach whatever they pleased and claim that they were the “true” disciples of Jesus Christ, which is what happened. However, after the Peasant Rebellion (1523), Martin Luther quickly backtracked on the issue of eliminating the Church hierarchy in order to guard a certain level of doctrinal and social order. Ironically, his realization came only after he had rejected the Roman Church’s authority and hierarchy. In many ways, Protestant rebels within the Lutheran Church resented the grip that Lutheran orthodoxy maintained on matters of doctrine and spirituality, and were, in a sense, following their “master’s” footsteps. As Modernity progressed and the processes of secularization became stronger, the heterodox Protestant association of the Hermetic primal man with the more traditional belief in unique divinity of Jesus of Nazareth was either progressively taken out of its Christian context or conflated, leading to a more impersonal understanding of “Christ” as the Higher Self, or the Self or even as the Hermetic primal man. Jesus then came to be understood as a figure who, like Hermes Trismegistus, successfully achieved “rebirth in God” and became a “christ amongst christs.”

iii. The Phylogenic *Anima Mundi*

From Jung’s own description and taking into account the growing psychologization of Reality, we intimate that the collective unconscious also functions something like the ancient *anima mundi*. Noll claims that Jung’s idea of the collective unconscious is a development of his reception and adaptation of Ernst Haeckel’s version of Darwinism. Through Haeckel’s coinage of the word, “phylogenic,” Jung was able to express his belief that the unconscious had both a historical and a “biological” ground, in the acceptable scientific language of his day. “Phylogenic” is a word that was coined by Haeckel in 1866. It means “the origin and evolution of a division, group, or race of animals or plants” or even the historical development of a living or non-living thing, like a group of languages.⁸⁶¹ Given his dependence on Haeckel, Jung originally called the collective unconscious the “phylogenic unconscious,”⁸⁶² which supposedly unified humanity on both a historical and biological basis.

Haeckel’s theories on evolution were not only Darwinian, but also had a racist edge. They were later used by the German National Socialists to develop their theories on a pure “Aryan race.”⁸⁶³ In fact, as did many nineteenth century occultists, Haeckel had also attempted a reversal or alchemical inversion of Christianity. By reintroducing the religion of the Presocratics, as the Hermeticist *magus* Giordano Bruno had interpreted it, he felt that he was developing a truly

⁸⁶¹ ed. Victoria Neufeldt, “Phylogenic,” *Webster’s New World Dictionary of American English* (Cleveland/New York: Webster’s New World, 3rd ed., 1988) 1019.

⁸⁶² *The Jung Cult: a Biography*, 6.

⁸⁶³ Léon Poliakov, *The Aryan Myth: a History of Racist and Nationalistic Ideas in Europe*, trans. Edmund Howard (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1974) 284.

“scientific” religion. However, Gasman claims that Haeckel’s Monistic Religion, far from being “objective science,” helped to “revitalize for the modern world the mystical Monism of the pre-Socratics, the Hermeticism of Bruno, the pantheism of Spinoza, the romanticism of Goethe, the idealism of the German *Naturphilosophie*, [and] was a movement that was ultimately identifiable, not so much with the traditions of conventional positivism, materialism, and rationalism that were reflected in the popular, albeit superficial images of Haeckelian Monism, but rather, and more importantly, in the astonishing popular recrudescence of age-old Hermeticism as a viable intellectual tradition at precisely the same time.”⁸⁶⁴ More interestingly, Haeckel virtually took over Bruno’s interpretation of the *anima mundi* as a “life force.” Leon Poliakov in *The Aryan Myth: A History of Racist and Nationalistic Ideas in Europe* shows that Jung’s collective unconscious, with its phylogenic ground, was really his re-interpretation of Haeckel’s version of the *anima mundi*.⁸⁶⁵ This explains why Jung’s collective unconscious functions like the *anima mundi*, but on a psychic level. It also connects him to Bruno.

Jung began his work on his Haeckelian unconscious in 1909. In medical school, he read the *Die Welträtsel* (1899) or *The Riddle of the World*, where Haeckel not only tried to solve the mysteries of the world with his evolutionary and hermetic “keys” to biology, but also proposed a “‘phylogenetic psychology’ as a science of evolutionary research alongside embryology, paleontology, and biological phylogeny.” Noll shows that Jung’s scientific method closely resembles Haeckel’s in *Die Welträtsel*.⁸⁶⁶ One year after he wrote his letter to Freud expressing his desire to replace Christianity with a contemporary version of Dionysian religion, in 1911, Jung wrote *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido*. There, he pays direct homage to Freud and indirectly to Haeckel. Noll points out that Jung was disingenuous because he failed to refer to the progenitor of the ideas of the most creative aspects of his work, i. e. those aspects which were not obviously dependent on Freud, his main psychoanalytic rival and, hence, were not as easily open to criticism by his peers. By 1912, however, Jung has caused a break within the Freudian psychological community and had converted his Swiss-German and still culturally Christian colleagues “to the notion that organic memories of ancestral impulses were more important than individual memories.”⁸⁶⁷

Later, Jung would attempt to explain the “strata” of the Judeo-Christian tradition as “sediment” that needed to be brushed aside or “cut through” in order to get to the more vital primordial layer. By using psychological alchemy to eliminate the Judeo-Christian sediment, the

⁸⁶⁴ *Haeckel’s Monism and the Birth of Fascist Ideology*, 60.

⁸⁶⁵ *The Aryan Myth*, 288.

⁸⁶⁶ *The Jung Cult*, 51-52.

⁸⁶⁷ *The Aryan Christ*, 109.

more primordial “higher,” yet, weakened foundation of the Aryan race could be revitalized.⁸⁶⁸ For Jung, it was important to excavate the subterranean depths of the unconscious, since it supposedly contained the earlier “sediments” of memory from his pre-Christian Teutonic past to which he desired access. He believed that his version of psychological alchemy provided both the spiritual and temporal framework needed to achieve this goal. For Jung, objects that arise out of the unconscious into the conscious come from this *mythical historical layer*, which he believed proved that the “soul possess[ed] in some degree a historical strata, the oldest stratum of which would correspond to the unconscious.”⁸⁶⁹ Since, the oldest stratum of the unconscious was the pagan period prior to Christianity, Jung believed that its discovery in the psyche would give credence to his ambition to start a new type of religion, which was based on Hermetic solar animism. However, to make it more credible to a whole generation of “science worshippers,” the religion would need to use the language of the newly developing science of psychology.

Although beyond the scope of this paper, during this time, Jung and many of his compatriots were caught up in the euphoria of the Germanic nationalism of his time. In *The Aryan Christ*, Noll again attempts to show how Jung’s ideas were not only linked to Haeckel’s racist biology,⁸⁷⁰ but also to *völkish* ideas that were popular in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which gave birth to National Socialism.⁸⁷¹ According to Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, in *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, the *Völkish* Movement was a nationalist cultural movement that “concerned itself with raising national consciousness among Germans, especially in the large conurbations and provinces of mixed nationality, through the foundation of educational and defence leagues (*Vereine*) to foster German culture and identity within the empire.”⁸⁷² Jung’s theories plugged into this nationalist current, which he hoped to channel. As Von Stuckrad makes clear, Jung’s Hermetic interpretation of the human Self as the spiritual sun, “provided a foundation for the sacralization of the human soul, which led directly to a new religion,” i.e. Jungian psychoanalysis. Originally, it was “a movement reflecting a ‘cult of the inner Sun (with evident borrowings from *völkish* ideas in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries)” that “grew up around the mystified figure of Jung” himself.⁸⁷³

⁸⁶⁸ *The Jung Cult*, 54.

⁸⁶⁹ *The Jung Cult*, 53. Direct quotes from C. G. Jung, *The Psychology of the Unconscious: A Study of the Transformation and Symbolisms of the Libido* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991) paragraph 36 and 51.

⁸⁷⁰ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (New York: New York University Press, 2004) 13. Goodrick-Clarke states: Ernst Haeckel, the eminent zoologist, warned repeatedly against the mixing of races and founded the Monist League in 1906 in order to popularize this racist version of Social Darwinism among Germans. These scientific formulations of racism in the context of physical anthropology and zoology lent conviction to *völkish* nationalist prejudice in both Germany and Austria.”

⁸⁷¹ *The Aryan Christ*, 4-9, 11-12, 18, 21, 24, 115, 259-260, 263-266, 273-275, 277.

⁸⁷² *The Occult Roots of Nazism*, 8.

⁸⁷³ *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*, 137.

b. Solar Phallic Man

Jung's celebrated "proof" of the historical and biological *anima mundi*, or the collective unconscious, was the so-called mythic imagination of the *Solar Phallus Man*. Noll says that in the first editions of *Wandlungen*, Jung admitted that the Solar Phallic Man was actually a client of J. Honegger, a colleague who tragically committed suicide in the same year of the publication (1911). However, in the 1952 editions, Jung removed all mention of Honegger's name and claimed that the "Solar Phallic Man" was his own patient. Jung contended that in 1906 Honegger's psychiatric patient reproduced particular mythical imagery, which he could have never known. Noll points out that this was deceitful, because Honegger only started his research on the patient in 1909, the same year that Jung began to muse about the Haeckelian phylogenic unconscious.

In an article written in 1927 entitled, *Erdbedingtheit der Psyche*, or "The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche," published by Hermann Keyserling of the Darmstadt Wisdom School, he had already begun to claim that the patient was his. Jung says, "The vision of my patient in 1906, and the Greek text first edited in 1910, should be sufficiently far apart to rule out the possibility of cryptomnesia on his side and thought-transference on mine. ..." ⁸⁷⁴ In the article, Jung says that if the supra-individual psyche exists, i.e. the collective unconscious, then, "immemorial patterns of the human mind, which we have not acquired but have inherited from the dim ages of the past" would appear to the individual conscious "*sub specie aeternitatis*," as a depersonalized "picture-language." He goes on to say that we would experience these images "not as my sorrow, but as the sorrow of the world; not a personal isolating pain, but a pain without bitterness that unites all humanity. The healing effect of this needs no proof." ⁸⁷⁵ Despite the fact that the "Solar Phallic Man" had touched this supposedly healing supra-individual psyche, paradoxically, he was not healed at all, and remained in a mental institution, estimating himself to be the Savior of the world. Jung says that he, i.e. not Honegger, came across him a corridor, squinting up at the sun, swaying to and fro. "He took me by the arm and said he wanted to show me something. He said that I must look at the sun with eyes half shut, and then I could see the sun's phallus. If I moved my head from side to side the sun-phallus would move too, and that was the origin of the wind." ⁸⁷⁶

Noll shows, however, that contrary to Jung's declarations, the mentally ill "Solar Phallic Man" by the name of E. Schwyzer could have easily had access to this mythical imagery, because

⁸⁷⁴ Carl Gustav Jung, "The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche," *The Portable Jung*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, ed. Joseph Campbell (London: Penguin Books, 1971) 37.

⁸⁷⁵ "The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche," *The Portable Jung*, 35-36.

⁸⁷⁶ "The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche," *The Portable Jung*, 36.

the text was contained in the *Greek Magical Papyri* (*Papyri graecae magicae* or PGM). Already in 1903, a small book entitled *Ein Mithrasliturgie* was published by Eugen Dieterichs (1867-1930), a virulently anti-Christian publisher. In the 1911 version of *Wandlungen*, Jung cited “a translation of a passage from the Mithraic Liturgy from a 1907 Theosophical publication by G. R. S. Mead,” which Jung claimed the man could not have known, because his “visions” began in 1906 instead of 1909. But as Noll has shown, Honegger only started his research on the patient in 1909, six years after the original Dieterich’s publication and two years after the widely disseminated Theosophical Society publication. Although Jung himself owned a 1910 edition of Dieterich’s work, and even after he discovered the existence of the 1903 edition, he stuck to his story, fearing that it would undermine his credibility.⁸⁷⁷

2. The Process of Individuation

a. Conjoining Opposites

In support of our thesis, Lucy Huskinson says, in *Nietzsche and Jung: The Whole Self in the Union of Opposites*, that Jung’s process of Individuation -- Jung’s code word for “self-divinization,” where one become conscious that one is *the Self*, whom we have now identified as the Hermetic primal man or Aion -- is parallel to the psychological processes that are at work in the processes of spiritual alchemy.⁸⁷⁸ As pointed out, Jung believed that a form of psychological alchemy was the best replacement for traditional dogmatic Christianity. Therefore, he attempted to convince the academic community that basically all alchemy is psychological. Hermetic psychological alchemy points to the necessity of change in order to transform oneself from one state to another, from the lead of the old self, to the gold of the new divinized Self, represented as the Philosopher’s Stone. Hence, the process of Individuation is similar to the process of rebirth in alchemy or in the pagan Mysteries that leads to transmutation into “divinity.” His conscious use of psychological alchemy as a method to achieve psychological union with the Self is an innovation, albeit already anticipation in Bruno’s *Eroici*. After Bruno’s rejection of Platonic ideal forms and the reversal of the Platonic Scale of Being into the progressive evolution of the *cosmos*, intellectual ascent and *theoria*, or contemplation, of the ideal Man was no longer effective. Alchemy, therefore, became a necessary method to achieve union and transmutation.

Huskinson explains that prior to beginning the process of Individuation or self-realization, one needs to “understand the structure of opposites inherent within the psyche.” The

⁸⁷⁷ *The Jung Cult*, 182-183. Noll quotes Jung’s exposition on the Solar Phallus Man from the 1911 edition of *Wandlungen*. “Honegger discovered the following hallucination in an insane man (paranoid dement): The patient sees in the sun an ‘upright tail’ similar to an erected penis. When he moves his head back and forth, then, too, the sun’s penis sways back and forth in a like manner, and out of that wind arises. This strange hallucination remained unintelligible to us for a long time until I became acquainted with the Mithraic Liturgy and its visions.”

⁸⁷⁸ *Nietzsche and Jung*, 47.

opposites are contained, according to Jung, in the *personal unconscious*, which is “made up of all the forgotten and repressed material unique to the individual,” and the *collective unconscious*, which “represents a deeper level of the unconscious” that is independent of the personal ego and conscious processes. The *Self* is not only the *God-image*, but is more precisely understood to be “the totality of the personality, where all opposites are united, and consciousness is enriched in its coordination with the personal and collective unconscious.”⁸⁷⁹

For Jung, the unconscious is opposite, but not opposed to the conscious. “Conscious and unconscious are antithetical to one another; the nature of either is defined as opposite to the other. Although consciousness and the unconscious are diametrically opposed, they are, according to Jung, able to complement one another.”⁸⁸⁰ Jung believed that opposites are complementary, because he believed that the totality of Reality as such is bi-polar or binary. Opposites consist not only in consciousness-unconsciousness, but also male-female, good-evil, etc. Therefore, in Jung’s opinion, the goal of all Reality or of Consciousness is to achieve a union of opposites.⁸⁸¹ Huskinson states, “the ideal state of affairs is a union of opposites: the promotion of both opposites. This union does not minimize the tension between opposite forces, but increases it so that the production of psychic energy is maximized (Jung, 1942, par. 154).” Even though union is the *telos* of the human person, according to Jung, one should only start the process during the second half of one’s life, after the age of 35.⁸⁸² During the first half of one’s life, Jung believed that one was destined to emphasize only one “opposite in the binary pair.”⁸⁸³ If one attempts to unify one’s opposites too early or fails to do this too late, then, one will remain a “sick animal.”

In order to achieve divine-like self-realization, “an individual must seek first to separate the opposites, and to promote one over the other, and then, when such a promotion leads to ‘stagnation, congestion and ossification’, to reunite the opposites in order to maintain productivity and dynamism within the psyche.”⁸⁸⁴ Initially, one must confront, but also to find a way to psychologically incorporate the so-called shadow-side of one’s personality. One’s “shadow” can be “found” by excavating the *personal unconscious*. “The shadow is the most apparent archetype to the individual as it embodies the very opposite of his conscious one-sided attitude; it is the inferior function and attitude type within consciousness. To incorporate the shadow into consciousness is to reject the ‘sick animal’ with his propensity to promote one opposite in the

⁸⁷⁹ *Nietzsche and Jung*, 45.

⁸⁸⁰ *Nietzsche and Jung*, 35.

⁸⁸¹ Carl Gustav Jung, “Introduction to the religious and the psychological problems of alchemy,” *Encountering Jung on Evil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) 27ff; *Nietzsche and Jung*, 37.

⁸⁸² Conveniently, Jung’s scheme justifies his own one-sidedness during the “first phase” of his individuated life.

⁸⁸³ *Nietzsche and Jung*, 40.

⁸⁸⁴ *Nietzsche and Jung*, 42.

binary pair, for its incorporation entails the acceptance of the neglected opposite, and thus a unification of opposites.”⁸⁸⁵

Incorporation is never easy, and even “dangerous.” For Jung, this is because the shadow is often perceived to be alien, morally reprehensible, or even evil. Normally, as a defensive mechanism, one projects the shadow outside of oneself in order to expel it from one’s persona. According to him, traditional Christianity did not understand the true structure of the psyche and made a mistake with its doctrines of “original sin” and “the devil” – an opinion that many traditional Christians hold today. According to Jung, somehow the resistance that the ego experiences in integrating its shadow (evil or morally reprobate side) comes to a dangerous and even violent climax that results in a horrible *death of the ego*, which leads to a re-birth. The ego-death is symbolized by “the king,” an idea that we will explore in more detail later. Jung also understood it as a wounding from the unconscious Other, i.e. the Self within the self, both strongly alchemical themes. Huskinson says that:

The death of the ego, as with the death of the king, ‘signifies the overcoming of the old and the obsolete (Jung, 1955-1956, par. 169), and this entails a wounding from the might of the Self. The ego experiences the king’s sufferings: of dissolution and decomposition, the extinction of its light (its power and domination over all), and incineration in the fire (in the greater power) (Jung, 1945-1954, par. 468). Within the individuation process the Self forces the ego to acknowledge its impotence, and through its affects it inflicts radical change in the attitude of the ego. The ego is no longer in its petty personal world – believing itself to be in total possession of the world – as it was prior to individuation, but now participates freely in the wider world of objective interests (Jung, 1929, par. 68). It sheds its limited subjectivity for an ‘attitude that that is beyond the reach of emotional entanglements and violent shocks’ (Jung, 1929, par. 67-68). The king is thus reborn; his monarchy is revitalized so that his power can no longer be questioned, for he has attained the ultimate power: Selfhood.’⁸⁸⁶

b. Divine Androgyny

The process of Individuation begins when one confronts the symbols of projection, which initially have to do with the opposite sex. Sexual orientation, or whether one is born a female or a male, is to be found on the level of the archetype *anima/animus*, located at the deeper levels of the *collective unconscious*. Huskinson says that “the *anima* is the feminine component of the unconscious male psyche, while the *animus* is the male component of the unconscious female psyche. The former personifies ‘eros’ or love, while the latter is a personification of ‘spirit’ and ‘intellect’ (Jung, 1951, par. 29). The archetypal image of the *anima* is usually singular to compensate the fundamental masculine tendency to discriminate, while the image of the *animus*

⁸⁸⁵ Nietzsche and Jung, 45.

⁸⁸⁶ Nietzsche and Jung, 59.

is usually plural to compensate the fundamental female tendency to unify and synthesize (SNZ, II, pp. 1152-1153).⁸⁸⁷

By incorporating one's sexual opposite, one comes close to the goal of the union of masculine and feminine opposites and the alchemical occult ideal of androgyny. Given the parallels between the process of Individuation and Hermetic alchemy, the integration of either the *animus* or the *anima* (depending on the sex of the to-be-individuated person in question) is similar to the alchemical wedding, or the *hieros gamos*. Sometimes the wedding is known as the *mysterium coniunctionis*, but also *coniunctio oppositorum*, or the conjunction of opposites. The meaning of these terms is highly dependent on the worldview of those using them.

In pagan alchemy, the *hieros gamos* is the symbol of the conjunction of opposites, which should result in the production or birth of the hermaphrodite or androgynous Self, a supposed balance between male and female energies.⁸⁸⁸ As *The Dictionary of the Esoteric* explains, "In mysticism and occultism, the symbol of the human hermaphrodite or androgyne has special significance because it represents the fusion of opposite polarities, and therefore characterizes a major development on the spiritual path to transcending duality."⁸⁸⁹ Mircea Eliade, in *The Two and the One* -- a book where he attempts to "prove" that androgyny is the primordial concept of divinity --, says that the conception of divine/human perfection as androgynous or even bi-sexual can be traced back to Plato's *Symposium* (183D-193D). It was continued by "neo-Platonic, neo-Pythagorean theosophists" as well as "the hermetic school who quote the authority of Hermes Trismegistus or Poimandres, and in a number of Christian Gnostics, *human perfection is imagined as an unbroken unity*." Eliade admits, therefore, that the contemporary ideal of androgyny in the West is a Hermetic one, which can be traced back to the acceptance of the Hermetic doctrine of the primal man.

In occult thinking, transcending duality through androgyny is important, because it is analogous to the union of opposites in the Divine One. Eliade suggests that in pre-Christian neo-Platonism, neo-Pythagorism and Hermetism, the ideal is persuasive, because it performs like "a reflection of the divine perfection, of the All in One."⁸⁹⁰ Since the primal man contains all opposites within himself, including femininity, so too must the divinized man. Supposedly, androgyny is an existential replacement for Christian "gender dualism," which esotericists claim pits good against evil, male against female, light against darkness, order against chaos, etc.⁸⁹¹

⁸⁸⁷ Nietzsche and Jung, 45.

⁸⁸⁸ Lyndy Abraham, *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 98.

⁸⁸⁹ *The Dictionary of the Esoteric*, 138.

⁸⁹⁰ Mircea Eliade, *The Two and the One*, trans. J. M. Cohen (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965) 107.

⁸⁹¹ Certainly, this estimation of the inherent "duality" of Christianity has more to do with an esoteric worldview that attempts to see the world as a binary totality, which must somehow be balanced, than with the traditional Christian

Hermetic alchemy is perceived as the “solution” to this supposed dualism, because it assumes that Reality is a binary totality that must be balanced by opposites. According to Abraham:

Alchemy is based on the hermetic view that man had become divided within himself, separated into two sexes, at the fall in the garden of Eden and could only regain his integral Adamic state when the opposing forces within him were reconciled. The union of these universal male and female forces produced that third substance or effect which could heal not only the disease of the physical world but also the affliction of the separated soul. Metaphysically, the chemical wedding is the perfect union of the create will or power (male) with wisdom (female) to produce pure love (the child, the Stone). The creation of this Stone always involves some kind of sacrifice or death. Thus emblems of the chemical wedding almost always include symbols of death which overshadow the coniunctio. The amorous birds of prey copulate while devouring each other.⁸⁹²

c. Transformation through Moods

As seen above, the Hermetic union between or integration of opposites is not a calm “harmonious” procedure, but always entails some kind of violence. The elements are said to be at war with each other, a war, which is “needed” to bring about “peace.”⁸⁹³ Often the union of the “quarrelling couple” is understood as an incestuous union between fundamentally similar pairs, i.e. a brother and sister, mother and son, father and daughter or king and son.⁸⁹⁴ A death or sacrifice is needed, which can either be perceived as symbolic, real, psychological or all of these. For Jung, personal change or transformation into divinity is noted through a change in one’s “moods.” This might have been an insight deduced from his reading of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900).

For example, in *Schopenhauer as Educator* (SE), § 4 and *The Gay Science* (GS), § 86, 288, Nietzsche makes similar observations. In *Human All Too Human* (HATH) § 1 (1878), a book that Nietzsche wrote in order to work out his break with Richard Wagner, he addresses the problem of moods or feelings in relationship to *Chemistry*. As this section concerns “First and Last Things,” a reference to eschatology, we suggest that “chemistry” is a veiled allusion to alchemy. Nietzsche poses the problem in terms of opposites and suggests that the solution is related to the operation of sublimation, an alchemical term we came across in our discussion of Bruno. Nietzsche writes: “*Chemistry of concepts and feelings*. In almost all respects,

worldview itself. The so-called union between the bride and bridegroom (i.e. *hieros gamos*) is not the same as how Early Church understood the union between the lover and the beloved. The beloved is a friend and not a fundamental “enemy.” This Christian union resulted in the glorification of both sexes, not their amalgamy into androgyny. In contrast to the traditional Christian understanding of marriage, the “Chemical Wedding” is seen as a necessary death, or sacrifice, or dissolution, or even decapitation and castration of the masculine element, symbolized as the bridegroom or king. From standpoint of traditional alchemy, with roots in Hermetism, undergoing the terror of death or offering oneself up as a bloody sacrifice is seen as a necessary step towards divinization. This is not so in traditional Christianity.

⁸⁹² *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 36-37.

⁸⁹³ *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 141.

⁸⁹⁴ *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 106.

philosophical problems today are again formulated as they were two thousand years ago: how can something arise from its opposite -- for example, reason from unreason, sensation from the lifeless, logical from the illogical, disinterested contemplation from covetous desire, altruism from egoism, truth from error?" (HATH, 1) In this passage Nietzsche proposes that nothing has changed. He perceives psychic reality as binary; therefore, concepts or moods/feeling arise from their opposite.

If we recall, in Antiquity and the Middle Ages, the Galenic *humors* were associated with disease, but also with psychological predispositions. The idea was that if one could manipulate the humors or moods, one could manipulate the cause of disease and potentially restore a person to health, but also make a person sick. By changing a person's mood or mental states, one could change the microcosmic person and, hence, the macrocosmic world. Melancholic or black bile was connected to the black of *nigredo*; Phlegmatic or phlegm was connected to the white of *albedo*; Choleric was connected to the yellow bile of citrinitas, or the yellow stage. (As from the sixteenth century, the yellow was gradually dropped from the process.)⁸⁹⁵ The Sanguine humor, or blood, was connected to the red of *rubedo*.⁸⁹⁶ The *albedo* is often referred to as the lunar stage, while *rubedo* is the solar stage,⁸⁹⁷ which could easily be associated with the lunar goddess, Hecate or Circe, but also alchemical solar deity Aion respectively. The colors of the alchemical process were connected to "moods," which in turn have their correspondences with Galenic psychological *humors*, commonly understood to be the causes of diseases in Antiquity and the Middle Ages.⁸⁹⁸

According to Jung, Individuation "psychologically [...] means that during the assimilation of the unconscious the personality passes through many transformations, which show it in different lights and are followed by ever-changing moods' (Jung 1955-1956, par. 430). The unconscious is gradually 'illuminated' in the developing personality, which is characterized by a change in mood from black to white (or yellow) to red."⁸⁹⁹ Clearly, for Jung, the colors correspond to the stages of the alchemical process. Huskinson connects *moods*, which was formerly understood as the medieval *humors*, to Jung's interpretation of Nietzschean philosophy, supporting our contention that there is also a possible alchemical bent in Nietzsche's own thinking, which Jung then picked up:

The first 'mood' or stage of the alchemical process is black, which corresponds to the lack of unconscious incorporation (the shadow of the individuation process or the alchemical *nigredo*). The final stage is red, which corresponds to the fullest expression or illumination. We can think

⁸⁹⁵ *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 42.

⁸⁹⁶ *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 145-148.

⁸⁹⁷ *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 146.

⁸⁹⁸ Cf. Frances Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge, 1979) 59-60.

⁸⁹⁹ *Nietzsche and Jung*, 49.

of the red stage of enlightenment as the Nietzschean ‘Daybreak’, when authentic values, which were once hidden, are at last expressed, or in terms of the ‘blood’ that gives life to the whole individual, the Self. (cf. Jung, 1947/1954, par. 384).⁹⁰⁰

C. Nietzscheanism

1. Varieties of Nietzschean Religion

a. Esoteric Sun Worshipers

We believe that by looking more closely at Jung’s reception of Nietzsche, we will gain a better insight into the sacrificial nature of Jung’s understanding of the process of Individuation. Arriving at Ascona in 1933, in 1936, Jung gave one of his first lectures on “The Idea of Redemption in Alchemy” at the *Eranos Conference*.⁹⁰¹ This was also the period when he began his *Seminar on Nietzsche’s Zarathustra*, which lasted from 1934 through 1939.⁹⁰² *Eranos*, however, was founded by Frau Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn (1881-1962) at her Ascona home “Casa Gabriella” on Lake Maggiore. Jung had met her at Hermann Keyserling’s Darmstadt School of Wisdom, discussed earlier. Hammer says that “Keyserling believed not only in the existence of an esoteric form of religion, but in a kind of onion-layered structure in which the adept comes progressively to the ‘actual’ message of faith.”⁹⁰³ This means that at the beginning of the initiation process, an initiate is told one thing (i.e. lied to), but only later comes to know actual occult secrets, when he is able or ready to accept them. According to James Webb in *The Occult Establishment*, the Darmstadt School of Wisdom served as a prototype for *Eranos* since many of its lectures were repeated early on in Ascona.⁹⁰⁴

Similar to California in the 1960’s, Noll says that at the beginning of the twentieth century, southern Germany and Switzerland became the center of “neopagan, sun-worshipping, nudist, vegetarian, spiritualist, sometimes anarchist, sexually liberated groups experimenting with new life-styles or a new experience-based philosophy of life.” Many of these cultic groups were associated with what historian Steven Aschheim, in *The Nietzsche Legacy in Germany: 1890-1990*, calls the “varieties of Nietzschean Religion.” The proclamation by the “madman” in Nietzsche’s *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft* or *The Gay Science*, § 125 and Zarathustra in the “Prologue” of *Also Sprach Zarathustra* or *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, § 2 that “God is dead!” inspired occultists “to create their own forms of personal religion.”⁹⁰⁵ This solipsistic worship of the self was connected to hermetic sun-worship, which they believed to be the origin of Aryan religion, where the microcosmic planetary sun was seen as analogous to the microcosmic self. In

⁹⁰⁰ *Nietzsche and Jung*, 49.

⁹⁰¹ *The Jung Cult*, 284.

⁹⁰² Carl Gustav Jung, *Jung’s Seminar on Nietzsche’s Zarathustra*, Abridged Edition, ed. James L. Jarrett (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998).

⁹⁰³ *Claiming Knowledge*, 174.

⁹⁰⁴ *The Occult Establishment*, 397.

⁹⁰⁵ *The Jung Cult*, 104.

the general atmosphere of rising German nationalism, neopagan groups sprang up combining Nietzschean philosophical ideas, encouraging the creation of one's own values, with ancient Persian (i.e. Zoroastrian and Mithraic) and Gnostic sources.⁹⁰⁶ These "Jesus-the-man-friendly," anti-Judeo-Christian, neo-pagan German nationalists were the culmination of a long process of anti-traditionalism and anti-dogmatism that ironically began with the Reformation.

Like many others, Jung looked to Nietzsche to find a "new" way. "Nietzsche was absorbed by reformists on the left and on the right, and according to Aschheim, Nietzscheanism became a diffuse 'protean force' that could be adopted by politicians, theologians, anarchists, philosophers, psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, sexual libertarians promoting the 'new ethic' – indeed anyone seeking change, renewal, or rebirth."⁹⁰⁷ Hence, Noll believes that the only way to understand Jung and the Jungian movement is by showing their relationship to the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche, or what he calls early twentieth century Nietzschean religion. As a former Jungian, Noll was struck by the fact that while many Jungian practitioners "cite its legitimacy as a fruitful psychological theory and a profession of psychotherapy, the far greater numbers of participants in the movement, who are not professionals are attracted by its 'spirituality.'" On the one hand, Jungian training institutes "emphasize their commitment to clinical training and desire to maintain professional associations with the psychological and medical sciences," while on the other hand, the same institutes might offer workshops "related to New Age spirituality and neo-paganism" as well as practical courses "on astrology, the I Ching, palmistry, and other practices associated with the occult sciences."⁹⁰⁸ According to Noll:

Nietzscheanism was part creator and part beneficiary of a general erosion of traditional belief and dissatisfaction with the established church. For many this dissatisfaction, far from quenching the thirst for religion, gave it renewed impetus. It is indeed paradoxical that Western spirituality in the twentieth century has been so influenced – indeed, awakened – by a man who declared the death of God and who defined himself as the Antichrist. Yet, Nietzsche's 'hammer' of questions has been taken up time and again in the modern age by spiritual seekers who felt their paths were blocked by the walls of convention and dogma, and who have felt compelled to initiate unconventional acts of personal salvation out of a yearning for a new nectar to satiate a very old thirst. When we survey the spiritual landscape of the Western world a century later we find that there is a wide cultural interest in a movement that has its origins among these late-nineteenth-and-early-twentieth-century Nietzschean currents. This is the international movement centered on the transcendental ideas and the idealized personality of Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961), the Swiss psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, and founder of the school of analytical psychology.⁹⁰⁹

⁹⁰⁶ *The Jung Cult*, 105.

⁹⁰⁷ *The Jung Cult*, 7.

⁹⁰⁸ *The Jung Cult*, 7.

⁹⁰⁹ *The Jung Cult*, 5-6.

b. Jung's Experience of Nietzsche

Jung began reading Nietzsche around 1898, two years before his death, while he still languished in extreme mental and physical torment at his sister's home in Weimar. At the age of twenty three, Jung said that he experienced *Also Sprach Zarathustra* in the same way that he experienced Goethe's story of the *magus* and alchemist, *Faust*, "like a thunderbolt." Noll notes that Nietzsche's influence on Jung was tremendous. "Jung's Collected Works are filled with references to Nietzsche, and he devoted an extensive seminar to Nietzsche's *Zarathustra* between 1934-1939."⁹¹⁰ Noll goes so far as to even call Jungian psychology "Nietzschean religion," as it assents to Nietzschean principles of own value creation and uses many of Nietzsche's Dionysian metaphors.⁹¹¹ Nietzsche's Dionysian religion "promised to release the creative powers of genius within the individual, the courage to freely express oneself and to reject authority and moral and social conventions. Through deeds one could truly be who one was, and perhaps even achieve symbolic immortality,"⁹¹² through the fame that one could achieve through one's writings. As Nietzscheanism presented early twentieth century spiritual seekers with the philosophical and spiritual mandate to tear down what they perceived to be the walls of "convention and dogma" that blocked them from realizing themselves, Jungianism provided them with a "safer" method than pure Nietzschean nihilism to realize themselves after the walls had been destroyed.⁹¹³ Given the Romantic associations of madness with genius, going insane did not discredit Nietzsche's philosophy, but actually served to elevate his reputation amongst "individuals and groups seeking *Lebensreform* ('life-reform'), whether spiritual or political," who wanted to become iconoclastic *Übermensch* or intellectual gods.⁹¹⁴

2. The Return of Shamanic Inspiration

a. Genius and Inspired Madness

Carl Pletsch writes, in *Young Nietzsche: Becoming a Genius*, that a common idea was perpetuated by Romantic authors from Goethe to Schopenhauer that "genius was next to madness."⁹¹⁵ As we saw earlier, the idea had been already launched in Pseudo-Aristotle's *Problemata physica* and popularized through Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia* (ca. 1531-1533) that "great men" were "inspired melancholics," which implied with it a tinge of madness. In fact, in Nietzsche's *Morgenröte* or *Daybreak*, I, § 14, he confirms his nineteenth century bias: "A grain of the spice of madness is joined to genius, all earlier people found it much more likely that wherever there is

⁹¹⁰ *The Jung Cult*, 30.

⁹¹¹ *The Jung Cult*, 137.

⁹¹² *The Jung Cult*, 4.

⁹¹³ *The Jung Cult*, 4.

⁹¹⁴ *The Jung Cult*, 4.

⁹¹⁵ Carl Pletsch, *Young Nietzsche: Becoming a Genius* (New York: The Free Press, 1991) 88.

madness there is also a grain of genius and wisdom – something ‘divine,’ as one whispered to oneself.”⁹¹⁶ Although sometimes a bit obtuse, Pletsch argues that the category of “genius” was important to nineteenth century intellectuals, because the advent of democracy and universal education had brought the noble old world of aristocracy into ruins. Pletsch sees the promotion of “genius” in nineteenth century Europe as a mechanism to establish a new type of aristocracy to lead the world. Men like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Johann Wolfgang Goethe, but also the musical genius Richard Wagner -- whose autobiography Nietzsche helped to edit -- popularized the genre of the autobiography. Without much humility, they extolled the development of their own genial personalities:

By distinguishing genius as inherent, the product of birth rather than education, the autobiographies set in motion an extraordinary new model of human excellence and achievement. ... The great romantic heroes like Rousseau, Goethe, and Byron [writers whom Nietzsche admired] actually stepped onto the stage that that social space provided, and lived out the role of the creative individual as genius. They were, or seemed to have been, born to create. The difference between genius and talent was categorical. Only a genius could create, and his creations were so remarkable that contemporaries could not recognize them immediately. ... Genius was thus defined by qualities not formally ascribed to humans at all, but reserved for God. The romantic generation revolutionized aesthetic theory by making the artist a creator. It redefined the artist as the maker of completely new objects, not just the imitator of God’s creations that he had been for centuries. Works of art ceased to be mirrors of nature and became independent sources of insight and illumination. The genius-artist was credited with imagination, originality, and creativity – terms and qualities that at the turn of the nineteenth century were as new as the concept of the genius itself. Ascribing such qualities to the genius culminated in the belief that the genius could create *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, as God had supposedly, done or at the very least out of his own soul.⁹¹⁷

Pletsch believes that “becoming a genius” or longing for recognition as a genius was a goal of Nietzsche’s philosophical project. His paradoxical fear of, but also desire for madness played into this. As discussed, in the shamanic model, the ability to come out of a bout of madness was perceived as a sign of one’s successful initiation. For both Jung and Nietzsche, the shamanic model would have, therefore, provided a technique to “go mad,” “heal oneself,” then, “prove” their genius. That this was at least Nietzsche’s intention can perhaps be confirmed by returning to the passage in *Daybreak* § 14, mentioned above.

Directly after asserting that madness is “joined” to both genius and divinity, Nietzsche claims that the greatest good came to ancient Greece through madness. All “innovators,” whether political or poetical, established their credentials through madness. Then, he asks the tell-tale question: “How can one make oneself mad when one is not mad and does not dare to appear

⁹¹⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) 14.

⁹¹⁷ *Young Nietzsche: Becoming a Genius*, 4-6.

so?” Apparently, it would be desirable because, according to him, “almost all the significant men of ancient civilization have pursued this train of thought; a secret teaching of artifices and dietetic hints was propagated on this subject, together with the feeling that such reflections and purposes were innocent, indeed holy.” That is to say, according to Nietzsche, all men who have made a mark, i.e. who have had something to contribute to history, used “secret techniques” in order to go mad. It was in their state of madness that they supposedly found “inspiration.” Then, Nietzsche makes it perfectly clear that he has the shamanic model in mind:

The recipes for becoming a medicine man among the Indians, a saint among the Christians of the Middle Ages, an *angekok* among Greenlanders, a *pajee* among Brazilians are essentially the same: senseless fasting, perpetual sexual abstinence, going into the desert or ascending a mountain or a pillar, or ‘sitting in an aged willow tree which looks upon a lake’ and thinking of nothing at all except what might bring on an ecstasy and mental disorder. Who would venture to take a look into the wilderness of bitterest and most superfluous agonies of soul in which probably the most fruitful men of all times have languished!”⁹¹⁸

In *Daybreak*, I § 14, not only does he discuss the “techniques” these holy men used in order to bring upon madness, but he also connects medieval Christian saints to the medicine men or shaman of three different primitive cultures. He claims that they willingly applied these techniques in order to bring on ecstasy and mental disorder. Their goal, however, was not madness, but to increase their knowledge and power through a temporal emotional state. Long before Kingsley, Nietzsche subscribed to the interpretation of the Presocratics that respectable philosophers like Chitwood find so “distasteful.” According to Nietzsche, like the ancient Greek poets and politicians, the mental suffering or anguish of the shaman is “fruitful.” Nietzsche says that these men worked themselves up into fervour and demanded madness from the “heavenly powers” in order to confirm the truth of their convictions and as a necessary sign of their election. Because they had destroyed the “law” and had become a law unto themselves, they were plagued by doubt and needed madness in order to learn how to believe in themselves. Only madness would “prove” that they were right, or confirm their election. Although he claims that these were the “sighs” of these ancient “madmen,” obviously, with hindsight, the sighs were his own as well:

Ah, give me madness, you heavenly powers! Madness, that I may at last believe in myself! Give deliriums and convulsions, sudden lights and darkness, terrify me with frost and fire such that no mortal has ever felt, with deafening din and prowling figures, make me howl and whine and crawl like a beast: so that I may only come to believe in myself! I am consumed by doubt, I have killed the law, the law anguishes me as a corpse does a living man: If I am not *more* than the law,

⁹¹⁸ *Daybreak*, 14.

I am the vilest of all men. The new spirit which is in me, whence is it if it is not from you? Prove to me that I am yours; **madness alone can prove it.** (Bold mine.)⁹¹⁹

b. There's a Method to the Madness

It is not insignificant the resurgence in the popularity of shamanism can also be, to some extent, connected to the resurgence in the popularity of Presocratic philosophers, who we showed in earlier chapters were themselves shaman or *iatromantis*. This “return” to the Presocratics was initially advocated by none other than Friedrich Nietzsche, but less known is the influence of the German Darwinian scientist and founder of Monistic Religion, Ernst Haeckel, whom Nietzsche had studied.⁹²⁰ Haeckel was a contemporary of Nietzsche, whose worship of Nature in his monistic churches figured both Bruno and Empedocles as central.⁹²¹ The fact that Nietzsche, the classical philologist, associated Zarathustra with Empedocles is important. According to Kingsley, already in Antiquity, it was believed that Empedocles had been taught by Zoroastrian *magi* and, had been initiated by them into the shamanic arts.⁹²²

Those familiar with Nietzsche's biographical information also know how he used many of the same type of spiritual techniques known to induce oracular experiences, which he discussed in *Daybreak*, § 14. For example, he cultivated long periods of silent contemplation, combined either with walking in elevated atmospheres -- with reduced oxygen levels to the brain -- or sitting in darkened rooms. He was known to have out-of-body experiences and play repetitive melodies on the piano, which brought him into something like an ecstatic trance. He fasted as well as regularly took addictive drugs like opium, even though they were prescribed by doctors for his headaches. In fact, many of these techniques are known to induce ecstatic “religious experiences,” albeit immanent ones. In *Daybreak*, § 14, he made it clear that he was aware of this. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche's most autobiographical work, in the section on the *iatromantis* Zarathustra, he gives an admirable explanation of his inner experience, which strongly resembles that of a trance medium:

⁹¹⁹ *Daybreak*, 15.

⁹²⁰ Curt Paul Janz, *Friedrich Nietzsche Complete Biografie*, Vol. I, trans. C. W. A. J. A. Walraven (Baarn: Tirion, 1999) II, 186.

⁹²¹ *Haeckel's Monism and the Birth of Fascist Ideology*, 64-65. Concerning Haeckel's Brunian religion, Daniel Gasman explains: “In place of Christian altars, Monist churches would substitute pre-Socratic and Platonic perfect spheres portraying the ‘starry heavens’ and the earth – representations exhibiting the ‘dance’ and the music of the universe, the ‘infinitely great star world,’ as Haeckel described it, permeated at each point by the divine spirit. Proposals that were, in fact, familiar as a reconstruction of Giordano Bruno's vision of the infinite cosmic sphere suffused with ubiquitous divine central points, an open universe that had been equated in the hermetic tradition with the Cosmic Center of God.”

⁹²² Peter Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) 227.

Has anyone at the end of the nineteenth century a clear idea of what poets of strong ages have called *inspiration*? If not, I will describe it. -- If anyone had the slightest residue of superstition left in one's system, one could hardly reject altogether the idea that one is merely incarnation, merely mouthpiece, merely a medium of overpowering forces. The concept of revelation – the sense that suddenly, with indescribable certainty and subtlety, something becomes *visible*, audible, something that shakes one to the last depths and throws one down – that merely describes the facts. One hears, one does not seek; one accepts, one does not ask who gives; like lightning, a thought flashes up, with necessity, without hesitation regarding its form – I never had any choice.

A rapture whose tremendous tension occasionally discharges itself in a flood of tears – now the pace quickens involuntarily, now it becomes slow; one is altogether beside oneself, with the distinct consciousness of subtle shudders and of one's skin creeping down to one's toes; ...

Everything happens involuntarily in the highest degree but as in a gale of feeling of freedom, of absoluteness, of power, of divinity. – The involuntariness of image and metaphor is strangest of all; one no longer has any notion of what is an image or a metaphor; everything offers itself as the nearest, most obvious, simplest expression. It actually seems, to allude to something Zarathustra says, as if the things themselves approached and offered themselves as metaphors ('... Here the words and wordshrines of all being open up before you; here all being wishes to become word, all becoming wishes to learn from you how to speak').

This is *my* experience of inspiration; I do not doubt that one has to go back thousands of years in order to find anyone who could say to me, 'It is mine as well'." (*EH*, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra" 3)⁹²³

In the above description, although he does not mention the word "shaman," his discussion of his experience during the section on Zarathustra as well as his belief that his experience is one that went "back thousands of years" suggests that Nietzsche knew that his experience was shamanic in nature. Given the fact that he was a classical philologist, who specialized in the Presocratic philosophers, we suggest that Nietzsche was attempting to procure a religious experience that was equal to the early iatromantic philosophers, from which he believed that everything great about Greek culture was inspired. In this sense, he anticipates Kingsley.

c. Lou Salomé's Estimation

i. Self-Divinizing Mysticism

Lou Salomé, a onetime girlfriend, wrote in her *Nietzsche* that Nietzsche must not only be seen as a philosopher, but also as a religious thinker. Despite his atheism, Nietzsche had an insatiable longing to *return* to Paradise or some kind of Golden Age.⁹²⁴ Salomé especially touches on the mystical character of Nietzsche's philosophy, an idea which the serious academic Walter Kaufmann goes to lengths to discredit. He makes her out to be not much more than a "floozy" and gossip, although he provides no evidence (as he does in the case of Elizabeth Nietzsche) to

⁹²³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, The Basic Writings of Nietzsche, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 2000) 756-757.

⁹²⁴ Lou Salomé, *Nietzsche*, trans. Siegfried Mandel (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001) 32.

substantiate his calumny.⁹²⁵ Rüdiger Safranski, on the other hand, compliments Salomé in her almost prophetic ability to judge Nietzsche's philosophical goals before he published *Zarathustra*. He says that it was an "attempt to expound a kind of religion in Zarathustra" so "that he will appear to us as the promulgator of a new religion, and it will be the sort that recruits heroes as its disciples (Peeters, *Lou Andreas-Salomé* 136)."⁹²⁶ We take Salomé's insights seriously, given Nietzsche's own high estimation of her intelligence and his willingness to bear his soul to her.⁹²⁷

In *Nietzsche*, Salomé describes Nietzsche's method of self-dividing, which is a process that helped him to create his double Zarathustra. She claims that it was a religiously motivated practice.⁹²⁸ If this is true, then, Nietzsche's practice and experience are similar to Jung's experience with Philemon. Salomé gives a good account of how Nietzsche proceeded, a process that greatly resembles spiritual alchemy and shamanism. She says that "One could say that Nietzsche chooses the most gloomy thoughts in order to nourish them with his own blood and to transform them painfully into another self, his double."⁹²⁹ It is possible and as we will attempt to show, the cultivation of such gloomy or destructive thoughts (i.e. moods or humors) should be seen as a psychological *coniunctio oppositorum*. Nietzsche progressively and successively embarked on the road to self-destruction, presumably to re-create himself. Salomé says:

Indeed, the hallmark of Nietzsche's entire manner of thinking is a never-ceasing motion of returning into himself. However, the possibility of combinations is not endless; in fact, it is quite limited in that the forward-driving and self-wounding impulse which gives his thoughts no respite springs from the inner uniqueness of his personality. Although his thoughts seem to roam widely, they still are bound to the same intellectual processes that ever subjugate his thoughts to dominant necessities. We shall see to what extent Nietzsche's philosophy forms a circle and how toward the end the man again nears the youth through several of his most intimate and concealed thought-experiences. Relevant to the ways of his philosophy are the words, 'There, behold a stream that through its many windings returns to its source!' ('Of Virtue that Makes Small,' Z, III, 1). It is no coincidence that during his last period of creativity, Nietzsche arrived at his mystical teaching of the eternal recurrence: the picture of a circle – eternal change in an eternal recurrence – stands like a wondrous symbol and mysterious cipher over the entrance to his works.⁹³⁰

⁹²⁵ Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974, 4th ed.) 49. After detailing the falsifications of Elizabeth, he writes: "Now we know that *both* women are unreliable witnesses," but provides no proof this in the case of Salomé.

⁹²⁶ Rüdiger Safranski, *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, trans. Shelley Frisch (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002) 254.

⁹²⁷ *Nietzsche: a Philosophical Biography*, 256-257.

⁹²⁸ Salomé, *Nietzsche*, 72.

⁹²⁹ Salomé, *Nietzsche*, 76.

⁹³⁰ Salomé, *Nietzsche*, 32-33.

Salomé notes that Nietzsche's philosophy cannot be separated from his life, his life is his philosophy and vice versa. Throughout his life, Nietzsche keeps returning into himself in order to overcome himself. For example, she notes that as he approaches madness, he returns to the same themes of his youth, the nature of evil and its origin in himself. "At a boyish age, Nietzsche wrote what he called his first 'juvenile attempt at literary play,' an essay 'about the origin of evil ('Preface,' GM, 3) in which he made God 'quite properly, the *father* of evil.'" ⁹³¹ Salomé believes that for Nietzsche, the process of divinization consisted in the reconciling the opposites within himself, his good with his evil, the sun with his moon, the mud with gold, etc. Salomé gives an admirable account of Nietzsche's religious practice, i.e. "directing cruelty against himself," equating it with a "frenzy of mysticism," which he hoped would form him into a superior type of human being:

In reaction to his long subservience to the disciplined search for knowledge ... he was drawn into a frenzy of mysticism ... Even so, he attempted to grasp intellectually the power of moods. He does not rest until the triumph of his unchained life's will becomes a self-mockery of the mind. In an uncanny way, and through the discarding of all logical knowledge, the thinker is 'secretly enticed by his own cruelty and is pushed forward by the dangerous thrill of that cruelty directed against himself'; he must reign as 'artist and transfigurer of cruelty' (BGE, 229). The human spirit finally descends voluntarily into its own destruction because only then does it receive its greatest enlightenment; he dives into the limitless and the measureless, which close over him; only in this fashion does he fulfill his goal.

In the aesthetics and ethics of Nietzsche's last philosophizing, we find again the pervasive theme that a decline through excess is the necessary precondition for a highest and new creation. And therefore, Nietzsche's theory of knowledge culminates in a kind of personal thrall in which the concepts of madness and truth are inextricably entwined. For that reason the idea of the 'humanly superior' comes like a lightening stroke which annihilates the spirit, a madness, which ought to inoculate his sense of truth: 'I would wish that you possess a madness that destroys you! ... Truly, I would wish that your madness were called 'truth'! And the happiness of the spirit consists of this – to be anointed and sanctified through tears as a sacrificial animal;...(Of the Famous Wise Men,' Z, II).'" ⁹³²

Since Salomé intimately knew Nietzsche, we take it that her description of Nietzsche's practice or technique is not only based on her reading of his works, but also on her personal observation and knowledge. Her description of Nietzsche's "aesthetics and ethics" is remarkably filled with conjunctions of opposites. Attempting to grasp the power of "moods," or humors, he sets about to destroy his mind in order to "transfigure" himself or to re-create himself anew. He "descends" willingly into his own abyss in order to achieve "enlightenment," or ascent into the light of sanity. He "dives" into mental chaos in order to "fulfill his goal." According to Salomé his philosophy is saturated with the pervasive theme that "decline" will bring about something "higher" and "new."

⁹³¹ Salomé, *Nietzsche*, 33.

⁹³² Salomé, *Nietzsche*, 99.

He uses “madness” as an inextricable part of his search for “truth.” That is to say, madness (or the willful destruction of his mind and rejection of logical knowledge) is a technique that he applies to precisely increase knowledge. Although Salomé associates Nietzsche’s procedures with “mysticism,” given our knowledge of the alchemical processes, ancient Hermetism and the Presocratics, we intimate that the psychic cruelty that Nietzsche directed against himself is equivalent to the *nigredo* of the *opus alchymicum*, but also to the interrelated practices of the shaman. Nietzsche’s practice of “directing cruelty against himself” is plainly self-destructive, but with a particular goal in mind. By destroying “himself,” he hopes to transfigure himself into a “new creation,” a “superior” or “higher” type of human being, which he will call the *Übermensch*.

ii. Shamanic and Chemical Dissociation

Siegfried Mandel, commentator of Lou Salomé’s *Nietzsche*, writes: “The clue to Nietzsche’s most creative moments – as he describes matters – is the state of depersonalization [i.e. dissociation] in which the ‘It’ (*Es*) and not the author composes. ‘I am neither mind nor body,’ declared Nietzsche, ‘but a *tertium quid*’ – another dimensional entity. That sense is particularly pervasive in *Zarathustra*.⁹³³ In chemistry, the modern successor of alchemy, *dissociation* means, “the breaking up of a compound into simpler components, as with heat or a solvent, frequently in a reversible manner so that the components may recombine.”⁹³⁴ In psychology, *dissociation* is the ability to split or break off one’s consciousness from regular consciousness in such a way that it seems to belong to another person. That is to say, dissociation is the ability to project one’s own consciousness in such a way that it appears to become a phantasmic *Doppelgänger*, “spirit guide,” “*parhedros*” or “alchemical assistant.” Obviously, “dissociation” is what a shaman does in order to procure the necessary spiritual initiatory experiences to be recognized as a “healer” and mediator between the world of the living and the dead. Nevill Drury remarks in his book *Shamanism*:

In one sense, as we have seen, shamanism can be regarded as a controlled act of mental dissociation. It is as if the practitioner is able to travel in soul-body to other realms of existence: harnessing familiar spirits, perhaps encountering spirits of death or disease, meeting with ancestor or creator gods, and sometimes even participating in the mythic drama of the Creation itself. This act of dissociation can come about in many ways. As we will see in subsequent chapters of this book, sometimes sacred psychedelic plants provide the impetus for the shamanic journey. At other times the spirit quest comes about following periods of fasting, sensory deprivation,

⁹³³ Sigfried Mandel, “Introduction” Lou Salomé’s *Nietzsche* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2001) xxxviii.

⁹³⁴ Ed. Victoria Neufeldt, “dissociation,” *Webster’s New World Dictionary of American English* (Cleveland & New York: Webster’s New World, 3rd College ed., 1988) 397.

meditative focusing, chanting, through the beating of drums, or through a particular response to a dream.⁹³⁵

3. The Dionysian *Übermensch*

a. The Higher Self in Nietzsche

Whereas Jung is concerned with the “Self,” Nietzsche is concerned with the *Übermensch*. Huskinson has suggested that Nietzsche’s later teaching on the *Übermensch* is really his re-interpretation of the doctrine of the Higher Self, or “God,” although clearly not in the traditional sense of the word.⁹³⁶ This of course brings Nietzsche’s early God-concept very close to the Hermetic one on the primal man. Nietzsche’s teaching on the Higher Self can be explicitly found in *Menschliches, Allzumenschliches* or *Human, All Too Human* (1878: HATH § 624, 629) and in *Der Fall Wagner* or *Richard Wagner in Bayreuth* (1876). Similarly, in Nietzsche’s *Schopenhauer als Erzieher* or *Schopenhauer as Educator* (SE; 1874), found in *Unzeitgemässe, Betrachtungen* or *Untimely Meditations*, the theme of the “true self’s” need for liberation from the “false self” is pregnant. Nietzsche’s goal is to show people how to find their true “selves” again. Jung’s teaching on the Higher Self or the Self was more probably developed in dialogue with Nietzsche, whom he was able to quote from heart. However, Jung’s “Self” is not a copy of Nietzsche’s, but a re-interpretation based on his knowledge of ancient Hermetism, Gnosticism and alchemy.

According to Nietzsche, the “authentic” person should first see himself as a product of failed Nature, a recurrent theme in Hermetic spiritual alchemy and the Gnostic Hermetic myth of the fall of the primal man. For example, in SE, § 4: “‘Only nature is good, only the natural is human,’ he despises himself and longs to go beyond himself: a mood in which the soul is ready for fearful decisions but which also calls up from its depths what is noblest and rarest in it.” This means that for Nietzsche the “true self,” which he says is “high above,” is precisely to be found in the depths of the interior man. Hence, for Nietzsche, the “true self” is the “Higher Self.” In the same section, he uses initiatory language: “‘I will remain my own!’ It is a dreadful resolve; only gradually does he grasp that fact. For now he will have to *descend into the depths of existence* with a string of curious questions on his lips: why do I live? what lesson have I to learn from life? how have I become what I am and why do I suffer from being what I am?...” (Italics mine) In SE § 6, the doctrine of the Higher Self as the true self is put in even clearer perspective of perfecting his own failed nature and, hence, Nature itself by becoming one with it:

⁹³⁵ Drury, *Shamanism*, 15.

⁹³⁶ Nietzsche and Jung, 57, 61, 62, 64, 96, 114; as “Other”: 57-59, 62, 64, 197; as “Perfection,” 88; as “Dionysos,” 93-94.

By coming to this resolve he places himself within the circle of culture; for culture is the child of each individual's self-knowledge and dissatisfaction with himself. Anyone who believes in culture thereby saying: '*I see above me something higher and more human than I am*'; let everyone help me to attain it, as I will help everyone who knows and suffers as I do: so that at last the *man* may appear who feels himself perfect and boundless in knowledge and love, perception and power, *and who in his completeness is at one with nature, the judge and evaluator of things.* (Italics mine)

This text, written early in Nietzsche's career, is intriguing, because the "man," who at last may appear, reminds us of the "unbounded being," Poimandres, who was, as we have shown, often equated with the primal man and Aion in Hermetic tradition. Not only Nietzsche's "man" perfect and boundless in knowledge, but like the original condition, the man is "one with nature." He is, however, no longer located in the zenith of the Neoplatonic spheres, but is the immanent "judge and evaluator of things." Here we see that Nietzsche's early understanding of the "Higher Self" follows the Hermetic line, which later becomes his infamous *Übermensch*.

b. The Dionysian Primordial Unity

Although the *Übermensch* is Nietzsche's re-interpretation of the "Higher Self," Huskinson says that it is also the "Dionysian impulse that enables 'nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated' to celebrate 'once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man' (BT, 1)." Nietzsche believed that "in complete contrast to Christianity, with its need to alienate man from nature, the *Übermensch* proclaims: 'Learn to become nature again yourselves, and then with and in nature let yourselves be transformed' (UM, IV, 6). The *Übermensch* is identified with nature itself, a 'Dionysian' nature."⁹³⁷ In this sense, as an avid anti-Platonist, Nietzsche forwards the more destructive, Brunian-like idea of divinity. Huskinson is correct to see the Dionysian nature as the primal chaos that underlies all there is. Rüdiger Safranski says in *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*:

The Dionysian is the 'primordial unity' (1,38; BT § 4), an all-encompassing being that is ultimately incomprehensible. The concept of the Dionysian naturally implies a theoretical choice that, in turn, goes back to a defining experience. Even for the young Nietzsche, being was something precarious, at once threatening and enticing. He experienced it in 'lightening, storm, and hail,' and in his early notes there are references to the 'world child' of Heraclitus, who playfully forged and destroyed worlds. It is indeed necessary to have experienced being as a monstrosity. Life that is roused to consciousness should be wary of being.⁹³⁸

In many ways, the Dionysian *is* the union of opposites, the place where contraries meet and merge. The Dionysian is the "third thing," the *tertium datum* that is only to be separated again at another level of existence. It is not a fuzzy warm unity of a supposedly loving "Mother Nature,"

⁹³⁷ Nietzsche and Jung, 29.

⁹³⁸ Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography, 79.

but the horrific abysmal womb, where the subterranean “divine child” was shred to bits, swallowed by his father “Zeus” in order to be reborn out of his “leg.” It is the place where individuality is disintegrated, only to be reintegrated or sublimated again in the illusion of the Apollonian.⁹³⁹ Nietzsche explains this in *Will to Power* (WP) 1050:

The word ‘*Dionysian*’ means: an urge to unity, a reaching out beyond personality, the everyday, society, reality, across the abyss of transitoriness: a passionate-painful overflowing into darker, fuller, more floating states; an ecstatic affirmation of the total character of life as that which remains the same just as powerful, just as blissful, through all change; the great pantheistic sharing of joy and sorrow that sanctifies and calls good even the most terrible and questionable qualities of life; the eternal will to procreation, to fruitfulness, to recurrence; the feeling of necessary unity of creation and destruction. The word ‘*Apollinian*’ means: the urge to perfect self-sufficiency, to the typical ‘individual’, to all that simplifies, distinguishes, makes strong, clear, unambiguous, typical: freedom under the law.⁹⁴⁰

4. An Aesthetic Justification

a. *Enantiodromia*

The Apollonian is diametrically opposite, yet, complementary to the Dionysian. As Huskinson explains, “The Dionysian is the meaningless world from which man requires aesthetic salvation; it is therefore intolerable to the individual in its pure form. Apollinian form is required to stabilize the terror of the Dionysian and prevent the dissolution of individuality. ... Nietzsche praises the Apollinian impulse because it protects the individual from the terrors of nature by using illusion to creatively falsify reality without denying its true nature.”⁹⁴¹ The world cycle is itself a dialectic between two forces, which in *The Birth of Tragedy* he calls Dionysos and Apollo. Like Nietzsche, based on what he considered to be the Presocratic Heraclitus’ conception of the world, Jung asserted that the states of the world are destined to reverse themselves.

Huskinson claims that this can be understood by looking at Jung’s reception of the philosophy of Heraclitus. She points out that the Presocratic philosopher Heraclitus’ “doctrine of the tension of opposites as the basic life force is fundamental” to the thought of both Nietzsche and Jung.⁹⁴² If one state is good, then, it will eventually dismember itself and become bad. If another state is bad, it will eventually re-assemble itself and become good, etc. We, of course, recall that Bruno held a similar idea. Although not found within the existing Heraclitan fragments, Huskinson points out that Heraclitus’ ancient commentators believed that his doctrine of the tension of opposites was based upon a concept called *enantiodromia*. *Enantiodromia* is a composite of ἐναντιος, meaning “opposed”, “contrary” or even “hostile,” and δρομος, meaning

⁹³⁹ Nietzsche: *A Philosophical Biography*, 67.

⁹⁴⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968) 539.

⁹⁴¹ Nietzsche and Jung, 15.

⁹⁴² Nietzsche and Jung, 81. We suggest that they could have just as easily derived this notion from Empedocles’ understanding of the tension between Love and Strife.

“course,” as in the “course of the heavenly bodies” or the “course of one’s life.” *Enantiodromia* means that during the course of a cosmic cycle, with the swing of the pendulum, opposites can turn into each other. It is “the occasion where one opposite suddenly reverses and assumes the character of its opposite counterpart.”⁹⁴³ The doctrine is an attempt to explain change within a monistic or “holistic” universe.

Huskinson suggests that Nietzsche took the Heraclitan model of polarity, where two diverging forces separate and then seek to reunite (Cf. WP, 641; BGE, 259; BGE, 36) for his concept of the “will to power.” For example, Heraclitus claims that “Two made one are never one. Arguing the same we disagree. Singing together we compete. We choose each other to be one, and from the one both soon diverge.” (Fragment (F) 59). Or, “From the strain of binding opposites comes harmony” (F 46).⁹⁴⁴ She posits that Nietzsche built upon Heraclitus’ position that in unity, opposites are relative or complementary. For example, according to Heraclitus, “The sea is both pure and tainted, health and good haven to the fish, to men undrinkable and deadly.” (F 52); “The way up is the way back.” (F 69); “The beginning is the end.” (F 70); “Under the comb the tangled and the straight path are the same.” (F 50); “Good and evil are one” (F 57),⁹⁴⁵ and so forth.

Huskinson claims that although Nietzsche affirmed change and plurality, he also accepted some underlying unity, although this is contested by some contemporary philosophers.⁹⁴⁶ According to Heraclitus, “All things follow from the word” (F 1), affirming that “all is one” (F 2). Nietzsche called the ambiguous underlying unity the “Will to Power,” but also Dionysos.⁹⁴⁷

⁹⁴³ Nietzsche and Jung, 83.

⁹⁴⁴ Heraclitus, *Fragments*, trans. Brooks Haxton (London: Penguin Classics, 2001) 39, 31. Or, “What was scattered gathers. What was gathered flows apart.” (F 40). This seems to be the wisdom of reality that “guides and permeates all things.” (F 19). Heraclitus’ point is that without opposites, existence would not be the same. For example, “Without the sun, what day? What night?” (F 31); “The poet was a fool who wanted no conflict among us, gods or people. Harmony needs low and high, as progeny needs man and woman.” (F 43); “The cosmos works by harmony of tensions, like the lyre and bow.” (F 56); “Without injustices, the name of justice would mean what?” (F 60); “Always having what we want may not be the best good fortune. Health seems sweetest after sickness, food in hunger, goodness in the wake of evil, and at the end of a daylong labor sleep.” (F 104).

⁹⁴⁵ Cf. Heraclitus, *Fragments*.

⁹⁴⁶ Paul J. M. van Tongeren, *Reinterpreting Modern Culture: An Introduction to Friedrich Nietzsche’s Philosophy* (West Lafayette, Purdue University Press, 2000) 161, 301.

⁹⁴⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Will to Power*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage, 1968) 549-550. In *Will to Power*, § 1067, Nietzsche says: “And do you know what ‘the world’ is to me? Shall I show it to you in my mirror? This world: a monster of energy, without beginning without end; a firm, iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expend itself but only transforms itself; as a whole, of unalterable size, a household without expenses or losses, but likewise without increase or income; enclosed by ‘nothingness’ as by a boundary; not something blurry or wasted, not something endlessly extended, but set in a definite space as a definite force, and not a space that might be ‘empty’ here or there, but rather as force throughout, as a play of forces and waves of forces, at the same time one and many, increasing here and at the same time decreasing there; a sea of forces flowing and rushing together, eternally changing, eternally flooding back, with tremendous years of recurrence, with an ebb and a flood of its forms; out of the simplest forms striving toward the most complex, out of the stillest, most rigid, coldest forms toward the hottest, most turbulent, most self-contradictory, and then again returning home to the simple out of this abundance, out of the play of contradictions back to the joy of concord, still affirming itself in this uniformity of its

Huskinson sees Nietzsche's Apollonian and Dionysian dialectic as his attempt to re-interpret the alchemical union of opposites into a new philosophical language. In short, from the alchemical perspective, Dionysos is the chaotic *prima materia* into which the old state or form must be dissolved in order to be transmuted into gold or the god Apollo. For Nietzsche, Apollo is merely a sublimated version of Dionysos. Paul Bishop says in *The Dionysian Self: C. G. Jung's Reception of Friedrich Nietzsche* that Jung basically assented to Nietzsche's conception of the Dionysian essence of Reality. "For Jung, there is of course but one religion and one myth, uniquely embodied in the Dionysian mythologem: the archetype of the born-dying-reborn god." Jung saw little difference between the traditional Christian resurrection story and the myths about the rebirth of Dionysos or the resurrection of Osiris – who became associated with Dionysos in Hellenistic Antiquity. For both men, Christianity had made a mistake when it attempted to radically distinguish or differentiate itself from pagan myths,⁹⁴⁸ emphasizing only one side (i.e. the good) of the binary pair, while attempting to expel or exorcize the other.

b. Dionysian Sublimations

The "Apollonian-Dionysian dialectic," together with the Heraclitan concept of *enantiodromia* allows us to better interpret Nietzsche's famous credo in *Ecce Homo*: "Dionysos vs. the Crucified."⁹⁴⁹ For Nietzsche, Dionysos was merely the 'shadow side' or the opposite of Jesus Christ. He considered Jesus Christ to be a sublimation of Dionysos, or another Apollo, who had become petrified, static and in need of re-sublimation. According to this theory, in order to restore the balance after a long period of decadence, Dionysos had to return as Christianity's opposite and, yet, necessary complement. Since the unity of the world is composed of a "dialectic" between the good Christ (i.e. Apollo) and the evil Anti-Christ, (i.e. Dionysos, who can also be called Zarathustra), the one is the dark-side or shadow side of the Totality, while the other is the light-side.

Since Nietzsche believed that Christianity was a degenerated form of a former Apollonian sublimation, it needed to be conjoined again with the Dionysian in order to create a new sublimation. The Apollonian/Dionysian dialectic is meant to be a system of salvation, where

courses and its years, blessing itself as that which must return eternally. And becoming what knows no satiety, no disgust, no weariness: This my *Dionysian* world of eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying, this mystery world of the twofold voluptuous delight, my 'beyond good and evil,' without goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal; without will, unless a ring feels good will toward itself – do you want a name for this world? A *solution* for all its riddles? A *light* for you, too, you best-concealed, strongest, most intrepid, most midnightly men? -- *This world is the will to power – and nothing besides!* And you yourselves are also this will to power – and nothing besides!"

⁹⁴⁸ Paul Bishop, *The Dionysian Self: C. G. Jung's Reception of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Monographien und Texte zur Nietzsche-Forschung (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995) 288.

⁹⁴⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, The Basic Writings of Nietzsche, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 2000) 791.

Apollonian beauty makes Dionysian barbarism bearable. Unlike most of his Apollonian contemporaries, who romanticized Nature as a kind of “good” mother, Nietzsche confronted the potentially abysmal and immoral character of Nature from which “humanity” seeks salvation. However, given his doctrine of the Eternal Return, where everything will eventually come back or be reconfigured again in the exact same order as it was before,⁹⁵⁰ Nietzsche saw salvation as a primarily aesthetic phenomenon.

This is made clear in *The Birth of Tragedy* (BT, § 5 and § 24). Here, Nietzsche implies that the world itself is an illusion, which human artists created in order to cover up, but also to make the Dionysian brutality of the world bearable. Prefiguring New Age conceptions of reality, he sees human beings as “merely images and artistic projections of the true author.” Although he believes that human beings have no inherent significance, sometimes individual artistic genius coalesces with the “primordial artist of the world,” who might be something like the creative primal man, to create a great work of art. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, the development of Greek tragedy and the role of the chorus served as Nietzsche’s excuse to extol the genius of Richard Wagner’s operas as an instance where this had occurred. When human beings achieve their highest dignity as “works of art,” then, they achieve a dignity all to themselves. “For it is only as an *aesthetic phenomenon* that existence and the world are eternally *justified*.”⁹⁵¹

c. Sacrificing in the Temples of Dionysos and Apollo

In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche believes that the only way to justify one’s existence is to live one’s life in the most memorable or aesthetically appealing way possible. According to Nietzsche, the pleasure that one receives from Greek tragedy shows that evil, ugliness, disharmony and pain all play a role in shaping the artistic work, whether this concerns a civilization or an individual. These “are part of the artistic game that the Will in the eternal amplitude of its pleasure plays with itself.” (BT, § 24) In order to achieve the greatness of their civilization, the Greeks had to suffer greatly. Nietzsche exclaims: “How much did this people have to suffer to be able to become so beautiful!” Thereafter, he links their aesthetic accomplishments to the development of Greek dramatic tragedy, but also to their willingness to

⁹⁵⁰ See *Will to Power*, § 1066: “If the world may be thought of as a certain definite quantity of force and as a certain definite number of centers of force – and every other representation remains indefinite and therefore useless – it follows that, in the great dice game of existence, it must pass through a calculable number of combinations. In infinite time, every possible combination would at some time or another be realized; more, it would be realized an infinite number of times. And since between every combination and its next recurrence all other possible combinations would have to take place, and each of these combinations conditions the entire sequence of combinations in the same series, a circular movement of absolutely identical series is thus demonstrated: the world as a circular movement that has already repeated itself infinitely often and plays its game *in infinitum*.”

⁹⁵¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 2000) 52.

sacrifice in the temples of *both* Apollo and Dionysos. That is, Nietzsche affirms the transitory beauty that Apollo brings, but also the brutality and cruelty of Dionysos (*BT*, 25). He believed that the Greeks achieved greatness, because they affirmed both good and evil. In his opinion, unlike traditional Christians, they did not deny the Dionysian or evil, but sought to integrate and affirm it *within* themselves. Nietzsche believed that the human being belongs to both of these modes and, therefore, must honor both. Huskinson says:

Suffering, pain and death precede rebirth. Dionysus represents each of these things, which are illustrated in the mythological story of his birth from the incestuous coupling between Zeus and his daughter Persephone, his horrific mutilation and murder by the Titans, and his rebirth to Zeus and Semele (see chapters 2 and 4). The *Übermensch* and Self are expressions of this continuous Dionysian cycle of destruction and creativity: The *Übermensch* is ‘Dionysus *torn* into pieces... a *promise* of life: it will be eternally reborn and return again from destruction (WP, 1052; cf. UM, III, 1). The rebirth of the ego as Self is a typical dangerous Dionysian experience.’⁹⁵²

In many ways, the necessary suffering of the Nietzschean *Übermensch* and Jungian Self are both psychological re-interpretations of the Gnostic belief that the primal man must suffer as a result of his fall into matter. In Jung’s *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, he was aware of the myth, which had been handed down by Hippolytus in his *The Refutation of All Heresies*, V, II.⁹⁵³ In Hippolytus’ *Refutation*, he claims that the “Chaldeans” believed that the earth brought forth Adam in the form of an inanimate statue and then – probably the evil demiurge -- imprisoned the image of the “Great” or “Perfect Man,” who was an image of humanity in its totality, within him in order to overpower and punish him.⁹⁵⁴ That is to say, the Great Man or *Anthropos* suffered *because* his image is implanted into the human Adam and tainted with evil matter. Jung, however, interpreted this both positively and psychologically. Erdinger explains the Jungian position, which implies that redemption – in the Jungian scheme – is a balance of good and evil, which requires suffering as a necessary aspect of the process, not as a result of human sin:

The suffering of the *Anthropos* image imprisoned in the soul of Adam is thus a part of the redemption drama of the divine or transpersonal aspect of the psyche. ... The first Adam --- was imbued with a soul, which is the image of the heavenly *Anthropos*. The text says that the soul, that image, was put into the original Adam in order to make the heavenly *Anthropos* suffer. That was the evil demiurge’s intent, to make it suffer – it was a prisoner of war he was going to torture. But the consequence is quite different, because the heavenly deity has another plan: he intends to poison the powers of darkness by allowing the light soul to enter into the lower realm. And

⁹⁵² Nietzsche and Jung, 93.

⁹⁵³ Edward F. Edinger, *The Mysterium Lectures: A Journey through C. G. Jung’s Mysterium Coniunctionis*, ed. Joan Dexter Blackmer (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1995) 240.

⁹⁵⁴ Hippolytus, “The Refutation of All Heresies,” *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. V, trans. Rev. J. H. Macmahon (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995) 48-49.

although the suffering of the soul does take place, it is for the purpose of redemption, the net goal being the reconciliation of the conflict that goes on between the realms.⁹⁵⁵

Furthermore, unlike Bruno's system, in Nietzsche's system, there is no evolution or transmigration to higher spheres. According to Nietzsche's doctrine of the Eternal Return, one will return in the "next life" exactly as one was. In *The Gay Science* (GS), § 341, after the madman's declaration of the "death of God" in GS § 125, he begins the section with the words: *Das grösste Schwergewicht* or "The greatest weight." Nietzsche considered this section a clear proclamation of his doctrine of the Eternal Return. It is also an important introduction to his character, Zarathustra, who appears in one section later, in GS, § 342. The fact that the main doctrine is conveyed to Nietzsche by a demon or daimon, directly before the "Zarathustra section," is significant. In fact, Nietzsche is openly admitting that Zarathustra is his "daimon," "*Doppelgänger*" or "spirit guide," much in the same way "Philemon" is Jung's. Nietzsche asks the reader to contemplate what they would do should a demon would approach them in their most lonely moment and tell them:

This is the life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and sigh and everything unutterably small or great in your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence – even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust! (GS, Book 4, § 341).⁹⁵⁶

Nietzsche says that one will either be crushed under the weight of such an idea, or be challenged to stoically affirm and overcome it. He supposes that this is what the early Greeks must have done. In the literary construct, the author Nietzsche rises to the challenge and tells the demon that he is a "god" and "never have I heard anything more divine." However, in real life, Nietzsche was unable to bear the weight of such a demonic thought. He eventually plunged into permanent madness and died a cruel and lonely death. As we will see, it was precisely this *factum* that pushed Jung to revise Nietzsche's heroic doctrine to something more practicable.

D. Nietzschean Mysteries

1. The Esoteric Nietzsche

There has not been much work done on Nietzsche and esotericism. Abir Tahah, in *Nietzsche, Prophet of Nazism: The Cult of the Superman, Unveiling the Nazi Secret Doctrine* (2005), attempts to show how the Nazi's were influenced by Nietzsche's ideas, which she claims were

⁹⁵⁵ *The Mysterium Lectures*, 240-241.

⁹⁵⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974) 273.

steeped in the occult.⁹⁵⁷ André van der Braak, in *Hoe men wordt, wat men is: Zelfvervolmaking, zelfoverwinning en zelfvergetelheid bij Nietzsche* or *How one becomes what one is: Self-realization, self-overcoming and self-forgetting in Nietzsche* (2004) does a better job at showing how Nietzsche is an esoteric thinker. He claims that both *The Birth of Tragedy* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* are esoteric writings meant to initiate the reader into a philosophical system of salvation.⁹⁵⁸ Babette E. Babich in “Nietzsche’s *göttliche Eidechsen*: ‘Divine Lizards,’ ‘Greene Lyons,’ and Music,” alludes to the esoteric and alchemical nature of Nietzsche’s thought, calling it “metaphorical alchemy.”⁹⁵⁹ Babich begins her article by quoting a seventeenth century poem entitled: “The hunting of the Green Lion.” In alchemy, the “Green Lion” is a synonym for the *prima materia* or the “ore from which philosophical mercury is extracted.”⁹⁶⁰ Like Huskinson, Babich sees the dialectic between Apollo and Dionysos in *The Birth of Tragedy* as an “alchemical wedding.”⁹⁶¹

By primarily examining *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, whose respective end and beginning are linked together with the line “*Incipit tragoedia*,” Peter Berkowitz, in *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist*, has shown how Nietzsche’s philosophy is oriented towards the process of self-divinization. Nietzsche’s philosophy is an attempt to work out what kind of human beings would be necessary, if indeed the world is “Will to Power.” Berkowitz says that based on Nietzsche’s love of truth, “which he sometimes calls his gay science,” he comes to the conclusion that the final good or perfection “for human beings consists in the act of self-deification.”⁹⁶² In order to make oneself into a god, one must figure out a “form of life” or ethics that is conducive to the project. Berkowitz says that a close survey of Nietzsche’s books reveals that he identified “self-deification as a human being’s supreme perfection,” which he gradually realizes is unfortunately unattainable. Since he believes that there is no God, his teaching to make oneself into a “god” is rooted in the idea that not reason, but the will rules the soul. Although Berkowitz does not discuss this, in this sense, Nietzsche remains within the Lutheran tradition and assents to William of Ockham’s reversal of the traditional Thomistic or

⁹⁵⁷ Abir Taha, *Nietzsche, Prophet of Nazism: The Cult of the Superman, Unveiling the Nazi Secret Doctrine* (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2005).

⁹⁵⁸ André van der Braak, *Hoe men wordt, wat men is: Zelfvervolmaking, Zelfoverwinning en zelfvergetelheid bij Nietzsche* (Budel: Damon, 2004), see especially 165-198.

⁹⁵⁹ Babette E. Babich, “Nietzsche’s *göttliche Eideschen*: ‘Divine Lizards,’ ‘Greene Lyons,’ and Music,” *A Nietzschean Bestiary: Becoming Animal Beyond Docile and Brutal*, ed. Christa Davis Acampora and Ralph R. Acampora (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004) 270. This, of course, makes no sense, because alchemy is a “technique” to acquire the Philosopher’s Stone or gold. What would metaphorical alchemy acquire, metaphorical gold? Nevertheless, it is extremely important that Babich has recognized the alchemical nature of Nietzsche’s philosophy.

⁹⁶⁰ *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 92.

⁹⁶¹ “Nietzsche’s *göttliche Eideschen*: ‘Divine Lizards,’ ‘Greene Lyons,’ and Music,” *A Nietzschean Bestiary: Becoming Animal Beyond Docile and Brutal*, 270.

⁹⁶² Peter Berkowitz, *Nietzsche: The Ethics of an Immoralist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995) 14-15.

Catholic doctrine that God's goodness and reason is prioritized over God's omnipotence and will.⁹⁶³ Most of the original Protestant Reformers accepted Ockham's reversal and coupled it with an extreme version of St. Augustine's explanation of the doctrine of original sin and predestination. In the Reformers' scheme, where God is omnipotent and potentially capricious, human free will has been totally "bonded" by original sin. Only an act of predestined supernatural grace can free the human person from sin and fate and, hence, save him from doom. Humans are predestined to heaven, but also to hell and nothing can change this. Natural human goodness and human reason are both useless to come to any positive knowledge of God. Although Berkowitz is not concerned with the Protestant intellectual tradition, which Nietzsche inherited, we should keep this in mind when trying to understand Nietzsche's motivation for developing his concept of the *Übermensch*.

Berkowitz points out that if this is true, that the will rules reason, then, indeed "there are neither facts nor rights, only projections and creations of the strongest or most efficacious wills." He argues that "this conundrum ultimately proves fatal to Nietzsche's highest ambition; consequently, he does not succeed in establishing the will's sovereignty."⁹⁶⁴ That is, over the potentially capricious Divine Will that has become equivalent to Nature Itself. In short, Nietzsche's philosophy and his positing of the supremacy of the will – an idea that is dominant in Nominalism as well as Hermetism, which he might have inherited from the Pietist tradition – does not work. This is made painfully clear by Nietzsche's final descent into madness, from which he would never ascend or return. Even so, Berkowitz believes that Nietzsche's failure is our gain:

For Nietzsche's failed effort reveals that the attempt to transcend the human by making one's will a supreme law requires the principled denial of the distinction between political liberty and legal slavery, the ruthless denigration of political life, and in the end the merciless reduction of history, nature, and human beings to artifacts of strong wills. Nietzsche's writings display how and to what a terrifying extent the coronation of the will withers the humane sensibilities, instills an indiscriminate contempt for authority, limitation, and form, and generates impossibly high and inevitably destructive standards for ethics and politics. The pathos of Nietzsche's exaltation of the will is that it subverts the rank order among desires, souls, and forms of life that he cherishes, and causes him to betray the intellectual conscience to which he professes allegiance and which in the first place dictated the will's exaltation.⁹⁶⁵

Although Berkowitz claims that Nietzsche's philosophy was a practical failure, this is something that he only realized towards the end of his life. Nevertheless, before coming to the realization,

⁹⁶³ Michael Allen Gillespie, *Nihilism before Nietzsche* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995). Gillespie gives a fascinating account of Nietzsche's assent to Ockham's understanding of God, which he claims is ultimately a nihilistic pagan conception.

⁹⁶⁴ Nietzsche: *The Ethics of an Immoralist*, 19.

⁹⁶⁵ Nietzsche: *The Ethics of an Immoralist*, 20.

he attempted to develop a fitting religion for his “perfect” human being. Roger Hollinrake, in *Nietzsche, Wagner and the Philosophy of Pessimism* claims that Nietzsche sought to create a new initiatory self-religion. He claims that Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra* is an initiatory novel that imitates the structure of the ancient Mystery Religions. As a gifted classical philologist, he knew a great deal about the subject. Hollinrake says:

In Parts I-III, we are frequently reminded that in Zarathustra’s scheme of reference self-annihilation (‘Untergang’) and self-transcendence (‘Übergang’) are part and parcel of the same process. The nightmarish, intestine struggle generated by these two contending yet strangely inseparable impulses is described in a series of discourses dealing either directly or in passing, with death and rebirth. One recalls the remark in a late collection of notes on the Greeks in which, by a daring attempt at intuitive deduction, Nietzsche identified eternal return as the teaching of the Mysteries. With their probably theme of regeneration and rebirth, the classical Mysteries were a regular subject of his lectures at Basel: ‘*Ich habe das Griechenthum entdeckt: sie glaubeten an die ewige Wiederkunft! Das ist der Mysterien-Glaube! (I have fathomed the Greeks: they believed in eternal return! That is the belief of the Mysteries! N-A, VII 18[15].*⁹⁶⁶

Zarathustra might also be seen an alchemical workbook for self-divinization. Given the connection between alchemy and the Mysteries, even in Antiquity, this possibility is not far fetched. Therefore, like Bruno’s works, we propose that Nietzsche’s works should be seen as literary magical talismans. His disciples should read his books and commit their images to memory, which can be used during the psychological *opus alchymicum*. By *returning* to Zarathustra, the first *magus*, and mentally going through Nietzsche’s prescribed alchemical processes of destruction and creation in and on themselves, he promises that they can approach the level of the *Übermensch*, Nietzsche’s “god,” although in the end, it is impossible.

2. Joining Good to Evil

In an article “Eagle and the Serpent in Zarathustra,” David Thatcher also explores Nietzsche’s esoteric side. More explicitly, he connects Nietzsche’s literary *Doppelgänger* Zarathustra, the Persian Zoroaster, with the Hermetic tradition. Thatcher explores the symbolism of Zarathustra’s pet snake and eagle, and says that because Nietzsche had read Georg Friedrich Cruezer’s (1771-1858) *Symbolism and Mythology of Ancient Nations*, he learned that “Zoroastrianism is based on the conflict between the divine source of light and goodness, Ormuzd the eagle, and the satanic source of darkness and evil, Ahriman the dragon,” or serpent.⁹⁶⁷ In gnostic texts, it is important to note that the *Oroboros* was associated with the dragon. Lindsay says that the Gnostic text “the

⁹⁶⁶ Roger Hollinrake, *Nietzsche, Wagner, and the Philosophy of Pessimism* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1982) 78-79.

⁹⁶⁷ David S. Thatcher, “Eagle and Serpent in Zarathustra,” *Nietzsche-Studien: Internationales Jahrbuch für die Nietzsche-Forschung*, Band 6 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1977) 243.

Pistis Sophia depicts the dragon ... as the supreme sun-god: ‘But the disk of the sun was a great dragon, with its tail in its mouth, which ascended to the seven powers of the left and was drawn by four powers in the shape of white horses.’”⁹⁶⁸ Therefore, the identification of the *Oroboros* with the dragon and the serpent was well known in Antiquity and easily led to its association with Aion, the supreme alchemical solar deity.

We might add that, coming from the Lutheran Pietist tradition, Nietzsche might have also seen the illustrated front to several German editions of Jacob Böhme’s *The Way to Christ*. These illustrated versions show “a heart beset by a serpent and a dragon, above which is the weeping sun, and then clouds separating what is below from divine light above. The heart, beset by bestial forces, is anchored by a rope penetrating the clouds to a cross in dazzling light above, surmounted by an eagle.”⁹⁶⁹ Arthur Versluis, in *Wisdom’s Children: A Christian Esoteric Tradition*, says that “the illustration shows how the heart must maintain faith, must remain centered upon the divine light and the cross during all its earthly tribulations.” Fundamentally, this image of the serpent and eagle on Böhme’s masterpiece is an image of hermetic spiritual regeneration dipped in a Christian dye, from being bound by “selfishness” or egotism to being loosed by “selflessness.” Böhme’s understanding of “selfishness,” however, differs somewhat from the traditional understanding of selfishness as an inordinate concern with one’s welfare, which is exerted at the expense of the other’s welfare. “Selfishness, in Böhme’s perspective, means a bestial life subject to wrath, hence an unconscious life pulled and pushed by emotional tides; selflessness on the other hand means a conscious life lived in the light of the Divine. A selfless life is a life anchored in the Divine, for only in the transcendent Divine do we find a center freed from the winds of action and reaction. Ordinary man is bestial because he lives solely beneath the astral shell, subject to envy, anger, and deceitfulness, an animal-like creature, who possesses reason.”⁹⁷⁰ As noted earlier, for Böhme, transcendence was a psychological condition. Therefore, as the son and grandson of Lutheran ministers, Nietzsche would have been acquainted with this tradition. When one interprets this symbolically or psychologically, then, the parallels with Jung become obvious.

Thatcher, however, attempts to understand Nietzsche’s desire to reconcile the two seemingly opposite animals. In mythology, the bird is a celestial or heavenly symbol, while the snake is a symbol of the underworld and subterranean wisdom, which can be connected with the *Oroboros*, the world-consuming snake. From the perspective of *The Birth of Tragedy*, the eagle would represent the Apollonian side of divinity, while the snake would represent the Dionysian side. The reconciliation of the eagle and serpent or the heavenly Apollo with his subterranean

⁹⁶⁸ *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, 272.

⁹⁶⁹ *Wisdom’s Children*, 145.

⁹⁷⁰ *Wisdom’s Children*, 145.

brother Dionysos would, therefore, signify the “marriage between heaven and hell.” Thatcher says that in a letter to the Danish professor of philosophy, Georg Brandes, Nietzsche openly claims that his program of re-valuation or transvaluation has a distinctly alchemical structure:

In fact, Nietzsche defined his ‘*Umwertung aller Werte*’ in alchemical terms: Im Grunde ist der Goldmacher die verdienstlichste Art Mensch, die es gibt: ich meine der, welcher aus Geringem, Verachtetem etwas Wertvolles und sogar Gold macht. Dieser allein bereichert, die andern wechseln nur um. Meine Aufgabe ist ganz kurios dies mal: ich habe mich gefragt, was bisher von der Menschheit am besten gehaßt, gefürchtet, verachtet worden ist – und daraus gerade habe ich mein,Gold’ gemacht...’ Letter to Brandes, May 23, 1888 (SA III, p. 1295).⁹⁷¹

Although in *Daybreak*, § 103, Nietzsche appears to deny alchemy, what he actually denies is not alchemy, but the motives of the medieval material alchemist for performing alchemy, i.e. the processing of material gold.⁹⁷² In this sense, Nietzsche fits squarely into the nineteenth century “spiritual” interpretation of alchemy. In his letter to Brandes, it is obvious that he believes that his brand of psychological alchemy is able to elevate nature into “philosophical gold” or something truly higher or valuable. Other methods, which dualistically oppose each other, merely achieve a reversal of the same. One creates gold by precisely integrating or conjoining oneself to the things that one hates or fears the most: good with evil, God with Satan, Christ with the Antichrist, etc. Even though one might initially fear it, Nietzsche-Zarathustra sees self-destruction, or a conjunction, as a necessary step in the process. Furthermore, he associates self-destruction or evil with self-overcoming, one of Nietzsche’s code words for self-divinization. The subsequent increase of power that one amasses after the destructive process, which is equated with self-sacrifice, is the path that one must take to reach the *Übermensch* or philosophical gold. Self-sacrifice is necessary to increase power and, hence, necessary for self-overcoming. In fact, Zarathustra proposes to his “disciples” that if they want to found a new religion, they will have to become a sacrifice:

O my brothers, he who is a first-born is always sacrificed. Now we are first-born. We all bleed at secret sacrificial tables, we all burn and roast to the honour of ancient idols. Our best is still young: this excites old palates. Our flesh is tender, our skin is only a lamb-skin: -- how should we not excite old idol-priests! He still lives on in us ourselves, the old idol-priest, who roasts our best for his feast. Alas, my brothers, how should the first-born not be sacrifices! But our kind will have it thus; and *I love those who do not wish to preserve themselves. I love with my whole love those who go down and perish: for they are going beyond.* (Italics mine; Z, III, “Of Old and New Law Tables,” 6).⁹⁷³

⁹⁷¹ “Eagle and Serpent in Zarathustra,” *Nietzsche-Studien*, 249-250n.

⁹⁷² *Daybreak*, 60.

⁹⁷³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Classics, 1969) 217.

3. The Hermetic Zarathustra

a. Zarathustra's Golden Caduceus

As discussed in previous chapters, in ancient times, the gods Apollo, Dionysos as well as Hermes were fundamentally associated with each other. As a classical philologist, Nietzsche would have known this. For example, in the Dionysian festival, the *Anthesterion*, we saw that Hermes always made an appearance. Thatcher further claims that in *Zarathustra*, I, "Of Bestowing Virtue" 1, Nietzsche associates his main character, Zarathustra, with Hermes and his caduceus. Not only did the caduceus double as Hermes' magic wand, but it also signifies that Nietzsche's Zarathustra is a "prophet, seer, magus or medicine-man, like Moses or Hermes."⁹⁷⁴ In the passage in question, Zarathustra's disciples bade him farewell and presented him with

A staff, upon the golden haft of which a serpent was coiled about a sun. Zarathustra was delighted with the staff and leaned upon it; then he spoke thus to his disciples: Tell me: how did gold come to have the highest value? ... Only as an image of the highest virtue did gold come to have the highest value. Gold-like gleams the glance of the giver. Gold-luster makes peace between moon and sun.⁹⁷⁵

By resting upon a staff with "a serpent coiled about a sun," Nietzsche associates Zarathustra with the solar god Hermes, the Greek god of magic, inspired prophesy and trickery, but also alchemical "gold-making." Zarathustra claims that he is the "god," who can reconcile the opposites, i.e. the sun and the moon, or Apollo and Hecate, but also good and evil. Directly thereafter, Zarathustra implies that his followers are similar to cats and wolves, animals often associated with witches and sorcerers or *pharmakeus*. This is because they "thirst to become sacrifices and gifts" themselves, i.e. *pharmakon*. Zarathustra, therefore, implies that an important aspect of following Zarathustra is the willingness to make oneself into a scapegoat or a suicidal self-sacrifice.

b. Upward to the Superspecies

Moreover, in the same section, Zarathustra tells his disciples that his way is "upward, from the species across to the superspecies. ... Our mind flies upward: thus it is an image of our bodies, an image of an advance and elevation. ... Then your body is elevated and risen up; it enraptures the spirit with its joy that it may become creator and evaluator and lover and benefactor of all things." In this section, Zarathustra claims that he is leading humanity upwards towards the creation of new type of humanity, the superspecies. This is a fundamentally esoteric theme, with a broad appeal in nineteenth century occult circles. For example, in *The Will to Power* § 987,

⁹⁷⁴ "Eagle and Serpent in *Zarathustra*," *Nietzsche-Studien*, 248.

⁹⁷⁵ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 100.

Nietzsche even believed that the destiny of humanity itself depended upon its realization or incarnation on earth:

What is most harmed is precisely the memory of the great, for the semi-failures and the failures misunderstand them and vanquish them by means of ‘successes.’ Every time ‘an influence’ shows itself, a mob crowds upon the scene; the chatter of the petty and the poor in spirit is a terrible torment for the ears of those who remember with a shudder *that the destiny of humanity depends upon the attainment of its highest type.*⁹⁷⁶

In fact, Zarathustra’s speech is highly suggestive of the *Poimandres* (i.e. *CH*, I, 1), where “out-of-body-experiences” are a sign of one’s divinity.⁹⁷⁷ If we recall, at the end of the Hermetic ascent through the spheres, one had a vision in the Mind of God and of the primal Anthropos. Similarly Nietzsche encourages ascent to the superspecies, which for Nietzsche is the *Übermensch*, the human being who is “over” or “higher” than other human beings. When the normal human being reaches this level it becomes “creator and evaluator of all things,” meaning to some extent the human being has fused with the superspecies.

Just as Mind told Hermes in *CH*, XI, 19ff, to command his soul/mind to travel upwards towards India and then through the solar system, Zarathustra tells his disciples to allow their minds to fly upwards, but also to become indifferent to praise and blame. As discussed in our chapter on Bruno, when one becomes indifferent to praise or blame, then, one becomes impervious to potential magical binding. Thereafter, Zarathustra’s disciples are told to unite their wills to the single will of the world, which we showed in Hermetic understanding is “God”/Aion/Cosmos. They must attempt to encapsulate the plurality of good and evil within themselves, becoming the origin and beginning of All.⁹⁷⁸ The type of union that Zarathustra suggests is similar to Hermes’ command to Tat to prepare himself for rebirth in the primal man Aion/Eternity. Zarathustra says that it will bring them power and transform their souls into “a golden sun, and around it the serpent of knowledge.”⁹⁷⁹ As we recall, the sun is the symbol of the center of the *cosmos*, or Aion, while the serpent is a symbol of the cosmic *Oroboros*, or the nature of the *cosmos* itself, perpetually consuming and spitting itself out.

⁹⁷⁶ *The Will to Power*, 516.

⁹⁷⁷ “Once, when thought came to me of the things that are and my thinking soared high and my bodily senses were restrained, like someone heavy with sleep from too much eating or toil of the body, an enormous being completely unbounded in size seemed to appear to me and call my name and say to me: ‘What do you want to hear and see; what do you want to learn and know from your understanding?’” (*CH*, I, 1).

⁹⁷⁸ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 101. “When you are willers of a single will, and you call this dispeller of need your essential and necessity: that is when your virtue has its origin and beginning. Truly, it is a new good and evil! Truly, a new roaring the depths and the voice of a new fountain!”

⁹⁷⁹ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 101.

c. Two Representations of Aion

The possible hermetic/alchemical connection is strengthened when one considers how the alchemical solar deity, Aion, was represented in late Antiquity. Jack Lindsay, in *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, discusses two images of Aion found in Roman Mithraeum. In the first image, a nude Aion/Mithras (?) is presented with the head of a lion and wings standing on a globe. This means that Aion is the ruler over the *cosmos*. A serpent entwines itself three times around the globe and the figure's body. The fact that the snake is wound three times around the body might be an allusion to the belief in the tripartite nature of the universe (i.e. heaven, earth and Hades), or to Hermes Trismegistus or to both. The serpent slithers down the figure's face in preparation to enter its mouth. This is a reversal of the image of the *Oroboros*, who consumes his own tail, but also a way of associating Aion with the tail-eating serpent itself. Lindsay says that in ancient Egypt, a king was often depicted devouring a serpent. In this case, the consumption of the *Oroboros*, which signifies the world, means that the king (or Aion) rules over the *cosmos*, containing within himself the powers of creation and destruction.

In the second image, a nude Aion is presented with the head of a lion and wings. He stands on the ground. At the left-hand side of the base, the hammer and tongs of the smith Vulcan-Hephaistos are depicted. Here, we should recall Bruno's *Eroici*, where he reveled in the thought of suffering under the blows of Vulcan's hammer. At the right-hand side of the base, the caduceus of Mercury-Hermes as well as the pine and cock of Asclepius are depicted. This time the serpent is entwined six times around Aion's body, with its head resting on his skull. According to Lindsay, this symbolized the guardianship of the king Aion over the world. Aion holds the Hermetic "keys" and scepter in his hands, while a thunderbolt is engraved upon his breast.⁹⁸⁰ This particular representation of Aion reinforces the associations with Zeus, discussed earlier. Thatcher further notes that in Antiquity both Zeus and Hermes were associated with eagles,⁹⁸¹ which strengthens his claim that Nietzsche's serpent and eagle are Hermetic figures. The Aionic figures recall the concentric image of the Totality of all there is, depicted in *CH*, XI, 2, where becoming is in time, and time is in the cosmos and the cosmos is in Aion and Aion is in God. In some way, the statues say that Aion is the serpent/*Oroboros* and the serpent/*Oroboros* is the *cosmos*. In *Zarathustra*, we propose that Nietzsche is providing us with a literary image or talisman that represents the statue of Aion, the cosmic king, mentioned above. It is an image that signified Aion's rule over the *cosmos*, because he *is* the self-consuming *cosmos* itself. Like Bruno, by re-accepting the Presocratic cosmology, Nietzsche envisions the *cosmos* as being a part

⁹⁸⁰ *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, 270-271.

⁹⁸¹ "Eagle and Serpent in *Zarathustra*," *Nietzsche-Studien*, 248.

of himself and not vice versa. He has intellectually collapsed the *cosmos* into his ego and believes that he is reborn as the primal man, but not in him.

4. The Alchemical Aion

a. Rehabilitating Evil

According to Thatcher, not only the hermetic, but also the alchemical association is further exploited in *Zarathustra*, Part I, "Of the Adder's Bite." Here, Zarathustra has fallen asleep under a fig tree, a symbol of magical wisdom, and is bitten in the neck by an adder. Instead of killing the snake, he thanks it. Thatcher says that "Zarathustra does not kill the snake, nor bear it ill-will; he has no need for revenge. He profits from the snake's act of aggression, turning it to good account, transforming it into good by what might be termed his power, symbolized by the Hermetic staff, of psychological or homeopathic alchemy."⁹⁸² This is not unusual since Nietzsche considered himself as well as his double Zarathustra to be psychologists. In *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche's autobiography, it is of no small consequence that he says "Zarathustra, the first psychologist of the good, is – consequently – a friend of the evil."⁹⁸³ Therefore, long before Jung, in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche was already beginning to work out the details of his new discipline, psychological alchemy.

For Nietzsche, the eagle is a representative of his solar, masculine, Apollonian side of rational consciousness. The serpent is a representative of his lunar, feminine, Dionysian side of unconscious drives. Thatcher says that these two aspects of the "One" "stand in the same relation as spirit and body, alpha and omega, and embody the dualism which lay at the heart of Zoroastrian religion, a dualism which Nietzsche, 'der erste Immoralist,' seeks to transcend. ... Just as Zarathustra sees in himself a counter-image of his Persian forerunner, so the eagle and the serpent, as agathodaemon, are set up as counter-images, i.e. no longer enemies, but friends, beyond good and evil and *beyond* death and time."⁹⁸⁴ The task of Zarathustra, and those who follow him, is to become what he is, a god, the Philosopher's Stone, or alchemical gold. In order to do this he must reconcile the warring opposites within himself into a higher synthesis of the Same. Thatcher goes on to say:

In a later passage Zarathustra explicitly identifies himself with the shepherd and, addressing his eagle and serpent, emphasises once again the crucial necessity of rehabilitating evil: 'Ach, meine Tiere, das allein lernte ich bisher, daß dem Menschen sein Bösestes nötig ist zu seinem Besten, -- daß alles Böseste seine beste *Kraft* ist und der härteste Stein dem höchsten Schaffenden; und daß der Mensch beser *und* böser werden muß (SA, II, p. 464). This, it might be argued, is the central lesson his two complementary animals have taught him: that good and evil, together with related

⁹⁸² "Eagle and Serpent in *Zarathustra*," *Nietzsche-Studien*, 249.

⁹⁸³ *Ecce Homo*, 786.

⁹⁸⁴ "Eagle and Serpent in *Zarathustra*," *Nietzsche-Studien*, 253-254.

existential antinomies, are interdependent and *necessary*. *Both* must be transcended. ... If the dark side of divinity is not acknowledged it will manifest itself as a destructive rather than potentially creative force.⁹⁸⁵

Thatcher says that “the *Übermensch* needs the evil principle as an aid to his own self-overcoming, and he will not retreat from it in horror or fear, no matter how repellent the form it takes.”⁹⁸⁶ Even though Zarathustra was bitten by a poisonous snake, he has no fear of it or death, because he needs them to implement a conjunction on himself. In fact, Zarathustra believes that he has made himself equal to the dragon, or the cosmic and alchemical *Ouroboros*. By biting or consuming Nietzsche-Zarathustra, it is merely biting or consuming itself. Hence, Zarathustra says, “When did a dragon ever die from the poison of a snake?” By associating himself with the alchemical *Oroboros*, which means that he considers himself equal to Aion/Eternity, Nietzsche/Zarathustra, like Bruno, has not only conjoined good with evil, light with dark, but has potentially collapsed the Totality into himself. This will lead to potentially destructive panentheism in himself and his disciples: unless they, like Jung, devise some type of “break-mechanism,” which allows them to recoil from the abyss.

b. The Parable of the Shepherd and the Snake

Thatcher points out that the principle of joining evil to good is no where more evident than in *Zarathustra*, III, “Of the Vision and Riddle.” In section § 1, he confronts his “devil,” the “Spirit of Gravity.” This “spirit” is “half dwarf, half mole; crippled, crippling,” who pours *lead* into his ears and brain, a symbol of the *prima materia*. His pouring lead into the brain is, of course, an allegory of his psychological alchemy. In order to transfigure his lower self, i.e. his dwarf, into the Higher Self, i.e. Aion, he must first be willing to reduce his mental capacities to lead or the *prima materia*. That is like the Gnostic “Great Man,” he must necessarily go through some kind of mental torture.

Furthermore, when we take into account that the alchemical homunculus, literally a “small human,” was often depicted as a dwarf, the alchemical imagery of this passage is strengthened. Sometimes the homunculus was a symbol for the “philosophical child” or the “Philosopher’s Stone,” or was merely a “mischievous spirit.”⁹⁸⁷ In this case, the dwarf is a mischievous spirit, who represents Zarathustra’s “smaller,” merely human self. Zarathustra attempts to climb upwards, but he is hindered by his dwarf, who calls Zarathustra, you “stone of wisdom,” which is another way of expressing the Philosopher’s Stone. Obviously, the dwarf is

⁹⁸⁵ “Eagle and Serpent in *Zarathustra*,” *Nietzsche-Studien*, 251-252.

⁹⁸⁶ “Eagle and Serpent in *Zarathustra*,” *Nietzsche-Studien*, 250.

⁹⁸⁷ *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 102.

Zarathustra's evil or "shadow side," who he must overcome through a psychological conjunction of opposites in order to turn his intellectual lead into gold.

In the following section, *Zarathustra*, III, "Of the Vision and Riddle," § 2, Zarathustra meets a young shepherd, who is writhing on the ground with a black snake hanging out of his mouth. We should not forget that in Antiquity both Hermes and Dionysos were known to be shepherds. On the urging of a voice which cried out from Zarathustra, the shepherd bites off the snake's head that had attached itself to his throat and spits it out.⁹⁸⁸ "Thus a voice cried from me, my horror, my hate, my disgust, my pity, all my good and evil cried out of me with a single cry." Of course, it is unusual that the voice cries out from Zarathustra instead of the shepherd, unless we realize that the shepherd is to some extent Zarathustra himself. Lindsay says that in alchemy, the destruction of the serpent was often associated with beginning of the *opus*.

In alchemical myth, he was seen then as the guardian of the secret that had to be gained, the initiation-monster that had to be slain or outwitted. After the design of the dragon with three ears and four feet we read, 'The dragon is the guardian of the temple. *Sacrifice him, skin him, separate the flesh from the bones, and you will find what you seek.*' Then appears the man of brass who changes colour and becomes the man of silver, who in turn becomes the man of gold.⁹⁸⁹ (Italics mine)

The subsequent transformation of the man from brass to silver and then to gold represents the stages of the alchemical process and spiritual progress, which ultimately leads to the creation of the "man of gold," or Aion. The parallels, then, with "Of the Adder's Bite" and "Of Bestowing Virtue" are clear. After the confrontation with the snake, a symbol of the underworld wisdom and death, Zarathustra overcomes his fear and is transformed into a divine being.⁹⁹⁰ However, before his transfiguration, he asks "the bold men around him" to solve a riddle of his vision of the "most solitary man." Given our understanding of Aion containing the Totality of all there is, i.e. the *cosmos*, within himself, we might estimate that Aion might be the *most* solitary man, i.e. the only man or the Supernal Adam, to whom Nietzsche is referring. He goes on to say: "For it was a vision and a premonition: *what* did I see in allegory? *Who* is it that must come one day? *Who* is the shepherd into whose mouth the snake thus crawled? *Who* is the man into whose throat all that is heaviest, blackest will thus crawl?" Often, the "*who*" is interpreted as the *Übermensch*, who, of course it is. However, Nietzsche also insists upon "*what*" he explained in his allegory of the shepherd and the snake. The fact that he calls it an "allegory" suggests that he is "publicly" transmitting a secret, i.e. esoteric information, which he hopes his readers will guess. The "who"

⁹⁸⁸ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 179-180.

⁹⁸⁹ *The Origins of Alchemy in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, 272.

⁹⁹⁰ "Eagle and Serpent in *Zarathustra*," *Nietzsche-Studien*, 250.

is surely the *Übermensch*, but surely the *Übermensch* is Aion-Hermes! The shepherd must be transfigured into the primal man and the primal man must be incarnated on the earth. Then, Zarathustra says:

No longer a shepherd, no longer a man – a transformed being, surrounded with light, *laughing*! Never yet on earth had any man laughed as he laughed! O my brothers, I heard a laughter that was no human laughter – and now a thirst consumes me, a longing that is never stilled. My longing for this laughter consumes me: oh how do I endure still to live! And how could I endure to die now!

Thus spoke Zarathustra.⁹⁹¹

When we take into account that the section “Of the Vision and Riddle,” III, § 2, actually begins with a discussion of time and eternity, the connection with Aion is obvious. This is also where Zarathustra mentions the Eternal Return of the same. At the beginning of the section, Zarathustra explains to his “dwarf” (his shadow or evil *Doppelgänger*) that they have reached a gateway or a crossroads: “Behold this gateway, dwarf!’ I went on: ‘it has two aspects. Two paths come together here: no one has ever reached their end. This long lane behind us: it goes on for an eternity. And that long lane ahead of us – that is another eternity. They are in opposition to one another, these paths; they abut on one another: And it is here at this gateway that they come together. The name of the gateway is written above it. Moment’.” The dwarf completes Zarathustra’s thoughts by telling him that time is a circle, which is of course a monistic picture of Reality. Zarathustra is saying that each “now moment” is an “eternity” and must return. Everything must return again to the same.

Of course, eternity is always one; however, when we take the Heraclitan doctrine of *enantiodromia* into account, then, Nietzsche’s meaning becomes clear. As stated earlier, *enantiodromia* means that during a cosmic cycle, with the swing of the pendulum, opposites can turn into each other. It is “the occasion where one opposite suddenly reverses and assumes the character of its opposite counterpart.”⁹⁹² Nietzsche is in fact saying that there are two “Aions.” Since Aion can also be equated with the alchemical *Oroboros*, a symbol of the totality of all there is, Nietzsche claims that there is a good or light “Aion,” and an evil or dark “Aion”: Apollo and Dionysos, Christ and Anti-Christ. Both comprise the Totality of all there is.

c. Hermetic Panenanthropism

As we saw in Z, “Of the Vision and Riddle,” III, § 2, Nietzsche consumed the cosmic *Oroboros* and, therefore, collapsed the *cosmos* into himself. According to the Hermetic scheme of self-

⁹⁹¹ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 180.

⁹⁹² *Nietzsche and Jung*, 83.

divinization, as “Aion,” Nietzsche considered himself equal to the *cosmos*. Like Bruno, in his mind, Nietzsche appears to have reversed the traditional microcosm/macrocosm analogy and esoteric method into “As below, so above.” This possibility is strengthened when we take a look at the section that immediately precedes “Of the Vision and Riddle,” namely, “The Wanderer.” The section begins with Zarathustra’s travels and mountain-climbing. He is alone and says (to his heart), “And whatever may yet come to me as fate and experience – a wandering and a mountain-climbing will be in it: in the final analysis one experiences only oneself.” That is to say, his experience of objective reality is really an experience of himself. In fact, all his descents and ascents are merely a “returning home” of his Self to himself, in other words an alignment of his lower self with his Higher Self, and of the gathering of all the fragments, that is of experiences, into one. He says that he now stands before the last and most difficult summit, which he says he will not avoid: “Only now do you tread your path of greatness! Summit and abyss – they are now united in one!” That is to say, Nietzsche-Zarathustra believes that he has united the Totality, good and evil, into himself. But first, before becoming the greatest being, he must do the darkest and deepest deed. Very tellingly Zarathustra claims:

My last solitude has just begun. Ah, this sorrowful black sea beneath me! Ah, this brooding reluctance! Ah, destiny and sea! Now I have to *go down* to you! I stand before my highest mountain and my longest wandering: therefore I must first descend deeper than I have ever descended, -- deeper into pain than I have ever descended, down to its blackest stream! So my destiny will have it. Well then! I am ready. Whence arise the highest mountains? I once asked. Then I learned that they arise from the sea. ... The highest must arise to its height from the deepest.⁹⁹³

As a “creator,” instead of focusing his experiments on himself, he believed that he could experiment with the totality of “rotten” humanity (including himself), which was already “an experiment,” in order to alchemically compose or breed a higher version. Humanity as such must be annihilated, brought down to its deepest and lowest point, so that out of its ashes, a new type of being can arise, the *Übermensch*. By “returning” in the form of a literary talisman to Zarathustra, the first *magus*, Nietzsche believed that he has performed a temporal literary *inversio* on the history of Western religion. He admits, however, that turning back the historical clock will take time.⁹⁹⁴

As the solitary “one,” who is “one with the will,” as in *SE* § 6, he felt “himself perfect and boundless in knowledge and love, perception and power, *and who in his completeness is at*

⁹⁹³ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 174-175.

⁹⁹⁴ See Cooper, *Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978) 164-166. “Although it is beyond the scope of our research here, this is perhaps why the Nazi’s chose the solar symbol of the inverted or counter-clockwise Swastika, which is a symbol that can be found in many cultures not only in India.”

one with nature, the judge and evaluator of things.” If the world is radically “One;” therefore, “I” am the only one who objectively exists. This would mean, then, that the objective world is an illusion. Nietzsche is, therefore, asking: What must “I” do to make my life or existence meaningful? In fact, Nietzsche has taken the Hermetic holistic paradigm to its logical conclusion. However, it also shows, through his lived failure to make himself into a “god,” that the paradigm is itself an illusion. In a sense, Jung too agrees that Nietzsche’s project is a failure. However, instead of distancing himself from the Hermetic scheme of self-divinization, Jung only distances himself from “getting stuck” during the inflationary phase.

5. Entertaining the Destruction of Humanity

a. Empedocles Redux

In *Zarathustra*, III, “Of the Vision and Riddle,” § 1, directly following Zarathustra’s introduction of the Eternal Return and before he meets the shepherd/divine being, i.e. the Hermes figure, he is confronted by a dog “in the stillest midnight.” If we recall, dogs were the companion of Actaeon, but also the goddess of hunters and magicians, Hecate. Hecate haunted crossroads at midnight and her assistance was invoked at all sacrifices.⁹⁹⁵ Through subtle allusion and association, the first magician “Zarathustra” (Hermes/Aion) is claiming to initiate his disciples into the magic of Hecate. If we recall, Kingsley said that the “one bronze sandal,” which the mountain spewed out of its mouth, was a sign that she had been invoked by Empedocles, a possible adept of the magic and the Mysteries of Persephone,⁹⁹⁶ before legend has it that he sacrificed himself into the forges of Etna. As discussed earlier, there was a legend that Empedocles had even been taught by or had encounters with Zoroastrian *magi*.⁹⁹⁷ Nietzsche would have certainly known this from his extensive research into the source material of Diogenes Laertius’ *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* (3rd century AD), a subject about which he wrote an important philological essay.⁹⁹⁸

Through allusion to Empedocles, who was already associated with Hermetic alchemy in Antiquity, Nietzsche makes it clear that his process of self-divinization entails some sort of self-sacrifice. In *Zarathustra*, Part II, “Of Great Events,” Nietzsche begins the section by sketching a picture of an island volcano, where “especially the old women” -- perhaps an allusion to witches - - “say that it is placed like a block of stone before the gate of the underworld.” Obviously, Nietzsche is referring here to Mt. Etna. In the ancient world, the volcano Etna was a symbol of the transformative fires of the underworld, where, according to Empedoclean doctrine, the

⁹⁹⁵ Oskar Seyffert, *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature, and Art* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1995) 271.

⁹⁹⁶ This is Peter Kingsley’s hypothesis.

⁹⁹⁷ *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic*, 227.

⁹⁹⁸ Ronald Hayman, *Nietzsche: A Critical Life* (London: Phoenix Giant, 1995) 83-84.

creative *pur technikon* can be found. By alchemically returning to the primal underworld sun, one could emerge again, distilled or sublimated, into an alchemical god like Aion.

A group of sailors observe a man flying overhead – like a witch on a broomstick -- towards the volcano and, then, see him disappear. “‘Just look,’ said the steersman, ‘there is Zarathustra going to Hell!’” The people of the island believed that the devil had led Zarathustra to the center of the earth. Through a series of allusions, Nietzsche makes it clear that Empedocles/Zarathustra are sorcerers (or at least the people believed that they were). After five days, Zarathustra reappeared from his temporal “*coniunctio oppositorum*” to tell a story about his encounter with a fire-dog he met on his way to the Underworld. Since dogs guarded the entrance to Hades, again, this encounter could be an allusion to Hecate. Zarathustra says that gold can be found at the “heart of the earth,” because “the heart of the earth is of gold.”⁹⁹⁹ That is to say, by alchemically sacrificing himself into the primal chaos, he emerged with gold in the hand or as a god. The disciples in the line of Empedocles-Zarathustra-Nietzsche must, like an *iatromantis*, go through “Hell” in order to realize their divinity. They must incarnate the Gnostic myth of the necessary suffering of the primal man or the orphic myth of the suffering and dismemberment of Dionysos. Since reality is interpreted psychically, the best way to accomplish this is to descend into a psychic “hell.”

b. The Stench of Burning Flesh

In “Of the Bestowing Virtue,” I, § 2, Zarathustra appears as an alchemist, a solitary figure, encouraging his disciples to withdraw from society. This is the advice that Jung wisely rejected. From them, “you have chosen out yourselves, shall a chosen people spring – and from this chosen people, the Superman [*Übermensch*]. Truly the earth shall yet become a house of healing! And already a new odour floats about it, an odour that brings health – and new hope!” We will see that the odour that brings “health and new hope” to Zarathustra will be the stench of dead bodies. This is because, for Zarathustra, man has no intrinsic dignity in himself. From the beginning, man “was an experiment” that can be alchemically aborted.¹⁰⁰⁰ Zarathustra says that the vice of ignorance became embodied in our present form of humanity, so that it needs to be purified with knowledge. Only by *going under*, by succumbing to self-destruction, which is simultaneously the destruction of the other, can one gain knowledge and ascend or cross over the abyss to the side of the *Übermensch*. For Nietzsche, human beings stand between the animal nature and the divine nature and must submit to the Dionysian processes in order to be “sublimated” into the

⁹⁹⁹ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 155.

¹⁰⁰⁰ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 102.

Übermensch. Not only is the transcendent God of Christians “dead,” but all humanity, the little gods, must die, so that Nietzsche’s god, i.e. the *Übermensch*, might live:

And this is the great noontide: it is when man stands at the middle of his course between animal and Superman and celebrates his journey to the evening as his highest hope: for it is the journey to a new morning. Then man, going under, will bless himself; for he will be going over to Superman; and the sun of his knowledge will stand at noontide. ‘*All gods are dead: now we want the Superman to live*’ – let this be our last will one day at the great noontide. Thus spoke Zarathustra.¹⁰⁰¹

The possibility that Nietzsche actually entertains the destruction of what he deemed as rotten humanity is strengthened by the fact that directly preceding the first section discussed by Thatcher, Z “Of the Bestowing Virtue,” I, § 1, is the section “Of Voluntary Death.” Here, Nietzsche’s *iatromantis* Zarathustra gives a speech on “dying at the right time.” Namely, it is an exhortation to “heroically” take one’s own life as a form of self-sacrifice. He says that humans should make death or dying into a festival. “I commend to you my sort of death, voluntary death that comes to me because I wish it. And when shall I wish it? -- He who has a goal and an heir wants death at the time most favourable to his goal and his heir.”¹⁰⁰² That is to say, the Nietzschean *magus* will emulate Bruno or Empedocles and orchestrate his own death in order to maximize the effect. “Many a man never becomes sweet; he rots even in the summer. It is cowardice that keeps him fastened to his branch. Many too many live and they hang on their branches much too long. I wish a storm would come and shake all this rottenness and worm-eatenness from the tree! I wish the preachers of speedy death would come! They would be the fitting storm and shakers of the trees of life! But I hear preached only slow death and patience with ‘all earthly things’.”¹⁰⁰³ Not only does Zarathustra urge dying on one’s own conditions, but he is also urging the extermination of all the “rotten fruit” of “all earthly things,” supposedly out of “love for the earth,” over which he, as *Übermensch* and Aion, believes himself to be king and high priest.

Thus I want to die myself, that you friends may love the earth more for my sake; and I want to become earth again, that I may have peace in her who bore me.

He associates his exhortation to “speed up the natural processes” with the throwing of a “golden ball” to his disciples, encouraging them to throw it to others. In mythology, a golden ball is a symbol of the sun; however, the throwing of the “golden ball” is also associated with the

¹⁰⁰¹ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 104.

¹⁰⁰² *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 97.

¹⁰⁰³ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 98.

Harpies,¹⁰⁰⁴ or the goddesses of mischief. Originally, they were “the goddesses of the sweeping storm, symbolic of the sudden and total disappearance of men.”¹⁰⁰⁵ Therefore, through a Hermetic allusion to the sun, Zarathustra is exhorting his disciples to create mischief on the earth so that humanity, as it finds itself, will disappear. Because Zarathustra “loves” humanity, he advocates the destruction of the unworthy in order to produce alchemical gold out of those who will become.

c. Daybreak’s Dark Light

In fact, Nietzsche expresses this same thought less poetically and more directly in *Morgenröte* or *Daybreak* or (1881), two years before the first publication of *Zarathustra*. When we take into account that Böhme’s first book had the same title, that is, *Morgenröte* (sometimes called *Aurora*), then, things become interesting. As noted, for Böhme, God contained a destructive or “wrathful principle.” This wrathful principle is like the chaotic *prima materia* of the alchemists.

Nietzsche, son of a Lutheran minister with Pietistic leanings, begins the book by telling the reader that they “will discover a ‘subterranean man’ at work, one who tunnels and mines and undermines.”¹⁰⁰⁶ This means that his thoughts are Dionysian, chthonic thoughts; they are destructive thoughts that will hopefully reduce the reader to the *prima materia*, or at least encourage them to do it to themselves as well as be willing to reduce others to it as well. In *Daybreak*, § 146, Nietzsche challenges the traditional Christian idea of the love of one’s neighbors. Although he is right to challenge hypocrisy, he goes one step further. He claims that one should look “beyond immediate consequences” of one’s potentially destructive or harmful actions and consider more long range goals, which might entail the acceptance of short term suffering for others as well as oneself. Assuming that his readers are as hard on themselves as he is on himself, he asks why one should treat their neighbors differently. That is, why shouldn’t one be as hard on one’s neighbour as one is on oneself. Thereafter, the murderous and suicidal tone of his proposition becomes immediately clear:

Supposing we acted in the sense of self-sacrifice, what would forbid us to sacrifice our neighbour as well? -- just as the state and as princes have done hitherto, when they sacrificed one citizen to another ‘for the sake of the general interest’, as they put it. We too, however, have general, and perhaps more general interests: why may a few individuals of the present generation not be sacrificed to coming generations? Their grief, their distress, their despair, their blunders and fears not be deemed necessary, because a new ploughshare is to break up the ground and make it fruitful for all? --

¹⁰⁰⁴ *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols*, 17.

¹⁰⁰⁵ *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology, Religion, Literature, and Art*, 270.

¹⁰⁰⁶ *Daybreak*, 1.

First of all, Nietzsche provides a seemingly historical justification to sacrifice, i.e. kill, oneself as well as one's neighbour for some perceived "greater good." He implies that since the beginning of time, princes have used their people as cannon fodder, "for the sake of the general interest," why shouldn't it be done now? He implies that since it has been done in the past and people accepted it, why shouldn't they accept it now? Moreover, why shouldn't one accept it for oneself, if one has a supposedly "higher goal" in mind? Nietzsche says that like the princes, he not only has a "general interest," but a more specific one in mind. Although posed as a question, the positive sense is clear. Nietzsche implies that some individuals of one generation *should* be sacrificed, i.e. murdered, for the sake of future generations. Whether this means they should be convinced to go voluntarily or forced is not clear at this point. Nietzsche says that in the same way that the ground must be broken up in order to plant new seeds, so too must "individuals" be "broken up," "torn to bits," "fragmented," for a new generation to spring up. He concludes the segment with a positive encouragement to mass suicide:

Finally: we at the same time communicate to our neighbour the point of view from which he can *feel himself to be a sacrifice*, we persuade him to the task for which we employ him. Are we then without pity? But if we also want to *transcend our own pity* and thus achieve victory over ourselves, is this not a higher and freer viewpoint ... We, on the other hand, would, through sacrifice – in which we and our neighbour are both included – strengthen and raise higher the general feeling of human power, even though we might not attain to more. But even this would be a positive enhancement of *happiness*. – Finally, if even this – but not a word more! A glance is enough, you have understood me.¹⁰⁰⁷

Nietzsche is, therefore, suggesting that one should find persuasive arguments, which would convince one's "neighbour" to want to become a sacrifice, that is, to go willingly and without much of a fuss. He probably bases his strategy on Sir Isaac Newton's "Third Law of Motion," or of reciprocal actions, that Nietzsche extrapolated to the psychological realm. Concisely, Newton's Third Law states that for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Therefore, if one's attempt to exterminate one's enemy is too extreme, i.e. forceful, then, this will cause a counter or defensive reaction of equal force. Nietzsche appears to believe that one should attempt to convince the "herd" that they want to die so that they will go voluntary to their deaths. Then, they will disappear without causing (via reaction) a new and stronger version of, for example, traditional Christians to re-appear. Although one might feel initial pity, one should become indifferent and *transcend* pity. Pity keeps one from attaining a higher and freer point of view. It is through magical indifference to pain, suffering, etc. that one attains victory over oneself and supposedly attains the courage needed to sacrifice one's neighbour as well as oneself.

¹⁰⁰⁷ *Daybreak*, 92.

E. Jung's Diagnosis of Nietzsche

1. Jung's Aionic Vision

In a lecture that Jung delivered in 1925, Jung related his own experience of meeting Elijah and Salome to the process of self-divinization in the Teutonic and Hellenistic Mysteries. His experience also shows strong parallels to the passage in Zarathustra mentioned above. In that lecture, it becomes obvious that Jung's experience of self-divinization was also a Hermetic experience that entailed "considering himself equal to Aion." It should also be noted that one of Jung's most esoteric books was entitled, *Aion: Untersuchungen zur Symbolgeschichte*, or "*Aion: Researches into the Phenomenology of the Self*,"¹⁰⁰⁸ where he equates "Aion" with the "Self," which is for him the "God image."

In his vision, the two human figures were preceded by a vision of a black snake on one side, and a white snake on the other side. Jung believed that this represented "a fight between 'two dark principles.'" When the head of the black snake turned white and was defeated he felt he could go on."¹⁰⁰⁹ If we recall, the *Ouroboros* is often depicted as being half black and half white, representing both good and evil. Afterwards, Jung sees Elijah standing on top of what he interprets as a Druidic altar. This symbolizes that Jung will need to be sacrificed by his psychic doubles. Then, a blind Salome and another snake appear to "escort" him to the underworld, where the comment is made that below appears the same as above.¹⁰¹⁰ This is a reference to the well-known alchemical doctrine. Jung told the lecture audience that Salome not only became sexually interested in him, but also began to worship him. Although he resisted, both Salome and the snake continued to approach him. Noll reproduces the text of the lecture:

She came close and began to circle me and press me in her coils. The coils reached up to my heart. I realized as I struggled that I had assumed the attitude of the Crucifixion. In the agony and the struggle, I sweated so profusely that the water flowed down on all sides of me. Then Salome rose, and she could see. While the snake was pressing me, I felt that my face had taken on the face of an animal of prey, a lion or a tiger.¹⁰¹¹

In the vision, Jung's crucifixion, but also his healing of the blind Salome recalls Jesus's life and death. Immediately after recounting his experience, Jung switches to a discussion on the religious experience of the initiates of the Mysteries. He believes that his agonizing trance experience must have been similar. Noll says that "it is now clear that Jung believed he had undergone a

¹⁰⁰⁸ Carl Gustav Jung, "Aion: Phenomenology of the Self," *The Portable Jung*, ed. Joseph Campbell, trans. R F. C. Hull (New York: Penguin Books, USA, 1976) 139ff.

¹⁰⁰⁹ As quoted in Noll, *The Jung Cult*, 211-212.

¹⁰¹⁰ *The Jung Cult*, 213.

¹⁰¹¹ As quoted in Noll, *The Jung Cult*, 213. See also, Edinger, *The Aion Lectures*, 192. Edinger reproduces the same text.

direct initiation into the ancient Hellenistic mysteries and had even experienced deification in doing so.” In the lecture, Jung goes on to claim that the “mystery of divinization” was the most important moment of the Mysteries, wherein the initiate’s immortality was confirmed. Jung himself understood Salome’s advances and the snake’s coiling around him as a moment of divinization. Then, most astoundingly, Jung admits that his self-divinizing vision entailed visualizing himself as the alchemical solar deity, Aion:

The animal face which I felt mine transformed into was the famous [Deus] *Leontocephalus* of the Mithraic Mysteries, the figure which is represented with a snake coiled around the man, the snake’s head resting on the man’s head, and the face of the man that of a lion. This statue has only been found in the mystery grottoes (the underchurches, the last remnants of the catacombs). The catacombs were not originally places of concealment, but were chosen as symbolical of a descent to the underworld.¹⁰¹²

Jung points out that the figure, into which he himself was transformed, was known in Antiquity as “Aion.” This signifies that his vision and experience were both alchemical and Hermetic. As Jung closes the lecture, he returns to the subject of pagan divinization and relates it again to his own experience. He says that “in this deification mystery you make yourself the vessel, and are a vessel of creation which the opposites reconcile.”¹⁰¹³ That is, one submits oneself, or sacrifices one’s ego and will to the “process.” The ability to identify oneself with the World Will-Aion, but also with Dionysos is essential. As we have shown, metaphysically, “Dionysos” is the *prima materia* into which the opposites are reconciled or dissolved by “shredding them to bits.” One must submit to “him,” if one wants to be transfigured into Apollo. In this lecture, no where is it more obvious that Jung attempted to realize himself as the Hermetic solar deity of Time, Aion, who was able to accumulate all of the powers of the divine *cosmos* within himself. Given the parallels with Nietzsche’s parable of the “shepherd and the snake,” it appears that Jung also interpreted Nietzsche’s vision as a Hermetic one. However, since Salome (a coded reference to Lou, who was also a friend of Jung’s rival Freud?) worships him, he feels that he has transcended or overcome him.

2. Nietzsche Caught a Spell of Inflation

As stated, although Jung promoted himself as Nietzsche’s superior, the very fact that he would devote a *Seminar on Nietzsche’s Zarathustra* that spanned six years, from 1934 to 1939, reveals the importance of Nietzsche to Jung’s thought. Towards the end of the Seminar, Jung’s final estimation of Nietzsche becomes clear. Jung diagnosed Nietzsche with “inflation;” that is, he was

¹⁰¹² As quoted in Noll, *The Jung Cult*, 213-214.

¹⁰¹³ As quoted in Noll, *The Jung Cult*, 214.

filled with the divine being “Zarathustra,” and could no longer separate his human identity, as Friedrich Nietzsche, from that of his double. Jung, of course, hints that he had been able to do this with Philemon.

Jung believes that “inflation” is a dangerous disposition that is unavoidable when embarking upon an excavation of the collective unconscious. In order to overcome or transcend it, one must remain connected to others, i.e. grounded, or risk remaining in the “inflated state,” as did Nietzsche. Speaking from his own experience, Jung says:

Naturally, it is impossible to realize the collective unconscious without being entirely dismembered or devoured, unless you have help, some strong link which fastens you down to reality so that you never forget that you are a human individual like other individuals. For as soon as you touch the collective unconscious you have inflation – it is unavoidable – and then you soar into space, disappear into a clouds, become a being beyond human proportions. That is what happened to Nietzsche.¹⁰¹⁴

Still, Jung admits that in order to go through the process of Individuation, one *must touch* the collective unconscious, who we have shown for Jung is a conflation between the Hermetic *Anthropos/Aion* and the Kabbalistic Supernal Adam, “inflate” and necessarily go through a process of ego-destruction or, like the shamanic god Dionysos, psychic dismemberment. That is, one must consider oneself to be “one” with the divine collective unconscious, which expresses itself through the projection of oneself as a divine being. Thereafter, one must realize that one is not the collective unconscious (or the primal man), and “deflate.” Inflation, therefore, is the moment of descent into the collective unconscious and reduction to the *prima materia*, where one is dismembered like the divine child Dionysos by “titanic” forces. However, because the collective unconscious is theoretically the “collection” of all psychic data or memories, one psyche could not encompass it or at least this is how Jung envisioned it. It therefore functions something like a naturalized version of the Platonic realm of Ideal Forms. In this sense, Jung is closer to the ancient Hermeticists than Nietzsche, who like Bruno, rejected “Platonism”. According to Jung, Nietzsche, however, allowed himself to become “possessed” by the collective unconscious, due to an imbalance in his basic personality. In other words, during his “shamanic voyage,” he got “stuck” in the stickiness of the *prima materia* and did not return. Jung says that this was because, on the one hand, he was obsessed with power, while on the other hand, he had a tremendous inferiority complex.

What was the man Nietzsche in reality? A neurotic, a poor devil who suffered from migraine and a bad digestion, and had such bad eyes that he could read very little and was forced to give up his

¹⁰¹⁴ Jung’s *Seminar on Nietzsche’s Zarathustra*, 331.

academic career. And he couldn't marry because an early syphilitic infection blighted his whole Eros side. Of course, all that contributed to the most beautiful inferiority complex you can imagine; such a fellow is made for an inferiority complex, and will therefore build up an immense power attitude on the other side.¹⁰¹⁵

3. As Below, So Above

a. The Tight Rope Walker

The problematic nature of Jung's solution is highlighted during the Zarathustra group's exchange on the parable of the "tight rope walker," found in "Zarathustra's Prologue," § 4-6. They discuss Zarathustra's assimilation of the tight-rope figure with himself, accepting the danger associated with his profession. "Man is a rope, fastened between animal and Superman – a rope over an abyss. A dangerous going-across..."¹⁰¹⁶ According to Zarathustra, the human person is merely an evolutionary stage in the development of the Superman or the *Übermensch*, i.e. the incarnation of the Supernal Adam. He can be admired because he is the *raw material* out of which the *Übermensch* will be created. "What can be loved in man is that he is a going-over (*übergang*) and a going-down (*üntergang*)." Those who despise the present condition of humanity and long to bring about the condition of *Übermensch* are Zarathustra's followers. Like Zarathustra, they too should be willing to die or to become sacrifices, so that nothing of the present humanity will be left.

I love those who do not first seek beyond the stars for reasons to go down and to be sacrifices: but who sacrifice themselves to the earth that the earth may one day belong to the Superman. I love him who lives for knowledge and who wants knowledge that one day the Superman may live. And thus he wills his own downfall...¹⁰¹⁷

Zarathustra hopes to free humanity from their fear of death, so that they will voluntarily want to die in order that the *Übermensch* might live. Zarathustra rejects the traditional Christian consolation that when one dies, one's soul will continue to live. As the tightrope walker, who is another projection of Nietzsche, he starts his trek across the rope and falls. His body is completely shattered. Initially, he fears that the devil will drag him to Hell. Nietzsche's Zarathustra comes to the rescue and says that he should not fear Hell, for neither Hell nor the devil exist. "Your soul will be dead even before your body: therefore fear nothing any more!" ("Zarathustra's Prologue," 6)

During the *Seminar*, Jung claims that Nietzsche's new consolation is to be understood within the framework of his particular "psychological condition," i.e. what we call pananthropism, where he anticipates that "the body, the earth is all and that the soul is

¹⁰¹⁵ Jung's *Seminar on Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, 307.

¹⁰¹⁶ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 43.

¹⁰¹⁷ *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 44.

nothing.” Jung implies that Nietzsche/Zarathustra has nothing to fear because he has chosen the Dionysian way. “In the intoxication, the god enters the *mystes*. He becomes a god himself. He becomes the great current of nature, the stream itself, and there are no individual worries any longer.”¹⁰¹⁸ Jung, therefore, admits that by choosing the Dionysian way, Nietzsche chooses the way of Aion, collapsing the totality into himself. Thereafter, Jung proposes his medical diagnosis. In fact, he does not see the problem as identifying with Hermetic Aion or the supernal Adam, but with “inflation.” According to Jung, it is acceptable to identify with the Totality, but Nietzsche should have remained “grounded” and “deflated.” He should have ascended from his descent into the collective unconscious, but did not or could not due to a basic imbalance in his personality, an imbalance that Jung, of course, avoided.

b. The Successful Witchdoctor (*Pharmakeus*)

As is well known, the characteristic of a good or successful shaman is his ability to heal him or herself, to undergo a particular type of temporary a mental illness, fight the demons which confront him during the darkness of his underworld voyages, and return to the light, i.e. sanity, stronger and healthier.¹⁰¹⁹ During his initiatory experience, the shaman is often ripped into shreds, cooked or boiled and then reassembled.¹⁰²⁰ The prototypical shamanic experience is recounted in the Orphic myth of the mutilation of the divine-child Dionysos-Zagreus by the Titans, but also of Orpheus himself. Nietzsche, Jung as well as many nineteenth century intellectuals saw the same shamanic structure of descent and ascent, or destruction and creation, in the Christian mystery of the Passion of Christ, albeit with a totally esoteric interpretation. Noll claims that:

Within the unconscious there is a progress flow of libido [i.e. sexual energy that Jung associates with the subterranean god of orgy and fertility, Dionysos], which if the individual personal (the ego) “identifies” with it, he or she undergoes the experience of self-deification and becomes (symbolically) Christ. As we have shown, Jung himself underwent such a deification experience in which he merged with Aion and Christ. If the individual (ego) identifies with the regressive flow of the libido, he or she suffers the pain of dismemberment and annihilation in the “realm of the Mothers” and becomes (symbolically) a victim of the Terrible Mother. If one does not heroically resurface from these depths, one then becomes permanently damaged and will then probably develop dementia praecox. [brackets mine.]¹⁰²¹

Noll says that “the identification of the personality with the collective unconscious manifests itself always in the phenomenon of self-deification – be it an identification with the function [i.e. of the personality] of intuition, with the function of extraversion, or with the function of

¹⁰¹⁸ *Jung's Seminar on Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, 76.

¹⁰¹⁹ *De Sjamaan: Reizen van de Ziel. Trance, Extase en Genezing van Siberië tot de Amazone*, 59.

¹⁰²⁰ *De Sjamaan: Reizen van de Ziel. Trance, Extase en Genezing van Siberië tot de Amazone*, 60.

¹⁰²¹ *The Jung Cult*, 255.

introversion. It is self-divinization according to the function, but the phenomenon always remains the same. It is therefore a question of the overcoming of self-deification, which might also be compared with the Death of Christ, a death of the greatest agony.”¹⁰²² That is to say, since Jung believed that Jesus died and remained dead, the one who symbolically overcomes death, would be greater than Jesus. In Jung’s understanding, by agreeing to die a temporal death, Jesus proved himself inferior. Jung thought that Jesus, perhaps like Nietzsche, suffered too much from “inflation” and failed to see that his sacrifice must only be “symbolic.”

In Jung’s scheme, self-divinization is symbolically linked to Death or to the sacrifice of the person. The success of Individuation depends on the ability to confront psychic death and Hell, i.e. insanity, and overcome it. One turns inward, descends into the subterranean realm of the collective unconscious – deemed sacred -- and then returns. To become a fully individuated person, one must overcome the process of self-divinization itself, that is, death and be reborn into a new divine-like personality or a “genius” and achieve “symbolic” immortality. Noll says that for Jung, “analysis becomes, then, a ritualized reenactment of Jung’s own experience as a suffering and dying god, just as a Roman Catholic communion is a ritualized reenactment of the Last Supper... Jung offers his own unique path as the one for his disciples to mimic.”¹⁰²³

As Noll pointed out, Jung’s process of individuation includes a fusion between Aion/*Anthropos* and Christ. Since he conceived of Reality as a binary totality, to overcome self-divinization, i.e. self-destruction, and become fully “individuated,” i.e. where the opposites are in absolute balance, one must not only identify with “the good” Christ, but also with the devil. Individuation is an attempt to re-enact “their” story. The story of Jesus was also Jung’s story. If one becomes a “christ,” “after experiencing the agony of psychological death (as Christ did on the cross) and then, after fully experiencing both humanity and divinity through being a dying and suffering god, one must also reenact Christ’s *katabasis* or descent into Hell (the ‘realm of the Mothers’, or the collective unconscious). After the initial deification experience and successfully overcoming it (through analysis, as implied here by Jung), the ‘whole Hell of the overcome past opens’ and one begins a confrontation with the collective unconscious.”¹⁰²⁴ For Jung, this means the realm of the ancestors, where one has a responsibility, like Hermes or Orpheus, to help troubled spirits find rest as well as to collect messages from less troubled spirits, which are meant to further assist humanity towards individual and collective salvation. Noll notes that the whole process is more akin to spiritualist techniques, with which Jung was very familiar. He then links Jungian psychology with the practice of channeling. Noll remarks:

¹⁰²² *The Jung Cult*, 275.

¹⁰²³ *The Jung Cult*, 257.

¹⁰²⁴ *The Jung Cult*, 256.

The individual who undergoes Jung's brand of analysis must also become a spiritualist medium who can receive messages from the deceased for the benefit of humankind. Indeed, one must have contact with the dead before one can achieve individuality, a process that Jung here calls the *Menschwerdung*.¹⁰²⁵

4. The *Übermensch* as a Protestant Idea

a. Reaction Against a Too Restricted Idea of "God"

Jung, therefore, wisely rejects Nietzsche's version of self-divinization and his *Übermensch*. Unwisely, however, he does not reject the process. In order to understand Jung's line of reasoning, we will present the discussion in the order that it took on the 13th of May 1936. At a certain moment, Jung proposes that God is a psychical phenomenon; however, a too restricted idea of God had been building up and, according to him, "had to be destroyed." Jung claims that the "image of God" in the psyche of humanity had become too "dogmatized" and needed to be challenged. Of course, the reference to "dogma" is a reference to traditional Christianity. According to the "individuated" Jung, "Life itself could not tolerate any longer such a blasphemous restriction of the powers or the possibilities of the psychical phenomenon that is ultimately called 'God.'" According to him, Nietzsche came at a time when the "dogmatized" feature was meant to be overthrown, but he went too far and "suffered the consequences." Then, in a surprising move, the pastor's son, Jung, claims that Nietzsche's *Übermensch* is a derivate of the Protestant idea of responsibility.

It is very important to him to be responsible; if things are imperfect that should be made perfect. Therefore, make a Superman; make the man that you really should be, the man who makes true that theory that God is not: namely, that man whose will is never crossed, to whom everything is possible. You see, this is by no means a very original idea: you hear this kind of talk in a Protestant sermon; it is a most Protestant notion that you should be the one whom you wish to be – or rather, do not wish because it is immoral to wish for anything. You might wish for something agreeable and anything agreeable is immoral; you must always wish for something disagreeable. So since the Superman is not agreeable, it is a moral task; you ought to, you should, and damn you if you don't pray for it every Sunday. You see, this idea of the Superman is a derivative of that very Protestant idea.¹⁰²⁶

Although Jung says that Protestants believe in grace, Jung accuses them of having what he calls a "Jew-complex," a very delicate accusation in 1936. He says that due to the course that their theology took in history, implying the idea of *Sola Scriptura* and probably also Luther's doctrine of the "bonded will," their belief in grace needed to be balanced with a careful observation of the law. For Jung, the real God that Protestant communities worship is "respectability, as you see in America and elsewhere." He says that this has nothing to do with Christian love, but with fear.

¹⁰²⁵ *The Jung Cult*, 256.

¹⁰²⁶ *Jung's Seminar on Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, 223.

You see, this attempt of the Protestant to force himself into an ideal form is really disbelief in the grace of God, for if he really believes in that, he will gladly assume that in his time God will do the right thing for him... But the real Protestant practically does not believe that. He believes that he has to make himself into a good being, and that he will do it – that it is his responsibility only. ... Everything is made dependent upon one's own morality, one's own responsibility; there is no absolution and at the same time one believes in the grace of God.¹⁰²⁷

b. The Expelled or Integrated Scapegoat?

Thereafter, Jung returns to the *Zarathustra* text where Zarathustra exhorts his disciples to become the “fathers and forefathers of the Superman.” Jung says that here Nietzsche is most Protestant in that, although one may not attain the kingdom of heaven, i.e. become the *Übermensch*, one should prepare oneself so that one's descendants are able to become it. That is, one should not only take responsibility for one's own salvation, but one must also take responsibility for the generations to come. However, Jung also says: “What I did not accomplish, I shall burden my son with; he will do it. For always underneath is that idea: Christ will take care of the business. If there is a conflict in me, I will hand it over to Christ and he will run away with it into the desert and take it away from me.”

Here, Jung alludes to Leviticus 16, central to the Jewish Yom Kippur liturgy. In the text, the high priest, Aaron is supposed to take two goats and place them at the entrance of the tent, where the Ark of the Covenant resides. After casting lots over the two goats, one is designated as the Lord's and the other as Azazel. Azazel was considered to be the name of a demon. The one for the Lord was sacrificed as a sin offering; however, the one for Azazel was kept alive as a scapegoat. The sins of Israel were placed upon it and then it was sent into the wilderness to go to Azazel. (Lev 16: 7-10). Unterman says that, originally, a scarlet thread was wrapped around the horns of the scapegoat and, then, it was pushed over a high cliff. It was thought that “the sins of Israel were thus being returned to their source of impurity.”¹⁰²⁸ That is “down” to the realm of the demonic. The scapegoat was expelled and never returned to the community. It did not re-emerge into the community as a “god.”

Jung says that the Protestant attitude is similar and “born out of the misery and real need of the Protestant conscience which must find a way out,” supposedly of the psychic conundrum. In this, Jung shows that his problem has more to do with the historic manifestation of Christianity in “Protestantism” than with traditional Christianity as such, although he would reject the historical manifestation of Christianity as such as well. Jung says that, like the Jews, the Protestants make Christ into a scapegoat, who must be sent out into the desert with their sins.

¹⁰²⁷ Jung's *Seminar on Nietzsche's Zarathustra*, 224.

¹⁰²⁸ Alan Unterman, *Dictionary of Jewish Lore and Legend* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991) 30.

Because they are unable to bear the psychic stress of being totally responsible, they transfer their responsibility onto Christ. “They burden him since he is the crucified, deified scapegoat.” Jung claims that by expelling their sin onto Christ, i.e. their evil, and not integrating it, they become “no longer human.” According to Jung, however, “they have lost their sin, the black stuff, which is spiritually fertile earth,” a reference to the alchemical *prima materia*.¹⁰²⁹

With extremely similar insights as René Girard into the ancient or primitive process of divinization, Jung says that the scapegoat is the “divine representative,” who takes over the role of the sacrificed. However, instead of seeing the *difference* between pagan forms of religion and traditional Christianity, as does Girard, like most Romantics, he only highlights the similarities. Unlike Girard and traditional Christians, he does not reject violence, but attempts to re-mythologize it, through the process of “Individuation.” Therefore, Jung sees the idea of a completely expelled scapegoat as a psychologically inferior one, which can only work when one is a member of a like-minded community or institution. That is to say, Jung does not condemn the idea as such, as reprehensible, but only because it ceases to function in the modern context. He says that only when the unity of the group is so intense that its members can be worked up into a kind of collective ecstasy, i.e. where they no longer think but only *feel*, can such an idea work. It is precisely at the moment when the feelings are the most intense that an individual must be sacrificed for the “benefit” of the collectivity. In line with Girard, however, Jung does recognize that they do this in order to forget or escape their responsibility for their sins.

Then it doesn’t matter who is carrying the burden, preferably the priest, or an animal sacrifice, or a criminal who represents the God or the king. It doesn’t matter who is chosen in that community to carry the sin, because he is the whole community and the whole community is himself. This is a collective emotion which is exceedingly strange to us; we can hardly imagine it now – it is utterly primitive. Of course when you work yourself up into a dervish-like state, you are in a vibrating emotion, an ecstatic condition, and everybody else is the same; so it doesn’t matter who is struck, you or anybody else. Then you can tear your skin, cut your throat, or the priest may come and cut your throat and sacrifice you. It is all one: you yourself do not exist. It needs such an emotion and such a oneness to make the idea of the scapegoat work at all; nowadays it would not work because our consciousness is really too individual. Though we see very peculiar things; think of the 6th of May [1936] enthusiasm in Germany! I cannot appreciate how far that goes, but I assume, when consciousness is not particular strong and there is much collective fear, that under certain conditions the people are again united in a sort of *ekstasis*.¹⁰³⁰

c. The Symbolic Solution

Directly after this long comment, and while responding to an observation on the role of the *Fürher*, i.e. Hitler, Jung turns again to the question of the *Übermensch*. After explaining that Nietzsche’s ideas were helped somewhat by Darwin, he says that Nietzsche thinks further than

¹⁰²⁹ Jung’s Seminar on Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, 225.

¹⁰³⁰ Jung’s Seminar on Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, 225.

this and says that man should evolve into the Superman. According to Jung, “And then the Protestant ideal leaps in and says: This is what you *ought* to do. You see if there was a Protestant ape, he might once on a Sunday morning say, ‘Now I really ought to produce man’ – which is exactly what Nietzsche is proposing to do here, of course not in one generation: he gives it at least three generations.” That is to say, for Nietzsche, the *Übermensch* is not a symbol (as it is for Jung), but a temporal idea that must be realized through actual sacrifice.

Jung believes that Nietzsche (as well as the Nazis) made a mistake by insisting on the temporal realization of the *Übermensch* in biological time instead of asserting its symbolic value as a “God-concept.” Jung claims that this was because Nietzsche was still a product of his Darwinian generation that insisted on the progress of Nature. Here, we clearly see Jung’s distancing from Nietzsche’s model. Jung warns that the *Übermensch* is not the same as the Self. He says that although both are “God-concepts,” Nietzsche envisioned it temporally and insisted on “Its” realization through actual sacrifice, while Jung’s Self must only be realized through symbolic or “virtual” sacrifice.¹⁰³¹ Although Nietzsche himself did not recognize it, Jung says that Nietzsche’s *Übermensch* is a symbol, because you cannot explain it without falling back into hopeless contradictions. It is his God-symbol, even though he refused to recognize it as such. Then, Jung says:

You see, the Superman is really a god who has been killed, declared to be dead, and then naturally he appears again in an overwhelming desire for salvation; that means the birth of the Superman. There is the god again. So the word Superman sounded like ‘God’ to the good Christians; it was a word pregnant with emotions, desires, hopes, highest meaning. And when we analyze it in a dry and critical way, we surely do not do justice to that conception. But we belong to a time after Nietzsche. We know of symbols and we have an idea of psychology, and to us it cannot mean the same.¹⁰³²

Jung is not criticizing Nietzsche’s insights into the “signs of the times,” i.e. that traditional Christianity needed to be re-valued or “reversed.” Up to a certain point, he agrees with Nietzsche that “whatever exists must be destroyed in order to be created into something new.” In 1938, Jung says that even though it is “one-sided truth,” it is still “a revolutionary truth. Nietzsche was a forerunner of our revolutionary age, and he felt very much that that was a truth of the time which should not be concealed.”¹⁰³³ Still, even though he assented to Nietzsche’s basic religious motifs, in the end, Jung believed that Nietzsche’s claim that “God is dead,” simply did not work. It did not work, *not* because Jung believed in the God of traditional Christian theism, but because Nietzsche had been *too* iconoclastic. He had gone too far and had destroyed the *symbolic value* of

¹⁰³¹ Jung’s Seminar on Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, 226.

¹⁰³² Jung’s Seminar on Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, 227.

¹⁰³³ Jung’s Seminar on Nietzsche’s Zarathustra, 308.

the “God-concept.” Paul Bishop says in *The Dionysian Self: C. G. Jung’s Reception of Friedrich Nietzsche*, Jung believed “that by denying to the God-concept its symbolic value, Nietzsche had been unable to deal with or successfully integrate the Unconscious in its archetypal form.”¹⁰³⁴ Therefore, Jung does not contradict or criticize Nietzsche’s insight into the necessity of going through a period of mental and historical self-destruction, but only his inability to “deflate” or de-conflate his personal identity with the primal one, and realize his individuality, after touching the collective unconscious. Significantly, he alchemically formulates his insights:

Nietzsche was clear-sighted enough to see that in the process of life and of becoming, the pairs of opposites come together; good and evil are the classical designations, the idea that next to the best is the worst. So if a bad thing gets very bad it may transform into something good, and when a thing is too good it becomes unlikely – we say it is too good to be true, it undoes itself. This is the natural *enantiodromia*. You see, he expresses a truth here which was already said by old Heraclitus, and it is of course a passage which formulates the modern mind.¹⁰³⁵

Although Jung does not disagree with the *structure* of Nietzsche self-divinatory process, Jung believes that he has not made the same mistake as Nietzsche, that is, by confusing the Self/*Übermensch*/God for something other than a symbol. The Self, like the *Übermensch*, is “a god who has been killed,” and is then reborn to new life, albeit symbolically and not “temporally.” Similarly, Jung understands his alchemical replacement for traditional Christianity symbolically and does not make the mistake, like Nietzsche, to “go too far. He does not imagine that the *opus alchymicum* could or should be temporally executed on a human being. Jung says, “We know quite well that no man can ever become the Self; the Self is an entirely different order of things.”¹⁰³⁶ Therefore, Jung’s “symbolic order” serves as a “braking-mechanism” that stops the Modern Hermetic *magus*/alchemist/*iatromantis* -- who dares to make himself equal to Aion and inevitably collapses the *cosmos* into his ego -- from eventually completely destroying himself and, perhaps, the world. By claiming that the processes of Hermetic alchemy and Individuation are primarily “symbolic,” he attempted to take the temporal and panenanthropic threat out of Nietzsche’s program.¹⁰³⁷

In the Seminar, although Jung is critical of Nietzsche’s inability to withdraw from the collective unconscious in-tact, on the eve of the carnage of Second World War, Jung positively credits Nietzsche for his insight into the revolutionary atmosphere of his time. Nietzsche had, according to Jung, realized that the “good things,” namely traditional Judeo-Christianity, had become too mature. He felt that it was “beginning to rot. Therefore he realized the necessity of

¹⁰³⁴ *The Dionysian Self*, 290.

¹⁰³⁵ *Jung’s Seminar on Nietzsche’s Zarathustra*, 309.

¹⁰³⁶ *Jung’s Seminar on Nietzsche’s Zarathustra*, 226.

¹⁰³⁷ *Carl Gustav Jung*, 244-46. See section on the correspondence between Jung and Sabina Spielrein.

destruction.”¹⁰³⁸ In Jung’s opinion, because Nietzsche was the son of a Protestant minister – as was Jung himself --, he was the “representative of a dying system and a dying spirit,” and was able to perceive that the Reformation had brought traditional Christianity to its logical historical finality. Nietzsche’s *Umwertung aller Werte* or “Revaluation/Transvaluation of all Values” was supposedly the culmination of a necessary historical, i.e. psychological and biological, process that would advance humanity onto its next stage. From the perspective of the occult/alchemical dialectic, the demise of traditional Christianity was bound to bring about something “new.”¹⁰³⁹

Noll says that Jung offered “the promise of truly becoming an individual after becoming a god, or rather, after learning to directly experience the god within. This is a process of self-sacrifice and struggle during which one must give up one’s former image of god, indeed most effectively smashing the Judeo-Christian idol with the ‘hammer’ of questions that is analysis. Jung’s analysis helps to destroy the hold that the Judeo-Christian God has over the individual. The promise here, then, is Jung’s promise of liberation, of freedom, of becoming a continually self-re-creating individual in a state of constant becoming, a perpetual revolution of the soul.”¹⁰⁴⁰ Noll believes that most of Jung’s disciples were enchanted by his promises that they too might become divine geniuses *through imitation* of his model. Although Jung held out his own divinity as a goal, in reality, he only offered the pattern of his own experience. His experience is simultaneously a proto-typical human experience, with ambiguous results.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have shown that Jung is a modern psychological interpreter of the Hermetic Tradition. Given the fact that Jung’s Self is the equivalent of the Hermetic primal *Anthropos/Aion*, which he developed through his reading of Friedrich Nietzsche, we can also detect the Hermetic roots in Nietzsche’s philosophy and his development of his understanding of his “god-image,” the *Übermensch*. Given the similarities of the identities of the Jungian Self and the Nietzschean *Übermensch*, we have also shown the similar structure to which Jungian and Nietzschean self-divinization adheres. After Bruno’s collapse and reversal of the Platonic system at the beginning of what we now call Modernity, we suggest that self-divinization becomes increasingly self-destructive and potentially suicidal. As we have shown, in Modern times to make oneself equal to Aion is the metaphorical equivalent of consuming the world-devouring *Oroboros* and psychically collapsing the Totality into one’s ego. This is incarnated panentheism, with its roots in the Hermetic Tradition.

¹⁰³⁸ *Jung’s Seminar on Nietzsche’s Zarathustra*, 309.

¹⁰³⁹ *The Dionysian Self*, 288-289.

¹⁰⁴⁰ *The Jung Cult*,

However, although Jung was fascinated by Nietzsche's philosophy, as a medical doctor and shamanic healer, he had learned from the consequences of Nietzsche's mental illness and "deflated," during his own attempt to make himself equal to "Aion," or in Jungian terms the primal "collective unconscious." After observing the effects of what we call Hermetic panenanthropism on an actual living human being, i.e. Nietzsche, Jung took a distance from the tendency to translate the Hermetic process of self-divinization temporally and called it "symbolic." However, he did not take a distance from the Hermetic scheme of self-divinization, but only its temporal realization. Hence, original Jungian Individuation is in many ways a more sober version of Nietzscheanism that has voluntarily restrained itself. Because of this, Jung chose Dionysos over the Crucified. Given the fact that Jung is something of the "godfather" of contemporary holistic esotericism, what we loosely call New Age, to some extent, through Jung, it is also indebted to Nietzsche and is potentially threatening to mental health, both on an individual as well as collective level.

CHAPTER V

THE AGE OF AQUARIUS

“In terms of prophecy,” Teabing said, “we are currently in an epoch of enormous change. The millennium has recently passed, and with it has ended the two-thousand-year-long astrological Age of Pisces – the fish, which is also the sign of Jesus. As any astrological symbologist will tell you, the Piscean ideal believes that man must be *told* what to do by higher powers because man is incapable of thinking for himself. Hence it has been a time of fervent religion. Now, however, we are entering the Age of Aquarius – the water bearer – whose ideals claim that man will learn the *truth* and be able to think for himself. The ideological shift is enormous, and it is occurring right now.

Langdon felt a shiver. Astrological prophecy never held much interest or credibility for him, but he knew there were those in the Church who followed it very closely. “The Church calls this transitional period the End of Days.”

Sophie looked skeptical. “As in the end of the world? The Apocalypse?”

“No.” Langdon replied. “That’s a common misconception. Many religions speak of the End of Days. It refers not to the end of the world, but rather the end of our current age – Pisces, which began at the time of Christ’s birth, spanned two thousand years, and waned with the passing of the millennium. Now that we’ve passed into the Age of Aquarius, the End of Days has arrived.”

...

Teabing struggled deeply with the decision, but in the end Rémy had proven himself a liability. Every Grail quest requires sacrifice.

Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*.

I. New Age *Sensu Stricto*

A. Contemporary Hermetic Tradition

Throughout this work, we have attempted to show how the New Age phenomenon has been tacitly or implicitly associated with western Hermetism and, therefore, must be considered a trend or as a development within the long history of western esotericism, even though it has adopted some elements from eastern esotericism. As we have shown, the creation of the “new” (e.g. a new age, religion, civilization and even human being), through the destruction of the “old” has always been a feature of Hermetic esotericism. As we have shown, most of the time, the destruction of the old religion, civilization or man is understood as a sacrifice. Based on the principles of Hermetic alchemy within the monistic framework, destruction of the old is believed to be needed to achieve a higher order of the same or something “new,” which is then believed to be “divinization” or “transfiguration.” Interpreting New Age or contemporary holistic esotericism as a modern expression of Hermetism explains to a large degree why such an influential “Movement” seemed to miraculously emerge out of the Hippie-movement of the 1960’s, reach its peak in the late 1980’s and “disappear” by the beginning of the second millennium. Hermetism,

as a highly subjective religious expression that transforms itself to the needs and expectations of individuals searching for religious or spiritual experiences, and is by its very nature adaptable to the contexts and cultures wherein it finds itself. Sometimes it seems to adapt itself right out of existence, only to re-emerge in a totally new constellation. It is for this reason that we have attempted to show the variety of Hermetic expressions in the West, from Antiquity to Modernity, which to some degree show a certain level of “family resemblances.”

Although New Age as a “movement” seems to have faded out of existence, New Age (*strictu senso*) remains a good term, because it expresses the ultimate goal of those practitioners, who have been influenced to some degree by Hermetism. This goal was or is the self-creation of a *new* age, culture, civilization, and eventually a *new* type of humanity. Since New Age is frequently used as a catch-all phrase that applies to a broad range of beliefs and practices, from “incense burning” to ceremonial magic, in order to supplement what Hanegraaff calls New Age *sensu stricto*, I coined the term *contemporary holistic esotericism*, but contemporary Hermeticism might also be appropriate.

New Age proper or in the strict sense refers to the more narrow anti-traditional Christianity movement, associated with the Age of Aquarius and simultaneously the coming of a “new” Christ. As suggested, its foundations were already built from nineteenth century Romanticism and its related occult revival, coming into age during the 1960’s Hippie and UFO rage. Its main theorists were Alice Bailey, George Trevelyan, Benjamin Creme, Rudolf Steiner, Carl Jung, amongst others, whose names we have come across. Although New Age proper has almost vanished or has more likely gone underground, many of its main ideas were adopted, often in a piecemeal fashion, by other groups, and then mutated and developed.

Together with its emphasis on a “new age” over against an “old age,” there are four (4) aspects or beliefs of the historical “New Age Movement,” which help us to distinguish it from New Age *sensu lato* or the broader phenomenon, contemporary holistic esotericism.

These are:

- 1.) the New Age corresponds to an astrological era;
- 2.) “the Christ” will return as another incarnation of a greater “energy source” or principle;
- 3.) there are a group of “Ascended Masters” or “Chiefs” who belong to a “Spiritual Hierarchy”;
- 4.) the “Spiritual Hierarchy” are preparing a “New World Order,” that will be administered by one world government and religion.¹⁰⁴¹

¹⁰⁴¹ See Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998).

B. New Age as an Astrological Era

1. The Age of Aquarius

With respect to the first belief, we should be careful not to confuse or conflate astrology with New Age. Not all astrologers are New Agers and perhaps not all so-called New Agers embrace astrology. Astrology is the science or art that believes that the various constellations of planets and stars influence the lives of human beings. Astrology played an important role in the traditional New Age Movement since many believed that they were leaving the Age of Pisces, the zodiacal sign of the fish, in order to enter into the Age of Aquarius, the zodiacal sign of the water carrier or bearer. The fish is also a reference to the monogram IXΘΥΣ,¹⁰⁴² or in Greek *Ichthus*, meaning “fish,” which is a symbol of Jesus Christ and traditional Christianity. The traditional Christian sign of the fish, however, probably has little to do with the sign of the Zodiac, but is more a reference to the fact that Jesus told his disciples, who were fishermen, that he would make them “fishers of men.” (Mt 4: 19; Mk 1:17)

Astrologers believe that every two thousand years or so, the sun passes through one of the twelve signs of the Zodiac. New Agers, therefore, interpreted Pisces as the zodiacal sign of traditional Christianity, while Aquarius was interpreted as the sign under which a significantly better epoch than the previous one, i.e. the epoch associated with traditional Christianity, would take place. Although estimates varied widely, from 1781 to 2160, New Agers believed that within the distant future – if it has not already – the sun would pass over into Aquarius.

Despite differences over the dates, astrologers and New Agers generally agree as to the characteristics of the Age of Aquarius. Unlike the Piscean Age, the Age of Aquarius will be energetic and highly intelligent. Supposedly, humanity will enter a period of independence and strength, an era when humans are ‘likely to achieve self-realization and self-salvation.’ As a result of such individual transformations, the Age of Aquarius will be a time of peace, harmony, unity, freedom, joy, accomplishment, science and inspiration.¹⁰⁴³

In *Externalization of the Hierarchy* and *The Destiny of the Nations*, New Age Mother Alice Bailey popularized the belief in the astrological connections to the New Age. She claimed that the movement from Pisces into Aquarius was according to “the Plan” of an inner Spiritual Hierarchy.¹⁰⁴⁴ This was a group of “spiritual beings,” who operated on a higher plane of consciousness than “earthlings.” The belief that the “old age” of Christianity was associated with

¹⁰⁴² *Iesous Christos Theou Uios Soter*, or Jesus the Christ, Son of God, Savior.

¹⁰⁴³ Richard Kyle, *The New Age Movement in American Culture* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1995) 189.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Alice Bailey & Djwhal Khul, *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/externalisation/exte1011.html; Alice Bailey & Djwhal Khul, *The Destiny of Nations*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/destiny/dest1065.html.

the astrological Age of Pisces was also accepted by the psychoanalyst Carl Jung in his book *Aion*,¹⁰⁴⁵ and in his autobiographical work, *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*.¹⁰⁴⁶

In her now New Age classic, *The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in Our Time* (1980), Marilyn Ferguson claimed that there were people in powerful positions who were actively working to bring about this significantly better epoch in history. She began her book with the claim that “a leaderless but powerful network is working to bring about radical change in the United States. Its members have broken with certain key elements of Western thought, and they may even have broken continuity with history.”¹⁰⁴⁷ She called this network an “Aquarian Conspiracy,” which was meant to challenge the traditional Christian establishment, no longer from without as did the “hippies,” but now from within. She claimed that the Aquarian conspirators were from all walks of life, “from the humblest to the highest,” even reaching to the lofty realms of the White House staff.¹⁰⁴⁸ Given the occult belief that the position of the stars rule human destiny, Ferguson implied that a large number of people in the United States, also with influential positions in the world of business and government, were occultists. According to Ferguson:

The Aquarian Conspirators range across all levels of income and education, from the humblest to the highest. There are schoolteachers and office workers, famous scientists, government officials and lawmakers, artists and millionaires, taxi drivers and celebrities, leaders in medicine, education, law, psychology. Some are open in their advocacy, and their names may be familiar. Others are quiet about their involvement, believing they can be more effective if they are not identified with ideas that have all too often been misunderstood. There are legions of conspirators. They are in corporations, universities and hospitals, in the faculties of public schools, in factories and doctors’ offices, in state and federal agencies, on city councils and the White House staff, in state legislatures, in volunteer organizations, in virtually all arenas of policy-making in the country.¹⁰⁴⁹

2. Jung and the Good and Evil Pisces

Although Jung did not accept all astrology, and strongly criticized popular astrology, still, it should be noted that many of his important doctrines were driven by certain astrological assumptions. For example, Jung was struck by the correlation between important events in his

¹⁰⁴⁵ Frank McLynn, *Carl Gustav Jung: a Biography* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1996) 469.

¹⁰⁴⁶ C. G. Jung, *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*, ed. Aniela Jaffé, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Random House, 1961, 1962, 1963) 220-221. Jung says: “In *Aion* ... I had attempted to explain how the appearance of Christ coincided with the beginning of a new aeon, the age of the Fishes. A synchronicity exists between the life of Christ and the objected astronomical event, the entrance of the spring equinox into the sign of Pisces. Christ is therefore the ‘Fish’ (just as Hammurabi before him was the ‘Ram’), and comes forth as the ruler of the new aeon.”

¹⁰⁴⁷ Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in Our Time* (Los Angeles: J. P. Tarcher, 1980) 23.

¹⁰⁴⁸ *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, 23-24.

¹⁰⁴⁹ *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, 23-24.

life and given psychic states at a particular time, calling this *synchronicity*.¹⁰⁵⁰ Jung's personal life was apparently full of examples where he had a passing thought, which was later confirmed through experience. Jung believed that the theory of synchronicity could be empirically proven through astrological evidence, or even through the occult science of numerology. Jung engaged the help of the world renowned physicist, Wolfgang Pauli. They were never able to back up the theory with any convincing scientific evidence and, later, Pauli abandoned the project.¹⁰⁵¹ Jung believed that thoughts, both individual and collective, could be so powerful that they could create realities in the world. Although to some extent we agree, some have taken this to mean that thoughts create, for example, solar systems.

Having said this, Jung's attitude towards astrology was not facile. According to McLynn, "The Jungian theory of astrology involves at least five major propositions: the idea of the procession of the equinox; the idea it was the seasons, not the stars, that had an influence on humans; the notion that astrology applies mainly to the macrocosm and not to individuals; the theory that astrology is primitive or projected psychology; and its link with the wider tenets of 'synchronicity,'" discussed above.¹⁰⁵² Nevertheless, given his belief that the human person is the microcosm of the macrocosm, the individual human must be influenced somewhat by the celestial movements. Based on his understanding of the procession of the equinox, as stated, Jung believed that humanity was entering into the Age of Aquarius. Sometimes, he calculated the date as beginning in the 1940's, but at other times, he thought that it might begin as late as 2200.¹⁰⁵³ Jung believed that at the beginning of Pisces, Jesus of Nazareth was its forerunner; however, towards the end of Pisces, Jesus' shadow or evil side would be projected. This was foreseen in the astrological symbol of two fishs swimming in opposite directions.¹⁰⁵⁴ According to the Jung biographer, McLynn:

If in *Mysterium Coniunctionis* Jung seemed happy to spirit away the Christian god in the alchemical process, or dissolve him in Mercury's fountain, in *Aion* he seemed to have set himself the task of making Christianity a sub-class of astrology. Ostensibly an attempt to describe human history as the unfolding of a necessary process (again the echoes of Hegel!) which originated in

¹⁰⁵⁰ See, for example, Carl Gustav Jung, "On Synchronicity," *The Portable Jung*, ed. Joseph Campbell, trans. R F. C. Hull (New York: Penguin Books, USA, 1976) 505-518.

¹⁰⁵¹ *Carl Gustav Jung: a Biography*, 496-500. "It was oft reiterated theme of Jung's that the very notions of statistical probability and causality must admit of exceptions, otherwise they would be mathematical or *a priori* truths. However, there are two cogent objections to Jung's position. In the first place, many mathematically minded philosophers, such as Bertrand Russell, have argued that the naïve 'cause and effect' notion of causality is otiose and could be replaced by a description of the physical universe relying solely on differential equations. In short, Jung's objection scarcely holds water. Secondly, there is the fundamental fallacy involved in arguing for acausality along causal lines; this is similar to the core paradox of the late Wittgenstein arguing for the inadequacy of language, by using the language of logical positivists arguing for a verification principle which could not itself be verified."

¹⁰⁵² *Carl Gustav Jung: A Biography*, 492.

¹⁰⁵³ *Carl Gustav Jung: A Biography*, 492.

¹⁰⁵⁴ Carl Gustav Jung, "The Problem of the Fourth," *Jung on Evil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) 55.

the collective unconscious, the *Aion* contained a core message that Christ had manifested himself as a predetermined moment (7 BC) when the point of spring entered the zodiacal sign of the Fishes. In Jung's words: 'A synchronicity exists between the life of Christ and the objective astronomical event, the entrance of the spring equinox into the sign of Pisces. Christ is therefore the 'Fish' (just as Hammurabi before him was the 'Ram') and comes forth as the ruler of the new aeon.' It is a complex argument, depending on astrological terms like 'movement along the ecliptic' and the 'precession of the equinoxes'. Basically, though, Jung argues that Christ's birth occurred when the spring point of the Equinox was situated at the star call Al Rischa, known to astrologers as 'the knot' as it links the 'vertical fish' in the constellation of Pisces with the 'horizontal fish'. As the centuries wore on, the spring point moved along the ecliptic until in 1789-1818 it reached the tail of the horizontal fish. According to Jung this ushered in a period of enantiodromia or Anti-Christianity. The birth of the Antichrist can be dated at the French Revolution, when a statue to the Goddess Reason was set up in Notre Dame Cathedral...¹⁰⁵⁵

Jung believed that the Age of Pisces was plagued by oppositions between good and evil, masculine and feminine, material and spiritual, etc., and needed to be brought into balance. This could be done alchemically by positing an opposite "negative" value or epoch over against a so-called "positive" value or epoch. For Jung, the battle between so-called opposites culminates in the final battle of the last book of the New Testament, the *Book of Revelation*, or the *Apocalypse*.¹⁰⁵⁶ This would be played out as much on an individual as on a cosmic level. As Jesus of Nazareth was the good Christ, then, by astrological necessity, an evil Antichrist must appear. Since reality is essentially one and evil is a principle of the conscious, then, evil must be a necessary principle in the Mind of God, similar to Böhme's First and Wrathful Principle in God. Christ and the Antichrist, or as Jung sometimes said, the devil, are both equals and opposites and are engaged in a battle to the finish. Jung believed that humanity must endure this "cosmic battle," which is a battle waged within the developing consciousness of God Himself, and is mirrored in individual human consciousness, until good and evil are balanced out again. Displaying his Nietzschean bent, Jung claimed that this balance would only happen when the good and evil consciousness begins "to doubt themselves, and the cry is raised for a morality 'beyond good and evil'."¹⁰⁵⁷ Stein states that Jung believed that:

Now we are coming to the end of this era, we can look back and see how the dark side of the Lord of History has incarnated Himself and is continuing to do so. Materialism is the philosophy of the age, the feminine is returning in the form of the Goddess (Jung felt that the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Assumption of the Virgin, promulgated in 1952, signaled the return of the Goddess ...), and evil is rampant in world politics (totalitarian Communism and Fascism have dominated the present century). Toward the end of the Age of Pisces, especially, there is a strong movement from within the collective unconscious to realize and incarnate the shadow side of God, which contains these elements.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Carl Gustav Jung: *A Biography*, 477-478.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Murray Stein, "Introduction," *Jung on Evil* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995) 14.

¹⁰⁵⁷ "On the Problem of the Fourth," *Jung on Evil*, 57.

For Jung this movement toward the incarnation of God's darkness was to be seen as the most elemental source of the persistent lure to do that which consciousness judges to be evil. It is an irrational force beyond the will of the ego. The ego is drawn by the magnetism of God's need to incarnate His own dark destructiveness. This is the ultimate source of evil, its absolute home.¹⁰⁵⁸

C. The Return of "the Christ"

In close connection with the astrological vision of Aquarius, which supersedes Pisces, was a "New Age Messianism" that expected of the return of "The Christ." However, one should not easily assume that this expectation was reconcilable with the traditional understanding of the Second Coming of Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah. For most, the "return of the Christ" referred more to a principle or an "energy force" rather than to a historical person mentioned in the canonical Gospels or elsewhere. As we saw, the confluence of the Hermetic primal man with the traditional Christian understanding of Jesus as the divine *Logos* and The Son of Man, in what we have identified as "Hermetic Protestantism," eventually led to the belief that Jesus, like Hermes Trismegistus, was a christ amongst christs, or a divine being amongst divine beings. Therefore, some New Age believers announce the "second-coming of Christ" as a personal reality, who is something like another incarnation of the Hermetic primal man. As we will see, most New Agers, who expected the return of a new "Christ" were also influenced by the theosophical idea of the coming of a new world teacher. This idea was developed by Annie Besant at the beginning of the twentieth century.

1. Benjamin Creme and the Approach of Maitreya

As suggested above, according to the monistic, i.e. holistic scheme, one version of the New Age Christ could be Jesus' cosmological as well as astrological opposite. Within this framework, a conjunction of opposites between Jesus the Christ and his "Antichrist" would signal the advent of the "new age." Other groups thought that the Christ "figure" would be an incarnation of a "christic energy force" and would reveal itself as "the Lord Maitreya," or "Maitreya the Christ."¹⁰⁵⁹ This group was probably best represented by the Baileyite, Benjamin Creme of Share International, mentioned earlier. In *The Great Approach: New Light and Life for Humanity*, meaning the approach of "Maitreya," Creme says that after a stock market crash (or perhaps some other disaster), "Maitreya will emerge. He will take up an invitation that He has received to appear on a major television network in the US, then in Japan. After that all the networks will want to interview this extraordinary man." However, "He will not be called Maitreya. He will

¹⁰⁵⁸ "Introduction," *Jung on Evil*, 14-15.

¹⁰⁵⁹ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, exte1121.html. Bailey and Khul base their idea on the belief in various religions in a return of God. According to them, "The doctrine is found in all the basic world religions, in every time and age; it appears in the doctrine of the Avatars of the Hindu faith, in the teaching of the return of Maitreya Buddha or the Kalki Avatar, in the belief in the Western world in the return of Christ and his Advent or Second Coming, and in the prophesied issuing forth of the divine Adventurer of the Moslem world."

not be introduced as the Christ or World Teacher, but simply as a man among men, one of extraordinary potency, wisdom, obvious love and concern for the people of the world --.”¹⁰⁶⁰ Although a mere man, he is also both omnipresent and omniscient. Creme teaches that Maitreya began his evolution as a normal man eight million years ago in the age of Atlantis.¹⁰⁶¹

The Great Approach is a collection of non-chronological responses to various questions about various subjects, which are supposedly related to the approach of Maitreya, from the beginning of the Second World War to the death of Princess Diana and the Florida vote-rigging scandal (2000). In an earlier response, given in 1977, Creme claimed that Maitreya and his group (i.e. the Hierarchy and Ascended Masters) realized that the world crisis was so acute that it was time for the World Teacher to reveal himself. At that time, he supposedly descended from his Himalayan mountain retreat into Pakistan. After spending a few days there, “on 19 July 1977, He entered London, England. He remains in the Asian community of that city, which He calls His ‘point of focus’ in the modern world. From there He directs His energies to all parts of the world in a highly scientific fashion which only He is able to do.”¹⁰⁶² According to Creme, from London, he is awaiting the right moment to declare to the world (on TV) that he is the man for whom all religions have been waiting. His universal TV appearance keeps being postponed, supposedly, because past stock market crashes were insufficiently severe or disasters not sufficiently catastrophic.

According to Creme, the destructive energy that humanity experiences in the present system of commercialization, and which manifests itself in the stock market, is a result of the two previous world wars, “and all the confrontations between the nations since.” Creme teaches that although the energy is destructive, it is merely energy that has not yet been channeled into a positive mode. After the first two world wars, it circled the globe and found its “womb” in the market forces. Once humanity realizes what needs to be done according to New Age principles, then, the negative or destructive energy can be transmuted into positive energy. Creme says that the reconstruction or transmutation of energy will occur through the “law governing action and reaction, which is the law underlying the work of the Spirit of Peace or Equilibrium, the Cosmic Avatar Who overshadows Maitreya, will re-create, out of that destructiveness, its opposite, and in exact proportion.”¹⁰⁶³ In other words, according to alchemical principles, Creme claims that this is now being achieved.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Benjamin Creme, *The Great Approach: New Light and Life for Humanity* (London: Share International Foundation, 2001) 25.

¹⁰⁶¹ *The Great Approach*, 40.

¹⁰⁶² *The Great Approach*, 18.

¹⁰⁶³ *The Great Approach*, 87.

Giving a politicized and temporal interpretation of occult doctrine, Creme says that at the end of an old age, “forces of progress” desire change so much that if they are allowed to flow freely, then, “they would sweep away everything, both the good and bad, that exists at the present time. At the beginning of each new age this process takes place, because the old energies are waning, the structures are crystallizing and inevitably they begin to break down.” When the “progressive forces” come into contact with “conservative forces,” then, combustion occurs. Creme gives the examples of the French Revolution, the Russian Revolution and the American Civil War. According to him, if the Hierarchy had not intervened, then, total destruction would have occurred. Displaying no recognition that these ideas, or what he calls “thoughtforms,” existed much earlier than the historical examples given, he claims that although these revolutions resulted in blood-baths, and even though the ideal was not achieved, “humanity was left with thoughtforms of freedom, brotherhood, equality, sharing, and a better relationship between the peoples of any country.”¹⁰⁶⁴ That is, the Hierarchy desired these bloodbaths, but not total destruction in order to leave humanity with “thought-forms” that could be used or recognized when they incarnated themselves in Maitreya.

In a surprising section, Creme discusses the 2000 United States Presidential election and the Florida vote-rigging scandal. During the questioning, Creme’s followers seemed concerned that some of Bush’s evangelically leaning advisors, who were in positions of power, seemed to oppose Maitreya’s objectives. In his response, although Creme seemed to imply that it was a part of the Hierarchy’s “Plan” to for Al Gore to win the election, George Bush’s election would not hinder its unfolding and, in fact, might facilitate it. Creme predicted that Bush would increase military spending, which would up-set the balance-of-power established at that time. He claimed that this might ironically bring Maitreya out into the open more quickly, “whatever the state of the (already shaky) stock markets” would be.¹⁰⁶⁵ According to him, although the decision by the Supreme Court to indirectly rule in favor of George Bush showed that the American legal system was corruptible, the Hierarchy or the “esoteric processes” had nothing to do with their decision – even though as we know they are in complete control of everything. Creme, however, did not think that the outcome of the election would have much impact on the approach of Maitreya. In fact, Creme believed that the negative impact of the Bush government might actually facilitate the approach of Maitreya. Creme states:

However, I believe that the Bush ‘victory’ does increase the tension in world affairs, particularly if the new administration proceeds with the \$ 60 billion anti-missile defence system. That would

¹⁰⁶⁴ *The Great Approach*, 157-158.

¹⁰⁶⁵ *The Great Approach*, 108.

frighten and anger both Russia and China who are reluctant to engage in another arms race. For that reason alone I think that the Bush success will have the effect of making the emergence of Maitreya sooner rather than later.¹⁰⁶⁶

Although the event happened after Creme's writing, according to his political occult logic, the destruction of the World Trade Center and the launching of the Iraq war would further catalyze the destructive "progressive forces," which are needed to establish a new balance of power and "thought-forms." Creme intimates that destructive progressive forces "sweep away" old "thought-forms" and create the possibility for Maitreya to appear as a "saviour."

2. The Liberal Catholic Church and its Preparation of the Coming World Teacher

The idea of the "Return of the Christ," as a tenet of the New Age, was first formulated by a group of occultists around Annie Besant, after the death of Helena Blavatsky in 1891. As a former evangelical missionary, she was well acquainted with the Christian doctrine of the "second coming of Jesus." At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Theosophical Society (TS) launched several new initiatives, one of which included the belief in the "immanent Coming of the World Teacher." The regular members of the TS were told that a young Hindu Brahman, Jiddu Krishnamurti, who Besant had adopted, was the newest vehicle for the "Christ" to come. As discussed, "Christ" refers to an impersonal energy force, or the inner Self, or an impersonal *logos* (Divine Mind) that periodically descends into or possesses individual human beings in order to "help" humanity. It does not exclusively refer to the historical Jesus of Nazareth. As intimated, humanity's "help" might also mean its destruction.

Krishnamurti, the so-called new "christ," was discovered in 1909 on an Indian beach by the former Anglican minister, Freemason, leader of the Theosophical Society and occultist, C. W. Leadbeater, mentioned in Chapter One. Later, he told others that he was "impressed with the 'size and beauty' of the young Krishnamurti's aura," announcing that "this boy would become a great spiritual teacher, greater even than Besant." According to Joy Dixon in the *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (an important book that traces the occult roots of the feminist movement in England), as a former Anglican priest, who, like Blavatsky had converted to Buddhism, Leadbeater became one of the founders of the Liberal Catholic Church (LCC). The LCC was formed in 1916 by James Ingall Wedgwood, a member of the famous china producing family and a former Anglican seminarian,¹⁰⁶⁷ as a substitute for the disbanded

¹⁰⁶⁶ *The Great Approach*, 109.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001) 84. Interestingly, many of the arguments, which were used by the theosophical and occult saturated suffragettes to gain the vote, are today reiterated by the feminist wing within the Roman Catholic Church to obtain female ordination. The fact that the theosophical suffragettes first began this tactic in the Liberal Catholic Church is telling. There, initially, female ordination was banned on the basis that divine energy in "ceremonial magic is best

Temple of the Rosy Cross (TRC). Wedgwood, a high ranking member of the TS, formed the TRC as “a ceremonial form of preparation for the Coming of the World Teacher.”¹⁰⁶⁸ After the TRC was disbanded, the LCC was founded to “blend ‘theosophical mysticism and Catholic sacramentalism’.”¹⁰⁶⁹ As a supposedly “liberal” version of the Roman Catholic and Anglican sacramentalism, it attempted to combine ceremonial magic and the “esoteric Wisdom Tradition” with Catholic-like rituals, plus the freedom to believe whatever one wants to believe. In essence the LCC is the contemporary form of Hermetic Christianity, first proposed by Bruno. The website of The Liberal Catholic Church, Province of the USA says:

Divine energy permeates the whole universe and is channeled through it like other forces known to man. An effective tool for its channeling is the Holy Eucharist (Mass as celebrated in the Liberal Catholic Church). It proves to be a medium most perfectly suited to the flow of spiritual energy, as frequently attested to by those possessing trained clairvoyant sight. The work of the Liberal Catholic Church, while seemingly of the character of institutionalized worship, is free from rigid structuring, except that in their outer forms its services provide the visible channel facilitating the transmission of that spiritual (divine) energy down to the physical level. It is essential that the mind be completely free to participate in the services of the Liberal Catholic Church according to each person’s inclinations and his/her potential for response. Thus, there can be no authority dictating beliefs, creeds, or dogmas, nor setting up restrictions which inhibit the participating of any of the Church’s Sacraments. In all, the individual’s conscience commands supreme authority and respect.”¹⁰⁷⁰

In line with typical New Age doctrine influenced by Bruno’s understanding of infinite spiritual progression, the Liberal Catholic Church teaches that “Man, made in the image of God, is himself divine in essence – a part of divine fire. Sharing God’s nature, he cannot cease to exist, therefore, he is eternal and his future is one whose glory and splendor have no limit.” Furthermore, human beings have the *duty* “to learn to discern the divine light in himself.” “Service” to humanity is also a duty and this can be understood within the framework of self-divinization. As in other occult schemes of self-divinization, the LCC claims that sacrifice is necessary. According to the doctrines of the LCC, “Service to humanity and the sacrifice of the lower self to the higher are laws of spiritual growth.”¹⁰⁷¹ In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many theosophists joined more magical and occult oriented organizations like the Liberal Catholic Church, which gave them “rituals without dogma.”

channeled through the male body.” Because the founder of the TS was a woman, this would change. The question of women’s ordination was originally fought out amongst occultists in the LCC, which was the house church of many TS members.

¹⁰⁶⁸ *Divine Feminine*, 82.

¹⁰⁶⁹ *Divine Feminine*, 84.

¹⁰⁷⁰ “Religion for Today in the Liberal Catholic Church,” The Liberal Catholic Church, Province of the United States, <http://members.tripod.com/~LiberalCatholic/Religion.htm>.

¹⁰⁷¹ “Doctrine of the Liberal Catholic Church,” The Liberal Catholic Church, Province of the United States, <http://members.tripod.com/~LiberalCatholic/doctrine.htm>.

Although offering a history of the church and its founders, prudently, the LCC website does not mention anything about Leadbeater's scandalous history. That is to say, Leadbeater's "discovery" of Krishnamurti was not without contention. Earlier, Leadbeater had become embroiled in several sex scandals involving young boys. Important members of the TS, who were also concerned parents, claimed that he had used their sons in sexual rituals to increase his occult powers. Charges included sodomy and encouraging the boys to masturbate for occult purposes. Dion Fortune, one of the founding members of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a ceremonial magical order that conceived of itself as secretly working towards the higher evolution of humanity,¹⁰⁷² warned against Leadbeater's sexual magic. She suggested that he attempted to stimulate the *kundalini* force (serpent fire), through masturbation. He "then directed [it] into abnormal channels where it will not be absorbed, but remain available for magical purposes."¹⁰⁷³ Since Leadbeater's occult-ethic, as well as that of the TS was utilitarian (i.e. if it furthers the evolution of humanity, then, it is "good"), as a self-perceived "white magician," he might have justified his need to use the boys' latent sexual energy in order to increase his own supposed occult powers for the "betterment" of humanity. Dixon elucidates:

Sex and spirituality were closely connected because both had to do with creative forces, G. R. S. Mead had made this point at the 1908 convention, with direct reference to Leadbeater: 'At all times of great spiritual revival, the foul reflection, the distortion, the perversion of the Most Sacred Mysteries accompanies it; at all such times the true Mysteries have been surrounded and be-smirched with the foulest of sex crimes.' Sex and spirituality were linked, Mead argued, because 'the high Mysteries have to do chiefly with the Mystery of Regeneration.' Spiritual progress involved a literal sublimation of sexual energy, the transmutation of base metal of sexual desire into purer and higher forms of creativity. The same knowledge, in the wrong hands, could also lead – as Mead suggested it had done in this case – to the perversion of spirituality.¹⁰⁷⁴

First of all, we must take into account that the accusing parents were themselves occultists and must have had some knowledge of the basis of their accusations. Second, there were many in the occult establishment, who maintained that he did teach sexual magic to his closest allies. This is possible, since the esoteric tradition, as it was developed by the TS, was closely linked with the sexual drive and its sublimation to spiritual powers.¹⁰⁷⁵ As we pointed out, Leadbeater was one of the founding members of the Liberal Catholic Church. Dixon claims that "The Liberal Catholic Church also had what could be interpreted as homoerotic aspects. David Hilliard, in his study of

¹⁰⁷² Susan Greenwood, *De Encyclopedie van Magie & Hekserij: Een geïllustreerd historisch verslag van spirituele werelden*, trans. Ineke Willems (Utrecht: Veltman Uitgevers, 2002) 174.

¹⁰⁷³ In short, one is encouraged to masturbate up to the point of ejaculation and then try to control one's impulse to "let go of one's self," so to speak. It is an exercise in controlling sexual desire, giving one the impression that one is in control of one's self and cannot be controlled.

¹⁰⁷⁴ *Divine Feminine*, 107. To some extent we agree with Mead, however, this has nothing to do with preserving the true sense of the Hellenistic Mysteries.

¹⁰⁷⁵ *Divine Feminine*, 76.

the homosexual of Anglo-Catholicism in the second half of the nineteenth century, claims that ‘Anglo-Catholicism provided a set of institutions and religious practices through which they [homosexual men] could express their sense of difference in an oblique and symbolic way.’ The LCC, drawing as it did on Anglo-Catholicism for both its membership and its ritual, may have served the same ends.”¹⁰⁷⁶ In *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, Joscelyn Godwin adds:

In a subculture, where the bishops outnumber the simple priests and deacons, Bishop Leadbeater could indulge his love of dressing up and celebrating Mass, in which he convinced his congregation that he, at least, could see with his astral vision the angelic host present at the Eucharist. Leadbeater was anything but a Christian supremacist or literalist: he revered the ‘Master Jesus’ as one among other masters, after the Hindu pattern of multiple avatars. At heart he was a magician, and the Mass was his preferred rite of ceremonial magic.¹⁰⁷⁷

After the pedophilia scandal, Leadbeater was expelled from the TS, but was readmitted after an internal fight at the 1908 convention. As the leader of the TS, Besant showed little concern for the safety of male children, and pushed to have Leadbeater readmitted “on the grounds that his forced resignation had violated the theosophical commitment to freedom of thought.”¹⁰⁷⁸ At the end of the same year, Besant declared the Coming of the World Teacher for the first time. Shortly thereafter, Krishnamurti with his “large and beautiful aura” was discovered. The declaration of a new “Messiah” in the person of Krishnamurti, plus the scandal surrounding the re-admittance of Leadbeater and his close working relationship with Besant, provoked more than 600 members to leave the society.¹⁰⁷⁹

Besant and Leadbeater, however, pushed on with their promotion of Krishnamurti. Lady Emily Lutyens, a TS leader, claimed that through the personal devotion to Krishnamurti, theosophy was becoming a “more human movement,” which followers had missed when the Society had been embroiled in abstract and intellectualistic debates. By 1917, -- still showing sympathy for the concepts of traditional Christianity, even though she herself had abandoned it -- she admitted that there are those “who need to see those ideals [i.e. abstract concepts] embodied in a more or less concrete form... [These] are hero-worshippers, who see God best when He shows himself through man.”¹⁰⁸⁰ Whether Krishnamurti’s discovery was timed at the critical moment, when Leadbeater needed to re-prove his spiritual clout to the remaining TS members, is

¹⁰⁷⁶ *Divine Feminine*, 117.

¹⁰⁷⁷ Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: the State University of New York Press, 1994) 367-368.

¹⁰⁷⁸ *Divine Feminine*, 94.

¹⁰⁷⁹ *Divine Feminine*, 76-77. Supposedly, this was also one of the reasons why Rudolf Steiner left the TS and formed his own Anthroposophical Society.

¹⁰⁸⁰ *Divine Feminine*, 78.

difficult to tell. In any case, the advancement of Krishnamurti as the new incarnation of “divine energy” helped to redirect the focus away from Leadbeater, who remained a close ally of Besant.

3. Hesiod’s Golden Age and the Hindu Kali Yuga

In part, Besant’s teaching of the Coming World Teacher, who inaugurates the New Age, was already prepared by Helena Blavatsky. Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891), or HPB, was born in the Ukraine, but was for the most part reared by her maternal grandparents.¹⁰⁸¹ Her grandmother was Princess Helena Dolgorukii and her grandfather was a Russian diplomat, Andrei de Fadeev. He administered Kalmuck affairs, a tribe in the Astrakhan steppes practicing Tibetan Buddhism. Blavatsky’s mother wrote a novel on the Kalmuck, and Blavatsky claimed to have been introduced to their brand of Tibetan Buddhism at the age of five.¹⁰⁸² By the time she was 15, she had probably read most of the books in the vast occult library of her maternal great grandfather, Prince Pavel Dolgorukii who, until his death in 1838, lived with his daughter’s family. According to K. Paul Johnson in *The Initiates of the Theosophical Masters*, Prince Pavel was a prominent Rosicrucian Freemason, who was said to have met the illustrious alchemist Saint-Germain (fl. 1710-1784). Prince Pavel’s lodge was connected to the German Templar movement and the rite of the “Strict Observance,” which was started by Karl Gotthelf von Hund (d. 1776).¹⁰⁸³ It is through the fertile imagination of Von Hund that the idea of a group of “hidden” adepts or Masters, which later became a group of hidden Ascended Masters, first came into being.

Through her grandfather, she also came in contact with Prince Aleksandr Golitsyn, “a magician and Freemason who encouraged her growing interest in esotericism.”¹⁰⁸⁴ By 18, she fled from her first husband to Cairo, where she met Paolos Metamon, a Coptic magician who remained her mentor for many years afterwards. Her path crossed with many important esotericists associated with various secret societies like the Rosicrucians, the Italian nationalist and anti-Catholic Carbonari (coal burners), the Masonic Rites of Memphis and Misraim, many which pretended to further the legacy of the disgraced Count Cagliostro,¹⁰⁸⁵ a. k. a. Giuseppe Balsamo, the almost mythical last prisoner of the Roman inquisition.¹⁰⁸⁶ Johnson says that her *western* occult connections were superb:

¹⁰⁸¹ K. Paul Johnson, *The Masters Revealed: Madame Blavatsky and the Myth of the Great White Lodge* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994) 1.

¹⁰⁸² *The Masters Revealed*, 19.

¹⁰⁸³ Peter Partner, *The Knights Templar and their Myth* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1990) 117. Sometimes spelled von Hundt.

¹⁰⁸⁴ K. Paul Johnson, *Initiates of the Theosophical Masters* (Albany: State University of New York, 1995) 1.

¹⁰⁸⁵ *The Masters Revealed*, 4.

¹⁰⁸⁶ *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 99.

During the 1850's and 1860's, HPB became familiar with Sufism, Kabbalah, the Druze religion, and Coptic Christianity. ... In the early 1870s in Cairo, she was associated with several other esotericists. It is likely that among them was Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani, a political reformer, Sufi teacher and Freemason who later went to India around the same time as HPB and Olcott. Other Cairo figures from whom she derived inspiration were Louis Bimstein, a Polish Jew who later became 'Max Theon,' teacher of Cosmic Philosophy, and British vice-consul and Masonic leader, Raphael Borg. HPB, Metamon and Bimstein tried to establish an occult society in Cairo in 1871, but the effort failed.

After moving to New York in 1873, HPB was reunited with Rawson [an American artist] and met his Masonic and Rosicrucian associates, most importantly Charles Sotheran, who became a co-founder of the Theosophical Society. Sotheran belonged to the Societas Rosicruciana in Anglia and the Masonic Rite of Memphis, both of which honored Cagliostro. The TS was also linked with a mysterious Brotherhood of Luxor based in Egypt, with which Bimstein was affiliated. Shortly before the founding of the TS, HPB noted in her scrapbook that she had been ordered to found a 'secret society like the Rosicrucian lodge.' As late as 1878, HPB and Olcott were considering making the TS a Masonic order as advised by Sotheran and others. Thus it would be hard to overestimate the influence of secret societies in the early years of Theosophy.¹⁰⁸⁷

In an attempt to syncretize western and eastern esoteric teachings, Blavatsky "had taught that the end of the nineteenth century would roughly coincide with the end of a cycle in the Hindu Kali Yuga or 'Dark Age'." This meant that the age coming after the Kali Yuga would be a new age of enlightenment in cosmic history, presupposing the existence of other prior Yugas or ages. According to Joscelyn Godwin, in *Arktos: The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism and Nazi Survival*, the four Yugas are related the Hindu doctrine of cosmic cycles. "The Sanskrit names for these four ages refer to their relative durations: Krita or Satya Yuga (four units), Treta Yuga (three), Dvapara Yuga (two), and Kali Yuga (one), the whole tenfold period making up one Mahayuga... After the Krita or Satya Yuga, things get progressively worse: each successive Yuga sees the human race falling into increasing unhappiness and vice, until at the end of the Kali Yuga (mercifully, the shortest of the series) the world is set on fire, deluged with water, and then reborn."¹⁰⁸⁸ That is to say, according to occultists, traditional Christianity corresponded to the age of *an anticipated and even desired* cataclysmic destruction, which is a necessary precursor to the New Age.

Although Blavatsky made use of the Hindu understanding of cosmic cycles, the West also knew of this cyclical understanding of cosmic history as early as Hesiod (700 BCE). In his *Works and Days*, Hesiod posited five ages of the human race. The first age was the Golden Age, traditionally associated with Kronos or Saturn. After telling the story of Pandora, who brought evil into the world, Hesiod explains how humans and gods began from the same origin, an ancient idea which reappeared in the *Corpus*.

¹⁰⁸⁷ *The Masters Revealed*, 5.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Joscelyn Godwin, *Arktos: The Polar Myth in Science, Symbolism and Nazi Survival* (Kempston, IL: Adventures Unlimited Press, 1996) 16.

The race of men that the immortals who dwell on Olympus made first of all was of gold. They were in the time of Kronos, when he was king in heaven; and they lived like gods, with carefree heart, remote from toil and misery... They at their leisure harvested their fields in contentment amid abundance. Since the earth covered up that race, they have been divine spirits by great Zeus' design, good spirits on the face of the earth, watchers over mortal men, bestowers of wealth: such is the kingly honour that they received.¹⁰⁸⁹

After the gold age, the silver, bronze, heroic and iron ages follow. According to some commentators, a heroic age was inserted into the list of four to better correspond to traditional Greek ideas about the heroes of Greek civilization. Later, other ancient writers, like Plato and Ovid, took up Hesiod's progressive, yet cyclical, understanding of Reality. This promoted the belief in an idealized beginning, followed by long periods of progressive decline, ending in cataclysmic destruction, which will set off a new "golden era." If we recall, similar ideas were promulgated in ancient Egypt. Godwin suggests that authoritative occultists like Blavatsky and later René Guénon (1886-1951), who claimed that we are now in the Kali Yuga awaiting immanent destruction, joined the Western concept of Hesiod's "ages" with the Hindu concept of the "Yugas."

The first era would then be the Satya Yuga or Golden Age, maintained by the 'divine cause,' and the other era the subsequent ages, falling under the law of entropy as the gods leave the earth and its inhabitants to their own devices. However, if this is not a single cycle but part of a larger movement, then there is hope. At the end of the Iron Age [Kali Yuga], at the uttermost nadir of dereliction, the world will suddenly experience a reversion to its original golden state. Like a clock that has been left to run down, the cycle of ages will begin anew.¹⁰⁹⁰

4. Preparing for the Coming Age

According to standard TS doctrine that derives from Blavatsky, members associated their present struggles and sufferings with the Kali Yuga, or the necessary cyclical "Age of Destruction." As shown, very early on these ideas were linked to astrology, where the Age of Pisces became associated with the rise and fall of traditional Christianity, but also with the Kali Yuga of Hindu cosmic cycles. This type of cataclysmic thinking climaxed at the start of the First World War (1914-1919), where talk about the coming of the New Age and the coming of the New World Teacher reached a fever pitch. In 1911, two years after the concrete discovery of the World Teacher, "Besant launched the Order of the Star of the East (OSE) to prepare the world for the new Advent. At the Christmas meeting at Adyar on December 28, 1911, the promised World Teacher apparently manifested himself through Krishnamurti for the first time." That is to say, Krishnamurti appeared in person at a TS meeting, supposedly, "throwing the atmosphere 'into

¹⁰⁸⁹ Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days*, trans. M. L. West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988) 40.

¹⁰⁹⁰ *Arktos*, 17.

powerful pulsing vibrations of a most extraordinary force.”¹⁰⁹¹ Dixon notes that the specific contribution of the OSE (Order of the Star of the East) was to link the idea of “the Coming of the New Era with the Coming of a New Teacher” as well as cosmic rebirth, which followed apocalyptic world destruction.

Members of the TS and OSE prepared for the “Coming” and saw the havoc wrought by the war as a necessary and welcome preparatory phase for the Golden Age to come. Given the fact that the OSE was created to prepare the New Advent, which according to occult doctrine must precede a period of horror and destruction that levels the ground for the “new,” we can see why certain members of the TS reacted so excitedly about the Great War. They did not see it as advantageous to stop it any time soon, believing that their age of dominion was about to be reigned in on the sacrificial bodies of millions. Dixon expounds:

The educationalist Beatrice de Normann argued that the TS had been founded to prepare for the New Age, and ‘as the new wine cannot be put into old bottles there is a great need for destruction and re-construction.’ The Great War was ‘the birth throes of the New Age’, and out of destruction of war new forms would emerge, fit for the new spirit, in religion, politics, sociology, and education. The war was only a dim reflection on the physical plane of the tremendous and powerful spiritual forces that were being poured into the world in preparation for the New Age.¹⁰⁹²

One of the most prominent theosophical feminists at the beginning of the twentieth century was Charlotte Despard. Born into a prominent property owning Irish-Anglican family with Presbyterian leanings, she became everything her family was not, a “romantic novelist, a socialist, a feminist, a pacifist, an Irish nationalist, and a communist.”¹⁰⁹³ Shortly after the death of her husband in 1890, she converted to Roman Catholicism, “the religion of many of the working-class Irish women.” In 1899, she joined the TS. According to Dixon, “the TS allowed Despard to integrate her interest in Buddhism and Hinduism with her commitment to Catholicism, especially after the formation of the theosophical Liberal Catholic Church, in which she became a devout and regular communicant.”¹⁰⁹⁴ She joined the LCC after its inception in 1916. Therefore, her conversion to the Roman Catholicism in 1899, as well as her communism and Irish nationalism, probably had much to do with a need to rebel against her Protestant, landed English parents. Her attraction to the occultist orientation of the LCC and its magical rituals suited her more than the traditional Church.

¹⁰⁹¹ *Divine Feminine*, 77.

¹⁰⁹² *Divine Feminine*, 142.

¹⁰⁹³ *Divine Feminine*, 185.

¹⁰⁹⁴ *Divine Feminine*, 186.

Paradoxically, as a well-known pacifist, Despard similarly saw the Great War as the apocalyptic event, which was needed to “sweep away the present social and political order ‘with its rivalries, its competitions, its complexity, its fears, its glorification of worldly success and material grandeur’ and bring in its stead the return of ‘the Divine Mother-Spirit of Love’ in national and international life.”¹⁰⁹⁵ This shows that the idea of *necessary destruction* was a common esoteric theme and widely accepted, even by those occultists professing pacifism.¹⁰⁹⁶ For example, in one of her books, *Woman in the New Era*, a direct reference to her hopes for a New Age, she claimed that “in all the ‘old mythologies’ the role of the ‘woman principle’ is recognized in the creation, preservation and even the *destruction of life*.” (Italics mine)¹⁰⁹⁷

Already in 1901, Despard had been lecturing to TS members about the need for a “new revelation” and “The Christ That Is To Be.” The influence of Despard must have certainly influenced Besant in her formulation of the doctrine of the Coming World Teacher and his discovery in 1909. In 1908, Besant wrote her classic, *Esoteric Christianity: The ‘Lesser Mysteries’*, where she tried to sell Christianity as a stepping stone to “higher Mysteries.” Intimating the future theosophical dogma to come, in *Esoteric Christianity*, Besant writes about Jesus: “The historical Christ, then, is a glorious Being belonging to the great spiritual hierarchy that guides the spiritual evolution of humanity, who used for some three years the body of the disciple Jesus.”¹⁰⁹⁸ As we will see, her understanding of a “glorious Being” was very similar to the enormous being, which acted as Hermes Trismegistus’ spirit guide in *Corpus Hermeticum*, I or the *Poimandres*.

After the First World War, given the importance of the concept of “destructive and creative motherhood” for feminist occultists, many feminist occultists not only began to advocate the “return of the Christ,” but also the “return of the Great Mother.” This was perhaps based on Johann Jakob Bachofen’s (1815-1887) theory of matriarchal/patriarchal dialectic, in *Mutterrecht und Urreligion* (1861).¹⁰⁹⁹ Bachofen’s dialectic followed the occult law of inversion, which we saw in *Gli eroici furori*. According to Bruno’s alchemical scheme, it was believed that to bring about a return to a previous Golden Age, but at a higher stage of evolution, one must force the

¹⁰⁹⁵ *Divine Feminine*, 189.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Similar mind-boggling paradoxes can be found in persons like Hitler and Wagner. Both were vegetarians and loved animals, but hatred humanity.

¹⁰⁹⁷ *Divine Feminine*, 188.

¹⁰⁹⁸ Annie Besant, *Esoteric Christianity: The ‘Lesser Mysteries’* (Wheaton: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1901, 1970) 96.

¹⁰⁹⁹ J. J. Bachofen, *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J. J. Bachofen*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967). See Appendix II.

current epoch to reach its nadir by positing or stimulating the period's opposite.¹¹⁰⁰ Since the early twentieth century, occultists perceived themselves to be in the period of Judeo-Christian "patriarchy," a term coined by Bachofen. He advocated a form of primitive polygamy over against the "Judeo-Christian conception of society based on the patriarchal family."¹¹⁰¹ According to Bachofen, the first societies were matriarchal. Unlike "matriarchy," "patriarchy" was supposedly a system where both males and females entertained various sexual partners, without fear of retribution or paternal responsibility for the maintenance and education of offspring. This responsibility fell solely on the female and was, according to Bachofen, the basis of peaceful co-existence. Since Bachofen believed that the present age was a period of patriarchy, in order to return to a higher level of Demetrian matriarchy, society would need to create a period of Dionysian androgyny in opposition to patriarchy.¹¹⁰² This would supposedly balance out the extremes. As we discussed earlier, Burkert's work has shown that no such primal matriarchy existed and that society was "patriarchal" from the beginning.

The influential Despard, for example, argued that a new matriarchal period – which according to Bachofen's dialectic needed to go through the chaos of Dionysos -- was even necessary for democracy. She promoted the idea within the TS that the "coming of the New Age was dependent on a transformation of the conditions of motherhood: 'The recognition of the Mother,'...and her return as a living force into the social, political and religious life of the nations."¹¹⁰³ For Lady Emily Luytens, motherhood was in itself an initiatic experience:

Moving seamlessly from an evocation of the 'great Earth-Mother' to the rhetoric of Anglican sacramentalism, Lutyens claimed that women's function was to 'transmute the lower into the higher, to consecrate the outward and the visible signs that they may better show forth the inward spiritual grace.' Motherhood was literally divine, because creative – not merely a physical symbol of divine creativity, but itself a manifestation of that divinity. The material facts of conception, pregnancy, and childbirth were thus consecrated and made sacred. As a priestess, the mother presided over the sacrament of birth. ... As a Christ-figure [she bore] children in blood and pain, like Christ crucified, 'she descended into hell in order to bring back heaven, she has passed through the valley of the shadow of death in order to give birth to life. Motherhood was therefore a great initiation into spiritual mysteries, a transfiguration, an illumination, and an expansion of consciousness.'¹¹⁰⁴

¹¹⁰⁰ Giordano Bruno, *The Heroic Enthusiasts: an Ethical Poem*, Part I and II, trans. L. Williams (London: George Redway, 1887) 57. Tansillo says: "But he who is quick, both seeing and hearing, and who, considering evil and good, estimating the one and the other as variable, and consistent in motion, mutation, and vicissitude, in such wise that the end of one opposite is the commencement of another, and the extreme of the one is the beginning of the other;..."

¹¹⁰¹ Richard Noll, *The Jung Cult: Origins of a Charismatic Movement* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1994) 160.

¹¹⁰² See Appendix I for more on Bachofen.

¹¹⁰³ *Divine Feminine*, 210.

¹¹⁰⁴ *Divine Feminine*, 213-214.

Although we agree that motherhood is (or can be) a profound spiritual experience, it is interesting to see how assent to the monistic worldview in many feminist authors with occult backgrounds tended towards the absolutization of motherhood as the *summum bonum*. In the nineteenth century, many female occultists and spiritualists were still cultural Christians and attached to the figure of the Jesus, even though they did not place much importance on historical Christianity or the historical person Jesus. But this affection was to change, as many powerful anti-Christian feminist occultists, like Blavatsky, began to associate Christian esotericism (meaning Hermetic Christianity) with weakness and unmanliness, whilst occultism *tout simple* became associated with strength and virility. In order to assert their political strength and virility, female occultists began to believe that they had to imitate men and reject “Christian weakness.”¹¹⁰⁵

The TS and others began to repetitively hammer out the idea that traditional or dogmatic Christianity was a supposedly patriarchal religion, while the Vedism of Old India had embodied the values of “matriarchy” needed to *save the world*. This is, of course, the same Vedism where widows were forced to incinerate themselves with their dead husbands, rather than be cared for by their surviving families. In 1883, one of Blavatsky’s Ascended Masters explained that the mission of women was to “become the mother of future occultists,” and that the spiritual and racial salvation of humanity depended on women by populating the world with little “buddhas” and “christs.” Of course, these buddhas and christs were an esoteric interpretation of the historical Buddha, Siddhartha Gautama (563-483 BC) and Jesus of Nazareth, who were conceived as great *magi* to imitate.¹¹⁰⁶

In order to meet the challenge of divine androgyny and to activate a temporal “conjunction of opposites” with the male teacher, in 1928, Besant launched yet another initiative to “herald the Coming of ‘a great Spiritual Being who represents the feminine side of Divinity. She was to represent Ideal Womanhood, as the ‘World Mother’. In the past, she was incarnate in Isis and then in the Virgin Mary, but now had decided incarnate herself in a young woman of the Brahman caste, Shrimati Rukmini Devi.” Supposedly, the elevation of Devi, wife of theosophist and bishop of the LCC, George Arundale, represented nothing short of a new Annunciation. Devi’s fitness for the task depended partly on her so-called pure unmixed Aryan blood and high

¹¹⁰⁵ Cf. Keith Ansell-Pearson, “Nietzsche, woman and political theory,” *Nietzsche, Feminism and Political Theory*, ed. Paul Patton (London: Routledge, 1993) 27-48. It is significant that the almost universal acceptance of something like “Patriarchy,” Christian theology today was first launched by feminist authors, who rely heavily on the “master of suspicion,” but also misogynist, Nietzsche, to create their “new ethic.”

¹¹⁰⁶ *Divine Feminine*, 213. As suggested, these popularistic ideas about the “salvific” nature of “Matriarchy” for the world raise the question whether the “Mothers” were to be like Hera, who tricked her rival Semele to gaze upon her lover’s splendor and was incinerated? Or, like the mother Demeter, who destroyed other people’s innocent children, because she was interrupted? Although these myths do not particularly flatter to the ideal of pagan matriarchy, surprisingly, these pseudo-academic theories have gained increasing acceptance in feminist circles.

social caste.¹¹⁰⁷ Dixon believes that Besant's insistence on Devi as the female counterpart to Krishnamurti was in part due to Krishnamurti's growing sense of independence and her need to counter his potential defection.¹¹⁰⁸ Krishnamurti had been adopted by Besant and was reared as a "son" by Leadbeater, although he maintained contacts with his Hindu family. In 1929, the year when the World Teacher would become fully manifest, Jiddu Krishnamurti declined the position and dissolved the Order of the Star of the East, the theosophical organ that had been established for the preparation of his manifestation, saying:

I maintain that Truth is a pathless land, and you cannot approach it by any path whatsoever, by any religion, by any sect. ... Truth, being limitless, unconditioned, unapproachable by any path whatsoever, cannot be organized; nor should any organization be formed to lead or coerce people along any particular path. If you first understand that, then you will see how impossible it is to organize a belief. A belief is purely an individual matter, and you cannot and must not organize it. If you do, it becomes dead, crystallized; it becomes a creed, a sect, a religion, to be imposed on others.¹¹⁰⁹

Godwin claims that Krishnamurti was the culmination of an extreme form of the Theosophical Enlightenment, which was radically world rejecting. We might add that perhaps Krishnamurti recognized the inconsistencies of the dogmas of the "anti-dogmatic" TS and resented his growing sense of being used as a tool to further the occult agendas of his ambitious and manipulative "parents" Besant and Leadbeater. In any case, shortly after the defection of Krishnamurti to the "pathless land," the TS practically collapsed on itself and its membership dramatically declined. After the death of Besant and Leadbeater in 1933 and 1934 respectively, Arundale, husband of the World Mother, took over the presidency of the TS. He as well as Krishnamurti -- albeit now outside of the confines of the TS -- shifted the focus back to the importance of the subjective personal experience of the individual. Reemphasizing the esoteric doctrine of the microcosm of the macrocosm, Krishnamurti stressed "the urgency of the inward revolution" and self-transformation needed to change society. Although on the surface, this proclamation seemed to confirm the eastern orientation of spirituality to come, it could have just as easily been formulated by another Theosopher, who knew little of India, Jacob Böhme.

Dixon emphasizes that the "Krishnamurti event" at the same time participated in the spiritual transformations that had been going on in the West since the Enlightenment. In agreement with Dixon, we also believe that Krishnamurti's defection was the pivotal moment when the more traditional esotericism of the Theosophical Society, which still relied on individual commitment to an organization or institution, became what we today understand as the

¹¹⁰⁷ *Divine Feminine*, 206.

¹¹⁰⁸ *Divine Feminine*, 206-225.

¹¹⁰⁹ Quoted in *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 367.

self-spirituality of contemporary esotericism or more popularly, New Age Religion. Krishnamurti was the catalyst that served to redirect spiritual energies away from the traditional esoteric secret societies like the TS, Freemasonry, Co-masonry, Anthroposophy, etc, toward a more privatized and solipsistic spirituality. Dixon asserts:

These shifts to a radically privatized spirituality are consonant with the broader shifts within what has come to be known as the New Age movement. The anthropologist Paul Heelas argues that a central characteristic of the modern New Age is an emphasis on what he characterizes as ‘self-spirituality,’ the assumption that the self is sacred. [The New Age ‘celebration of the Self’] can be found in the most recent theosophical writings as well as in Wiccan ritual, in the Pagan Federation, in the autobiographical writings of Shirley MacLaine, and in James Redfield’s best-seller *The Celestine Prophecy* (1994).¹¹¹⁰

D. “Ascended Spiritual Masters” and “Spiritual Hierarchy”

The third characteristic of New Age *stricto sensu* is that Jesus is a “master” amongst many other “Masters,” who together rule over the world in a so-called “Spiritual Hierarchy.” According to Alice Bailey and her channeled entity, Djwhal Khul, the “Masters” have a “Plan” to unite the world together into one world government and religion under “the Christ.”¹¹¹¹ As we have seen, this figure is a highly mutated version of the Hermetic primal man. Within more heterodox Protestant circles, who had accepted Hermetic pantheism and integrated the scheme of Gnostic Hermetic self-divinization into their understanding of human/divine nature, Jesus came to be seen as a christ amongst christs. If we recall, in *CH*, I, 25-26, the Hermetic adept is said to ascend the celestial spheres. He eventually enters the region of ogdoad, sees himself in the Mind of God or as a member of the primal man and meets others, who have supposedly had a similar experience. As discussed, under Bruno’s influence, this originally Neoplatonic-type ascent became interpreted as infinite “progressive evolution” to ever higher worlds and stars.

Although more research could be done on this subject, in Modernity, as these ideas became increasingly secularized and separated from their heterodox roots, the possibility increased to understand the Hermetic ogdoadic region as the realm of the “Spiritual Hierarchy,” localized in somewhere in higher ethereal regions. As we will also see, furthermore, the concept of “Ascended Spiritual Masters” can also be traced back to the idea of “Unknown Superiors” in Templar Freemasonry, mentioned earlier. We propose that both the temporalization of the Hermetic ascent, with its worship of the primal *Anthropos*, as well as the concept the “Unknown Superiors,” were instrumental in the development of the concept of the “Ascended Masters” and the “Spiritual Hierarchy” respectively.

¹¹¹⁰ *Divine Feminine*, 229.

¹¹¹¹ cf. *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*.

1. The Knights Templar and the Unknown Superiors

a. Templarism and Magic

In *The Knights Templar and their Myth*, Peter Partner attempts to elucidate the complicated history of the Knights of the Templar and their later connection to Freemasonry and magic. Given length restraints, we cannot delve into all of the intricacies of the development of the “Templar myth,” but we will attempt to convey the main points, because of its revival through the popularization of Dan Brown’s bestseller, *The Da Vinci Code*. This myth is important for understanding how the doctrine of the Ascended Masters developed.

According to Partner, Templarism was born in Germany as a reaction to the “democratizing” tendencies of early Freemasonry, which espoused the “brotherhood of man,” but also to the popular fascination with nobility and chivalry. This was aided by an element of Lutheran anti-Catholicism and German anti-French sentiment, which was in the air. Although original Speculative Masonry contained three degrees (i.e. Entered Apprentice, Fellow Craftsman and Master Mason), the introduction of Templarism allowed aristocratic Masons to develop the idea of higher degrees into the Masonic initiatory ceremonies.¹¹¹² These were introduced to appease aristocratic Masons, who were forced to socialize with members of the bourgeoisie and call them “brother.” Higher degrees allowed Masons from the nobility to put a social distance between their lower “equals” and themselves. Hence, one of the goals of the Templarist trend in Masonry was to create new noble titles and re-order society.

The egalitarian and rationalist thrust of Freemasonry was resisted by an old-fashioned and rank-dominated society, and there was a demand for a version of the Masonic craft acceptable to conservative doctrine and Gothic taste. During the Seven Years War a French prisoner in Germany co-operated with a German pastor who went under the name of Samuel Rosa to concoct a Templar myth to serve the ritual needs of the Masonic lodges.¹¹¹³

The stories around the cruel suppression of the order by the French king, Philip the Fair or Philip the Fourth (1268-1314), with the knowledge of pope Clement V (1305-14), was used to bolster support for the Seven Years War (+/- 1754-1763). Historians have shown that the destruction of the Templar Order was mainly due to the responsibility of the French King and less to the Pope at the time, Clement V, a Frenchman himself. The Pope’s main problem was more the weakness of his will against the potential military threat of the French king, than his desire to see the order destroyed. The legend of the murder of Hiram, the architect of Solomon’s temple, and his association with the execution of Jacques de Molay, the last Grand Master of the order, was

¹¹¹² *The Knights Templar & their Myth*, 108.

¹¹¹³ *The Knights Templar & their Myth*, 110.

concocted by aristocratic Lutheran Masons to rationalize the desire for vengeance against the French and the Catholic Church.¹¹¹⁴

First, an analogy was drawn between De Molay and the figure of Hiram who, in Masonic lore, was the murdered architect of Solomon's Temple.¹¹¹⁵ In turn, another analogy was drawn between Hiram and his work on Solomon's Temple and the individual Freemason's work on himself. In the Bible, however, there appears to be two Hirams. The first one is Hiram, the king of Tyre, who supplied much of the timber to build the Temple (cf. 1 King 5) and the bronze craftsman, Hiram or Huram, the son of a widow from the tribe of Nephtali and a father from Tyre (cf. 1 King 7:13ff). Some Jewish legends conflated King Hiram with Ezekiel's prophecy against the King of Tyre in Ezekiel 28:2,¹¹¹⁶ when the prophet says: "In the pride of your heart you say, 'I am a god; I sit on the throne of a god in the heart of the seas.' But you are a man and not a god, though you think you are as wise as a god." However, the fact that the author wrote after Solomon shows that Ezekiel was not referring to Hiram, the King of Tyre from Solomon's day.

Since Masonic thought is greatly indebted to hermetic magic as well as the Jewish-Christian Kabbalah, Masonic legend follows the later Jewish tendency of conflating these two figures. However, in some ways, it attempts to reverse Ezekiel's estimation of the King of Tyre, i.e. the king is merely a man and not a god. Another legend is added onto this reversal, namely, the legend of his supposed "martyrdom." By intertwining the fate of the Templars and De Molay with the Masonic legend of Hiram, the more elitist German Masons were able to respond to the nostalgia for lost medieval society, but still remain decidedly against the French king and the pope.

It is important to note that the initial charges against the Templars contended that they, amongst other things, worshipped an idol by the name of "Baphomet," a derivative of the name of the Prophet Mohammed.¹¹¹⁷ It is clear that these charges were false and used by the French king to maliciously discredit the order, perceiving them to be a threat to his own power. There is no

¹¹¹⁴ *The Knights Templar & their Myth*, 108-114.

¹¹¹⁵ *The Knights Templar & their Myth*, 111.

¹¹¹⁶ Cf. ed. Hayim Nahman Bialik and Yehoshua Hanna Ravnitzky, *The Book of Legends Sefer Ha - Aggadah: Legends from the Talmud and Midrash*, trans. William G. Braude (New York: Schocken Books, 1992) 335.

¹¹¹⁷ *The Knights Templar and their Myth*, 77-78. About the "charges" Partner states: "The vital points were the denial of Christ, spitting on the cross, ritual kiss on the back and navel of the brother receiving the postulant, promise to commit sodomy with the brothers or else to obtain sexual relief only from such sodomy, and worship of an idol. Many denied the last three of these charges. ... But the charge, however foolish, was needed in order to show that the Templars were guilty not merely of blasphemy but of apostasy. Many Templars denied the idol, but those that did not tended to let their imaginations run riot in describing it: it was like a skull, like a reliquary, like a cat, like two or three cats, like a painting on a beam or wall, like a head of a man with a long beard. A cord was supposed to have been placed round the idol and subsequently worn near his body by the Templar. The name given to the idol, 'Baphomet' (once or twice the form Mohomet is actually used by witnesses in the trial), is one of the most persuasive pieces of evidence that the charges were concocted to 'smear' the Templars. It was impossible for the Templars to have 'picked up in the East' the practice of worshipping an idol bearing the name of the Prophet Muhammed, since no such idol existed anywhere in the Levant, even among the breakaway sects such as the Ismailis or the Druse."

evidence that the order actually practiced magic. However, by the Enlightenment, the libelous condemnations made against them were, ironically, confirmed, and then reversed into something positive by later Masonic occultists, who wanted to see De Molay as the counter-part to Hiram.

Through Cornelius Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia* (1531-1533), one of the most popular books on magic ever written, the myth developed that the Templar Knights were heirs to ancient gnostic heresies and magic. In *De occulta*, Agrippa explains how the Templars were condemned for "detestable heresies," without any attempt to refute the charges. One of the most rabid Anti-Catholics of the Reformation, Agrippa protested that he himself condemned magic; however, his books are virtual magical encyclopedias that have been used by successive generations of magicians.¹¹¹⁸ Von Stuckrad says that Agrippa's approach to magic is subtle. Emphasizing "firm faith and trust in God," he was critical towards the occult sciences, but also towards science in general, in some way anticipating the epistemological insights of postmodern deconstruction. Before publishing his *De occulta philosophia*, he published a long essay entitled: *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum atque atrium et de excellentia verbi Dei* (*On the Uncertainty and Vanity of the Sciences and Arts and the Excellence of God's Word*, 1530).¹¹¹⁹ It is difficult to tell whether his criticism of the occult sciences in this abovementioned essay was a premeditated tactic devised to protect him from possible retribution by ecclesial authorities, or his own estimation, or both.

In *De Occulta*, Agrippa connected the Templars, the phallic worship of Priapus -- the son of Dionysos and Aphrodite -- to the worship of the ancient Gnostics. He did this by bringing in the name of Michael Psellus, an eleventh century Byzantine writer, who reported on the heresies of the Bogomils, a Gnostic sect that displayed Manichean-type tendencies. For many anti-Christian and especially anti-Catholic occultists, Agrippa's condemnation of the Templars' detestable practices would have been a clue to "invert" the condemnation, especially since he recounted so many practical details on the sorcerers' trade. That is to say, everything that traditional Roman Catholic Christianity would deem detestable could be inverted and deemed "good." The orgiastic rituals and sacrifices of the Mysteries of Priapus and Dionysos, Manichean Gnosticism, demonic magic and the Templars, etc. were all conflated. Agrippa says:

No man is ignorant that evil spirits, by evil and profane arts may be raised up, as Psellus saith sorcerers are wont to do, whom most detestable, and abominable filthiness died follow, and accompany, such as were *in times past in the sacrifices of Priapus*, and in the worship of the idol

¹¹¹⁸ His protestations might have been a magician's cover to transmit information without reprisal. All one has to do is to take his *De occulta* and then "reverse" his negative judgments.

¹¹¹⁹ Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*, trans. Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke (London: Equinox Publishing, 2005) 67.

Panor, to whom they did *sacrifice with their privy members uncovered*. Neither to these is that unlike (if it be true and not a fable) which is read concerning the *detestable heresy of old Churchmen* [meaning the Knights Templar] and like to these are manifest in witches and mischievous women, which wickedness the foolish dotage of women is subject to fall in. By these, and such as these evil spirits are raised. As a wicked spirit spake once to John, of one Cynops a sorcerer; all the power, saith he, of Satan dwells there, and he is entered into a confederacy with all the principalities together, and likewise we, with him, and Cynops obeys us, and we again obey him.¹¹²⁰

b. Templarism and the Unknown Superiors

Around 1736 during the reign of Louis XV (1723-1774), Andrew Chevalier Ramsay, a Scotsman of common origins, but uncommon imagination, made the first connection between the Templars and Masonry in a speech given to a group of aristocrats. During his French tour, it must be noted that Ramsay was speaking to Catholic nobles, who were still under the sway of hermetic magic that was influential during the reign of Louis XIV, the Sun King. In fact, Louis, the “most Catholic” king, believed himself to be the incarnation of Apollo!¹¹²¹ His son, Louis XV was noted for his interest in alchemy and his friendship with the alchemist Count de Saint-Germain (1701-1784),¹¹²² who was said to have discovered the “Elixir of Life” and never died. As noted, Blavatsky’s grandfather was also said to have had a friendship with him. In later, theosophical mythology, Saint-Germain was said to be one of the hidden unknown superiors.¹¹²³

At the peak of the Enlightenment, Ramsay was looking for aristocratic ideas that would satisfy the expectations of his audience. Therefore, he constructed a myth that the Crusaders were organized in “lodges” and composed of “stonemasons,” who were linked to operative Freemasonry, and “warrior knights,” who were linked to speculative Freemasonry. He used his own version of the internationalism of the Crusaders, without mentioning the word “Templars,” to suggest how Masonry could be the unifier of the biblical and pagan worldviews.¹¹²⁴ According to Ramsay’s new myth, which – like Agrippa -- ironically confirmed the false allegations in the Templar trial, the Crusaders brought back secret or hidden knowledge of the ancient Egyptian and Greek Mystery religions. These rites were “purified and legitimized by their transmission through the Christian Crusaders.” After their suppression in France, only the “lodges” in England and Scotland remained.¹¹²⁵ Partner says that Ramsay was careful not to use the word “Templar” in France, given the potential political connotations of treason. Ramsay’s myth was not

¹¹²⁰ Henry Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy in Llewellyn’s Sourcebook Series*, trans. James Freake (St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 2000) 114.

¹¹²¹ Geneviève Bresc-Bautier, *L’Album de la galerie d’Apollon au Louvre* (Paris: Gallimard Musée du Louvre, 2004) 16.

¹¹²² Antoine Faivre, *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition: Studies in Western Esotericism*, trans. Christine Rhone (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000) 185.

¹¹²³ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Key to Theosophy* (Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1995) 22-23.

¹¹²⁴ *The Knights Templar & their Myth*, 103.

¹¹²⁵ *The Knights Templar & their Myth*, 104.

constructed to support the idea that Freemasonry was trying to return to some ancient truth of the past. His story was rather an attempt to show that Masonry already belonged to a long lineage of esotericists, who had carefully guarded and transmitted the most ancient deposit of hidden truth from the past.

Ramsay's attempt to show the French nobility the compatibility of Masonry through a synergy between Catholicism and the pagan Mystery Religions is symptomatic of the confusion that reigned in Europe over the origin of religion and Christianity. Ramsay, for example, was also the author of "'Discourse upon the Theology and Mythology of the Pagans' (cf. *The Travels of Cyrus*; first ed. 1727)," where he theorized on the origin of religion, claiming that phallic and solar worship "'were two aspects of the One God.'"¹¹²⁶

In this atmosphere, Karl Gotthelf von Hund, mentioned earlier, spent most of his fortune "propagating and organizing" the "Rite of the Strict Observance," which he founded around 1754.¹¹²⁷ This Templar rite soon became entangled in a competition with another Templar rite, the "Clerks of the Temple,"¹¹²⁸ founded by August Starck. "Starck claimed that the Renaissance occultist Henry Cornelius Agrippa of Nettesheim had been a 'Clerk of the Temple'."¹¹²⁹ Central to Hund and other Masonic Templar lodges' organization was "an authority which could never be identified, that of the 'Unknown Superiors'." "To these mysterious and in fact non-existent persons Hund demanded complete and unquestioning obedience, especially as regards the delivery of scientific information about alchemical operations."¹¹³⁰ Templarism, given its associations with the alchemist Saint-Germain and Rosicrucianism,¹¹³¹ not only attracted eighteenth century German nobility, but also "acted as a big store-house for information about alchemical research."¹¹³² Freemasonry not only acted as a carrier of the Hermetic Tradition, but in its Templar version, it was also an important preserver and transmitter of Hermetic alchemy with Christian overtones.

¹¹²⁶ *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 389, 25.

¹¹²⁷ *The Master's Revealed*, 20. As cited in A. E. Waite, *New Encyclopedia of Freemasonry* (New York: Weathervane, 1976) 13.

¹¹²⁸ *The Knights Templar and their Myth*, 120. Starck was the brilliant son of a Protestant minister, whose brief conversion to Catholicism in search of "secret" books and rituals was more a source of later embarrassment as a Lutheran pastor, than his interest in pagan Mystery Religions. The Clerks of the Temple was a play on a Rosicrucian myth of a crusading group, the "Canons of the Holy Sepulcher, which had been in possession of secret knowledge transmitted by the Essenes."

¹¹²⁹ *The Knights Templar and their Myth*, 120-121. The fact that Clark could claim Agrippa as his own shows how easily Agrippa's work could be used in the occult sense.

¹¹³⁰ *The Knights Templar & their Myth*, 117-118. For example, the doctrine of the New Age "Ascended Masters" can be traced back, through Helena Blavatsky, to Hund's "Unknown Superiors."

¹¹³¹ Cf. Frances Yates, *The Rosicrucian Enlightenment* (London: Routledge Classics, 1992). "Rosicrucianism" was one of the most important transmitters of hermetic magic and alchemy in the Enlightenment.

¹¹³² *The Knights Templar & their Myth*, 117-118. For example, the doctrine of the New Age "Ascended Masters" can be traced back, through Helena Blavatsky, to Hund's "Unknown Superiors."

Johnson confirms that central to Hund's aristocratic rite was the idea that the Masonic Templars stood in the line of the unbroken chain of occult knowledge, which they had received from the Templars, and "unknown Superiors."¹¹³³ Antoine Faivre in *Theosophy, Imagination and Tradition* suggests that the Hund's idea for an "unknown Superior" was derived from the seventeenth century legendary literary figure Christian Rosencreutz, the main protagonist of the early *Rosicrucian Manifestos: Fama Fraternitatis* (1614) and *Confessio Fraternitatis* (1615).¹¹³⁴ The idea behind "Christian" was concocted by Johann Valentin Andreae. According to the legend, Christian was an exceptional spiritual leader and being. After going through initiation into the mysteries of esoteric science by certain Arabs of Damcar, he gathered chosen disciples around him and initiated them.

Rich in initiatory experiences, in journeys during which he meets remarkable men through whom he is initiated into sublime knowledge. In the twelfth century, the book published by Morienus Romanus (*Liber de compositione alchemiae*) contributed to the spread of this kind of narrative in an alchemical context. Christian Rosencreutz, having found his way, gathers around himself a few adepts for whom he is the 'Beloved Christian father' and who will assure the survival of his work and his undertaking; they constitute a fraternity or a brotherhood. Marginal to official monasticism, this is presented, well before Julius Sperber in whom the idea also appears, as a form of spiritual chivalry recalling the Friends of God group round Rulman Merswin in Strasbourg: he was said to have received his instructions from a mysterious character called the 'Friend of God, from Oberland,'¹¹³⁵

The idea of "Hidden Master" also became a later important theme in what Faivre calls "literary esotericism."¹¹³⁶ Later esoteric literature was inspired by the *Manifestos* and was employed by the likes of Novalis, Eckhartshausen, Goethe (i.e. *Faust*) and Sir Bulwer-Lytton. Lytton's popular occult novels like the *Last Days of Pompeii*, *Zanoni* and *Renzi*, etc. served to fuel the nineteenth century occult revival. In Masonic "esoteric lore" (which was influenced by Rosicrucianism, but cannot be equated with it), Christian was initiated by Arabian sages and in his turn became "the hidden master" that more naïve occultists actually sought. As Faivre points out, according to the *Manifestos*, if a Master is truly authentic, then, he is also hidden:

He "eludes all investigations: 'our dwelling-place, even if a hundred thousand men may have closely contemplated it, remains forevermore impregnable, intact, unknown, carefully hidden from the eyes of the impious world.' This idea of a society controlled by masters who would be manipulating the destiny of certain people, in truth, of a large part of human society, was to know the success we are well familiar with. It is Goethe once more who describes this, through the Society of the Tower, in *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1796). The theme of an intellectual and

¹¹³³ *The Master's Revealed*, 20.

¹¹³⁴ *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, 184.

¹¹³⁵ *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, 171-172.

¹¹³⁶ See Appendix I for more on this subject.

spiritual government by hidden or secret elites is found again in a number of initiatic novels. And closer to our times, in Hermann Hesse's *Das Glasperlenspiel* (1943). Many more examples could easily be given.¹¹³⁷

In a clever way, Hund rode on the already popular wave of romanticized chivalry. He combined this trend with the earlier Rosicrucian mythical tradition, which harks back to a superior quasi-historical spiritual being like Christian, who as a "true Christian" was mysteriously leading his group of faithful initiates on to higher spiritual achievements. Later, he bottled all of this into a new Masonic order. By the mid-nineteenth century, the idea of "unknown superiors," "hidden masters" or "secret chiefs" was a well-known concept in certain Masonic occult circles. Given her introduction into Masonic occult thinking at an early age, Helena Blavatsky, founder of the Theosophical Society, helped to develop the myth into what is today known as the doctrine of the "Ascended Masters," a topic to which we will now turn.

2. Initiatory Gnosis

a. The Dogma of the Anti-Dogmatic "Masters"

As noted, Blavatsky was introduced to occultism at an early age, especially through the well-stocked library of her maternal great-grand father, Prince Pavel Dolgorukii. Prince Pavel served in the Russian military under Catherine (II) the Great and was a high ranking member in Hund's "Rite of the Strict Observance." According to Johnson, it is through her readings from Prince Pavel's library that Blavatsky first came upon the notion of "hidden masters." Although it is unclear whether Pavel himself belonged to the so-called "inner circle" of the order, it is clear that by that time, the tradition that high ranking members of the order pledged obedience to the "Head of the Order" and to "Unknown Superiors" was well established. Other than her knowledge of Templar Masonry through her great-great grandfather, Johnson claims that her friend, Charles Sotheran arranged for her to be initiated in the "Masonic Rite of Memphis" through its "Rite of Adoption."¹¹³⁸ Adoption was a form of Masonry that accepted women and gained popularity after the French Revolution, when Napoleon's wife Josephine became the "Grand Maîtresse du Loge d'Adoption Sainte-Caroline."¹¹³⁹ Like adepts before her, Blavatsky seems to have devoted much of her early years to uncovering the Masters. In her first great occult work, *Isis Unveiled*, she claimed that the Masters were the spiritual descendants of the Templars, linking her work to the tradition of the "Rite of the Strict Observance." Godwin says that *Isis Unveiled* is a "clarion summons to humanity to awaken from the charmed sleep into which it had been plunged by the

¹¹³⁷ *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition*, 188-186.

¹¹³⁸ *Initiates of the Theosophical Masters*, 4.

¹¹³⁹ W. Kirk MacNulty, *Freemasonry: A Journey through Ritual and Symbol* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1991) 85.

deceptions of Christianity and the illusions of science.”¹¹⁴⁰ Johnson describes the effect of the myth, which Blavatsky had received from Rosicrucian-Templar-Masonry, on her travels.

The myth of the Secret Chiefs was clearly an influence on HPB’s conception of the Masters. The nine Chiefs of the degrees allegedly lived in Egypt, Cyprus, Palestine, Mexico, Italy, Persia, Germany, India, and England. All these countries figured significantly in HPB’s search for the Masters, and in many of them she met persons who provided her with information, which contributed to her synthesis of Theosophy.¹¹⁴¹

Johnson believes that in imitation of the occult figures before her, especially those of the Strict Observance, Blavatsky initially created the story of the Hidden Masters to gain approval in the eyes her followers in the Theosophical Society.¹¹⁴² Blavatsky, a successful spiritualist medium, originally claimed that she had received these ancient teachings from living men,¹¹⁴³ but later allowed the myth to develop out of all proportion in order to secure her spiritual authority. This probably happened under the influence of the co-founder of the Theosophical Society, spiritualist Henry Steel Olcott. Olcott asserted that the Mahatmas were spiritual beings, who existed on a higher plane of reality.¹¹⁴⁴ As we recall, Giordano Bruno had already claimed in *The Ash Wednesday Supper* that the planets were populated by superior beings, with whom practitioners of astral travel could come in contact. Bruno was also held in high regard by many revolutionary circles of the nineteenth century, especially those that were connected to the Italian *Risorgimento* of Giuseppe Garibaldi and Giuseppe Mazzini. Both Mazzini and Garibaldi were Masons and Carbonari.¹¹⁴⁵ Blavatsky claimed to have assisted Mazzini’s colleague, Garibaldi, at the battle of Mentana (November, 1867) in efforts to annex Rome to the Kingdom of Italy.¹¹⁴⁶

Johnson suggests that Maharaja Ranbir Singh, a Hindu ruler, or Mazzini, or a conglomerate of both personalities, were possibly the models for Blavatsky’s Master Morya.¹¹⁴⁷ If Blavatsky was influenced by Mazzini, this is a probable link between Blavatsky and the theology of Bruno, who the Carbonari held up as their martyr-hero. The combination of the practice of spiritualism, which has become known as “channeling,” Bruno’s doctrine of infinite worlds and the lore of Templar Masonry, all provided the necessary elements to develop the doctrine of the Ascended Masters. They were not just earthly men, who jealously guarded their

¹¹⁴⁰ *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 305.

¹¹⁴¹ *The Masters Revealed*, 20-21.

¹¹⁴² *The Masters Revealed*, 8-10.

¹¹⁴³ *The Masters Revealed*, 1.

¹¹⁴⁴ *The Masters Revealed*, 9.

¹¹⁴⁵ James H. Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men: The Origins of Revolutionary Faith* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1999, 2006) 330- 331.

¹¹⁴⁶ *The Master’s Revealed*, 39.

¹¹⁴⁷ *The Master’s Revealed*, 38-43.

identity, but superior beings, who had already ascended through re-birth to the higher ethereal realms. Like Hindu avatars, they periodically returned to earth to help lower earthly beings on their path towards spiritual enlightenment. Despite Blavatsky's own protestations, for example in *The Key to Theosophy*, that "the Masters do not guide the Society, not even the Founders, [but] only watch over and protect it,"¹¹⁴⁸ the idea continued to inflate.

Given the large number of spiritualists involved at the beginning of the Theosophical Society, the idea of superhuman "Masters," who offered their teaching from higher spiritual planes, seemed to add credibility to Blavatsky's authority, since she was the preferred medium of their teachings.¹¹⁴⁹ For die-hard New Agers, the Masters are supposedly a group of benevolent higher "spiritual entities," who together with "the Christ," not meaning Jesus of Nazareth, are trying to help humanity on to the next evolutionary level. After Blavatsky's death, Besant and Leadbeater further "elaborated the Theosophical teachings about the Masters." They obliterated any trace of "the human 'adept brothers' portrayed by Blavatsky." According to Johnson, Leadbeater's fertile imagination twisted Blavatsky's teaching "into an ecclesiastical model of the universe," where "superhuman cosmic personalities" even had "titles and formal job descriptions."¹¹⁵⁰ In theosophical version of the doctrine, the Ascended Masters are known as a fraternal body called "the Great White Brotherhood,"¹¹⁵¹ resembling something like a celestial Masonic Lodge.

Many subsequent occultists have incorporated Blavatsky's Masters into their teachings. Her direct descendants include such figures as William Q. Judge, Gottfried de Purucker, Charles W. Leadbeater [Liberal Catholic Church], Alice Bailey [Lucis Trust], and Elizabeth Claire Prophet [Church Universal and Triumphant - CUT], all of whom claimed communications from HPB's Mahatmas. More indirectly, Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophical Society and several modern Rosicrucian groups claim that their founders were instructed by adepts reminiscent of those described by Blavatsky. The Secret Chiefs of the Order of the Golden Dawn and the Ordo Templi Orientis clearly resemble the Theosophical Masters. G. I. Gurdjieff [4th Way, Enneagram] claimed that his teachings emanated from the Conscious Circle of Humanity, similar to HPB's adept brotherhood. In the most extreme cases, the Masters are seen as the Great White Lodge, the Inner Government of the World, Secret rulers of the planet, they are opposed by evil Black magicians who are always seeking to undo their benevolent plans.¹¹⁵²

Johnson shows that Blavatsky later regretted allowing the idea of advanced teachers, who had evolved to higher spiritual planes, to develop. Although from later personal writings, Blavatsky lamented giving into Olcott, who remained favorable to the spiritualist faction, the damage was

¹¹⁴⁸ *The Key to Theosophy*, 299.

¹¹⁴⁹ *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 333f.

¹¹⁵⁰ *Initiates of the Theosophical Masters*, 8.

¹¹⁵¹ *Initiates of the Theosophical Masters*, 3.

¹¹⁵² *The Masters Revealed*, 3.

done. As Johnson states, “HPB had several reasons to prefer the accusation of inventing the Masters to that of conspiring with them in deception.” One, she could not be seen to back track and lose her own credibility as an “agent” of the masters amongst her flock. Two, many of the Masters were real men from India and Punjab, now in present day Pakistan, and were involved -- as was Blavatsky herself -- in real and sometimes dangerous politics for Indian Independence and cultural revival, against the evangelizing efforts of Western Christian missionaries. Three, her human Rosicrucian and Masonic Masters in the West, as Johnson points out, had a secret agenda, which was “aimed at promoting HPB as a nineteenth-century successor to Cagliostro.” They all shared an interest in reviving western occultism in their opposition to dogmatic Christianity and especially the Roman Catholic Church,¹¹⁵³ whom they saw as the murderer of their *magus* hero, Cagliostro, but also his – according to Templar dogma – spiritual precursors, Jacques de Molay, the medieval “Hiram,” and Bruno. Later Theosophists, like Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater, her direct successors, but also Rudolf Steiner, Alice Bailey and Elizabeth Clare Prophet,¹¹⁵⁴ with more direct links to New Age *strictu sensu* or the contemporary New Age movement, incorporated the growing myth of the Ascended Masters with the practices of spiritism, which became what we today know as channeling. Many of these claimed to have channeled messages from Blavatsky’s hidden masters, or Mahatmas (great souls).¹¹⁵⁵ After Blavatsky’s death, her disciples in the Theosophical Society continued to promote the myth of the Ascended Masters. Their superhuman teachings served as the Theosophical Society’s sacred scripture, which supposedly originated from a primordial source of wisdom, probably somewhere in India or perhaps even in Tibet. Johnson explains:

The alleged writings of the Masters are regarded as sacred scripture; they are seen as eternal truths preserved by a secret world-wide fraternity, conveyed to humanity as it becomes ready to receive them. The mythical version of HPB’s relations with the Masters portrays them as a monolithic superhuman fraternity which chose her as its messenger to humanity. Her search ended, according to this version, at age 20, when she first encountered a mysterious Hindu sage in London: Thenceforth she was a mere instrument in the Masters’ hands, revealing their teachings progressively under direct orders. Theosophy was an ancient body of doctrine she discovered who and passed on intact.¹¹⁵⁶

¹¹⁵³ *The Masters Revealed*, 7-8.

¹¹⁵⁴ See, for example, Elizabeth Clare Prophet, *The Lost Teachings of Jesus 2: Mysteries of the Higher Self* (Gardiner: Summit University Press, 1986, 1988, 1994, 2005); *The Lost Teachings of Jesus 4: Finding the God Within* (Gardiner: Summit University Press, 1986, 1988, 1993, 2005). Prophet is an American woman, who founded The Summit Lighthouse and the Church Universal and Triumphant, whose teachings include belief in the theosophical Ascended Masters.

¹¹⁵⁵ *The Masters Revealed*, 3.

¹¹⁵⁶ *The Masters Revealed*, 8.

Following debates about the new doctrine of the World Teacher and World Mother and Krishnamurti's abdication in 1929, many former Theosophists felt free to go their own way, tread their own "pathless paths" and promulgate their own teachings, which they ironically claimed came from the abovementioned higher perennial source. It is significant that Alice Bailey, New Age mother and a former member of the Theosophical Society, channeled Khul as an "Ascended Master." Bailey would have heard about Khul, or Kul, from the so-called Mahatma Letters written to A. P. Sinnett by Blavatsky's Masters, Koot Hoomi and Morya. Sinnett used the correspondence with these semi-divine figures to vie for the leadership of the TS in London from the Hermeticist and seeress Anna Kingsford.¹¹⁵⁷

Kingsford promoted a version of theosophy that emphasized the western, i.e. Hermetic, tradition. As the leader of the Hermetic Society within the Theosophical Society, she wrote a popular and influential book entitled, *The Perfect Way*, which she herself heralded as a new Gospel for a new age. It was to be a new Bible for a new type of completely ahistorical Christianity.¹¹⁵⁸ Jesus was presented, neither as the only Son of God, nor as a personal savior. Christianity was presented neither as unique, nor as superior to other religions. Godwin says, removing "the 'stumbling-block' that Christianity presented to the Jews (or Kabbalists), and the 'foolishness' that it otherwise seemed to the Greeks (or Hermeticists and Neoplatonists). The teaching of reincarnation also eliminated one of the major disagreements between Christianity and the oriental religions." Godwin further explains:

Once the conflict of personalities was out of the way, this became the sort of Christianity with which the Theosophists could live. The principles of *The Perfect Way* were appropriated by Annie Besant (*Esoteric Christianity*, 1901), and by her colleague the Rev. C. W. Leadbeater in his many works. The Christian parts of Alice A. Bailey's writings (especially *From Bethlehem to Calvary*) are in the same allegorizing tradition.¹¹⁵⁹

Dixon says that although *The Perfect Way* taught reincarnation, "its emphasis was on Christian esotericism rather than Hinduism or Buddhism." Kingsford's spiritual authority was very strong, given her predisposition to ecstatic visionary trances, which many saw as a sign of her "election." "Kingsford's account of her 'inspiration,' however, was much closer to the model of passive, trance mediumship – in which a (usually female) medium served merely as a channel through whom the spirits could speak -- than was Blavatsky's."¹¹⁶⁰ That is to say, although Blavatsky had earned money as a medium, her style was more occultist and that of a magical operator.

¹¹⁵⁷ *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 343.

¹¹⁵⁸ *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 340.

¹¹⁵⁹ *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 346.

¹¹⁶⁰ *Divine Feminine*, 30.

However, the battle *within* the TS between the primacy of esoteric, Hermetic Christianity and esoteric Buddhism was not over. Godwin believes that Sinnett needed affirmation from higher ethereal Masters in order to displace the attention from Western Christian Hermeticism to that of Eastern “Esoteric Buddhism,” that is, from Egypt to Tibet and India, and from Kingsford, a Christian-Hermeticist, to himself, an esoteric Buddhist. He was the author of two books entitled, *The Occult World* (1881) and *Esoteric Buddhism* (1883), which he plugged – along with his correspondences with Blavatsky’s Masters -- upon his return to London from India.¹¹⁶¹

In an anonymous review made of *The Perfect Way* in the journal *The Theosophist* the battle lines were drawn: Dixon says that the “gendered oppositions between Kingsford’s “esoteric Christianity” and theosophy’s “esoteric Buddhism” [were] very clear: ‘Occult philosophy, or esoteric Buddhism, is a stern uncompromising system of reason and logic; Christianity, a scheme of thought which throws reasons and logic altogether overboard and rests its claims entirely on sentimentality – it is a religion in fact for women and not for men.’”¹¹⁶² In the end, the internal occult battle was ultimately won by stern and manly “esoteric Buddhism.” The separation of the former theosophists, Rudolf Steiner and Alice Bailey, whose style resembled Kingsley’s, represent a development of this early split within the TS.

b. Alice Bailey’s Further Development and Popularization of the Doctrine

According to Mircea Eliade, initiation is “a body of rites and oral teachings whose purpose is to produce a radical modification of the religious and social status of the person to be initiated.”¹¹⁶³ The most common form of initiation, found in almost all societies, is participation in various *rites of passage*, that is, passage from one state of being or responsibility into another state or phase. Other important forms of initiation are participation in the *rites which allow entry into secret societies*, like the Freemasons, etc. or the ability to have *personal ecstatic experiences*. For example, in the pathless land of self-spirituality, the doctrine of the Higher or Ascended Masters functions as a guarantor of authentic esoteric knowledge or *gnosis*. It seems that the channeling of a “Master,” whether a reincarnation of a warrior from legendary societies like Atlantis and Lemuria, as J.Z. Knight supposedly did with Ramtha,¹¹⁶⁴ or a confrontation with one’s *Doppelgänger*, as Nietzsche had with Zarathustra, and Jung had with Philemon and Basilides, serves similar purposes. That is, the channeler or medium’s confrontation with a spiritual entity

¹¹⁶¹ *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 341-343.

¹¹⁶² *Divine Feminine*, 30.

¹¹⁶³ As quoted in *Initiates of the Theosophical Masters*, 5.

¹¹⁶⁴ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 40. J. Z. Knight is a famous channeler, who earned a fortune in television and book rights based on her experience of channeling the “warrior” Ramtha from the legendary civilization Atlantis. Like Poimandres taught Hermes Trismegistus, Ramtha taught Knight how to leave her body, so that Ramtha could speak through her.

serves as an *initiatory experience* that is supposed to provide him with super-terrestrial knowledge of some primordial spiritual source, which the uninitiated do not have. Hence, such an experience *establishes one's right to spiritual authority* above the masses, as the “chosen,” elite channel of an unadulterated secret primordial tradition.

As mentioned, one of the most significant figures of authority behind the contemporary New Age movement is Alice Bailey (1880 - 1949).¹¹⁶⁵ As the founder of *Lucis Trust*, formerly *Lucifer Trust*, she became, together with Blavatsky and Annie Besant, one of the “mothers” of the New Age Movement. In 1907, after a period of serving as an Evangelical missionary in India, Bailey married Walter Evans. The couple moved to Hollywood, where Evans became an Episcopalian minister. After three children, Bailey discovered the works of the Theosophical Society. Soon thereafter, she divorced her husband and married the Theosophist and Freemason, Foster Bailey.¹¹⁶⁶ Due to her sympathies for Christian esotericism, she was expelled from the TS in 1923.¹¹⁶⁷ Thereafter, they founded the Arcane School and Lucis Trust, “which was formed to overlook the legal aspects of the School and the published books.”¹¹⁶⁸ A third organization, World Goodwill, was formed later. The Lucis Trust has offices around the world, in Geneva, London and on Wall Street. It also has “consultative status” with the United Nations. The Arcane School is a more overtly occult organization. It was formed to teach the “ancient” wisdom of the inner Spiritual Hierarchy to a group of initiated disciples in order to fulfill the “Great Universal Plan” led by a “Christ figure”.¹¹⁶⁹ Bailey’s “Christ figure” is related to the Aquarian “Christ” discussed earlier, who will overcome the ecclesiastical orders.¹¹⁷⁰

Part of the Hierarchy’s “Plan” for humanity -- through proclamation by “regenerated” Christian churches – is to recognize its essential divinity of all humanity and the essential unity

¹¹⁶⁵ Because of the difficulty to find print copies of many of the “classic” New Age and Theosophical Society works, we will make use the internet for the works of authors such as Helena Blavatsky, Anne Besant, Alice Bailey, Rudolf Steiner etc., as most of their major works are more easily available on the Internet.

¹¹⁶⁶ See Alice Bailey, *Unfinished Autobiography*, Alice Bailey & Djwhal Khul, NETNEWS Association, <http://laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/autobiography/toc.html>.

¹¹⁶⁷ *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*, 130.

¹¹⁶⁸ M. Alan Kazler, “Alice Bailey”, KHEPER: transformation – evolution – metamorphosis, www.kheper.net/topics/Theosophy/Bailey.html. This website promotes Bailey’s ideas and begins, “Welcome to Kheper website, over 1500 pages dedicated to a new scientific and esoteric evolutionary paradigm concerning the nature of existence and its infinite metamorphoses, and the transformation of the Earth and the Planetary Consciousness to a post-singularity state of Supramental (Infinite Truth-Consciousness) divinization.”

¹¹⁶⁹ “Alice Bailey”, www.kheper.net/topics/Theosophy/Bailey.html

¹¹⁷⁰ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/externalisation/exte1087.html. “The living Christ will assume His rightful place in human consciousness and see the fruition of His plans, sacrifice and service, but the hold of the ecclesiastical orders will weaken and disappear. Only those will remain as guides and leaders of the human spirit, who speak from living experience, and who know no creedal barriers; they will recognize the onward march of revelation and the new emerging truths. These truths will be founded on the ancient realities but will be adapted to modern need and will manifest progressively the revelation of the divine nature and quality. God is now known as Intelligence and Love. That the past has given us. He must be known as Will and Purpose, and that the future will reveal.”

(i.e. the perennialism) of all religions.¹¹⁷¹ As a Theosopher, Bailey was well acquainted with the ideas of the hidden superiors in Freemasonry. Her second husband was also a prominent Freemason and author of the books: *The Spirit of Masonry*, *Changing Esoteric Values* and *Running God's Plan*, all published by Lucis Trust Publishing. After denouncing traditional Christianity in favor of esoteric Christianity, Bailey became an important witness to the already long and significant syncretic heritage of western esotericism. By “channeling” her Tibetan Ascended Spiritual Master, Djwhal Khul, Bailey attempted to position herself as privy to this more primordial knowledge as well as the spiritual successor to Blavatsky.

Furthermore, Bailey represented a faction that continued to believe in the doctrine of the World Teacher after Krishnamurti's defection, without identifying him as either this or that person. She also promulgated a similar astrological doctrine as did Jung. In fact, both Bailey and Jung were well acquainted with each other through their mutual friend, Olga Kapetyn. Similar to Jung's *coniunctio oppositorum* between the good Pisces-Christ and the evil Piscean Antichrist, Bailey taught that the arrival of the new Christ would signal the beginning of the *Age of Aquarius*, where “Christ” would return under the sign of the water carrier, and no longer under the sign of Pisces, the fish. She also proposed that just as Jesus came to bring an end to the Jewish dispensation of Aries, the “new” Christ would come to bring an end to the Christian dispensation of Pisces.¹¹⁷² In her scheme, Christians would be expected to follow the new “Aquarian Christ” or repeat the same “sin” as the Jews, that is, not properly responding to the *law of evolution*. Those who hindered the laws of evolution and rebirth, i.e. traditional Jews and Christians, and stalled the processes of “sparking” a new, superior humanity and civilization, would face destruction from the *Shamballa*. She claimed that the *Shamballa* is otherwise known as the *beneficent Will of God*, or the *Will or Power*.¹¹⁷³

Hence, traditional New Age theory was inclined to use Christian terminology, which has been transformed to cohere with the theories of hermetic magic and deterministic astrology. Bailey also adhered to the idea of a future incarnation of a Buddha of loving-kindness, who would not-be-so-loving towards traditional Jews and Christians. Bailey claimed that Maitreya is the head of an inner-worldly spiritual Hierarchy,¹¹⁷⁴ but her interpretation of Maitreya is more a

¹¹⁷¹ cf. Alice Bailey & Djwhal Khul, *The Problems of Humanity*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/problems/prob1062, 1002.html.

¹¹⁷² *The Reappearance of the Christ*, reap1024.html.

¹¹⁷³ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, exte1028.html

¹¹⁷⁴ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, exte1203.html. According to Bailey, the Spiritual Hierarchy is “the result of human activity and aspiration; it has been created by humanity. Its members are human beings who have lived, suffered, achieved, failed, attained success, endured death and passed through the experience of resurrection. They are the same in nature as are those who struggle today with the processes of disintegration, but who -- nevertheless -- have in them the seed of resurrection. All states of consciousness are known to Them and They have mastered all of them;

syncretism between Judeo-Christian eschatological Messianism and the expectation of a future Buddhist Bodhisattva, with strong occult overtones.

Bailey believed that when the “other” Christ appears or returns, it is a decision of the Hierarchy.¹¹⁷⁵ In *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, she and Khul emphasized the spiritual meaning of the “Return.” “The return [of Christ] must not be understood in its usual connotation and its well-known mystical, Christian sense. Christ has never left earth. What is referred to is the externalization of the Hierarchy and its exoteric appearance on earth. The Hierarchy will eventually, under its Head, the Christ, function openly and visibly on earth.”¹¹⁷⁶ On the one hand, they professed that the “the Second Coming of Christ” must occur in conjunction with destruction, but on the other hand, they believed that it might also be a purely spiritual event,¹¹⁷⁷ similar to the “Harmonic Convergence,”¹¹⁷⁸ described in the Introduction. Therefore, they might have been hedging their bets, when they stated: “Keep the concept *impersonal* and link not that appearance to a personality or an individual. If you make the mistake of attaching the meaning to an individual, you will limit your understanding and fail in right recognition of group purpose. The work of pouring out the principle of love (which is the Christ principle) and of lifting the masses in the their consciousness to the pitch where they can understand and welcome that love-principle is the main work of the *new age*, and it will inaugurate the age of brotherhood and mould humanity into the likeness of Christ.” (italics mine)¹¹⁷⁹ As stated, this is not the likeness of Jesus of Nazareth, because, according to them, Jesus participates in the Hierarchy as a master amongst other masters, who works in the closest cooperation with “The Christ.”¹¹⁸⁰

c. The Need for the Coming of the Anti-Christ

As seen above, we cannot preclude that the so-called “return of the Christ” in the thoughts of some New Age thinkers does not mean the necessary appearance of something like the Antichrist, or the embodiment of the principle of evil within a human being. According to this logic, the appearance of the Antichrist is necessary to bring about balance or harmony to the overly good,

They have mastered them as men, thus guaranteeing to humanity the same ultimate achievement. We are apt to look upon the members of the Hierarchy as different radically from humanity, forgetting that the Hierarchy is a community of successful men, Who earlier submitted Themselves to the purificatory fires of daily living, working out their own salvation as men and women of affairs, as business men, as husbands and wives, farmers and rulers and that they know life, therefore, in all its phases and gradation. They have surmounted the experiences of life; Their great Master is the Christ; They have passed through the initiations of new birth, the baptism, the transfiguration, the final crucifixion and the resurrection. But they still are men and different from the Christ only in the fact that He, the first of our humanity to attain divinity, the Eldest in a great family of brothers...”

¹¹⁷⁵ *The Reappearance of the Christ*, reap1034.html.

¹¹⁷⁶ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, exte1209.html

¹¹⁷⁷ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 101.

¹¹⁷⁸ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 335; *The New Age Movement in American Culture*, 2; ed. James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton, *Perspectives on the New Age* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992) ix-x.

¹¹⁷⁹ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, exte1215.

¹¹⁸⁰ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, exte1215.

but now decadent consciousness of traditional Christianity. According to their monistic or holistic view of Reality, “God” *needs* to incarnate his light side, i.e. Jesus the Christ, but also his dark side, i.e. the coming Antichrist, in order to achieve a higher consciousness within Itself.¹¹⁸¹ From this perspective, it could be reasoned that the coming of the Antichrist is an amoral event, and even a good and necessary part of Nature.

In short, the doctrine of Ascended Masters is a convenient epistemological device to deter critics. Because of their supra-historical nature, specific doctrines or identities can never be challenged by any historical or empirical research. To be privileged receivers of correspondences with Blavatsky’s Mahatmas and later theosophical Ascended Masters accomplishes three things. First, they serve as the channel for seekers to touch the primordial or perennial source of knowledge. Second, the doctrine implies that one has received the mantel of spiritual authority from Blavatsky, but also from those with even higher spiritual authority. Third, it helped to synthesize or syncretize the traditional Hermetic belief in the primal *Anthropos*, dominant in the West, with the eastern understanding of Hindu Avatars and Buddhist Bodhisattvas. This meeting between East and West should supposedly prepare the way for the One World Religion and Government so that it will become acceptable to all. According to Bailey and Khul, those who disagree will be annihilated by the *Shamballa*.

E. One World Government and Religion

The fourth feature of New Age *stictu senso* is the belief in the necessity of global government. Sometimes this is described as “planetary unity, planetization, world order, planetary consciousness and the new global society.”¹¹⁸² There are differences amongst New Agers, however, about how global politics will operate in the New Age. Those with strong occult backgrounds like Scottish theosophist Benjamin Cream, advocate a political system governed by the spiritually elite and even by a spiritual hierarchy. Under the guidance of the Lord Maitreya/Christ, they will inaugurate a New World Order. For them, the New World Order will be organized by the United Nations and supported through the principles of a One World Government and One World Religion.

As we saw earlier, the idea of one world government and one world religion is in fact not a new idea. Plato’s *Republic* is perhaps the first philosophical blueprint for the establishment of an ideal state and city,¹¹⁸³ whereas his *The Laws* seems to be a more practical approach to the

¹¹⁸¹ Although beyond the scope of our research, the doctrine displays structural similarities to the Dionysian/Apollonian dialectic proposed by Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy*.

¹¹⁸² *The New Age Movement in American Culture*, 121

¹¹⁸³ See Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin Classics, 2nd ed. 2003).

governance of society.¹¹⁸⁴ In late Antiquity, the idea of one world government was perhaps almost achieved by the Roman Empire. Based on the *Asclepius* and *Picatrix*, in Modernity, the idea of a Hermetic world religion and government to replace traditional Christianity was openly proposed by Giordano Bruno. Later, in *Città del Sole*, Tomasso Campanella re-worked the idea in an attempt to make it more acceptable to a still largely traditional Christian population. To varying degrees, there have been attempts to execute the idea, from the empire of the sun king, Louis XIV to Mazzini's "Third Rome," discussed earlier, but also Hitler's *Welthauptstadt Germania* or World Capital Germania. Already in 1946, Gershom Sholem, in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, well acquainted with various forms of western esotericism, suggested that the "manifold attempts to abandon the fixed forms of dogmatic and institutional religion in favour of some sort of universal religion" had to do with the growth of the acceptance of pantheism.¹¹⁸⁵

1. New Age Politics

In *The New Age Movement in American Culture*, Richard Kyle says in the 1970's, the New Age movement in the United States began to develop a political consciousness. New Age Holism, as a contemporary version of philosophical monism or pantheism (sometimes panentheism), also informs political thought. Since all reality is One and divine, humanity, as the most conscious "animal" on the planet, is also the most responsible. This means that high on the list of "New Age political priorities [are] ecology, sexual equality and world order (or unification)." World or global unity is just a natural working out of the monistic worldview and is "central to New Age thought." Because Reality is One, supposedly then, politics should mirror the oneness of Reality. Since globalization has brought the world into closer commercial unity and appears to want to make the world into a one global culture, i.e. through fashion, fast food, transportation systems, communication systems like telephones and internet, but also globalized television, like CNN, political unification seemed like a natural goal. Before the tragic events of September 11th and the beginning of the Iraq War (Second Gulf War), there were aspirations to establish "a new world order characterized by internationalism. Nations are to be united politically and economically. Such political interdependence has a religious, perhaps even a sacred character."¹¹⁸⁶ Perhaps the elder George Bush's call for a New World Order on the eve of the First Gulf War was somehow connected to this, although more research needs to be done. Before the destruction of the World Trade Center towers in New York, commonly referred to as "911," Kyle claimed that New Agers saw the effects of globalization as a sign of an "emerging global

¹¹⁸⁴ See Plato, *The Laws*, trans. Trevor J. Saunders (London: Penguin Classics, 2005).

¹¹⁸⁵ Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1946, 1954) 6.

¹¹⁸⁶ *The New Age Movement in American Culture*, 119-120.

civilization. What must follow technical interdependence is a unity in politics, economics and religion.” Placing great confidence in evolution, they believed that “humanity [was] progressing to higher levels in most areas of life, including political relationships. Moving from the nation-state to planetary unity [was] seen as an aspect of planetary evolution.”¹¹⁸⁷

The transformation into the world as one big happy political family is called “planetization” and is based on the planetary unity or a world order of society. Although there was no consensus how this world order or planetary unity could be achieved, many believed that a world government would be the most efficient means to achieve it. Kyle states that the idea of world government was “grounded in several practical considerations -- the survival of humanity [as well as the planet itself] and modern technology.” As shown in previous sections, the so-called “survival of humanity” did not necessarily exclude its destruction, or at least a greater portion of it. In the minds of some occultists, it might even be necessary. In the 1990’s, most New Agers were still optimistic, but there was a growing sense that a huge global catastrophe of apocalyptic proportions was looming if a radical transformation of the political structures was not effectuated.¹¹⁸⁸ Scientific studies concerning the effects of global warming played into (and continues to play into) this impending sense of doom. Kyle says that some theorists advocated something like a “democratic republic of the world,” where the United Nations and the United States work together. They believed that:

The model for the strengthened United Nations is the United States. The United Nations must be changed from a confederation to something resembling a federal republic. As [Keyes and Ferencz] point out, the United States government has sufficient strength to enforce laws throughout the land. Yet, the central government’s power is not unchecked. Ultimate political power, they contend, still resides with the people and the individual states.¹¹⁸⁹

Kyle says that New Agers with strong occult backgrounds preferred more elitist and potentially totalitarian structures. The “Baileyite” Cream expected that after the Christ returned as the Lord Maitreya, he would prevent a global apocalypse and establish a government where power rested with the so-called spiritual hierarchy. “The various international political agencies, including the United Nations, will be under the control of those spiritual masters. The Christ will be the world teacher who will ‘outline the possibilities’ of the new world order,” where power and wealth would be redistributed and balanced.¹¹⁹⁰ Since they believed that “hierarchy is a fact of nature,” and the human is a microcosmos/theos of the macrocosmos/theos, then, they assumed that it was

¹¹⁸⁷ *The New Age Movement in American Culture* 123.

¹¹⁸⁸ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 95-103.

¹¹⁸⁹ *The New Age Movement in American Culture* 125-136.

¹¹⁹⁰ *The New Age Movement in American Culture*, 126-127.

natural that humanity should be ruled by a spiritually elite hierarchy. Since “all people are on the ladder of spiritual evolution,” then, “they must recognize that some individuals have ascended to the top of the ladder and are qualified to be rulers.”¹¹⁹¹ “Consciousness” or mental reality is the primary manifestation of the One Divine Mind. Supposedly, the most highly evolved human beings are those who profess New Age ideals.

Of course, it is not totally clear how exactly all of these changes could be carried out, what structures would be put in place to ensure that there would somehow be a broad agreement. Basically, we recall the author of *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, Marilyn Ferguson’s explanation that New Age was like a “conspiracy” or a group of people with similar ideals and aims, who secretly band together to change society. This change meant a change of consciousness, or a change in the conceptual paradigm that steers people’s expectations and therefore choices, from Christian theism to a form of religious monism or pantheism. As discussed, Hanegraaff believes that this paradigm change has already occurred. Instead of trying to openly change outward forms of organizations and government, supposedly, through the “conspirators’ influence,” inward forms and structures of thought will be changed. As Ferguson stated, “The periodic attempts to achieve a just society by political experiments seem to have been thwarted by human contrariness... and now what?”¹¹⁹² According to her, human beings have now arrived at the “‘and now what?’ moment” and have become willing to accept a revolutionary different way of thinking that could bring about a true social and spiritual revolution. She claimed that “human contrariness” will not be able to thwart this “inward conspiracy,” because “a critical contagion of change” has been launched.¹¹⁹³

Once the critical mass of influential individuals in power has been reached, then, the change is expected. Ferguson stated that “the paradigm of the Aquarian Conspiracy sees humankind embedded in nature. It promotes the autonomous individual in a decentralized society. It says that we are not victims, not pawns, not limited by conditions or conditioning. Heirs to evolutionary riches, we are capable of imagination, invention, and experiences we have only glimpsed.”¹¹⁹⁴ By placing “moles,” so to speak, inside various governmental or religious organizations, once they rise to power, they can affect the paradigm shift from “inside.” According to her:

One veteran bureaucrat at the National Institute of Mental Health said, ‘There are a lot of us in the woodwork.’ He was referring to a loose coalition of conspirators in agencies and on

¹¹⁹¹ *The New Age Movement in American Culture*, 128.

¹¹⁹² *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, 26.

¹¹⁹³ *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, 25.

¹¹⁹⁴ *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, 29.

Congressional staffs. Within the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, innovators have created informal rap groups to share their strategies for slipping new ideas into a resistant system...¹¹⁹⁵

In *The Problems of Humanity*, Bailey positioned traditional Judaism and Christianity as constitutive of two of the problems. She also claimed that the “structure [of the New World Religion] is being raised by the dissenting groups within the institutional churches, by the many world groups who present the concept of God immanent,” even when they do this with impure motivations.¹¹⁹⁶ Through early proper education, people can be taught the “right interpretation of life, past and present, and its relation to the future of mankind; the keynote of the new religion must and should be a right approach to God, transcendent in nature and immanent in man, whilst the keynote of new science of politics and of government will be right human relations.”¹¹⁹⁷

2. The New World Order and Religion according to Bailey and Khul

Since Bailey is considered both a *mater magna* of New Age and the initiator of the term in its contemporary context, here, we will try to define the idea of a New World Order, with its One World Government and Religion according to her own vision. Bailey’s writings with Khul are highly obscure and not always consistent. Throughout, they are peppered with occult “doctrine” and “history” that appears largely consistent with that of the Theosophical Society and Freemasonry. Since Bailey’s writings are often re-interpreted and filtered through her adherents, we will do our best here to convey, as closely as possible, the basic thrust of her writing. Because of the easy availability of her texts on Internet, we use copies of her works in English, made available by the Lucis Trust.

In *The Externalization of the Hierarchy* -- one of the many books that Bailey is said to have written under the guidance of Khul, and one of the most synthetic for understanding her version of New Age -- she claims that the goal of the “Plan” is the “New World Order.”¹¹⁹⁸ In this section, we will attempt to express in her own words the details of this “Plan” and how it is related to “sacrifice.” For Bailey and Khul, the objective of the New World Order is the establishment of “right human relations, based on justice, on the recognition of inherited rights, on opportunity for all -- irrespective of race, color or creed -- on the suppression of crime and selfishness through right education, and on the recognition of divine potentialities in man as well as the recognition of divine directing Intelligence in Whom man lives, and moves and has his

¹¹⁹⁵ *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, 236.

¹¹⁹⁶ *The Problems of Humanity*, exte1063.html.

¹¹⁹⁷ *The Problems of Humanity*, exte1029.html.

¹¹⁹⁸ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, exte1080, 1082.html. In *Externalization of the Hierarchy* Bailey lays out the “Plan” of the inner Spiritual Hierarchy of the world.

being.”¹¹⁹⁹ In the *New World Order*, confirming New Age’s juxtaposition of “direct experience” with “dogma,” “spirituality will supersede theology; living experience will take the place of theological acceptances. The spiritual realities will emerge with increasing clarity and the form aspect will recede into the background; dynamic, expressive truth will be the keynote of the New World Religion.”¹²⁰⁰ Concerning the *New World Religion*:

The day is dawning when all religions will be regarded as emanating from one great spiritual source; all will be seen as unitedly providing the one root out of which the universal world religion will inevitably emerge. Then, there will be neither Christian nor heathen, neither Jew nor Gentile, but simply one great body of believers gathered out of all the current religions. They will accept the same truths, not as theological concepts but as essential to spiritual living; they will stand together on the same platform of brotherhood and of human relations; they will recognize divine sonship and will seek unitedly to cooperate with the divine Plan, as it is revealed to them by the spiritual leaders of the race, and as it indicates to them the next step to be taken on the Path of Approach to God. Such a world religion is no idle dream but something, which is definitely forming today.¹²⁰¹

She says that the New Age is an age of selflessness and (self)-sacrifice,¹²⁰² where the age of Separateness,¹²⁰³ which was the chief “heresy” of the Jews, is brought to an end. She claims that separateness is a “heresy” that orthodox Christianity perpetuated. In *The Problems of Humanity*, section IV, Bailey and Khul elaborate more on what they consider to be the “Jewish Problem.” According to them, this heresy consists of preserving their own racial and religious identity, which is a problem of traditional Judaism and Christianity. Perpetuating rather anti-Semitism than religious tolerance, Bailey and Khul say that the Jews are “materialistic.” Although we will not go into detail, this is slanderous prototypical anti-Semitic lie, which suggests that because of their traditional role in banking, Jews unfairly dominate the world economy. Bailey and Khul claim that their love of money has made many people dislike and mistrust them. “Because of the aptitude of the Jew to live off other people and to live within a nation, benefiting by its customs, culture and civilization but retaining a separate identity and not becoming a true part of the national life, the Jew has ever been subjected to persecution; as a race, he is nowhere liked and people are on guard against him and his methods.”¹²⁰⁴ They claim, however, that this is not true of the individual, but of the “race.”

¹¹⁹⁹ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, exte1083.html

¹²⁰⁰ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, exte1087.html.

¹²⁰¹ *The Problems of Humanity*, exte1056.html.

¹²⁰² *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, exte1072, 1073, 1079,1080,1087, 1089.html.

¹²⁰³ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, exte1010, 1032,1080, 1084.html.

¹²⁰⁴ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, exte1028, 1084. See also Alice Bailey & Djwhal Khul, *The Problems of Humanity*, prob1040,1042, 1048, html.

Moreover, in *The Problems of Humanity*, Bailey and Khul claim that “theology, dogma, doctrine, materialism, politics and money”¹²⁰⁵ of the churches cloud the true vision of Christ. Only when the churches recognize that their dogmas are teachings about which the Christ, Buddha or Shri Krishna knew nothing, will they be regenerated and ready to proclaim the new Gospel of the New Age.¹²⁰⁶ “Great and good, holy and humble men” in every church are asked to rise up and “*eliminate* out of the churches those materially minded and narrow *doctrinaires* who keep the church as it is today (*Italics mine*).” They are asked to draw not only close to Christ -- who is not Jesus of Nazareth, but a higher principle of energy -- and to the spiritual Hierarchy. They are to discard “*with stealth yet without aggression*” the Church’s dogmas, which are deemed a “mental prison.” They are to preserve only a few teachings that everyone can accept. They should take heart, because the “forces of evil [i.e. dogmatic Christianity and separatist Judaism] have been greatly weakened,” since the masses are awakening to true spiritual values of higher consciousness [i.e. to their own divinity]. “Let them know that Christ and the true inner church are on their side; therefore, victory is already theirs.”¹²⁰⁷

According to them, the only thing that stops the evolving “spiritual unity” and recognition of innate divinity are the existing clerical organizations. “Churchmen need to remember that the human spirit is greater than the churches and greater than their teaching. In the long run, that human spirit will defeat them and proceed triumphantly into the Kingdom of God, leaving them far behind unless they enter as a humble part of the mass of men. Pompous prelates and executive ecclesiastics have no part in that kingdom. Christ does not need prelates and executives... If the great organized religious groups of churches in every land and composing all faiths do not offer spiritual guidance and help, humanity will find another way.”¹²⁰⁸ When these churchmen have been eliminated, then *all* of the churches “*duty*” will be to “proclaim that men can draw near to God, not through the mediation, absolution and the intercessory work of any priest or churchman, but by the right of man’s inherent divinity.”¹²⁰⁹

¹²⁰⁵ *The Problems of Humanity*, exte1051.html.

¹²⁰⁶ *The Problems of Humanity*, exte1050.html. According to Bailey and Khul, “The more ancient the Scripture, the greater, necessarily, the distortion. The doctrine of a vengeful God, the doctrine of retribution in some mythical hell, the teaching that God only loves those who interpret Him in terms of some particular school of theological thought, the symbolism of the blood sacrifice, the appropriation of the Cross as a Christian symbol, the teaching about the Virgin Birth and the picture of an angry Deity only appeased by death are the unhappy results of man’s own thinking, of his own lower nature, of his sectarian isolationism (fostered by the Jewish *Old Testament*, but not generally found in Oriental faiths) of his sense of fear, inherited from the animal side of his nature...”

¹²⁰⁷ *The Problems of Humanity*, exte1062.html.

¹²⁰⁸ *The Problems of Humanity*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/problems/exte1050.html.

¹²⁰⁹ *The Problems of Humanity*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/problems/exte1062.html.

World unity, one world government and world religion will be achieved through the efforts of a “New Group of World Servers.”¹²¹⁰ Bailey’s “World Servers” strongly resemble Ferguson’s “Aquarian Conspirators” or “New Age moles.” According to Bailey, these “World Servers” will oversee, or usher in the New Age, which is the age of a “new civilization, and the coming into manifestation of a new race, a new culture and a new world outlook.”¹²¹¹ The World Servers will start as “seed groups of the New Age,” who though tiny “will come to flower, and -- through an eventual ‘scattering of seed,’ succeed finally in ‘covering the earth with verdure.’”¹²¹²

The New World Religion will be “brought into expression” through esoteric groups who witness to the spiritual fact of the Hierarchy and through “meditation techniques,” which will allow some to become “mediums of a high order,” that is who offer (i.e. sacrifice) their lives and individuality “to advanced souls on the other side of the veil.”¹²¹³ For the servers of the Spiritual Hierarchy, as for Jungian disciple-analysts, meditation is basically a form of channeling or mediumship. Apparently, meditation and channeling are supposed to bring about “Christ-consciousness” in oneself, i.e. that one realizes oneself divine. According to the “Spiritual Hierarchy’s” definition, meditation is:

The process whereby the head center is awakened, brought under control and used [i.e. by higher evolved or “reincarnated” souls]. When this is the case, the soul and the personality are coordinated and fused, and at-one-ment takes place [i.e. with a spiritual entity like Khul], producing in the aspirant [i.e. in a human being like Bailey] a tremendous inflow of spiritual energy, galvanizing his whole being into activity, and brings to the surface the latent good and also evil.¹²¹⁴

Comments and Conclusions

It is yet to be seen whether this supposedly “right approach” to God and politics will actually be a solution to the “old order” crisis, and not just another form of tyranny, wrapped in a new package. Edith Wyschogrod has pointed to a similar possibility in the processes of Postmodernity, which is to some extent is a philosophical counterpart to New Age Self-Spirituality. In her *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy*, she says, as “Ihab Hassan shows that, on the one hand, postmodernism ‘veers towards open, playful, optative, disjunctive, displaced or indeterminate forms.’ Yet on the other hand, built into postmodernism is an opposing tendency: ‘Postmodernism depends on the violent transhumanization of the Earth, wherein terror and

¹²¹⁰ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/externalisation/exte1089.html.

¹²¹¹ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/externalisation/exte1027.html.

¹²¹² *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/externalisation/exte1011.html. This section goes on to say that one should not be unimpressed with the smallness of efforts, but “a tiny seed is a potent force” and can multiply itself unpredictably.

¹²¹³ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/externalisation/exte1004.html.

¹²¹⁴ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/externalisation/exte1006.html.

totalitarianism, fractions and wholes, poverty and power summon each other. The end may be cataclysm and/or the beginning of a genuine planetization.”¹²¹⁵ As suggested, the problem for some esoteric-minded politicians may not be how to *avert* the cataclysm, but how to start it. For some, massive cataclysm might be perceived as the “conjunction of opposites” needed to start the period of “planetization,” or to “spark” a higher type of civilization and human being.

As intimated, Bailey’s ideas have a great deal to do with the Enlightenment myth, derived from subsequent theosophers like Jacob Böhme, that all dogma is somehow tyrannical and anti-spiritual, whereas direct religious or spiritual experiences lead to unmediated contact with God or the “Self” and, therefore, when extrapolated to a world-cosmic scale will bring about a reign of harmony and peace. It is, however, highly questionable whether the holistic worldview, coupled with direct experiences of God, can be elevated to a program for peaceful co-existence. For example, the National Socialist party was also influenced by the doctrines of Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society and held a similar monistic view of reality as many contemporary esotericists and Hermeticists.¹²¹⁶ Like Nietzsche, Blavatsky, and Jung, also the Nazi’s believed that the *creation* of the New Order and New Reich must be established through destruction. Destruction was to begin with the Jews, thereafter, traditional Christians. However, the German people were also expected to sacrifice themselves for the greater Aryan ideal and the re-design of German culture and cities.¹²¹⁷

Joachim Fest explains, in *Der Untergang: Hitler und das Ende des Dritten Reiches* or *Inside Hitler’s Bunker: The Last Days of the Third Reich*, that Hitler and Gobbels believed in the concept of Total War, meaning total destruction.¹²¹⁸ Perhaps somewhat like Nietzsche, Hitler had a propensity to take his visions, which were a “strange mixture of fantasy and ice-cold calculation – literally.” As Fest points out, Hitler believed that after everything “old” was leveled to the ground, then, the new Germanic era could begin. Many of his early associates “assumed incorrectly that his tirades about war, a New World Order, and a huge empire extending to the Urals and beyond had their origin in the momentary inspirations of a runaway temperament,” not his actual intention. Although ideas about *Lebensraum* had been formulated by earlier Pan-Germans, coupled with his “wild ideas about a global sickness, racial poisoning, the elimination of ‘weak elements’, and renewal of the bloodline to ‘save the planet Earth’,” Hitler seemed intent

¹²¹⁵ Edith Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1990) xxi.

¹²¹⁶ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (New York: New York University Press, 2004) 15-31; See also his, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity* (New York: New York University Press, 2002).

¹²¹⁷ Joachim Fest, *Inside Hitler’s Bunker: The Last Days of the Third Reich*, trans. Margot Bettauer Dembo (New York: Macmillan, 2004) 129 – 130.

¹²¹⁸ *Inside Hitler’s Bunker*, 27.

to make Pan-Germany into an incarnated reality. But Hitler's ideas went further than grabbing extra "living space" for the German nation and reveal the occult bent to his thinking. That is to say, like most nineteenth century Romantic occultists and Hermeticists, Hitler dreamed of a distinct "New Age" and the creation of a "New Man," which must be achieved through the destruction of the old. Perhaps Hitlerism shows us more clearly the implications of the darker side of Hermes, which New Agers are wont to see. Fest explains that Hitler dreamed of:

A racial utopia that promised to lead to a new age. It was to be won and sustained by several hundred million genetically conscious people resolutely following their historical mission, conquering land and exterminating all 'inferior races,' or holding them in subjugation. There would be a 'New Man' who razed everything to the ground, resettled territories, and sought relaxation from his historic mission by engaging in joyful 'community folklore' in huge KdF (*Kraft durch Freude*, or Strength Through Joy) hotels on the Channel Islands, the Norwegian fjords, or in the Crimea. It was a break with everything the world had ever stood for.¹²¹⁹

Earlier, we saw how the New Age idea of One World Government and the New World Order are originally hermetic type ideas, where tyranny and death in the name of "peace and harmony" is not eschewed. It is important to show this shadow side of Hermetism, because in some circles a new Hermetic revival is being contemplated as a peaceful alternative to organized religion.

For example, the Dutch writer Jacob Slavenburg has recently intimated that Hermeticism's popularity has to do with the fact that it has never developed into an organized religion. In this sense, it forms a perfect complement to contemporary holistic esoteric spirituality. He also claims that we are standing at the dawn of a new Hermetic renaissance. According to him, Hermeticism is about being a "good person," implying that traditional Christianity is merely about conforming to "dogma." He contends that unlike so-called dualistic forms of thinking (i.e. traditional Christianity), so-called "Hermetic Christianity," e.g. the Christianity of Bruno, Campanella, Besant, Leadbeater, Kingsford, Bailey, Despard, etc., connects matter, soul and spirit and envisions the above as the below. He believes that esoteric Christianity is justified because, throughout history, so many "large minds" have been influenced by it, giving direction and meaning to their lives.¹²²⁰ Although Antoine Faivre's *The Eternal*

¹²¹⁹ *Inside Hitler's Bunker*, 41.

¹²²⁰ Jacob Slavenburg, "Hermes en Zijn Betekenis voor nu," *De Hermetische Code* (Uitgeverij Ten Have, 2006) 224. "Hermes is van alle tijden. Hermes is universeel. Hermes is een bewustzijnsstoestand. Steeds meer mensen gaan hermetisch bewustzijn in zichzelf ontdekken en naar boven halen. We staan aan de vooravond van de geboorte van een nieuwe hermetische renaissance. De hermetische wijsheid heeft nog nooit tot enige vorm van godsdienst geleid, en toch is ze in hoge mate religieus. Het kann ook niet anders, omdat de mens een *uomo religioso*, een religieus wezen, is. Een van de meest pakkende zinnen van Hermes vond ik samengevat in één enkele zin uit zijn omvangrijke werk: 'Er is maar één eredienst waar God mee gediend wordt, en dat is een goed mens te zijn.' Hermes legde de verbinding tussen materie, ziel en geest: zo boven, zo beneden. En dit hermetisch bewustzijn heeft vele grote geesten in onze geschiedenis diepgaand beïnvloed. Eeuwenlang heeft het de mensheid richting gegeven en een persoonlijke zin aan het bestaan."

Hermes assumes that “wherever *Hermes* passes, religious tolerance prevails,”¹²²¹ as we have shown, this is not always the case. Perhaps “tolerance and peace” prevails in the literary imagination, but like all totalizing ideas, it can also turn into its opposite, namely, tyranny and destruction. Having lived through the horrors of the Nazi regime, Pope Benedict XVI, as Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, is more skeptical and has expressed his concern about ideas to create a New World Order. According to him:

Pareille philosophie n’est plus utopiste, au sens où l’était le rêve marxiste; au contraire, elle est très réaliste: elle détermine les limites du bien-être recherché à partir des limites des moyens pour l’atteindre, et recommande, par exemple, sans chercher à se justifier, de ne pas se préoccuper de soigner ceux qui n’ont plus de productivité, ni de qualité de vie à espérer. De plus, elle n’attend plus que les gens, qui se sont habitués à la richesse et au bien-être, soient prêts aux nécessaires sacrifices, mais recommande, au contraire, des voies pour réduire le nombre des convives à la table de l’humanité, afin qu’au moins ne soit pas touché le prétendu bonheur déjà acquis par certains. Le caractère typique de cette nouvelle anthropologie, qui devrait être la base du Nouvel Ordre Mondial, se dévoile surtout dans l’image de la femme, dans l’idéologie du « *Women’s empowerment* », proposée par Pékin. Le but en est l’auto-réalisation de la femme qui a pour principaux obstacles la famille et la maternité. Ainsi, la femme doit-elle être libérée surtout de ce qui la caractérise et fait simplement sa spécificité: celle-ci est appelée à disparaître devant une « *Gender equity and equality* », devant un être humain indistinct et uniforme, dans la vie duquel la sexualité n’a d’autre sens qu’une drogue voluptueuse, dont on peut se servir n’importe comment. Dans la peur de la maternité qui s’est emparée d’une grande partie de nos contemporains, joue certainement aussi quelque chose d’encore plus profond: l’autre est toujours, finalement, le concurrent qui m’enlève une partie de ma vie, une menace pour mon moi et mon libre développement. Il n’y a plus aujourd’hui une « philosophie de l’amour », mais seulement une « philosophie de l’égoïsme ». Que moi, je puisse m’enrichir simplement dans le don, que je puisse me retrouver justement à partir de l’autre et à travers mon être-pour-autrui, voilà qui est refusé comme une illusion idéaliste. Mais c’est justement par là que l’homme est trompé. En effet, là où on lui déconseille d’aimer, on lui déconseille finalement d’être homme.¹²²²

¹²²¹ Antoine Faivre, *The Eternal Hermes: from Greek God to Alchemical Magus*, trans. Joscelyn Godwin (Grand Rapids: Phanes Press, 1995) 38.

¹²²² Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, “Preface,” *L’Évangile face au Désordre mondial* by Michel Schooyans (Paris: Fayard, 1997) II-III.

II. Sacrifice as a Necessary Pre-Requisite for “Global Unity”

In order to show that a period of destruction or violence is necessary to bring about a period of Hermetic harmony, in this section, we would like to explore the thought of two important New Age mothers on the New Age: Alice Bailey and Annie Besant. In line with occult and alchemical principles, destruction of the “old” – referred to as “sacrifice” -- is necessary for the creation of the “new.” According to these women, the new human divinity will be brought about through self-sacrifice, i.e. willing self-destruction. Unlike Jung, the first authors Bailey and Khul lack a symbolic interpretation, which could serve as a “breaking mechanism” against a too literal or temporal interpretation of self-sacrifice. As we will see, this line is also taken in Besant. This practically leads them to endorse suicide as a means to divinization. In Bailey and Khul, not only have the principles of spiritual alchemy been temporalized or biologized, they have also been extrapolated to a world cosmic scale. Although New Age is no longer a viable movement per se, many of Bailey’s works are still widely read and disseminated, ready to be picked up and executed by any willing disciple. The presence of her Arcane School in New York, London, Geneva and Buenos Aires, where disciples are initiated into the Mysteries of the arcane, is a testament to her influence.¹²²³

A. Bailey and Khul

From the following section, we will see how the Spiritual Hierarchy proposes to realize the New World Government and Religion, as Bailey and Khul see it. Thereafter, we will discuss the ideas of Annie Besant, the successor to Helena Blavatsky and the formulator and “messenger” of the theosophical doctrine of the “World Teacher” and “World Mother.” We interpret her writings as a continuing expansion of the basic teachings of Helena Blavatsky and the Theosophical Society in particular and secularized hermetic theosophy in general. The significance of both authors, seeing Khul as the alter ego of Bailey, is the importance that they place on “sacrifice” and violence in the attainment of a higher social order.

1. The Goal of the Law of Evolution and the Law of Rebirth as a Superior Race

According to Bailey, the Inner Spiritual Hierarchy has stated the goal of the New Age, the New World Order and New World Religion is the creation of a *superior race of humanity*, which is ultimately the goal of evolution.¹²²⁴ According to them, evolution is part of the “divine plan” and a “law,” where the development of a “spiritually self-conscious human being” inevitably brings conflict with it.¹²²⁵ What appears to be a syncretism between Darwin’s theory of the “survival of

¹²²³ *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*, 130-131.

¹²²⁴ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/externalisation/exte1027.html.

¹²²⁵ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/externalisation/exte1047.html.

the fittest” and the alchemical theory of the conjunction of opposites, supposedly, conflict is encoded in the process of evolution and will give birth to the “higher race.” “The processes of evolution may be long but they are proven and sure and nothing can arrest the moving forward into the Kingdom of God.” In *The Problems of Humanity*, Bailey and Khul claim that “humanity must progress; stage by stage and cycle after cycle, humanity approaches closer to divinity...”¹²²⁶ In a later text, *The Reappearance of the Christ*, they assert that the corollary of the *law of evolution* is the *law of rebirth*. The acceptance of re-birth will be the solution to all of the problems of humanity.¹²²⁷ “The law of re-birth” should make all of the necessary destruction, negation and sacrifice acceptable, since one will be re-born into a higher form of humanity the “next time.” That is to say, although one is certainly sacrificed as a lower entity, if it is happens “consciously,” then, it is a small price to pay to be reborn as a “god.”

As discussed earlier, time is an illusion and the past is merely a “faculty of brain-consciousness.”¹²²⁸ Hence, one should not be too concerned with history or past miseries and suffering. As the astrological Age of Aquarius, the New Age is according to the “Plan” of the inner Spiritual Hierarchy,¹²²⁹ a precursor to a “Future Age.” “Temporal” life is a virtual learning process, and much emphasis is accorded to “spiritual history,” where one learns how and why the *new race* needs to be developed. The “Hierarchy” inverts the traditional understanding of Genesis 6:1-6, where God was saddened by the wickedness of humanity,¹²³⁰ but also the traditional Jewish and early Christian view that Lucifer and his angels fell because of their hubristic pride. In the theosophical version of Bailey and Khul, the angels who remain with God are the selfish ones, while the fallen angels, become more like Bodhisattvaic-avatars, who out of compassion for humanity allow themselves to become imprisoned in “evil” matter. According to Bailey and Khul:

¹²²⁶ *The Problems of Humanity*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/problems/prob1062.html. “Revelation will succeed revelation until the great Informing Life of our planet (called in the Bible the Ancient of Days) will stand finally revealed in all His glory; He will then Himself approach His regenerated and purified people.” Interestingly, Bailey is referring here to the Apocalyptic vision of Daniel, chapter 7. In Daniel’s vision, he sees four beasts, which represent four kingdoms. The fourth kingdom is “different from all the other kingdoms and will devour the whole earth” (Dan 7:23). Finally, the Ancient of Days will pass judgment in favour of the saints of the Most High and gives authority to the Son of Man.

¹²²⁷ *The Reappearance of the Christ*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/reappearance/reap1034.html.

¹²²⁸ *The Reappearance of the Christ*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/reappearance/reap1034.html.

¹²²⁹ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/externalisation/exte1011.html; Alice Bailey & Djwhal Khul, *The Destiny of Nations*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/destiny/dest1065.html.

¹²³⁰ According to Genesis 6:1-6: “When men began to increase in number on the earth and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they married any of them they chose. Then the Lord said, ‘My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years.’ The Nephilim were on the earth in those days -- and also afterward -- when the sons of God went to the daughters of men and had children by them. They were the heroes of old, men of renown. The Lord saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain.”

Had the sons of God not ‘come in unto the daughters of men’ (which is the Biblical and symbolic way of expressing the great relationship between spirit and matter which was established in the human kingdom), had the spiritual entities which are humanity itself not taken unto themselves material forms, and had the positive spiritual element not attached itself to the negative material aspect, the present world conflict would not be taking place.¹²³¹

In the Hierarchy’s interpretation of the “fall of the angels,” it was necessary for them, as positive spirit, to descend “from their sinless and free state of existence” into negative matter. However, their descent must not have been totally out of compassion, because they, as “pure mind,” needed to come into contact with oppositional matter in order to develop “full divine awareness on earth.” This belies the new myth’s dependence on ancient Gnostic and hermetic idealism. The impregnation of the “daughters of men” by the fallen angels was supposedly a part of the “divine plan emanating from the Mind of God” in accordance with his Will. Thereafter, a war ensued in heaven between those sons of God who wanted to “experience, to serve and to sacrifice” and those who wanted to remain in their high state of being. Hence, war and death, i.e. understood as sacrifice, were necessary for higher consciousness.

Bailey and Khul propose that Jesus’ incarnation as the “Christ” is similar. They claim that Jesus was like the Prodigal Son in relation to his elder brother [i.e. the “evil” angels who remained in heaven].¹²³² That is, he was like the “higher” fallen angels, who chose to negate themselves in matter in order to help evolving humanity. Apparently, in the future, when certain members of humanity come to the realization of their “spiritual birthright,” in the struggle between mind and matter, they will be “sparked” into something greater. Bailey and Khul claim that the “Law of Evolution and the Law of Rebirth” are “the prime initiating cause of what is taking place today [i.e. the crisis of conflict].”¹²³³ Furthermore, they teach that crisis and conflict must come at every new stage of humanity and civilization in order to bring about an increasingly perfect form to the soul. They claim that humanity is now at the point of the process of evolution where it can experience the rebirth of an entire new civilization and create a new religion. Although the Hierarchy “cannot coerce and cannot forecast what mankind will do, it can and does stimulate right action.” “It can and does bring good out of evil.”¹²³⁴

¹²³¹ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/externalisation/exte1047.html.

¹²³² *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/externalisation/exte1047.html.

¹²³³ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/externalisation/exte1047.html.

¹²³⁴ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/externalisation/exte1045.html. The definitive and necessary nature of the Hierarchy’s pronouncement, that the Hierarchy “can and does” change evil into good (and vice versa) is at odds with the traditional teaching of the Church that God can bring about the good from evil. However, “evil never becomes a good” (CCC 312). If this should be the case, then, freedom is merely an illusion, albeit a useful one.

In Bailey's tortuous account of cosmic history in *Initiation, Human and Solar*, which basically follows Blavatsky's model of the chronological cosmogenesis of the world that became accepted by much of the esoteric and occult world as well as by Nazi historians like Otto Rahn,¹²³⁵ she claims that the Hierarchy started to change their methods around the time of the legendary Atlantean cataclysm.¹²³⁶ She equates the supposed destruction of Atlantis with the deluge of Noah.¹²³⁷ The civilization of Lemuria, however, existed before that of Atlantis. In the previous Lemurian epoch, which she claims occurred approximately 18 million years ago, the Hierarchy started to make itself known on planet earth, and the Planetary Logos, i.e. "the theosophical Christ," became incarnated as Sanat Kumara, an ancient Hindu sage, but in theosophical circles known as the "Ancient of Days" or the "Lord of the World." Because of his "extreme purity," yet, "relative sinlessness," Bailey claims that he did not take a dense material body (i.e. as matter is negative) and functioned in an "etheric" body.¹²³⁸ She says that the "Christ" is the "Great Sacrifice," supposedly, because "the Planetary Logos" left the pure spiritual realm of the Hierarchy in order to be "incarnated" into an etheric body to help the "evolving sons of men," together with a group of other "highly evolved Entities."¹²³⁹ As the "Great Sacrifice," "the Christ" encourages the "evolving sons of men" to imitate him and sacrifice themselves.

Bailey and Khul say that this conforms to Helena Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine*, where there are three "types" of humanity. The first type had the seed of mind implanted into "aspiring animal-men," and they became human beings of a low order. They were "sparked" and constitute advanced humanity and culture, even in present times. The second group was catalyzed through the coming into expression of the first sparked group. They too became human beings, and constitute the "'upper and lower middle class' people, the professional classes and the bourgeoisie everywhere." However, there is a third group, which is a result of neither process. This group is the result of the "slow moving influences of life itself." As seen earlier, most occultists and alchemists are impatient with the slow process of Nature and want to speed it up. To their consternation, this third group painfully evolved "out of the animal condition into that of human beings, with an awakening conscience, an urge to betterment, and an embryonic mind of such a nature that it can respond to simple educational processes, when available... They are the

¹²³⁵ Jean-Michel Angebert, *The Occult and the Third Reich: The Mystical Origins of Nazism and the Search for the Holy Grail*, trans. Lewis A. M. Sumberg (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1975) 57ff.

¹²³⁶ Alice Bailey, *Initiation, Human and Solar* (New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1922, 1997) 33.

¹²³⁷ *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 35.

¹²³⁸ *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 28ff. Bailey's accounts of this "historical" event on a spiritual plane is confusing and varies from document to document, hence, the chronology of this supposed event is difficult to exactly determine.

¹²³⁹ *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 29.

illiterate masses, the still savage races and the *low grade human beings* who are met with in their millions on our planet. (Italics mine)”¹²⁴⁰ In other words, they constitute the “herd” and are not yet in line for higher evolutionary “sparking.” As is made clear, “herd animals” are sacrificial animals. They should go to the slaughter house willingly, and do their “duty” to help Divine Consciousness evolve to a higher level in the next life.

According to Bailey and Khul, the process of *sparking a higher race* occurs when any great idea succeeds “in controlling a race in any age.” This happens because the idea was given to humanity by “intuitive sons of men to their generation.” After this, Bailey and Khul expound on what is more or less a magical operation akin to advertising techniques. These “advanced human beings [...] seized upon the intuited idea, subordinated it to the process of mentation, made it desirable, and then have seen it come into being through the ‘agency of recognition’, as it is occultly called. One illuminated mind would sense the divine idea, needed for the growth of racial consciousness, and then would give it form; the few would recognize it and thus foster its growth; the many would eventually desire it and it then could manifest experimentally and sporadically all over the civilized world of any age. ...”¹²⁴¹ They claim that this process was realized either through the teachings of men like Plato, Aristotle or Socrates, who worked through the minds of a few, or, it was realized through the “saviors” of the world. These “world saviors” evoked the “desire of the masses for that which is deemed desirable” and “reoriented the masses towards a fuller expression of this desire,” which often brought about the “emergence of a world religion.”¹²⁴² In the New Age this same process will “spark” the New World Order, the New World Religion and the new type of humanity.

2. The Will or Power of the Shamballa Force as the Will of God

By 1939, not only the Nazis, but also Bailey and Khul were claiming that the world faces a tremendous crisis and apparently will continue to face a tremendous crisis until the “Plan” of the Spiritual Hierarchy, the “new race” of superior humanity and civilization, is realized. This will happen through an apparently unknown force called the “Shamballa force,” mentioned earlier. According to them, even though it was unrecognized, it appeared during two other times of crisis and is either the “planetary center” where the “Will of God is known” or it might even be the Will of God itself.¹²⁴³ In *Initiation, Human and Solar*, which Bailey apparently wrote without Khul’s input, she says that the *Shamballa* is a secret island of ethereal matter located somewhere in or above the Gobi desert. When people finally develop what she calls “etheric vision,” due to

¹²⁴⁰ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/externalisation/exte1019.html.

¹²⁴¹ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/externalisation/exte1011.html.

¹²⁴² *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/externalisation/exte1011.html.

¹²⁴³ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/externalisation/exte1028.html.

superior evolutionary processes, they will be able to recognize it.¹²⁴⁴ In the glossary at the back of the same book, she defines the *Shamballa* as “The City of the Gods, which is in the West to some nations, in the East to others, in the North or South to yet others,”¹²⁴⁵ bringing to mind Campanella’s hermetic *Città del Sole* and the solar city in the *Picatrix*, Adocentyn. In *Externalization of the Hierarchy*, Bailey and Khul are quite ambivalent on how the *Shamballa* works or manifests itself, and say that the *Shamballa* is “an inflow of the force of will or power.”¹²⁴⁶

At the time of their writing, Bailey and Khul claimed that *Shamballa* is “will or power,” sounding remarkably like Nietzsche’s “will to power,” which for Nietzsche is the nature of Reality itself. Although an unknown divine energy, it “embodies in itself the energy, which lies behind the world crisis” that, they claimed was mounting. As noted earlier, this text was written in 1939, the year Poland was invaded by the German armies.¹²⁴⁷ Supposedly, the divine force of *Shamballa* as the “Will of God” will “produce certain racial and momentous changes in the consciousness of the race which will completely alter man’s attitude to life and his grasp of the spiritual, esoteric and subjective essentials of living. It is this force which will bring about (in conjunction with the energy of love) that tremendous crisis -- imminent in the human consciousness -- which we call the second crisis, the initiation of the race into the Mystery of the Ages, into that which has been hid from the beginning.”¹²⁴⁸ That is to say, according to occult legend, humanity as we now know it must brace itself for a crisis (or series of crises) equivalent to the changes that occurred during the legendary civilizations of Lemuria and Atlantis, which, apart from the elite few, were annihilated.

Bailey and Khul say that the first evolutionary crisis was in “Lemuria,” when humanity became “individuated” and the second crisis happened in Atlantis. They propose that, then, the “Lords of Light” battled the “Lords of Material Form,” which represent the evil or Dark Forces, even though they claim in other writings that there is no such thing as “evil.” In *Initiation, Human and Solar*, initially written in 1922, Bailey says that even though thousands of races of humanity were created and destroyed, finally, during this fourth Atlantean period, the Hierarchy succeeded to create a race they liked. That is to say, the Hierarchy *needed an enormous sacrifice of less evolved beings* to “spark out” such an evolutionary leap in “Atlantis.” Thereafter, a small group of the Hierarchy was called away to other places in the solar system. This opened a small

¹²⁴⁴ *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 33, 225.

¹²⁴⁵ *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 225.

¹²⁴⁶ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/externalisation/exte1042.html

¹²⁴⁷ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/externalisation/exte1042.html

¹²⁴⁸ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/externalisation/exte1042.html

space on the purely spiritual planes for a small group of humans, i.e. the Aryans,¹²⁴⁹ who are decedents of the last remnant of Atlanteans, to enter the ethereal realm. Supposedly, the remnant of the Atlantean group survived the deluge and was able to enter the Spiritual Hierarchy. Some of these appropriated human bodies to become the fifth root race, the Aryans. According to their account (i.e. Bailey and Khul), the Chinese and Japanese participate in the fourth root race; the Aryans (i.e. Hindus, Europeans and Americans, but not the Jews) are progeny of the Atlantean fourth root race, and constitute the fifth root race. The sixth and higher root races are spiritual planes to where humanity is headed in subsequent evolutionary transformations. After the Atlanteans became Aryans, it was decided to temporarily ban “monads,”¹²⁵⁰ (i.e. spiritual beings that strongly resemble spirit guides, *parhedros*, alchemical assistants, *daimons*, etc.) from “appropriating” what they call “animal-men bodies.” Humanity was arbitrarily limited to the Aryan fifth root race and lower root races. The Hierarchy also decided to demarcate spirit from matter, which apparently at this time had not been done by the “Council Chamber of the Lord of the World,” who as we saw earlier is supposed to be Sanat Kumara.¹²⁵¹ Bailey claims that various spiritual entities, who Bailey says are the same as the beings Christians call “angels,” are working together with the Hierarchy to bring about the next great evolutionary stage.¹²⁵² As we saw earlier, these spiritual entities will inhabit “World Servers,” who “meditate” and open themselves up for “fusion” with the *will or power* so that the Hierarchy can bring about the New World Order and Religion. After her prophesied next great cataclysm, we can deduce from her “history” of Atlantis, she intends that a small remnant of the Aryan fifth root race will be “saved” to plant the seeds, so to speak, of the more spiritual sixth root race. Bailey says that a door will be opened for a small group of elite humans, who discipline themselves and make “stupendous efforts,” to enter into the next spiritual level.

Since the Hierarchy periodically stimulates a crisis to raise the whole of humanity to a higher consciousness, starting with the first tier, etc..., then -- like Despard and Besant discussed earlier --, Bailey and Khul deemed the destruction of the Second World War an inevitable necessity, which was ultimately “good” for humanity. This is because they assent to a version of occult “history” that says that after each “pre-historical” crisis, humanity experienced evolutionary leaps. Every evolutionary advance is supposedly necessitated by and, in fact, needs catastrophic crises. Tremendous destruction and carnage is needed to “spark off” a “better”

¹²⁴⁹ *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 224.

¹²⁵⁰ *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 221-222. According to Bailey, “Monads” are: “The One. The threefold spirit on its own plane... or the immortal part of man which reincarnates in the lower kingdoms and gradually progresses through them to man and thence to the final goal.”

¹²⁵¹ *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 34.

¹²⁵² *Initiation, Human and Solar*, 36.

civilization each time. Bailey and Khul say that the success of “racial alteration” will depend on the appropriate use of propaganda, the “imposition” of ideas in various media, as well as “group loyalty” to each other and to their leader. That is, they insist that its “success depends upon the gained group cohesion, the group *willingness to sacrifice*, plus loyalty and allegiance to some directing personality (Italics mine).”¹²⁵³

In *The Reappearance of the Christ*, written after the Second World War, Bailey says that thanks to the “*cleansing of the earth* through the medium of the world war (1914-1945) and through the suffering to which humanity has been subjected (with an equally potent *purifying effect*),” the Christ will reappear and return to a period of earth that existed in Atlantean days (Italics mine).¹²⁵⁴ As we have shown, the *Will or Power* behind the *Shamballa* not only appears as a benevolent force in times of extreme crisis to guide selected members of humanity onto the next evolutionary stage, but it also appears as the malevolent force that seems to embody, or catalyze, the crisis itself. Although the *Will or Power* of the *Shamballa* is also the “Will of God,” surprisingly, as an extension of microcosmic human wills, it is not all powerful and only makes itself known in times of tremendous crisis. In fact, it needs and creates crises for evolutionary purposes. It is the power that both instigates the crisis, but then saves the worthy from the crisis by allowing them to evolve.

The *Shamballa* also plays the same ambiguous role of Mercurius or Hermes in the *opus alchymicum*. In her explanation of the alchemical law of inversion, Abraham states, “The paradoxical motif can also be seen in the dual role played by the transforming *arcanum*, ‘Mercurius, who is dissolver and coagulator, slayer and resurrecter, poison and medicine, demonic and divine.’”¹²⁵⁵ In Girardian terms, the *Shamballa* in fact represents the *scapegoat mechanism* itself. Bailey and Khul have recognized how the scapegoat mechanism functions to deify its victims, and then propose to use it as a tool to achieve their ends, a higher humanity and civilization, calling it the *Shamballa*. Bailey and Khul’s interpretation of cosmogenesis in fact represents a prime example of the temporalization of the alchemical processes, which they have then extrapolated to a cosmic scale.

3. Forces of Heretical and Sinful “Separation” that Stall Evolution and World Unity

In their account, Bailey and Khul say that despite the Hierarchy’s efforts, the next evolutionary stage is not guaranteed. They say that this is because there are five great energy sources that are battling for power to progress or to stall the processes of evolution leading towards “world unity.”

¹²⁵³ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, exte1032.html

¹²⁵⁴ *The Reappearance of the Christ*, www.laluni.helloyou.ws/netnews/bk/reappearance/reap1036.html.

¹²⁵⁵ *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 108.

The first one is the etheric *Shamballa*, mentioned above. In *Externalization of the Hierarchy*, they claim that “today, this force (i.e. *Shamballa*) streams out from the Holy Center: it embodies the Will aspect of the present world crisis.”¹²⁵⁶ Despite all of the talk of “light” and “love,” the *Will of Shamballa* desires to *destroy* all that it deems undesirable, which will then unify all that is separated.¹²⁵⁷ The second force is the Spiritual Hierarchy and the, third, humanity itself. They say that these three centers are closely inter-related “as expressions of divine livingness, as embodying three stages in the unfoldment of God’s Plan.” That is, the intelligent and visible manifestation of God’s love through the Hierarchy and *Shamballa*, even though this “love” is apt to destroy anything that disagrees with it. That is to say, the *Shamballa* and Hierarchy incarnate themselves in select human beings at specific times to achieve specific purposes to carry out “the Plan.” “Incarnations” of the Hierarchy and *Shamballa* occur through human beings upon whom they project their “divine energy forces,” eliciting various responses. This supposedly accounts for how “the three major ideologies (the totalitarian, the democratic, the communistic) may be the response -- distorted and yet responsive -- to the forces playing from the two higher centers on to the human,”¹²⁵⁸ which is the third force. Against the *Shamballa* and Hierarchy, Bailey and Khul claim that there are two other, negative and “separating forces,” which are trying to stall the evolutionary processes. The *Shamballa* seeks to destroy these “evil” forces, since *they are undesirable* and get in the way of unity. These forces are the origin of evil, although Bailey maintains that “evil” as such is an illusion. The first force is the force of materialism, otherwise known as the “Dark Forces” or the “Black Lodge.” The second force is the force of the Jews. Although she never makes this explicit, we surmise that the evil forces of the Black Lodge are represented by traditional or “dogmatic” Christianity. The “Dark Force” is the antithesis of the “Great White Lodge,” represented by the “Ascended Spiritual Masters.” Clearly in Bailey and Khul’s scheme, since what they categorize as “human” is a positive force, the two other negative forces should be understood as “sub-human” and, therefore, lower on the evolutionary scale.

As stated, according to Bailey and Khul, the second of the two negative forces emanates out of the Jewish people. The Hierarchy does not consider “the Jews” as an individual concern, but a “world problem, centering around the Jews as a whole.”¹²⁵⁹ Although they constitute a problem for the Hierarchy, apparently, they also help to produce the “right conditions for balancing.”¹²⁶⁰ As discussed in context, “balancing” can be taken as a conjunction of opposites, where it is believed that in order to achieve a higher form of life, the present “negatively”

¹²⁵⁶ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, exte1028.html

¹²⁵⁷ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, exte1028.html

¹²⁵⁸ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, exte1028.html

¹²⁵⁹ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, exte1028.html

¹²⁶⁰ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, exte1028.html

perceived form of life must be negated, or destroyed. As a form of magical inversion, the process is also known as the *opus contra naturam*, or within in a scheme of emanation, a consciously turning back towards the divine source. Abraham explains that alchemically:

In order for regeneration to occur, the imperfect metal (or outmoded state of being) has first to be destroyed. It must be dissolved into the original stuff of creation, the *prima materia*, before a new, purified microcosm or Stone can be reconstructed or created. This apparently destructive and backward-turning movement of the wheel of the philosophers which occurs at the beginning of the *opus* is known as the *opus contra naturam*.¹²⁶¹

Written before and during World War Two, Bailey and Khul saw the Jewish people and traditional Christians as “forces,” which they posit as the shadow side of the Totality. In other words, from their alchemical point of view, the positive evolution of a superior humanity can only emerge after the second force of evil, the Jews, and the first force, the traditional Christians, are themselves negated, destroyed or “sacrificed.” A new divine humanity will then emerge out of the ashes of their sacrificial bodies. In the imagery of the “backward-turning movement of the wheel of the philosophers,” the picture of the counter-clockwise swastika is brought to mind, given that its symbolism is quite similar.¹²⁶²

4. The “Christ” Will Reinstatethe Ancient Pagan Mysteries as the Foundation of the New World Religion

The so-called conditions for balancing are alluded to in other texts. In *The Reappearance of Christ* both Bailey and Khul lay out the conditions for the reappearance of the “Christ principle” on earth in order to demonstrate a spirit of inclusiveness,¹²⁶³ against the “spirit of separateness,” which they deem as a heresy and “evil”. Those who insist on “separateness” will be destroyed, but those who seek “right human relations will be gathered automatically to Him.” As we saw earlier, “right human relations” are synonymous with the New World Order. What constitutes right human relations is loyalty and inclusiveness. No longer will the sins, i.e. murder, adultery, theft, etc. of the Ten Commandments be considered as sins, but “to hate, to be separate, and to be exclusive will come to be regarded as the only sin.”¹²⁶⁴ Then, they believe that people will realize that all sin is derived from “anti-social consciousness.”¹²⁶⁵ According to this logic, “separateness” and wanting to have one’s own exclusive religion is the ultimate expression of hate. The main offenders of this sin are primarily Christians, who, according to them, parochially stick to orthodox Christianity and its dogmas and, of course, Jews. For the real “Christ” to

¹²⁶¹ *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 139.

¹²⁶² *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Traditional Symbols*, 166.

¹²⁶³ *The Reappearance of the Christ*, reap1033.html.

¹²⁶⁴ *The Reappearance of the Christ*, reap1033.html.

¹²⁶⁵ *The Reappearance of the Christ*, reap1033.html.

reappear, however, the world must be free of their “ecclesiastical structures” so that their understanding of “true religion” can be restored and people can return to the simple ways of “spiritual living.”¹²⁶⁶

Unlike *Externalization and Problems*, *The Reappearance of Christ* was written after World War II. As noted earlier, in this text, they claim that there the world missed its chance to be sparked to a higher level. According to Bailey and Khul’s spiritual account of world history, the reactionary forces attempted to return to the old forms of religion [i.e. traditional Christianity] and did not implement a new form of religion [i.e. a New Age syncretism of pagan Mysteries, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christian vocabulary]. After the War, they said that the “positive forces” were not strong enough to restore the elements of past religion that “proved useful and good and which could form the living germ of a new creation.”¹²⁶⁷ For them, the “useful” elements are to be taken from the ancient pagan Mysteries and their rites of initiation, which are based on sacrifice. Hence, we can deduce that, according to New Age theory, the “Hierarchy” was disappointed that the near extermination of the Jews as a holocaust did not lead to the reinstitution of ritual sacrifice, which was one of the goals of the “balancing” and “cleansing,” mentioned above. Bailey and Khul claim that one of the “Christ’s” tasks, when he once again takes on a physical presence, will be to “re-institute the Mysteries of Initiation in such a form that they would prove the basis of the new world religion.”¹²⁶⁸

According to Bailey and Kuhl, the “Christ,” together with certain agents of Freemasonry, will reestablish the ancient Mysteries and sacred landmarks, which they say that Masonry has fortuitously preserved in their symbols and rituals. They claim that the Hierarchy themselves gave humanity the Ancient Mysteries and in them the “entire clue to the evolutionary process, hidden in numbers, in ritual, in words and in symbology” are concealed the “secret of man’s origin and destiny.”¹²⁶⁹ Although they believe that contemporary Masonry has lost its true “livingness,” by possessing some of the forms and rituals of the Mystery Religions, its former élan can be restored. They claim that the purpose of Masonry is “closely related to the restoration of the Mysteries and has held the clue (down the ages) to that long awaited restoration.” Alluding to the alchemical *opus contra naturam*, they hope to restore older pre-Judeo-Christian religious forms. Bailey and Khul claim that this is humanity’s forward march down the “Path of Return.” They say that this march will progress once Masonry completely rids itself of its Jewish names

¹²⁶⁶ *The Reappearance of the Christ*, reap1005.html.

¹²⁶⁷ *The Reappearance of the Christ*, reap1027.html.

¹²⁶⁸ *The Reappearance of the Christ*, reap1021.html.

¹²⁶⁹ *The Reappearance of the Christ*, reap1036.html.

and nomenclature,¹²⁷⁰ apparently a reference to the important Masonic myths of Solomon's temple and Hiram, its architect.¹²⁷¹

In fact, the Hierarchy "demands" the return to pre-Judeo-Christian, i.e. pagan, religious forms. This will be re-defined as the "Kingdom of God." In their Masonic Kingdom of God, only "souls" will be allowed to function as "citizens." Since traditional Jews and Christians represent the "negative forces," we gather that they will be excluded from "citizenship." Bailey and Khul claim that the arrival of the Kingdom of God on Earth is now possible for three reasons. First, many people are able to recognize re-birth and evolution as "natural laws" as well as live according to the rules and spirit of these laws. As we have mentioned, these "laws" are: *loyalty to the group and to a directing personality*, who "imposes" ideas in order to bring about evolutionary changes; *inclusiveness* (i.e. claims of exclusivity of one's religion will constitute the "only" sin, as well as non-response to evolutionary laws); *willingness of the group and individuals to sacrifice*. This is primarily the willingness to sacrifice oneself, but it is not excluded that it is also the willingness to sacrifice those who hinder unity, and persist in their "separateness," or who are "not responsive" to the Law of Evolution, i.e. meaning traditional Christianity and Judaism. Second, because they want the Christ to appear, he has decided to appear. Third, when the Christ appears, the Hierarchy will also appear.¹²⁷² They say that this is the beginning of the Age of Aquarius, where their "Christ" returns under the zodiacal sign of the "water carrier" or Aquarius and no longer under the sign of Pisces, the fish.

5. Obligatory Recognition of the "Messiah" Under the Sign of Aquarius

Finally, Bailey and Khul's explanation of the progression of religions to higher forms, in fact, reveals their cyclical understanding of time, which has been fused onto the notions of evolutionary progression. This is due to their insistence on the restoration of pre-Christian forms of ancient pagan Mystery Religions and their interpretation of Judaism and Christianity as conforming to the cyclical nature of the Greek Zodiac. According to them, with a highly obscure and specious reasoning, that looks like an astrological reading of the history of comparative religions, ancient Israel's sin in worshipping the golden calf in the Sinai was not idolatry as such

¹²⁷⁰ *The Reappearance of the Christ*, reap1036.html.

¹²⁷¹ cf. Daniel Bèresniak, *Symbols of Freemasonry* (Barnes & Nobel, 2003) 26. For example, early Masonic documents, like the Thistle manuscript (1756), saw King Nimrod, the builder of the Tower of Babel, as its first Master. Originally, this "creator" of titanic pride "gave them their signs and terms so that they could distinguish themselves from other people..." According to Masonic historian, Daniel Bèresniak, initially, both King Nimrod and Solomon were seen side-by-side. Later, "speculative Masons, who were concerned with social respectability and had no desire to threaten the establishment, finally rejected the 'Legend of the Craft' which honoured the Tower of Babel, a pagan edifice constructed in open defiance to heaven. Instead of the Promethean or Faustian Nimrod, they preferred 'our wise King Solomon'."

¹²⁷² *The Reappearance of the Christ*, reap1034.html.

(Exodus 32). Conflating the tiny Jewish people with the vastly more powerful Roman Empire, according to their logic, the “sin” of the Jewish people had to do with their refusal to progress from Mithraic “bull” worship of the “scapegoat” in the Age of Aries to the worship of the “fish.”¹²⁷³ Whether this was because they were supposed to worship the “ram” or “scapegoat,” or to readily agree to become a scapegoat themselves, is not clear from the text. Bailey then says that “the Jewish race has remained symbolically and practically in the sign Aries, the Scapegoat; they have to pass -- again symbolically -- into the sign, Pisces, the Fish, and recognize their Messiah when He comes again in the sign Aquarius. Otherwise, they will repeat their ancient sin of non-response to the evolutionary process.”¹²⁷⁴ They say that as the “old” Christ, i.e. Jesus, came to bring an end to the Jewish dispensation of Aries -- a task that he did not accomplish due to Christian and Jewish stubbornness --, the “new” Christ will come to bring an end to the Christian dispensation of Pisces¹²⁷⁵ and, therefore, an end to the worship of Jesus. Christians are expected to follow this new “Aquarian Christ” or repeat the same “sin” as the Jews, that is, not properly responding to the Law of Evolution. Those who hinder the Laws of Evolution and Rebirth, and stall the processes of sparking a new superior humanity and civilization will face destruction and negation from the *Shamballa*, otherwise known as the beneficent Will of God, or the *Will or Power*.¹²⁷⁶

¹²⁷³ *The Reappearance of the Christ*, reap1024.html.

¹²⁷⁴ *The Reappearance of the Christ*, reap1024.html.

¹²⁷⁵ *The Reappearance of the Christ*, reap1024.html.

¹²⁷⁶ *The Externalization of the Hierarchy*, exte1028.html

B. Annie Besant

Unlike Blavatsky, who was a vehemently anti-Christian occultist, Bailey and Besant maintained certain culturally Christian sympathies, even though they rejected what they deemed to be “dogmatic Christianity.” In fact, they instinctively realized that many cultural Christians still had strong affinities to the person of Jesus and were not ready to totally cast aside their cultural heritage. Therefore, they appropriated Christian terminology and then gave it a new meaning in order to undermine traditional Christian teaching and language of the Church.¹²⁷⁷ For example, in a chapter entitled, “The Historical Christ,” Besant claims to base herself on the translation of the Gnostic text *Pistis Sophia*,¹²⁷⁸ mentioned earlier in the context of alchemy and the Eleusian Mysteries. Jesus the Christ is no longer the historical Jesus of Nazareth, but was a *magus* and became a docetic body that higher “harmonizing forces” inhabited to bring about the “brotherhood of man” into a higher, yet, undifferentiated unity. Jesus was merely a body, who allowed the “Christ Energy Principle” to fill him during his life on earth. She says:

The historical Christ, then, is a glorious Being belonging to the great spiritual hierarchy that guides the spiritual evolution of humanity, who used for some three years the human body of the disciple Jesus; who spent the last of these three years in public teaching throughout Judea and Samaria; who was a healer of diseases and performed other remarkable occult works; who gathered round Him a small band of disciples whom He instructed in the deeper truths of the spiritual life; who drew men to Him by a singular love and tenderness and the rich wisdom that breathed from His Person; and who was finally put to death for blasphemy, for teaching the inherent Divinity of Himself and of all men. He came to give a new impulse of spiritual life to the world; to reissue the inner teachings affecting spiritual life; to mark out again the narrow ancient way; to proclaim the existence of the ‘Kingdom of Heaven’, of the Initiation which admits to that knowledge of God which is eternal life; and to admit a few to that Kingdom who should be able to teach others....”¹²⁷⁹

Unlike Bailey, Besant was not known to channel “entities” and received her doctrine from her experience as a Co-Mason, her studies under Blavatsky and in the Esoteric Section of the

¹²⁷⁷ Besant uses words like the historical Christ, Trinity, prayer, sins, sacraments, sacrifice, atonement, resurrection and ascension etc. in titles of her book, but with a different meaning than traditional Christians would understand. This is only gathered after a fine reading of the text. For example, prayer is used in order to come to the knowledge of the Divinity that lies hidden within oneself, where after one no longer needs to pray. See *Esoteric Christianity*, 204. According to her, “forgiveness of sins may be declaratory; the karma is exhausted, and a ‘knower of karma’ declares this fact.” (p. 213.) Concerning the sacraments, Besant claims that the visible elements are “vehicles of energies higher than those which naturally belong to them; persons approaching them, touching them, will have their own etheric and subtle bodies affected by their potent magnetism, and will be brought into a condition very receptive of higher influences, being tuned into accord with the lofty Beings connected with the word and the sign used in the consecration...” (p. 235), among other things.

¹²⁷⁸ The *Pistis Sophia* was discovered in a Coptic version and first published in Latin in Berlin in 1851. A French version was published in 1895. For more information, see Kurt Rudolf, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, trans. Robert McLachlan Wilson (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1987) 27.

¹²⁷⁹ *Esoteric Christianity*, 96.

Theosophical Society.¹²⁸⁰ Besant dominated the TS until her own death in 1933. She took it upon herself to develop a doctrine of “religious tolerance” that would be acceptable to all — all except traditional Christians. As we have shown, together with Leadbeater, she was the main promoter of the idea of the coming of the World Teacher in Jiddu Krishnamurti. In this sense, she stands at the helm of New Age doctrine on “the Christ.” Nevertheless, her teachings were not totally new, as her synthesizing work had already been largely prepared by other theosophers and esotericists before her, like Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) and Anna Kingsford (1846-1888), mentioned earlier. Joscelyn Godwin says that Swedenborg, a Freemason and a rabid anti-Catholic, did “away with many of the things that made Christianity unacceptable to the men of the Enlightenment,” preparing the way for the spiritualist movement of the nineteenth century. Building on a hermetic and kabbalistic understanding of the universe, he rejected the traditional Christian doctrine of the atonement as well as any literal interpretation of the Bible, which he supplemented with his own allegorical approach.¹²⁸¹

Much like Swedenborg, Anna Kingsford was a self-assured heterodox Christian medium, who believed that her experiences were on par with biblical revelation. Building on Swedenborg’s synthesis, in *The Perfect Way* (1882), Kingsford published a series of her direct revelations and insights gleaned from visitations from none other than Swedenborg himself. The basic form of “esoteric Christianity” — that would be tolerant of all religions except traditional Christianity -- was established in the atmosphere of eighteenth century Enlightenment Freemasonry, and fine-tuned in Theosophical and spiritualist circles by the end of the nineteenth century. Their dogmatic anti-dogmatism later developed into the anti-traditional Christian position of the New Age Movement, which had been simmering for centuries.

1. Esoteric Christianity

In the New Age classic, *Esoteric Christianity*, Besant presents the New Age understanding of Christianity, whose basic principles were based on Kingsford’s *The Perfect Way*. Like Bailey, she was a former Anglican missionary and divorced wife of a Protestant minister. Therein, she attempted to explain to Christians the real meaning of Christianity, which they supposedly never understood.¹²⁸² The title implies that there is another doctrine of Christianity. This doctrine had

¹²⁸⁰ *Divine Feminine*, 81, 45.

¹²⁸¹ *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 97.

¹²⁸² Although Blavatsky was reared orthodox, it is interesting to note that both Annie Besant and Alice Bailey, the mothers of New Age, were both the dissatisfied, divorced wives of Protestant ministers.

been previously “hidden,” by those who wanted to keep Christianity for the simple and weak alone, but is now being revealed to the intelligent and strong.¹²⁸³

Her argument is based on elitist and Gnostic assumptions, i.e. that traditional Christians are too ignorant to understand their own tradition, and that salvation comes through esoteric knowledge. By asserting a Gnostic position, i.e. that esoteric knowledge saves, she reverses the traditional Christian position that belief or trust in the person of the historical Jesus, who traditional Christians believe is both human and divine, is salvific. Besant also launches an attack that appeals to present-day democratic, but also snobbish sympathies, i.e. those who assent to her proposition are the intelligent ones and have been “saved” by knowledge, those who do not agree with her position are ignorant and condemned to evolutionary non-progression. However, out of pity, the Gnostic elites will come to save the ignorant as well.

Precisely due to the influence of traditional Christianity, most people see it as a good thing to be concerned for the weak and the poor. Nevertheless, intellectual elitists, like Besant, like to think that they are more intelligent than others, a member of a chosen group, who has elected for some mission to save the world, especially the weak and poor. Those who do not assent to Besant’s position, according to her argument, admit that they are a member of a “lower” social and intellectual class, and by default a lower evolutionary grade. On the one hand, Besant claims that Christianity appeals to weak and simple-minded people, who she believes are the majority of the population. On the other hand, while claiming to be concerned for the majority weak and ignorant, she also claims that the intelligence of the superior class has been insulted by what she considers to be “dogmatic Christianity’s” simple teachings for simple people. Although disgusted by the “simple peoples” acceptance of traditional Christian teachings, the intelligent and powerful elite are still destined to “save” them from their own supposed dogmatic illusions. After destroying dogmatic Christianity, these Gnostic elite will constitute the new Church, then, supposedly peace, harmony and tolerance will prevail.

Cleverly disguised as the “progress towards higher humanity,” initiates are taught that only by successive sacrifices can humanity as a whole (and hence, themselves) evolve. Besant and Bailey both teach that this is the Law of Evolution.¹²⁸⁴ The idea of self-sacrifice as a *duty* was already prescribed in Blavatsky’s *The Key to Theosophy*. Taking a utilitarian line, Blavatsky says that “self-sacrifice for practical good to save many, or several people, theosophy holds as a far higher than self-abnegation for a sectarian idea.” Surprisingly, Blavatsky uses the example of the

¹²⁸³ *Esoteric Christianity*, 26. She especially faults Protestantism for claiming that “nothing ought to be preached save that which every one could grasp, that the glory of the Gospel lay in its simplicity, and that the child and the unlearned ought to be able to understand and apply it to life”

¹²⁸⁴ *Esoteric Christianity*, 137, 139, 142, 143

Belgian priest Father Damien, who died of leprosy helping the afflicted in Hawaii. She put him on par with both the Buddha and Jesus, as a good example of theosophical self-sacrifice. Later, she clarifies her theosophical approach to utilitarian ethics: “A man has no right to starve himself to death that another man may have food, *unless* the life of that man is obviously more useful to the many than is his own life.” [*Italics mine*]¹²⁸⁵ That is to say, someone useful should not sacrifice their life for others, e.g. in their thinking the weak and poor, but the “useless,” e.g. weak and poor, should be willing to do so for the “useful.”

a. Solar Deities and Sacrifice

For Besant as for Jung, the symbol of the *Logos* or Divine Nature is to be found in the myths and mysteries of the hermetic Solar Deity.¹²⁸⁶ Clearly, Besant’s understanding of *Logos* is not the traditional Christian doctrine of the *Logos* found in the Gospel of John (Jn 1:1), but a more Gnostic and Hermetic one. According to her, all those who were sent as “messengers” of the *Logos* were designated by the symbol of the sun. She contends that their stories are similar. Anyone who comes symbolizing something less than a “solar myth” is of a “lesser order,” because “the Solar Myth, then, is a story which primarily representing the activity of the Logos, or Word, in the *kosmos*, secondarily embodies the life of one who is an incarnation of the *Logos*, or is one of His ambassadors.”¹²⁸⁷ She says that examples of these solar ambassadors are found in stories about the birth of Jesus by the Virgin Mary, but also “Divaki is likewise figured with the divine Krishna, in her arms, as is Mylitta, or Istar of Babylon, also with the recurrent crown of stars, and with her child Tammuz, Mercury and Aesculapius, Bacchus and Hercules, Perseus and the Dioscuri, Mithras and Zarathustra, were all of divine and human birth.”¹²⁸⁸ She claims that the death and resurrection of these “solar logos symbols” are also to be found in the slaying of Osiris in Egypt, Tammuz in Babylon, “Adonis in Syria and Greece and Attis in Phrygia,” “Mithras’ death was similarly celebrated in Persia, and that of Bacchus and Dionysius – one and the same – in Greece.”¹²⁸⁹

She admits that the Mysteries and myth are closely related and states: “We shall find that myths are very closely related to the Mysteries, for part of the Mysteries consisted in showing the living pictures of the occurrences in the higher worlds that became embodied in myths.”¹²⁹⁰ She claims that the similarities of these stories show that they are not just stories about individuals, but about “the universal Christ,” who has been given the task to stand “towards

¹²⁸⁵ *The Key to Theosophy*, 238-240.

¹²⁸⁶ *Esoteric Christianity*, 117.

¹²⁸⁷ *Esoteric Christianity*, 106.

¹²⁸⁸ *Esoteric Christianity*, 109.

¹²⁸⁹ *Esoteric Christianity*, 113.

¹²⁹⁰ *Esoteric Christianity*, 107.

humanity in a special relationship, renewed age after age, as generation succeeded generation, as race gave way to race,” because “The Christ of the Solar Myth was the Christ of the Mysteries.”¹²⁹¹ Like most Romantics, Besant sees no real distinction between the story of Jesus’ Passion and the myths and legends surrounding Dionysos and Osiris. According to her Gnostic and esoteric interpretation, each “christ,” whose life and death was re-enacted in the Mysteries, was sent into matter as a representative of the “universal Christ principle” in order to bring about each new age or each new race through *willing* his own death or sacrifice. Interestingly, like Eliade, prioritizing myth over ritual, Besant asserts that the mythical stories of the sacred deaths of the gods were events that first happened in higher cosmic spheres and then had to be incarnated later on earth.

Like Girard and Burkert, although with a completely different interpretation, Besant points out that according to all the great ancient myths, sacrifice lies at the root of creation. That is to say, Besant sees that myth posits a horrendous act of violence, which is later understood as a sacrifice, at the foundation of civilization and culture. However, instead of rejecting it, as did early traditional Christianity, she affirms it. Unlike Girard and Burkert, instead of seeing myths as an attempt to come to grips with real human violence, she appropriates the same kind of mechanism that functions in mythical denial, and makes “creation through sacrifice” into a *biological law*. She claims that this “Law of Sacrifice must point to something in the very nature of the *Logos*; it must have its root in the Divine Nature itself”¹²⁹² She further remarks:

All the great religions of the world have declared that the universe begins by an act of sacrifice, and have incorporated the idea of sacrifice into their most solemn rites. In Hinduism, the dawn of manifestation is said to be by sacrifice, mankind is emanated with sacrifice, and it is the *Deity who sacrifices Himself; the object of the sacrifice is manifestation*; he cannot become manifest unless an act of sacrifice be performed, and inasmuch as nothing can be manifest until He manifests, the act of sacrifice is called ‘the dawn’ of creation. In the Zoroastrian religion it was taught that in the Existence that is boundless, unknowable, unnameable, sacrifice was performed and manifest Deity appeared, Ahura-mazdâo was *born of an act of sacrifice* (Italics mine).¹²⁹³

What she manages to eloquently avoid is the fact that most of these above-mentioned “solar gods” or “mythic christs” were violently murdered and some were themselves also murderers. For example, she mentions Ishtar, the Akkadian goddess of sexual love, fertility, and war, with her “son” Tammuz. In actuality, “Tammuz” is the Hebrew name for the shepherd god, Dumuzi, who was also known as the dying god of fertility. The connections with the fertility god, Dionysos, are clear. Ishtar was also known as Inana in Sumerian versions of the myth and

¹²⁹¹ *Esoteric Christianity*, 115.

¹²⁹² *Esoteric Christianity*, 139.

¹²⁹³ *Esoteric Christianity*, 137-138.

Astarte in Ugaritic and Egyptian versions. In fact, Dumuzi was not Ishtar's son, but her lover. As the story goes, after trying to usurp her sister and extend her own power into the realm of the underworld, Inana or Ishtar was captured and hung on a hook. To escape this situation, a substitute was found to take her place. In the Sumerian version, out of revenge for not sufficiently mourning her death, she deceitfully betrayed *her lover*, Dumuzi, to demons, who then took him to the underworld. With the help of others, he escaped eternal bondage, but was made to remain in the underworld for six months of the year.¹²⁹⁴ This aspect of the myth, of course, sounds familiar to the story of Kore or Persephone, who, after eating a few pomegranate seeds, was forced to remain in the underworld for a season each year. Unlike Jesus, who out of love for all died in their place as an innocent victim on the Cross, Ishtar found someone she loved to die in her place. Significantly, Besant confirms the occult perspective that violence needed to be done to these "gods" as a prerequisite to their divinization.

b. Law of Sacrifice and the Law of Evolution

i. Follow your Teacher

In her chapter on "The Atonement," or at-one-ment, the sacrificial nature of the contemporary Hermetic interpretation of self-divinization is made more explicit. For Besant, in the "Hebrew disciple Jesus," the *Law of Sacrifice* that "underlies all systems and on it all universes are [built]" as well as the principle upon which "lies at the root of evolution,"¹²⁹⁵ "finds perfect expression."¹²⁹⁶ That is to say, evolution to higher spheres is dependent upon the willingness of individuals to sacrifice themselves for an occultly interpreted "greater good." As we saw above, according to Blavatsky, self-sacrifice is a utilitarian principle and should be accomplished for the benefit of those who are deemed "more useful," i.e. the elite occult establishment. For the TS, the "greater good" was considered to be the higher evolution of humanity, and especially the higher evolution of the occultists, through "progressive spiritual reincarnation," discussed earlier. According to Besant, voluntary and self-chosen sacrifice -- instead of imposed sacrifice -- even becomes the "very mark of progress," because, as she put it, "those who are recognized as greatest by man's intellect and loved most by man's heart are the supreme sufferers, those heroic souls who wrought, endured and died that the race might profit by their pain."¹²⁹⁷

According to Besant, through the "perpetual sacrifice of the Logos all lives exist" and this is an "outpouring of Life directed by Love."¹²⁹⁸ Humanity should not be concerned with the

¹²⁹⁴ Alan Lothian, *Epics of Early Civilization: Myths of the Ancient NearEast* (Amsterdam: Time-Life Books, 1998) 40-44.

¹²⁹⁵ *Esoteric Christianity*, 137.

¹²⁹⁶ *Esoteric Christianity*, 148.

¹²⁹⁷ *Esoteric Christianity*, 139.

¹²⁹⁸ *Esoteric Christianity*, 143.

“breaking up of forms and the pain involved in the breaking,” that is, with the destruction of human life, but should follow the “deliberate lessons of the Teachers who gave him [i.e. humanity] religions.” That is, since Christians follow Jesus, they should follow his example and willingly die.

ii. Four Stages of Sacrifice

As discussed, according to Besant, all religions and their understanding of creation as an act of sacrifice were the same. She claimed that all great teachers, including Jesus, taught a similar message of the necessity of sacrifice, but it was interpreted differently during each successive historical stage. The message or lessons can be followed according to four supposed historical stages, during which the stages become increasingly self-sacrificial or self-destructive. In the first stage, men sacrificed their material possessions to deities in order to ensure material prosperity for themselves, their families and their nations. Sacrifices of a material nature were offered to ensure material well-being. She says that this form of sacrifice is found in all of the ancient religions of the world.¹²⁹⁹ The second stage of sacrifice was more difficult for people to conceptualize. Instead of sacrificing to “the gods” in order to ensure material well-being in this life, one sacrificed in order to ensure celestial well-being or bliss in the next. She states that in this phase, man “learned to surrender the visible for the invisible” and this set him on the path to understand the value of the unseen world. This is the stage of willingly “standing alone” and clinging firmly to one’s inner life, while the rest of the “race [...] pour[s] upon him pain, misery, and shame.”¹³⁰⁰ The third and even higher stage was when man, as a “hero-soul,” realized that he participated in a greater whole. This means that he realized that his individual life was not as significant or as valuable as the totality of life, i.e. the Divine One, which included sentient life as well as organic materials. Because of this realization, he was willing to endure hardship and death, not so much to be rewarded, but because it was his *duty* as a fragment of the whole. In Besant’s own words, he becomes

willing to sacrifice himself for the good of the whole, and so be[come] strong enough to recognize that sacrifice was right, that a part, a fragment, a unit in the sum total of life, should subordinate the part to the whole, the fragment to the totality. Then he learned to do right, without being affected by the outcome to his own person, to do duty, without which for result to himself, to endure because endurance was right, not because it would be crowned, to give because gifts were due to humanity, not because they would be repaid by the Lord.¹³⁰¹

¹²⁹⁹ *Esoteric Christianity*, 145.

¹³⁰⁰ *Esoteric Christianity*, 146.

¹³⁰¹ *Esoteric Christianity*, 146.

For Besant, it was in these first three stages that the human being experienced suffering. In the first phase, one only suffers a bit, but the next two phases, one suffers a great deal. During the third and most difficult phase, mentioned above, the next evolutionary level is prepared. At this supposedly pivotal point, the person must make the crucial decision to either remain within the “life of the world,” with all of its craving and dissatisfaction, or let go of it. Believing that the world is an illusion, by sacrificing one’s illusory life, one finds “reality.” Significantly, Besant compares this “*duty to self-sacrifice*” with alchemical processes. She states that “only the pure gold comes forth from the fiery furnace, where life seemed to be surrendered but where life was won.”¹³⁰² Since she assumes that all is One, individual identity is also an illusion. Therefore, one should not be too attached to it. By abandoning any rights to a personal identity, one is then able to realize the Self and fulfill the supposed Law of Sacrifice.¹³⁰³

It is at this point that Besant claims that one reaches the fourth and final stage. This is the level where all the little individual fragments or selves are willing to sacrifice themselves, because they have come to realize that the evolution of the Totality is more important than maintaining the illusion of their individual existences. She says that:

The hero-soul thus trained was ready for the fourth lesson that *sacrifice of all the separated fragment possesses is to be offered because the Spirit is not really separate* but is part of the divine Life, and knowing no difference, feeling no separation, the man pours himself forth as part of the Life Universal, and in the expression of that Life he shares the joy of his Lord (Italics mine).¹³⁰⁴

As Besant states, these stages of sacrifice are reflections or imitations of the “Sacrifice of the Logos,” which she claims is *perpetually sacrificing itself in order to create*. “Through perpetual sacrifice of the Logos all lives exist; it is the life by which the universe is ever becoming”¹³⁰⁵ In the chapter on “Resurrection and Ascension,” Besant makes it clear that the goal of ascension has been achieved, when all humanity has obtained the “Christ condition.” As we have seen, this means to *freely accept annihilation into the Eternal Unity*, or more bluntly, the destruction of humanity – except for the select “useful” few -- as we now know it. Besant asserts that, like “Christ,” when one freely agrees to do one’s duty and be annihilated into the One, the process of divinization will be complete.¹³⁰⁶

¹³⁰² *Esoteric Christianity*, 147.

¹³⁰³ *Esoteric Christianity*, 148.

¹³⁰⁴ *Esoteric Christianity*, 146.

¹³⁰⁵ *Esoteric Christianity*, 143.

¹³⁰⁶ *Esoteric Christianity*, 170.

c. Following the Master, Jesus

As stated, according to her version of the Passion, Jesus is a good example of how one becomes a god *through* self-sacrifice or suicide. She states, “Those who would prepare to rise to such a life in the future must begin even now to tread in the lower life the path of the Shadow of the Cross.”¹³⁰⁷ For Besant, Christ became divine on the Cross, only after he realized, i.e. became conscious, that he himself must become God (i.e. one with the One). Thereafter, he “overcame the last pain of separation [considered a “heresy” by Blavatsky and Bailey in theosophical doctrine] by giving himself over to the eternal Unity.” At that moment, “he feels the fount of life is within, and knows himself eternal.”¹³⁰⁸ In this scheme, Christ became “perfect” when he realized that he must willingly, or consciously, give himself over to be annihilated by and into the One. According to Besant, the historical Jesus became “a christ” (not *the* Christ), by allowing the “forces that war against man” to pour into him and became a force that helps, as a “peace-center.” In this understanding, a so-called “peace-center” is a being, who willing and consciously allows itself to become used – by the Hierarchy – as a vicarious scapegoat in the sense of René Girard.

For Besant, Jesus was a *pharmakeus* (a sorcerer), in the Brunian sense of the word, who knew how to manipulate the mechanism of the *pharmakos* (the scapegoat). As we discussed, Besant knew Bruno well, especially his *Gli eroici furori*, which she quoted in *Esoteric Christianity*.¹³⁰⁹ Furthermore, she wrote a pamphlet on his life and a biography of his life.¹³¹⁰ That is, she believed that like Bruno, he consciously provoked and then directed all of the community’s anger, resentment, frustration and guilt onto himself. Initially, the community designated him as the “one” responsible for all of their woes, but later they deified him as a “god.” The fact that Besant ignores, however, is that Jesus’ death did not unify the people in the same way that the death of the pagan gods must have temporarily unified Athens, Thebes, Crete, or any other ancient community that was in danger of disintegrating due to mimetic rivalry. Contrary to the prediction of the high priest Caiaphas, who prophesized during the year of his term that Jesus would die as a *pharmakos* to unify the people and catalyze the return of the dispersed Israelites,¹³¹¹ Jesus realized that his death would not function like a typical scapegoat:

¹³⁰⁷ *Esoteric Christianity*, 155.

¹³⁰⁸ *Esoteric Christianity*, 151.

¹³⁰⁹ *Esoteric Christianity*, 4, 77, 153, 220-221.

¹³¹⁰ See Annie Besant, *Giordano Bruno: Theosophy’s Apostle in the Sixteenth Century* (Adyar: The Theosophist Office, 1913).

¹³¹¹ After raising Lazarus from the dead, the leaders of the temple, plotted to kill Jesus. “So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the Council and said, ‘What are we do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation.’ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, ‘You know nothing at all. Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish. He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, and not for the nation

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ...” (Mt 10: 34ff) According to Girard, Jesus’ death and subsequent resurrection revealed the scapegoating mechanism and rendered it less effective. That is, because it was no longer “hidden” or an object of occult knowledge, it could no longer be easily used as a tool to unify opposing parties.¹³¹² With the decreasing inability to find an acceptable scapegoat upon whom everyone could subconsciously agree, conflicts could not be as easily defused as they had been in the past through the scapegoating method of vicarious revenge.

Nevertheless, Besant claims that because of Jesus’ example, now other “christs” can follow his “harmonizing” example of “discord-making forces” by becoming “peace-centers” themselves. Again, “balancing” refers to the alchemical *opus*, which requires not only destruction, but also self-destruction in order to realize oneself as god, or Hermes-Christ. Besant says that these little “christs” can become like their “Ascended Master, Jesus” by allowing the warring forces to “pour into them,” and become “perfect,”¹³¹³ that is, by allowing their individuality to be annihilated into the Non-Being of the One.¹³¹⁴ In order to become “divine” like Jesus, esoteric Christians need to make room for a “divinity” or an “entity” to descend into their bodies and allow “It” to take over or possess their personalities in a similar way that Bailey allowed Khul or Nietzsche allowed Zarathustra to take over their personalities. In fact, through one’s willingness to sacrifice one’s individuality, one becomes “God.” As Besant explains, Jesus “laid down His Body in glad surrender that a higher Life might descend and become embodied in the form. He *thus willingly sacrificed*, and how by that act He became a Christ of full stature, to be the Guardian of Christianity, and pour out His life *into the great religion founded by the Mighty One with whom the sacrifice had identified Him* (Italics mine).”¹³¹⁵ This is to say, Besant believes that Jesus was “possessed” by an entity, like a daimon, which convinced him to commit suicide for what she deemed to be the “greater good,” i.e. the evolution of humanity. From this we can see that Besant ascribes to a Modern version of Hermetic ascent, within the reversed Brunian interpretation. As we saw, she believes that he was the Apostle-martyr of the Theosophical Society. She believes that Jesus achieved union with the *Logos*, who in the

only, but to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.” (Jn 11: 45-53)

¹³¹² *Things Hidden*, 205-215.

¹³¹³ *Esoteric Christianity*, 152.

¹³¹⁴ H. P. Blavatsky, *The Voice of Silence* (Wheaton: The Theosophical Publishing House, 1992) 13. Besant’s mentor, Blavatsky, describes integration into the one: “It is the seed of freedom from rebirth. It isolates the Arhat both from strife and lust, it leads him through the fields of Being unto the peace and bliss known only in the land of Silence and Non-Being.”

¹³¹⁵ *Esoteric Christianity*, 148.

Poimandres could be understood to be the primal man/*Anthropos* or Aion, who she says identified with the “sacrifice.” She also calls this primal entity “Christ.” By allowing himself to be destroyed along Brunian lines, he became a “christ.” As we saw, this scheme is similar for Bailey.

Tellingly, she encourages “Christians” to offer themselves up for martyrdom as did their “Master.” As we have intimated, according to the occult principles of alchemy, destruction is necessary for the creation of something “new.” Hence, this form of self-sacrifice for the purpose of the further evolution of humanity, the willing destruction of oneself and others in order to create a new evolutionary order of being, looks more like the encouragement of voluntary mass suicide of potentially troublesome and “less useful” elements.

As discussed, the process of the evolution of basically ignorant humanity into perpetually higher forms of “being” needs sacrifice. Since, it will happen any way, according to her, it’s better to go with the flow, since sacrifice is the secret of evolution.¹³¹⁶ Going against the Law of Sacrifice and its corollary, the Law of Evolution, is the cause of unnecessary suffering and stunts the growth of “progress.” It is clear that one attains divinity when one finally one becomes re-absorbed into the “divine wholeness,” i.e. the Aionic Christ Principle, or become equated with it. Realizing this – and she suggests that Jesus did on the Cross --, is the start of the processes of divinization in the same way that the *opus contra naturam* is the beginning of the *opus alchymicum*. In an almost hypnotic cadence, she claims that “‘faith’ is the up-welling of the divine essence, seeking the divine ocean of like essence, and when this breaks through the lower nature that holds it in ... the power thus liberated works on the whole nature, bringing it into harmony with itself.”¹³¹⁷ In fact, this liberated power brings about an awareness of one’s own nature that the hidden God inside himself is himself.¹³¹⁸ However, if one goes against this flow, the person will be “dashed aside,” but for those who willing submit to the process of annihilation, the going will be easy.¹³¹⁹

2. Gaily awaiting the Apocalypse

Besant claimed that in all the ancient myths, sacrifice “lies at the root of creation.” Since Christianity is just another myth or Mystery, albeit a lower one, sacrifice must also lie at the root of Christianity. Even though traditional Christians would agree that Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross lies at the heart of Christianity, the interpretation of his sacrifice is a totally different one. From a Girardian perspective, it is the sacrifice, which reveals the scapegoating mechanism at the heart of

¹³¹⁶ *Esoteric Christianity*, 142

¹³¹⁷ *Esoteric Christianity*, 213.

¹³¹⁸ *Esoteric Christianity*, 214.

¹³¹⁹ *Esoteric Christianity*, 215-216.

sacrifice and an appeal to reject it. Although Besant claims that the *Logos*' sacrifice is perpetual, Besant is hard pressed to find evidence for the perpetual sacrifice of the Logos in Christianity. She alludes to the Bible and quotes the *Letter to the Hebrews* at least eleven times, but always out of context and not fully. In fact, she deliberately inverts the meaning of Hebrews in 9:25-28, which actually states:

Nor was it to offer himself repeatedly, as the high priest enters the Holy Place yearly with blood not his own; for then he would have had to suffer repeatedly since the foundation of the world. But as it is, he has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And just as it is appointed for men to die once, and after that comes judgment, so Christ, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him.

As the author to the letter states further on, unlike every other priest who “stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins, but when Christ *had offered for all time a single sacrifice* for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, then to wait until his enemies should be made a stool for his feet.” (Italics mine. Hebrews 10:11-13) As the former missionary and wife of an Anglican minister, she must have surely known that the passage in *Hebrews* says that Jesus's sacrifice on the Cross was a “once for all sacrifice”. It was the sacrifice meant to end sacrifice and not to perpetuate it. Besant's misuse of Scripture is a blatant attempt to “reverse the philosopher's wheel,” or perform an alchemical inversion, which she hoped would clear the path for her higher version of the ancient pagan Mysteries and the second coming of her “son,” Krishnamurti, who she was perhaps preparing as another “Great Sacrifice.”

In order back up her assertion that sacrifice, i.e. destruction, is needed for creation and that all religions promote perpetual sacrifice as a necessary “good,” she then quotes a verse in the book of *Revelation*. Besant claims that in the Christian religion as in all others, even “the Lamb [was] slain from the foundation of the world’, slain at the origin of things.”¹³²⁰ It is significant, however, that this verse actually follows the section on the beast that uttered blasphemies against God and was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them (Rev. 13:5-7). In fact, the quote does not say, “the Lamb was slain from the foundation of the world.” It says that all who dwell on the earth and “whose name is not written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb that was slain” *will worship the beast* (Rev 13:8). For most traditional Christians, the beast represents the Anti-Christ.

¹³²⁰ *Esoteric Christianity*, 138.

As a leader of the Theosophical Society, Besant subscribed to both a monistic (i.e. holistic) and Hermetic view of reality. What we see here is an attempt to re-interpret Jesus' death within a particular Hermetic scheme of self-sacrificial divinization that comes close to the Brunian example discussed in previous chapters. One follows the traditional Hermetic scheme of self-divinization, which entails "considering oneself equal to God". Thereafter, however, the scheme is reversed. Instead of merely scaling up the spheres and allowing one's mind to experience infinite expansion, at a certain point, one intellectually collapses the infinite *cosmos* into one's own finite ego. Like the statue of Aion, one consumes the *Oroboros* or the cosmic snake. Then, in order to become a "founder of a religion" one allows all of the "warring forces" of mimetic rivalry to pour into oneself. That is to say, one imitates the divine child Dionysos and allows oneself to be ripped to shreds – either psychically or physically -- by one's "enemies". After all of the envious frustration has been released and calm is restored, the self-induced murder victim is made into a "god." Nowhere is the pharmaketic process, as understood by the contemporary pharmakeus so clearly laid out as in Besant's *Esoteric Christianity*.

Conclusions

For Besant as for Blavatsky,¹³²¹ and as we have seen for Jung, “Christ” represents the Self,¹³²² which, for Jung, is the God-image. Like Jung, Besant’s explanation of Jesus’s “divinization” is structurally similar to how an occult medium comes into contact with a spirit or a “higher entity,” or how one makes oneself equal to “Aion” or the primal *Anthropos*. Nevertheless, we should avoid any facile comparison between Jung and the “New Age Mothers,” Bailey and Besant, whose theology is derived from the teachings of the TS. Although also Hermetic, their theology seems to be closer to the negative panenanthropic interpretation of the Hermetic Tradition, which we saw in Bruno. This is a position, which we suggest leads to the temporalization of the alchemical processes. Bailey and Besant believed that the alchemical dialectic needed to be executed on a world-cosmic scale. They understand this as a “sacrifice,” which will result in global unity and a higher order of being or reality. In this sense, their scheme of divinization or self-divinization closely follows Girard’s scapegoat theory and his hypothesis on the origin of the ancient gods. Besant and Bailey, intuiting the divinizing effects of the scapegoating mechanism, do not reject the violence that it entails, but attempt to use it for their political and social goals, namely, a new civilization and humanity. Besant and Bailey’s writings show that in New Age thinking both sacrifice and divinization go together.

Jung, however, through his reading of Nietzsche and observing the consequences of his philosophy, attempted to mitigate the possible violent panenanthropic interpretation of Hermetic self-divinization through a “symbolic interpretation,” which acts as a breaking-mechanism. Panenanthropism in Nietzsche is interpreted as an “illness,” that is, as *inflation*. Although he recognizes that there is a point in the process when one, so to speak, touches the collective unconscious and “inflates” -- which is something like fusion with the primal man Aion that might be experienced as contact with some sort of “spirit guide” like Poimandres, Hermes, Philemon, Zarathustra, or Djwhal Khul etc. –, the “healthy” response is to “deflate.” In the end, one should realize that one is a human being and not the exact equivalent of the Totality. Therefore, Jung and Jungians represent another possible interpretation of the development of contemporary Hermetic religion in Modernity.

¹³²¹ *The Key to Theosophy*, 181-182. ‘A God’ is not the universal deity, but only a spark from the one ocean of Divine Fire. Our God within us, or ‘our Father in Secret’ is what we call the ‘HIGHER SELF,’ *Atma*. Our incarnating Ego was a God in its origin, as were all the primeval emanations of the One Unknown Principle. But since its ‘fall into Matter,’ having to incarnate throughout the cycle, in succession, from first to last, it is no longer a free and happy god, but a poor pilgrim on his way to regain that which he has lost.

¹³²² *The Key to Theosophy*, 71.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

He remained in hospital throughout all the end of Lent and Holy Week. As he got better he remembered the dreams he had had as he lay there in fever and delirium. In his illness he had dreamt that the entire world had fallen victim to some strange, unheard of and unprecedented plague that was spreading from the depths of Asia into Europe. Everyone was to perish, apart from a chosen few, a very few. Some new kind of trichinae had appeared, microscopic creatures that lodged themselves in people's bodies. But these creatures were spirits gifted with will and intelligence. People who absorbed them into their systems instantly became rabid and insane. But never, never had people considered themselves so intelligent and in unswerving possession of the truth as did those who became infected. Never had they believed so unswervingly in the correctness of their judgments, their scientific deductions, their moral convictions and beliefs. Entire centres of population, entire cities and peoples became smitten and went mad. All were in a state of anxiety and no one could understand anyone else, each person thought that he alone possessed the truth and suffered agony as he looked at the others, beating his breast, weeping and wringing his hands. No one knew who to make the subject of judgment, or how to go about it, no one could agree about what should be considered evil and what good. No one knew who to blame or who to acquit. People killed one another in a kind of senseless anger. Whole armies were ranged against one another, but no sooner had these armies been mobilized than they suddenly began to tear themselves to pieces, their ranks falling apart and their soldiers hurling themselves at one another, gashing and stabbing, biting and eating one another. All day in the cities the alarm was sounded: everyone was being summoned together, but who was calling them and for what reason no one knew, but all were all in a state of anxiety. They abandoned the most common trades, because each person wanted to offer his ideas, his improvements, and no agreement could be reached; agriculture came to a halt. In this place and that people would gather into groups, agree on something together, swear to stick together – but would instantly begin doing something completely different from what had been proposed, start blaming one another, fighting and murdering. Fires began, a famine broke out. Everyone and everything perished. The plague grew worse, spreading further and further. Only a few people in the whole world managed to escape: they were the pure and chosen, who had been predestined to begin a new *species of mankind and usher in a new life, to renew the earth and render it pure*, but no one had seen these people anywhere, no one had heard their words and voices.

(Raskolnikov's dream in Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment*)

Self-Sacrificial Self-Divinization

In this work, we have tried to show that contemporary holistic esotericism, which is sometimes also called "New Age Religion," is a moment within a much longer tradition, called the Hermetic Tradition. The Hermetic Tradition is a western esoteric tradition that was revived in the Renaissance, but has antecedents in Antiquity. Today, the term "New Age" is more often used as a "buzzword" to describe everything from incense burning to advanced forms of ceremonial magic. Nevertheless, in the past, the term was used as an expression of a Hermetic soteriological longing: the creation of a new or higher type of humanity and civilization out of the rubble of the old. As shown, it was assumed that by returning to a previous "golden age," one could reverse the direction of time and perform a *coniunctio oppositorum* on what was perceived to be a

degenerated form of the present age. The occult *return*, alchemically conceived, would supposedly bring about a higher level of the same, understood as “divine.” As shown, this idea had been linked to alchemy and Hermetic Apocalypticism.

Although today New Age is often used as a “catch-all-phrase,” our study was primarily concerned with the specific aspirations within the Hermetic Tradition to confirm one’s divinity and how this has been conceived and reinterpreted from Antiquity to Modernity. As with all forms of Gnosticism, Hermetism is a system of salvation that requires consciousness or mental recognition of one’s own true nature as divine.¹³²³ In this sense, New Age or contemporary esoteric forms of self-divinization mirror the ancient forms, but especially Renaissance forms. How one achieves this salvific knowledge, or the method that one uses to become conscious of the fact that one is already divine, varies in content and degree. Nevertheless, as shown, the Hermetic method of divinization is usually sacrificial or self-sacrificial. In most cases, the destruction of the old in order to create the “new” is a euphemism that implies a violent sacrifice of some sort, be this psychological, spiritual or even physical.

Perennial Religion: Shamanic Ecstasy and Dismemberment

Even though certain aspects of the Hermetic Gnostic texts were much older, containing elements of earlier Egyptian and perhaps even also Presocratic teachings, the main body of Hermetic literature (i.e. the *Corpus Hermeticum*) was probably composed somewhere in the second or third century AD. As Dodd showed, the original Hermetic conception of divinity and divinization was probably understood within a Neoplatonic framework that mitigated a potentially “literal” interpretation of identifying with the “primal man.” However, when the Neoplatonic framework of Ideal Forms collapsed or was rejected in the modern era, this changed.

Although written or edited within a Neoplatonic framework, the work of Peter Kingsley has established that already in Antiquity, the Hermetic Tradition also acted as a kind of “storehouse” for maligned alternative philosophies. These could be singled out, called up and then activated at will. This aligns the Hermetic Tradition with contemporary spiritual practices. According to Kingsley, the Tradition contained significant elements of Presocratic and Pythagorean philosophies and shared their animistic worldview. This was the same worldview as the ancient Mystery Religions. According to some scholars and philologists, for example,

¹³²³ Kurt Rudolf, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, trans. Robert McLachlan Wilson (San Francisco: HarperSan Francisco, 1987) 113. As Rudolf says, “The word ‘gnosis’ itself, as we have seen, has a predominantly soteriological value and in itself already clearly expresses the understanding of redemption. It is the act of self-recognition [as having a divine origin] which introduces the ‘deliverance’ from the situation encountered and guarantees man salvation. For this reason the famous Delphic slogan ‘know thyself’ is popular also in Gnosis and was employed in numerous ways, especially in the Hermetic gnostic texts.”

Nietzsche, Kingsley and Waterfield, many of the original Presocratic and Pythagorean philosophers were also sorcerers and shaman, or at least displayed some of these characteristics. As we have shown, magic and shamanism function most effectively amongst people who, to some degree, assent to an animistic worldview, or a paradigm of reality that believes that Nature, including inorganic matter, is alive and sympathetic or “connected.” In this sense, contemporary monistic paradigms of reality, which are understood as “holistic,” strongly resemble ancient animism, where magical action was most effective.

We do not see magic as something supernatural, but the natural “art” or ability, through the imagination, to concentrate one’s own will (desire) and use it in order to shape or even manipulate the desires of others (as well as one’s own) to achieve some perceived goal, from the seduction of a lover to the establishment of a new world order. Although in some sense, reason and magic are connected, reason often serves as an antidote to intentional magical action and renders magical operations less effective. Nevertheless, it should not be surprising that sometimes reason itself can be magically appropriated or perverted in order to achieve some goal. The relation of reason to magic would be an interesting avenue for further research.

As discussed, to become an inspired healer or an *iatromantis*, in order to acquire the right to heal others, one must have gone through illness and have healed oneself. Inherent within the shamanic rites of initiation (whether primitive or modern) is the need to go through some kind of “shamanic illness,” which can be a form of self-mutilation, self-harm or even insanity. This period of mental or physical imbalance is induced in order to achieve inspiration. Shamanic ecstatic behaviour is perceived as a sign of election and even the possession of divinity. The psychological “dismemberment” to which one subjects oneself is understood to be a sacrifice. The sacrifice of one’s self or mental stability is seen as dangerous and potentially life-threatening, but those who come out of the process alive and stronger are recognized by the community as shamans or inspired healers. Significantly, the stories of shamanic “dismemberment” strongly resemble the ancient Orphic myth that re-counts the murder and dismemberment of the child, Dionysos, by his uncles the Titans. This connects primitive shamanism to the ancient Mystery cults and, as we will see, to founding violence.

Despite these murky associations, thanks to the writings of Mircea Eliade and Carlos Castaneda, the popularity of neo-shamanism is on the rise. Shamanic initiation is perceived as a method to achieve altered states of consciousness and as an alternative to organized religion, especially organized traditional Christianity. Articles about shamanic “mysticism” abound in

popular magazines¹³²⁴ and the highly publicized wedding of the pop star Anastasia was recently officiated by a Californian shaman in Mexico. The attraction of many spiritual seekers to neo-shamanism resides in the fact that shamanism is considered to be the primordial religion that lies at the root of all religions. By returning to the spirituality of shamanism, neo-shamans feel that they can plug into the very harmony of the *cosmos*. The ability to procure an ecstatic (mystical) experience, through shamanic techniques, seems to be proof of its spiritual value.

Early Shamanic Magic and Sacrifice

According to the theories of Walter Burkert and René Girard, the origin of religion was not peaceful and harmonious, only to become violent with the advent of Judeo-Christian tradition. The origin of religion and civilization probably has more to do with extreme acts of violence and revenge, such as murder or rape, which were later euphemistically referred to as a “sacrifice.” For Girard, sacrificial rituals initially referred to the founding violence or murder of human victims, while Burkert believes they originally referred to the decision by early human communities to kill animals for food. Burkert believes that early shamans probably assisted the bands of men, or *Männerbunden*, who were bound together in a “comedy of innocence” to seduce prey. Girard believes that the communal guilt for the murder of a human victim and the subsequent “comedy of innocence” acted out in order to displace guilt is the origin of the gods and accounts for their ambivalent character, namely, both good and evil. After the murder of a scapegoated victim and the subsequent restoration of communal harmony, the victim was perceived to be the “god,” who was sent to restore order and unity through his or her death.

As a mediator between humans and animals, the shamans functioned like priests, but also like the murdered victims, who had been transfigured into gods through the telling of communal stories and myths. The connection between shamans, priests and sorcery was noted earlier, but also the connection between “shamanic illness” and the mythical versions of the dismemberment and death of the god Dionysos. By establishing a sympathetic link between themselves and the prey -- through imitating animal behavior --, not only were the shamans able to seduce the prey for the kill, but also attracted the responsibility of the kill and the collective guilt of the community onto themselves. In this sense, they mediated and directed the pharmeketic process for the benefit of the community, i.e. to displace communal guilt, so that the members of the community could carry on with life. Still, given their sympathetic understanding of Nature, early peoples realized that a human victim could be easily substituted in the animal’s place. This was

¹³²⁴ A recent article appeared in the Flemish magazine, *Feliz: De Wereld & Ik*, concerning the Hungarian shaman, Joska Soos. Yurek Onzia, “In de Ban van het Sjamanenritme: Oude Kennis voor nieuwe Tijden,” *Feliz: De Wereld & Ik*, nr. 1 (Antwerpen: IP Press, 2007) 75-82.

made evident through the performance of the shaman, whose own “shamanic illness” resembled the death and dismemberment of the sacrificial victim. Given the shamans’ deceptive role in the seduction of prey, shamans were not only respected, but also feared members of primitive communities.

A Theory on the Origin of Esotericism

Later, more sophisticated *Männerbunden* and shamans became responsible for passing on important information about killing-techniques. These were most probably stories about the original mythical violence, instruction for sacrificial preparation and rituals, which were necessary for survival of the community or the re-establishment of communal unity and harmony. The information about how to kill was kept “secret,” given the guilt and shame associated with the communal involvement in death. Burkert suggests that it is out of this primitive hunting milieu and the need to carry on the “comedy of innocence” that the Mystery Religions, myth as well as early Greek thought developed. This is because the early Greek Presocratic philosophers, poets and storytellers were also most probably themselves shaman, in Greek, *iatromantis*.

The possible connection between the Presocratic philosopher Empedocles, the Pythagoreans as well as the worshippers of Dionysos, the Orphics, was discussed. We showed that the legend of Empedocles’ suicide into the “alchemical forges” of the volcano Etna was a possible early example of the temporal interpretation of the pharmeketic processes at work in mythical divinization or transfiguration, but also alchemy, discussed above. According to Kingsley, Empedocles envisioned the subterranean fires of Etna as the creative origin of the world out of which material life emanated. The assumption would have been that a magical return to the creative *pur technikon*, or the origin of all there is, would start the alchemical processes of dissolution on his material body needed to release his spiritual soul into the ethereal realm of the gods. His legendary leap into Etna was meant to confirm his divinity, although this was met with skepticism even in his day. The self-sacrificial or suicidal interpretation of divinization was possibly mitigated by the more rational philosophies of Platonism and Aristotelianism and later, Neoplatonism; nevertheless, it remained a possibility.

Given its connections to a more animistic understanding of reality in which, for example, the Mystery Religions were born, the esoteric knowledge that Hermetism proposes to pass down to its adepts is structurally similar to the type of self-divinizing knowledge that ancient shamans and *Männerbunden* attempted to keep secret, namely, the knowledge and mediation of death and sacrifice. As many anthropologists and historians of religion suggest, “shamanism,” which is closely connected to the behavior of hunters, is indeed perhaps the perennial form of religion. Therefore, based on the theories of Girard and Burkert, we can say that together with the original

violence that catalyzed the founding of religion and civilization, shamanism or shamanic magic, which attempts to mediate between the community and the gods, is also closely connected to the violent origins of society, culture and religion. In so far as contemporary esotericism and New Age are dependent upon ancient and Renaissance Hermetism for its understanding of divinity and divinization, it maintains this potentially violently self-sacrificial or self-destructive interpretation and structure.

Hermetic Divinization

With the rediscovery of the *Corpus Hermeticum* in the Renaissance, the esoteric Hermetic Tradition was accepted by many intellectuals and syncretized with more traditional forms of Christianity. This was very easy to do since Hermetism and Christianity developed in similar intellectual milieus and show remarkable similarities. Renaissance Hermetism, which was intellectually dependent on ancient Hermetic *Gnosis*, became the bedrock of the Modern western esoteric tradition, which developed or perhaps even mutated through successive stages into contemporary holistic esotericism.

As discussed, the goal of most Hermetic occultists was and is to become a “god” or even “God.” However, how divinity was conceived and how one actually achieves divinity has greatly varied since Antiquity, depending on the political, social and metaphysical context within which the Hermetic adept lived. As shown, throughout the long history of Hermetic esotericism, given its connections to the animistic worldview of the Presocratic philosophers and *iatromantis*, the method of becoming a god or achieving divinity was always inherently connected to the idea of sacrifice and even self-sacrifice or suicide.

However, for the ancient Hermetic *magus*, who still conceived of his ascent to the One within the confines of a Platonic and Neoplatonic framework, the goal of divinization was probably participation *in* an ideal form of humanity, namely, the form of the primal man, *Anthropos*. The primal man was also understood to be Aion or Eternity, the Hermetic and alchemical solar deity, who was depicted as the serpent-eating lion [Deus] *Leontocephalus*. Gnostic myths of the fall of *Anthropos* into matter functioned as an explanation for the dual nature of humanity: humanity was immortal and divine because it was an image of the primal man, but mortal, due to primal man’s fall into matter.¹³²⁵ The otherwise Neoplatonic ascent was, therefore, influenced by the Gnostic myth of the fall of primal humanity into “evil” matter. It incorporated the myth of the *Anthropos*’ necessary suffering and sacrifice in order to reverse the effects of the fall. Man’s suffering and his “sacrifice” was not the result of real violence, but his

¹³²⁵ *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, 108.

contact with matter. His release from matter, not his rejection of violence and even self-violence, meant his redemption. As Rudolf says, “The destiny of the *Urmensch* is the guarantee of the redemption of the gnostic, in that he comprehends his essential membership in him. ...”¹³²⁶ The sign that the Hermetic gnostic had been divinized, after astral ascent through the spheres, was his vision of the Mind of God in the Mind of God. After the self-divinizing vision, he mysteriously participated in the true Form of humanity, but did not consider himself to be *the* humanity or the only true human. Death, or separation of the soul from the material body, would be the final stage of the divinizing process, where the soul was reabsorbed into the One.¹³²⁷

The early Neoplatonic conception of Hermetic divinity began to change in the Renaissance. First, demons and planetary divinities came to be understood psychologically, although this was always inherent in the Hermetic mental understanding of reality. Ficino realized that the planetary gods could be understood as “energies,” “forces” of nature and psychological data rather than actual material entities. Nevertheless, Ficino continued to work – albeit tenuously – within the theological framework of traditional Christian theism, which he conceived within the philosophical framework of Neoplatonism. As the translator of not only the *Corpus*, but also of the complete works of Plato, Ficino’s understanding of God maintained a philosophical transcendence, even though this was perhaps a more Neoplatonic, i.e. impersonal, understanding of transcendence than a traditionally Christian one, i.e. personal.

As the Renaissance progressed and developed into the initial stages of Modernity, the belief in divine transcendence – whether this was a Platonic or a traditional Christian one -- came under pressure.¹³²⁸ As we saw, the collapse of transcendence as well as the collapse of the universal into the individual reached a climax in the thought of Giordano Bruno. Unlike other Renaissance *magi* and alchemists, he no longer attempted to reconcile his pantheistic philosophy with traditional Christianity, which affirmed a world sustained by a Creator, who is concerned with the world, Bruno’s goal was the creation of a new Hermetic religion that would not only supersede Roman Catholicism, but also the newly formed “Protestant” Christianity. He would be its founder and the new Messiah.

¹³²⁶ *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, 108.

¹³²⁷ *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, 116. For example, Rudolf says that this idea corresponds to other Gnostic texts like the *Gospel of Truth*: “Just as man’s ignorance is dissolved of itself when he comes to know, as darkness dissolves when the light appears, so also the deficiency dissolves in the perfection. From this time on the (external) ‘form’ is no longer visible, but it will be dissolved in the union with the oneness ... at the time in which unity will perfect the ‘spaces’ (i.e. the aeons). From the unity each one will (again) receive himself. Through knowledge he will unify himself out of diversity into unity, devouring the matter in himself like a fire, darkness through light, death through life.”

¹³²⁸ Although we did not figure this into our study, we cannot underestimate the effect that the development and acceptance of Nominalism had on the European psyche. The study of Nominalism on Hermeticists and the possible influence of some form of Hermetism on Nominalists like William of Ockham would be helpful.

Bruno's philosophy and cosmology was supposed to function as the superstructure of his new world religion and government. Rejecting traditional Christianity and the traditional cosmology of his day, he collapsed God into the *cosmos*. In an attempt to return to the philosophy of the Pythagoreans and Empedocles, he reversed the Platonic Scale of Being and accepted terrestrial emanation as well as transmigration (reincarnation) to other stars and worlds. To some extent, this prefigured Darwinism, but also the nineteenth century theosophical doctrine of "progressive spiritual evolution," which became fully developed in New Age thought. Believing himself to be "God," and adhering to a radical form of philosophical monism, he subsequently also collapsed the *cosmos* into his own ego. This not only led to his reversal of the traditional doctrine of correspondences, where the human person is considered to be the microcosm of the macrocosm, but also the alchemical doctrine "As above, so below" to "As below, so above." That is, since he believed that reality is one (*Hen to Pan*) and he believed himself to *be* the One, instead of working on himself in order to change the world, he would need to work on the world in order to change himself. The method to achieve the transmutation of reality (i.e. which he considered to be himself) was spiritual alchemy, which he had not only psychologized, but also temporalized. By forcing the word into a downward spiral, through further violence, the situation in the world would eventually reach its lowest point, performing a conjunction of opposites on the world and/or himself. At the world crisis reached its nadir, supposedly, the world situation would reverse from the downward spiral towards a new or superior level of existence.

As a late Renaissance Hermeticist, who rejected Neoplatonism, Bruno no longer ascended through the spheres to enter into the region of the ogdoad, where he would have a vision of himself *in* the Mind of God. As Yates suggests, he had a vision of himself *as* Aion, who contained *all* of the powers of the *cosmos* within himself or in his mind. We suggest that this movement represents the beginning of the possibility of modern panenanthropism, which we saw clearly expressed in the thought of the "New Ager" Shirley MacLaine. Still, exactly *how* Bruno understood himself to be Aion, sitting in his Inquisition dungeon, is not clear. Did he believe that he was the One? Could others also achieve equality with Aion and receive the same divinized status as fragments of the Totality? This is a subject that deserves further research. However his Aionic vision was conceived, we do believe that his estimation of himself as the incarnation of the Mind of God, making him something like a walking and talking *anima mundi*, gave him sufficient courage to face death before the Inquisition. He would not die, but would only be "re-configured." Thereafter, he would transmigrate to a higher planet or star.

On earth, however, as a sorcerer or *pharmakeus*, he wanted to found his own religion. Therefore, we believe that he intimated that sacrifice is the foundation of religion and civilization. It was the role of the shaman/priest to mediate sacrifices. According to the Gnostic myth of the fall of the primal *Anthropos*, in order to reverse the effects of the evil descent into matter, *Anthropos* had to suffer and be dismembered, like Dionysos, as a sacrificial victim. In ancient times, although the Hermetic adept suffered mental torment, which might have been like an institutionalized version of “shamanic imbalance,” given the Neoplatonic framework within which it was practiced, the suffering of the primal man was understood symbolically. However, with the collapse of the Platonic realm of Ideal Forms, this could be understood more literally or biologically. Bruno’s reinterpretation of Ovid’s Actaeon Myth, his poem about the suicidal moth, his praise of Livy’s suicidal heroes and exhortation to go to Etna suggests that Bruno had indeed begun to interpret the Gnostic, Hermetic myth of the necessary suffering of the *Anthropos*, the deity Aion, temporally.

Therefore, as the high priest of his own religion, we suggest that it is not entirely improbably that Bruno willingly provoked the Inquisition to murder him, and make him (in his own mind) the original sacrifice of his new world religion and government. As a forerunner of psychological alchemy, the reversal of the law of correspondences as well as the alchemical dictum led to the temporalization of the premises of spiritual alchemy. By burning at the stake, he believed that he would go through the alchemical fire, be dissolved into the *prima materia*, and then transmuted into gold or into the Philosopher’s Stone. From his body a new religion would grow. Although he did not realize his goal per se, he did become something like the hero or “patron saint” of modern solipsistic religion. Bruno, therefore, represents a fundamental change in the conception of Hermetic divinization as potentially panenanthropic, but also of modern alchemical self-divinization as a potentially temporal or biological process.

Nevertheless, as suggested, this was always a possibility given Hermetism’s relationship to Presocratic philosophy, especially the philosophy and life of the *iatromantis* Empedocles, or at least his suicidal legend. Bruno is a pivotal figure in the history of western Hermetism, because his philosophy changed the way that some subsequent Modern Hermeticists would think of self-divinization. Without the Platonic and Neoplatonic framework, which functioned throughout the Renaissance, in the minds of some Modern Hermeticists, the primal man was no longer an ideal form of humanity to which one aimed, but never achieved on earth, but the only truly “human” existent that one must become in order to exist or obtain immortality.

Modern Hermetism and Contemporary Holistic Esotericism

As discussed, in the nineteenth (and early twentieth) century Hermetic occult revival, this line of thinking continued, although it took different forms. In the psychologist Carl Jung, not only did reality itself undergo psychologization, but also alchemy became explicitly psychologized. The processes at work in alchemy became the processes of the psychological structure of reality. Jung was well acquainted with the Hermetic and Gnostic Tradition. As seen, Jung's own experience of self-divinization was explicitly Hermetic or Aionic and his experience of near insanity mirrored the structure of "shamanic illness," mentioned above. As shown, Jung understood his bout of insanity as the necessary sacrifice of his limited ego-self, which preceded his transformation into an immortal Self. His "discovery" of the collective unconscious was in some way a psychological re-interpretation of the Hermetic doctrine of the primal man.

Although Hermetic, his experience was also influenced by his attraction to the philosophy and life of Friedrich Nietzsche. We propose that it was also mitigated by Nietzsche's own failure to pull himself out of his self-induced "shamanic illness" and "make himself into a god." On the one hand, Jung was inspired by Nietzsche's exhortation to become *Übermenschlich*, but as a medical doctor, he realized that Nietzsche had failed. According to Jung, Nietzsche suffered from Inflation. His limited ego had inflated to the infinite size of the Self (Higher Self). He had touched the collective unconscious -- the equivalent of the Hermetic primal man (who could also be encountered as Aion, Zarathustra, Dionysos, Christ, etc.) -- and, then, sacrificed his limited ego consciousness to the "One," or to the chaotic Dionysian underground of existence. However, after that, he failed to deflate. That is, according to Jung, he failed to realize that he was still Nietzsche and not Dionysos/Zarathustra; he was still just a man.

Nevertheless, instead of fundamentally questioning Nietzsche's premise, that is, his critique of traditional Christian morality and exhortation to create the *Übermensch* through the sacrifice or destruction of one's ego self and even the world (e.g. when the self is understood pananthropically), he only questioned his method. Jung did not reject the Hermetic idea of divinity. He did not consider that Hermetic self-divinization and psychological alchemy as such is dangerous to the health of the human psyche, but only that "inflation" is dangerous. Replacing the Platonic realm of Ideas with the ideal realm of the collective unconscious, Jung developed a symbolic interpretation to mitigate the potentially self-destructive effects of Hermetic and alchemical self-sacrificial self-divinization. Whether this is a solution is highly questionable.

In Alice Bailey and Annie Besant, however, we saw a more Brunian (even Nietzschean) and, hence, self-sacrificial interpretation of Hermetic and alchemical self-divinization. In fact, we showed that Besant knew the works of Bruno, considered him to be the Apostle and martyr of

Theosophy, and freely quoted from his *Gli eroici furori*. For them, the effects of sacrifice and self-sacrifice would be the creation of a higher humanity and civilization, a new world order in the New Age. According to Bailey, it is even the “Plan” of the “Hierarchy.” Although neither Bailey nor Besant achieved any significant political power, as shown, their ideas about the “holistic” nature of reality and humanity were not really dissimilar to the ideas of the National Socialists in Nazi Germany.¹³²⁹ This is not to suggest that Bailey, Besant or contemporary holists are fascists, only that the holistic paradigm of reality cannot be necessarily understood as a solution to the contemporary crisis of western spirituality.

Some Ethical Considerations

This little known philosophical similarity between contemporary holism and fascism is important, because often New Agers and contemporary esotericists contend that assent to the animistic or holistic paradigm -- in rejection of traditional Judeo-Christian theism -- will bring about a new culture of peace and harmony. They believe that should everyone come to the realization that All is One and divine (*hen to pan*), human beings (and perhaps also animals) will act or behave differently, that is, more peacefully. Organized religion will no longer be needed and everyone will act according to his conscience, which is inherently connected to the “Higher Self.” After the destruction of the old age, namely traditional Judeo-Christianity, the New Age can begin.

It is for this reason that we began our epilogue with Rashkolnikov’s dream in *Crime and Punishment*. Dostoevsky wrote the novel towards the end of the nineteenth century which, as we have shown, was formative for the spiritual concerns of contemporary holistic esotericism and New Age. If all are gods, then, all can decide what is right and wrong. Since all have become the “Self,” there is no objective principle or law that could stand outside of one’s ego-self to convince one otherwise. As “gods,” each one contains the power of cosmic destruction and creation and will use this power against those who do not agree. Disagreement with one’s paradigm is a sign of a lower status of consciousness and, hence, humanity.

These new “gods” are a law unto themselves and everything exterior to their own mind-consciousness is an illusion. There is, therefore, nothing or no one, who could convince them that they might be mistaken. The harrowing fate of Aleskei Nilych Kirillov in Dostoevsky’s *Devils* or *The Possessed* is a good example of this mistaken possibility. Right before committing the act of suicide, which he believes exemplifies the greatest act of self-will, an act that will spark others to do the same, he exclaims to the atheist revolutionary Peter Stepanovich Verhovensky:

¹³²⁹ Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism: Secret Aryan Cults and their Influence on Nazi Ideology* (New York: New York University Press, 2004) 17-32. Amongst other things, Goodrick-Clarke discusses how national socialists were influenced by Blavatsky’s theosophical worldview.

“If there’s no God, then I am God. ... If God exists, then everything is his will, and I can do nothing of my own apart from His will. If there’s no God, then everything is my will, and I am bound to express my self-will. ... Because all will has become my own.”¹³³⁰

C. A. Miller says in her article, “The Nihilist as Tempter-Redeemer: Dostoevsky’s ‘Man-God’ in Nietzsche’s Notebooks,” that out of all Dostoevsky’s atheistic characters, Kirillov is the one who is the most concerned with the necessity to create a new type of Man-God to replace the loss of belief in Jesus, the God-Man. As we have shown, the necessity of self-divinization is a concern that contemporary holistic esotericism and New Age share with Kirillov. Miller further says: “It is this ‘fourth temptation’ to an apocalyptic ‘Christianity without God’ or world-regenerative program for the self-divinization of natural man which distinguishes Kirillov’s atheism from the ‘Western’ revolutionary nihilism that is Dostoevsky’s major theme in the *Possessed* and lends it a specifically Nietzschean tendency and pathos.”¹³³¹

It is, therefore, perhaps not entirely insignificant that in 1888, Nietzsche had read Dostoevsky’s *Devils* in French translation, and commented on the above passage in his notebooks.¹³³² In part I of the *Devils*, Dostoevsky presents Kirillov’s philosophy of the creation of the new man and new world. His philosophical ideal not only resembles Nietzsche’s goal of breeding the *Übermensch*, but also the goal of so many other nineteenth century occultists right up to the theorists of the New Age Movement. Kirillov says to the narrator:

He who conquers pain and fear – will become God. Then a new life will dawn; there’ll be a new man; everything will be new.... History will be divided into two parts: from the gorilla to the destruction of God, and from the destruction of God to.... to the physical transformation of the earth and of man. Man will become God and will be changed physically. ...

The narrator comments that if it doesn’t matter whether man lives or dies, then, people will kill themselves. Kirillov responds that that doesn’t matter either. “They’ll have killed deception. Everyone who wants absolute freedom will have to dare to kill himself. ... He who dares to kill himself is God. He who kills himself simply to kill fear – will become God immediately.”¹³³³ A similar idea is expressed in Nietzsche’s *Götzen-Dämmerung* (1889) or *Twilight of the Idols*,

¹³³⁰ Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Devils*, trans. Michael R. Katz (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1992) 691.

¹³³¹ C. A. Miller, “The Nihilist as Tempter-Redeemer: Dostoevsky’s ‘Man-God’ in Nietzsche’s Notebooks,” *Nietzsche-Studien: Internationales Jahrbuch für die Nietzsche-Forschung*, Band 4 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1975)

¹³³² “The Nihilist as Tempter-Redeemer: Dostoevsky’s ‘Man-God’ in Nietzsche’s Notebooks,” *Nietzsche-Studien: Internationales Jahrbuch für die Nietzsche-Forschung*, Band 4, 169-170.

¹³³³ *Devils*, 121-122.

“Expeditions of an Untimely Man”, 36.¹³³⁴ The fact that Nietzsche read the *Devils* a year before he wrote *Twilight of the Idols* and two years before his final descent into insanity merits further reflection, although it is beyond our scope here. Dostoevsky’s friend, Vladimir S. Solovyov, neatly summed up Dostoevsky’s thoughts on the *Devils* and *Crime and Punishment*, and it deserves to be presented here:

The meaning of the first of these novels, for all its depth of detail, is very clear and simple, though many have not understood it. Its principal character is a representative of that view of things according to which every strong man is his own master, and all is permitted to him. In the name of his personal superiority, in the name of his belief that he is a force, he considers himself entitled to commit murder and does in fact do so. But then suddenly the deed he thought was merely a violation of a senseless outer law and a bold challenge to the prejudice of society turns out, for his own conscience, to be something much more than this – it turns out to be a sin, a violation of inner justice. His violation of the outer law means its lawful retribution from without in exile and penal servitude, but his inward sin of pride that has separated the strong man from humanity and has led him to commit murder – that inward sin of self-idolatry can only be redeemed by an inner moral act of self-renunciation. His boundless self-confidence must disappear in the face of that which is greater than himself, and his self-fabricated justification must humble itself before the higher justice of God that lives in those very same simple, weak folk whom the strong man viewed as paltry insects.¹³³⁵

The Ethical Relevance of the Judeo-Christian Tradition in the Age of Holism

Finally, at the conclusion of this work, we hope that the reader will realize that Judeo-Christian theism is not yet another dualistic metaphysical concept of reality, but also an ethical exhortation to recognize the inherent dignity of the other, regardless of how simple, weak or unintelligent. This Other transcends any utilitarian conception of the human person or of reality. “I am the Lord thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. Thou shalt have no other gods before me. ... Thou shalt not kill.” (KJV: Exodus 21: 2-3, 13) Authentic Christianity is not about denying its Hebrew roots, but about affirming them. It is not about returning to Egypt, the house of “secret knowledge” and slavery, but about leaving it.

¹³³⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols/The Anti-Christ*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (London: Penguin Books, 1990) 99-100. “To create a new responsibility, that of the physician, in all cases in which the highest interest of life, of *ascending* life, demands the most ruthless suppression and sequestration of degenerating life – for example in determine the right to reproduce, the right to be born, the right to live... To die proudly when it is no longer possible to live proudly. Death of one’s own free choice, death at the proper time, with a clear head and with joyfulness, ... all of this in contrast to the pitiable and horrible comedy Christianity has made of the hour of death. ... Here, every cowardice of prejudice notwithstanding, it is above all a question of establishing the correct, that is physiological evaluation of so-called *natural* death: which is, after all, also only an ‘unnatural’ death, an act of suicide. One perishes by no one but oneself. Only ‘natural’ death is death for the most contemptible reasons, an unfree death, a death at the wrong time, a coward’s death. From love of life one ought to desire to die differently from this: freely, consciously, not accidentally, not suddenly overtaken... We have no power to prevent ourselves from being born: but we can rectify this error – for it is sometimes an error. When one does away with oneself one does the most estimable thing possible...”

¹³³⁵ David McDuff, “Introduction,” Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s *Crime and Punishment* (London: Penguin Books, 1991) 12-13.

Despite all its erudition, so-called Christian Hermetism in the Renaissance was about returning to Egypt. In doing so, the early heterodox Christian Hermeticists returned to the house of bondage of the will to fate (*heimarmene*) and, ultimately, to the house of violence and sacrifice. As we recall, Jesus told his critics to learn what the words of the prophet Hosea (6:6) meant: “I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.” If they had understood what the prophet meant, they would not have condemned the guiltless. (Mt. 9:13; 12:7) In other words, they would not have made, nor would have agreed to make scapegoats or sacrificial victims. “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets and decorate the monuments of the righteous, saying, ‘If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have taken part with them in shedding the blood of the prophets.’ Thus you witness against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets.” (Mt. 23: 29ff)

Perhaps one of the messages of the Cross is this: we are all capable of “murdering the prophets,” and of murdering our “brother Abel.” Therefore, Christianity is not so much about the denial of the violent origin of the first “shamanic religions,” nor is it about romanticizing or mythologizing it as a “golden era.” Perhaps authentic Christianity is the courage to confront ourselves with the truth about the origin of religion, not merely as a historical fact, but as a truth about ourselves. Authentic Christianity requires not so much the ability to imagine ourselves as the One on the Cross, or even as the “good neighbour,” but to imagine ourselves as one who nailed the One to the tree. The canonical Gospel accounts reveal that this was the experience of the early Christians: of both Peter and of Paul. The knowledge or *gnosis* of the violence that lurks at the heart of religion and in the heart of every human being is meant to transfigure religion as well as humanity into the non-violent image of the crucified, but resurrected Lord, Jesus Christ. As Girard says, to recognize Jesus Christ as “God is to recognize him as the only being capable of rising above the violence that had, up to that point, absolutely transcended mankind. Violence is the controlling agent in every form of mythic or cultural structure, and Christ is the only agent who is capable of escaping from these structures and freeing us from their dominance.”¹³³⁶

¹³³⁶ René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, trans. Stephen Bann and Michael Metteer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987) 219.

Of course, we should not ignore the fact that “New Agers” are pointing out something very important. Life and religion should not be reduced to a set of moralistic rules. Life is a search for God and this search should not be bereft of an experience of God. The Church should be a place where people find God; yet, the institutional Church has not always succeeded in helping people to do this. This is a concern and an area for further reflection and development.

To conclude, the Apostle Peter claimed that those who put their faith and trust in Jesus Christ can become, by His divine power, “partakers of the divine nature (γενήσθε θείας κοινωνοί φύσεως).” (2 Pet 1:3-4) It seems that the transfiguration of the human by grace, or *theosis*, is a part of God’s plan of salvation for humanity; however, it is not something that humans achieve through the efforts of their own intellectual contemplation or out-of-body experiences that take them to ever higher worlds or levels of consciousness. The New Testament and the Church say that it is through the grace of a relationship with the Only Son of God that we are made holy. This relationship begins, however, when we honestly confront ourselves with Jesus’ sacrifice on the Cross, leading to conversion. Christians are not required to crucify themselves, or to sacrifice their ego-selves and go through mental imbalance. They should better sacrifice their perverted desires, which limit or take the lives of others.

Knowledge of God, or *gnosis*, is not, therefore, an abstract concept, gained through the occult secrets of hidden mystery cults and secret societies, or even through the mystical ecstasies of neo-shamans, but a highly personal giving and receiving that is better understood through the converted language of agapic love. It is by knowing and seeing Jesus Christ, through a loving relationship with Him that one comes to know and see the Father and achieves one’s destiny with and in God. This is why the Catholic Church continues to insist upon the centrality of the Eucharistic sacrifice and liturgy,¹³³⁷ although this too deserves further reflection and study.

To be deified by grace is one of the very great promises that God offers to humanity through his Only Begotten Son, Jesus Christ. However, it is a promise that seems to have been obscured, not only by the Reformation debates, but also by the acceptance of other forms of non-Christian, i.e. Hermetic, self-divinization that have been popular since the Renaissance. The distinction between New Age, or contemporary esoteric forms of self-divinization, and Christian transfiguration by grace is perhaps the subject of another dissertation. Nevertheless, the Church must take seriously the spiritual longings of many people, who are simply searching for God and for meaning. They have been led to believe that esoteric forms of spirituality will satisfy their longings. As we have tried to show, this is highly doubtful. Nevertheless, given the popularity of

¹³³⁷ *Lumen Gentium*, 11: “Sacrificium eucharisticum, totius vitae christianae fontem et culmen, participantes, divinam victimam Deo offerunt atque seipsos cum Ea.”

the holistic worldview, the Church and mature Christians have a long haul ahead of them to convince otherwise.

1 October 2007

Feast of Saint Thérèse de L'Enfant Jésus

Doctor of the Church

APPENDIX 1

Literary Esotericism

A. The Hermetic Revival, Romanticism and the Nineteenth Century

Although the UFO and hippie movements influenced the development of New Age, as suggested, Hanegraaff believes that the philosophical framework of New Age was already in place by the nineteenth century.¹³³⁸ He also says that, as postmodern religion, New Age inherited its de-traditionalizing and individualizing tendencies from the Renaissance and Reformation traditions that launched Modernity.¹³³⁹ As the twentieth and twenty first centuries represent the intensification of Modernity, as it was experience by *fin de siècle* nineteenth century Romantic philosophers, contemporary esotericism and the New Age Movement represent an intensification of the nineteenth century Romantic and hermetic occult revivals, with obvious mutations. The nineteenth century synthesis was a result of Romantic philosophy, the scientific revolution, Darwinism as well as a revival of Hermetic philosophy and practices, deriving from a small group of texts found within the *Corpus Hermeticum*.

The complicated process that ultimately evolved into New Age cannot be understood outside of the eighteenth and nineteenth century hermetic and occult revivals. According to Hanegraaff, what we today understand as New Age “religion” emerged out of *western* esoteric traditions, namely, Christian Hermeticism and Gnosticism, as they became “reflected ‘in the mirror of secular thought’.”¹³⁴⁰ With the natural process of secularization in the Modern Era, together with the advent of the popularity of Eastern mysticism, the western esoteric tradition became separated from its heterodox Christian roots, which first took root in the Renaissance, and became a “new syncretism of esoteric and secular elements.”

Although the Romanticism of the nineteenth century was a Counter-Enlightenment movement, perhaps it is useful to see these two periods (i.e. the Enlightenment and Romanticism) as two sides of the same coin. Geoffrey Clive asserts in *The Romantic Enlightenment*,

¹³³⁸ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998) 419, 217.

¹³³⁹ Wouter J. Hanegraaff, “New Age Religion,” *Religions in the Modern World*, ed. Linda Woodhead (London: Routledge, 2002) 249. The most important of these sources are nineteenth century Romantic philosophy, the nineteenth century hermetic and occult revival, nineteenth and twentieth century fascination with Eastern religions as well as early twentieth century Jungian and Para-psychology.

¹³⁴⁰ *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 520-521. He goes on to say: “All New Age religion is characterized by the fact that it expresses its criticism of modern western culture by presenting alternatives derived from a secularized esotericism. It adopts from traditional esotericism an emphasis on the primacy of personal religious experience and on this-worldly types of holism (as alternatives to dualism and reductionism), but generally reinterprets esoteric tenets from secularized perspectives. Since the new elements of ‘causality’, the study of religions, evolutionism, and psychology are fundamental components, New Age religion cannot be characterized as a return to pre-Enlightenment worldviews but is to be seen as a qualitatively new syncretism of esoteric and secular elements. New Age criticism of modern western culture is expressed to a considerable extent on the premises of that same culture.”

“Romanticism and Enlightenment must be seen together not merely as negations of each other, nor as dialectical opposites, nor as cause and effect in time, but, metaphorically speaking, as ego and alter ego in the same personality.”¹³⁴¹ With the Enlightenment project of making the world more “intelligible” and “manipulateable,” the process of secularization flourished and was not halted by the Counter-Enlightenment. By the nineteenth century, however, Europeans had grown skeptical of the Enlightenment project and attempted to escape its grasp through the re-discovery of various esoteric traditions, which were by nature more intuitive. The post-Enlightenment Romantics re-emphasized the importance of “feeling” and “instinct” over against “reason,” which became associated with institutionalized religion. This emphasis on “feeling” over against “reason” became the fertile soil of the nineteenth century occult revival, but also of postmodern and New Age thought. The structural connections between the nineteenth century and New Age are undeniable, prompting some to call New Age a Neo-Romanticism.¹³⁴²

New Age is a mutation of already ancient and rich heterodox traditions of western Christianity, which were successively revived and re-interpreted in the Renaissance, then again in the Enlightenment, and once again, in the nineteenth century Romantic period. With each successive “re-birth” and “re-interpretation,” the once religious, albeit heterodox, tradition became increasingly anti-traditional-Christian, but also, increasingly self-sacrificial. By the nineteenth century, New Age received its basic structure and the theme of the sacralization and divinization of the self, through the process of self-sacrifice, which in the works of some Romantic writers was an exhortation to suicide, became more explicit.¹³⁴³ The theme of self-destruction in order to create a better species than the one we have now was played out in popular nineteenth century literature. We have already mentioned the philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche.

¹³⁴¹ Geoffrey Clive, *The Romantic Enlightenment* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1960) 20.

¹³⁴² *New Age Religion and Western Culture*, 369. Hanegraaff takes this analysis from Hans Sebald.

¹³⁴³ Paul Heelas, *The New Age Movement: The Celebration of the Self and the Sacralization of Modernity* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, reprint 1999) 24. “All the great themes of contemporary Self-Spirituality are to be found in the works of the Romantics. Rousseau, then the German and English Romantics, then those on the other side of the Atlantic (including Emerson and Whitman): it is easy to find passage after passage dwelling on the sacralized self, sacralized human-kindness and sacralized nature,” but within a totally secular context.

B. Literary Esotericism

Like many New Agers, the desire of many Enlightenment-Romantic poets was to achieve a *return* or a reversal to a pre-Christian and “romanticized” world of pagan Antiquity. However, this was not a simplistic historical return to the past. As Nicholas Riasanovsky explains in *The Emergence of Romanticism*, “According to a well-known dialectical law, it is possible to return to the positive only through a negation of the negation itself.”¹³⁴⁴ Given the broad acceptance of some form of monism, reality became understood as cyclical. Therefore, as the “good period” starts to wane, in order to return to the good, one must negate it with an “evil period.” In fact, Riasanovsky’s “well-known dialectical law” is an “occult law,” commonly understood as “inversion” amongst alchemists. Inversion or *inversio* is understood as a “return” or a “reversal” of a given present state. According to Lyndy Abraham alchemical “inversion” should be seen as a “work against nature,” whose ultimate goal is the elevation of the same nature to a higher level.

The theme of reversal can be seen in the idea of the alchemical work as the ‘*opus contra naturam*’ – the work which must go against nature in order to progress, the work which must go backwards before going forwards. Old outmoded forms of body and thought must return or dissolve into their original state, the *prima materia*, before they can become purer, more beautiful forms. At the peak of the *opus* the glories of the *coniunctio* (*coagula*) fade and the alchemist finds himself in the throes of yet another dissolution (*solve*) or reverse movement of the work, which enables him to regain the original state of the *prima materia* from which a new form can be coagulated.¹³⁴⁵

Many Romantics deemed their own present state and culture decadent because it was dominated by traditional Christianity, so, they sought to invert it. Alchemically understood, an inversion should bring about a higher culture. It is perhaps for this reason that much of the Romantic literary tradition set itself up against the literary tradition of the Bible. The literary tradition of the Bible speaks about God as a totally Good Creator, Who is wholly “Other” to Creation. For modern esotericists, however, God is the Totality of all there is, and encompasses a balance between good and evil. God does not promote only the good, but also the evil, yet, remains God. Since God is seen as a balance of both good and evil, human virtue entails, therefore, the ability to balance good and evil in oneself in imitation of God, who one already is. The realization of one’s divinity includes not only the consciousness of one’s divinity, but also the realization of the nature of one’s divinity as both good and evil. In the nineteenth century, these themes were increasingly worked out in Romantic literature and in philosophy and became themes in later esoteric writings. It is to those themes that we now turn.

¹³⁴⁴ Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *The Emergence of Romanticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 95.

¹³⁴⁵ Lyndy Abraham, *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 108.

1. Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton

It is generally acknowledged that the occult fiction of the statesman and writer, Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, fuelled the imagination of many nineteenth century occultists and, hence, the occult revival itself. Bulwer-Lytton's influence shows that, in many ways, the occult revival was a *literary one*, a trend that has continued into the twentieth century in the form of science-fiction and fantasy novels. The recent successes of the fictions *The Celestine Prophecy*, the *Harry Potter* series, and *The Da Vinci Code*, which attempt to transmit esoteric knowledge through story lines, shows that also the New Age Movement has a literary flare. Although Lytton was himself well versed in the occult sciences, he held a skeptical stance and seems to have written novels as a form of thought experiments. This might also be the case with some of the above mentioned authors. Leslie Mitchell, Lytton's biographer, states that although many ridiculed his interests and his "metaphysical novels, he could reply that they were an attempt to work out in literature what contemporary scientists were actively engaged in exploring. For a man who hated to expose himself to public ridicule, it was a welcome form of defense and one which, given the state of Victorian knowledge, had plausibility."¹³⁴⁶ Lytton, like other Romantic figures, was interested in the occult and spent a great deal of time investigating occult phenomena, but rejected their supernatural nature, seeing the phenomenon more as a testament to the powers of the mind.

Lord Lytton influenced other occult figures and writers such as Madame Blavatsky though his fiction, *The Last Days of Pompey* and perhaps also *Zanoni*,¹³⁴⁷ but also Richard Wagner's opera *Rienzi*, through his novel of the same name. Wagner even attempted to meet Lytton in London, but failed.¹³⁴⁸ Hitler saw the opera as a teenager and confessed that it was during his viewing of *Rienzi*, where his visions of world domination began.¹³⁴⁹ According to Jocelyn Godwin in *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, Lytton's novel *Zanoni: A Rosicrucian Tale* (1842) was one of the most popular novels in Victorian England and is a virtual encyclopedia of occult knowledge, with the underlying belief of universal sympathy (i.e. that the human being is a microcosm of the macrocosm or stated alchemically, "as above so below"). Alexander Dumas, George Sand, and Dickens himself were all inclined to use Zanonean themes, that is, to explore the idea of sacrificing one's life, i.e. in the sense of suicide, to save one's friends. Godwin gives a good and concise account of the main themes in *Zanoni* that are relevant to our topic. The novel

¹³⁴⁶ Leslie Mitchell, *Bulwer Lytton: The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters* (London: Hambledon and London, 2003) 143.

¹³⁴⁷ S. B. Liljegren, *Bulwer-Lytton's Novels and Isis Unveiled*, Essays and Studies on English Language and Literature, XVIII (Cambridge: Harvard University Press) 33ff.

¹³⁴⁸ Robert W. Gutman, *Richard Wagner: The Man, His Mind and His Music* (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1968, 1990) 66.

¹³⁴⁹ Joachim Fest, *Inside Hitler's Bunker: The Last Days of the Third Reich*, trans. Margot Bettauer Dembo (New York: MacMillan, 2004).

has several main characters. The two most important are several thousand year old Chaldean initiates, and the remaining earthly members of a “high and ancient order.”¹³⁵⁰ It is useful to remember that Chaldea was also known as Babylonia or Persia, and was the center of the Zoroastrian worship of Ahura Mazda, the God of the prophet and first known *magi*, Zoroaster.¹³⁵¹ The oldest initiate is Mejnour and the youngest Zaroni, who is a mere five thousand years old.

According to Mitchell, in *Zaroni*, the Chaldean initiates -- as did Lytton -- hate the impiety of the French Revolution, atheism and the idea of equality or democracy,¹³⁵² perhaps because they went against Nature as they perceived it. According to Godwin, for the adepts, “the whole of the universe is a hierarchy, from the archangel to the worm; and because it is human inequality alone that holds out the hope of progress. ‘The wiser the few in one generation,’ says Zaroni, ‘the wiser will be the multitude in the next!’”¹³⁵³ As a *magus*, Zaroni, for example, can make contact with higher beings and does so with a spirit Adon-Ai, a name that resembles the Hebrew “Adonai,” the name used as a substitute for the Tetragrammaton, YHWH. Although both *magi* possess the same occult knowledge and powers and are even members of the same secret order, they still have different personalities. According to W. B. Yeats’ interpretation of the story, Mejnour is more *Übermenschlich* and has overcome himself through the denial of every human passion within himself. He remains unflinching before his goal of the creation of a new superhuman race, which he admits, must be won through victims, that is, sacrifice. Godwin renders the important quote of Mejnour from *Zaroni*.

To form a mighty and numerous race with a force and power sufficient to permit them to acknowledge to mankind their majestic conquests and dominion; to become the true lords of this planet, invaders perchance of others, -- masters of the inimical and malignant tribes by which at this moment we are surrounded; a race that may proceed, in the deathless destinies from stage to stage of celestial glory, and rank at last among the nearest ministrants and agents gathered round the Throne of Thrones. *What matter a thousand victims for one convert to our band.*¹³⁵⁴ (Italics mine.)

Zaroni, whose name refers to the sun god Apollo, is, on the other hand, less Stoic in the face of necessary victims. Mejnour, however, is closer to the Dionysian ideals that Friedrich Nietzsche professed and more *Übermenschlich*. From the novel’s theme, we gather that Bulwer-Lytton was exploring the consequences of occult ideals that were ruminating in Europe in his day. He would explore these ideas more fully and darkly *Vril: The Power of the Coming Race*. Mitchell explains

¹³⁵⁰ Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: the State University of New York Press, 1994) 125.

¹³⁵¹ Georg Luck, *Arcana Mundi: Magic and the Occult in the Greek and Roman Worlds* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1985) 6

¹³⁵² See Bulwer Lytton: *the Rise and Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*, 154-159.

¹³⁵³ *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 125.

¹³⁵⁴ *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 126.

that *The Coming Race* was one of the first examples of the now popular “science fiction genre.” It was also similar to another Victorian political and social commentary, *Gulliver’s Travels*, as it was set in a fictitious society, which was a safe distance from their own. “As Lytton observed, the book was ‘satirical upon many things now discussed political and social but very gravely so’.”¹³⁵⁵

The character Zanonni seems closer to Lytton’s own personality than the *Übermenschlich* Mejnour, and succumbs to human passions and falls in love. He loses “his occult powers in the process but gain[s] what his master Mejnour has rejected: love and death.”¹³⁵⁶ Adon-Ai eventually gives his blessing to Zanonni’s desire to die, which Godwin interprets as Zanonni’s entrance into Adon-Ai’s eternity. “Zanonni was entering the state of his spiritual master and becoming a ‘blessed spirit’ in his turn.” But before all this can take place, Zanonni must face and overcome the “Dweller of the Threshold,” who is “a hideous personification of one’s past thoughts and evil tendencies, which even if not perceived lures the aspirant towards disaster. In modern parlance, it is the subconscious. The only way to conquer it, as Zanonni teaches to Glyndon [an occult neophyte] and demonstrates himself, is by overcoming one’s fear and persisting in one’s resolve to cling to virtue, come what may.” In the end, two paths to enlightenment are opened: the path of Mejnour, which is the path of *Übermenschliche* indifference, and the path of Zanonni, which is, supposedly, the path of the child.¹³⁵⁷

2. Romantic *Übermenschlich*kiet

The *Übermenschlich* Mejnour is reminiscent of another romantic character, Manfred, created by the great dark romantic poet, and Lytton’s contemporary, Lord Byron (1789-1824). Lord Byron’s anti-Christian heroes, like Cain and Manfred, identified more with the first murderer Cain than with the first victim, Abel. Since many nineteenth century esotericists rejected the authority of the canonical Judeo-Christian tradition, we might interpret Byron’s works as a *literary attempt* to overthrow or reverse the literary influence of the Bible, experienced as *Sola Scriptura*. According to *Cain’s* (1821) “Preface,” Byron intended the play to be performed as a “Mystery,” as in the Mystery Religions. His dramatic poem *Manfred* was to be understood as a “mental theater.” In other words, these works were to be used as literary magical talisman’s, which could be integrated into one’s memory via the imagination. By doing this, one became more like Byron’s fictional heroes, “Cain” and “Manfred.”¹³⁵⁸

¹³⁵⁵ Bulwer Lytton: *The Rise and Fall of a Victorian Man of Letters*, 227-228.

¹³⁵⁶ *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 126.

¹³⁵⁷ *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 128.

¹³⁵⁸ David S. Thatcher, “Nietzsche and Byron,” *Nietzsche-Studien: Internationales Jahrbuch für die Nietzsche-Forschung*, Band 3 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1974) 141.

In Hugh Parry's *Thelxis: Magic and Imagination in Greek Myth and Poetry*, he explains that from ancient times, it was recognized that rhetorical language could evoke a kind of magical power over the listener or reader in its attempt to persuade and deceive. For example, the sophist Gorgias of Leontini, who had seen Empedocles heal with the magical formulas (*goêteuonta*), explained that "the power of speech with respect to the regime of the soul and the regime of drugs toward the condition of bodies are of the same order. For just as different drugs (i.e. *pharmakon*) drive out different humors from the body, some ending disease and others life, so too some words bring pain to the listener, others joy, others fear, others again boldness, and yet others by a sort of evil persuasion drug (*epharmakeusan*) the soul and utterly bewitch it (*exegoêteusan*). (Praise of Helen 14)."¹³⁵⁹ For example, in the fifth century BC, the Presocratic Simonides of Ceos (ca. 556 – 468 BC) had already developed a theory associating poetry to painting. This was "later succinctly summed up by Horace in his famous phrase *ut pictura poesis*. 'Simonides,' says Plutarch, 'called painting silent poetry and poetry painting that speaks; for the actions which painters depict as they are being performed, words describe after they are done.'"¹³⁶⁰

As magical talismans and literary *pharmakon*, *Manfred* and *Cain* were attempts to magically invert the literary Christian tradition, or at least drive it out of western culture and psyche. Like the serpent in Genesis, Byron's *Cain* introduced doubt about God's love and goodness into the popular sentiment.¹³⁶¹ Once this doubt took hold, *Manfred* was intended to promote the superiority of the magician's or alchemist's individual will to power over and against both the will of the transcendent God as well as the wills of demons.

a. The Death of God and the Birth of the *Übermensch*

In the poem *Cain*, the main protagonist is portrayed as the only thoughtful or reflective member of the first human family. He is resentful towards the deistic-type God for kicking them out of Paradise. While Adam and Eve have repented for listening to the words of the serpent, and continue to praise God, Cain refuses. He openly defies his parents and identifies with the side of serpent, saying, "The snake spoke *truth*: it *was* the tree of knowledge; it *was* the tree of life: -- knowledge is good, and life is good; and how can both be evil?" His "sympathy for the devil" causes Lucifer to appear to the resentful child, who tells Cain that he should not be ashamed of his thoughts, as they are noble. Like Cain, he too fought with God. Although he lost that battle, he is now one of the "souls who dare use their immortality – souls who dare look the Omnipotent

¹³⁵⁹ Hugh Parry, *Thelxis: Magic and Imagination in Greek Myth and Poetry* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1992) 150-151.

¹³⁶⁰ Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Pimlico, 1966, 1992) 42.

¹³⁶¹ Lord (George Gordon) Byron, "Cain," *Lord Byron: The Major Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986) 881.

tyrant in His everlasting face, and tell him, that His evil is not good!”¹³⁶² That is to say, if one identifies with Lucifer and chooses to fight with God, one gains the immortality attributed to his divine insolence. This developed into a typical Romantic theme and is perhaps the reason why the New Age “mother,” Helena Blavatsky felt led to start a literary magazine called *Lucifer* and Alice Bailey was inspired to start an organization with the name, *Lucifer Trust*. Later, she prudently renamed it *Lucis Trust*.

To re-experience a “Golden Age” -- which is a higher version of the original, when humans supposedly acted with the impunity of the gods, without fear of retribution or judgment from the God who would judge them for all eternity -- they would have to negate or destroy Him. The Romantics would have to orchestrate an ultimate act of hubris and become themselves the murderers of God. For example, eight years before Friedrich Nietzsche announced the “death of God” in the *Gay Science*, Albert Leighton Rawson (1828-1902), while speaking to more than a thousand people at the Freethinkers’ Convention of 1878, said: “It is proposed that I say a few words by way of an appetizer for your dinner. I wish to call your attention to the fact that the great Jehovah of the Jews is dead. Just when he lived or died is a matter of history not easily determined.”¹³⁶³ Rawson was, amongst other things, an adamant follower of the Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini. Rawson was also the founder of the Masonic order called the “Guardians of the Mystic Shrine” as well as a close friend of Helena Blavatsky and early member of the TS.

Clearly, the Enlightenment and Romantic occult experience was primarily a literary experience. Since many occultists were also radical nominalists and believed that the Bible was merely another literary construct, the best way to “do the deed” was through literature. In order to progress, they must go backwards, that is, “dissolve” Christianity in literature. They must murder YHWH through words in order to allow a new, more beautiful literary paganism to emerge. For example, Friedrich Nietzsche’s overt declaration of the “death of God” in *The Gay Science* (1882) or *Die Fröhliche Wissenschaft*, § 125 and later in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1888-1885) can be seen as one of these literary attempts to murder God, in the same dark romantic tradition of Lord Byron, but also in the tradition of “freethinking” occultists like Rawson, mentioned above. According to Girard, we should see Nietzsche’s “Death of God” as a murder and not as a gentle passing away of a feeble “god.”

All mythological heroes are fundamentally the same. If you call them Cain, however, your interpretation of mythology is not the same as if you call them Dionysus. Nietzsche is not

¹³⁶² “Cain,” Act 1, 888.

¹³⁶³ As quoted in Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 285-286.

satisfied with ignoring the Bible in the sense that his time is beginning to do; he is trying to *reverse* it and to rehabilitate the violence of Cain. Cain, Romulus, and Dionysus commit the same deed and, from the standpoint of the Gospels, they must be given the same name. It is not the name of a monotheistic god but the name of the one ‘who was a murderer from the beginning’ (John 8:44), Satan, a word that really means the false accuser, whereas the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit of the Christians, really means the lawyer for the defense, the one who turns all martyrs into witnesses to the truth of the Gospels, therefore to the untruth of their own violent deaths.¹³⁶⁴ (Italics mine)

Girard also shows that Nietzsche’s portrayal of God’s death in the *Gay Science* (GS) § 125 is not an act committed by a single individual, but is a *collective murder*, in which everyone within modern liberal western culture had participated.¹³⁶⁵ According to Nietzsche’s madman, although everyone participated in the murder of God, they could not recognize their own responsibility in his death, still going to Church as a part of a social or cultural obligation. The madman came too early, before humanity could digest the significance of their deed. “This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars – *and yet they have done it themselves.*”¹³⁶⁶

Nietzsche believed that human beings cannot live without “a god,” but also that they must, therefore, be in the position to create new gods, new rituals and new myths in the place of the old ones. In the text, Nietzsche exhorts his followers to replace Christianity with something else, even though he never fills this in. This was a challenge that the “New Age fathers,” like Carl Jung, took very seriously.¹³⁶⁷ For Nietzsche, to have the audacity to murder God, in order to measure up to such a deed, one must consider oneself already God. One must be willing to accomplish such a terrible deed for the sake of the generations to come. Those who are born after the “first God-murderers” will be gods and take part in a higher history.¹³⁶⁸ According to Girard:

Gods do not have to exist really in order to be murdered. As a matter of fact, unless they are first murdered they will never exist. Unlike ordinary beings who can exist only if they are not

¹³⁶⁴ René Girard, “Nietzsche versus the Crucified,” *The Girard Reader*, ed. James G. Williams (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1996) 251.

¹³⁶⁵ “Nietzsche versus the Crucified,” *The Girard Reader*, 256.

¹³⁶⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974) 182. “The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes ‘Whither is God?’ he cried; ‘I will tell you. *We have killed him* – you and I. All of us are his murderers.”

¹³⁶⁷ This belligerent trend continues in contemporary esoteric writings. See, for example, Sankara Saranam, *God without Religion: Questioning Centuries of Accepted Truths* (East Ellijay, GA: The Pranayama Institute, 2005) 188ff. Saranam says in a section entitled, “An Alternative to Organized Religion” that “Just as a stream of myths have seeded social change throughout human history, so can a new myth invigorate social reform in our times. To succeed, attempts to formulate and introduce a new myth require understanding how social reform occurs and how mythologies operate.”

¹³⁶⁸ *The Gay Science*, 181. “How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed to great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us – *for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto.*” (Italics mine)

murdered, gods begin to exist as gods, at least in the eyes of men, only after they have been murdered. ... And the crime is so great that new festivals of atonement, new sacred games will have to be invented. New rituals will undoubtedly appear. The consequences of God's murder are religious, therefore, purely religious. The very deed that seems to put an end to the religious process is really the origin of that process, the sum total of it, really, the religious process par excellence. These new festivals and sacred games will certainly reenact the collective murder of God. They will be sacrificial rites. The death of God is also his birth.¹³⁶⁹

b. The Copycat Effect of Young Werther

As suggested, the "death of God," which would result in the possible birth of a "New Man" or super-human *Übermensch*, is a nineteenth century literary fantasy. The similar goals in New Age that anticipate a New Age and new holistic culture, to make oneself into a god, to rediscover the "divine" within oneself, is a similar tale. As we have suggested, this fancy tale actually began before Nietzsche's more explicit proclamations of "God's death" and is connected to the Enlightenment and Romantic poetic Hermetic revivals, which are the spiritual parents of the New Age movement. Like many New Agers, as monists and naturalists, many Romantics saw themselves as already "god," who could themselves create reality through their works of art. Because they believed that anything transcendent to themselves and to the *cosmos* was an illusion, the ultimate transgression, but also the ultimate "act of god-making" would be, of course, to murder themselves. The creation and destruction of themselves would be the ultimate expression of their own self-will.

The work that cracked Pandora's Box was Johann Wolfgang Goethe's *Die Leiden des jungen Werthers* (1774). In the novel, which took Europe by storm, Werther is a young artist, who falls in love with Lotte. She, however, is already engaged to another man, Albert. At first, he accepts his fate, and tries to get Lotte out of his mind. However, when he sees her with Albert, it sends him into deep depression that ultimately leads to his tragic – and melodramatic – suicide. *The Sorrows of Young Werther* created a fad of Werther imitations, and became known as the first real "copycat suicides," even though they were only imitating a literary fiction! Although Goethe lived to a ripe old age and died a natural death, as a Goethe biographer explains, his admirers were different: "Werther fever, a Werther fashion – young men dressed in blue tail coats and yellow waistcoats – Werther caricatures – Werther suicides."¹³⁷⁰

The drive to imitate Werther's destructive behavior can be explained through Girard's theory of mimesis. Mimetic desire is the combination of appropriative desire (i.e. the desire to have what the other has or greed) with modeling (i.e. the attempt to "be" or to "be like" the victim). Girard says that people create models and imitate them, because they desire to posses

¹³⁶⁹ "Nietzsche versus the Crucified," *The Girard Reader*, 256-257.

¹³⁷⁰ Richard Friedenthal, *Goethe: His Life and Times* (London: Weidenfeld, 1993) 128.

what the model has, but ultimately, to be what the model is. They desire to absorb the model's being into their own in order to become what the model is.¹³⁷¹ The "object" that the model has, and what the disciple-turned-rival desires to possess, merely mediates the ultimate desire to be what and who the model is. Although we cannot go into a detailed analysis here, Goethe created a fictional model, who was, at least in the story, a lesser rival. Werther desires to possess Lotte, because of his admiration for Albert. According to Girard's theory, when the object cannot be obtained by peaceful means, then, the rival resorts to some sort of violence. In the case of Werther, the violence is committed against himself. Instead of killing his rival Albert, he ends his own life, because he cannot obtain Lotte, because he can never measure up to Albert. Therefore, he becomes immortalized in Goethe's literary work of art, even though he never existed.

Not only was Goethe a powerful writer, but he was also well versed in the occult sciences, and understood how they play upon human desires via the imagination. As Parry explained, the ancient Greeks understood clearly how rhetoric functioned magically. Language could create a magical power over the listener or reader in its attempt to persuade, but also to deceive. Certain types of language could act as a *pharmakon*, either as a medicine or a poison, either curing the patient or sending him to his death. In this case language could act as an evil persuasion drug, as a *epharmakeusan* and totally bewitch (*exegoêteusan*) the soul.¹³⁷² We suggest that for many young Romantics, *The Sorrows of Young Werther* acted as a kind of evil literary drug, or an *epharmakeusan*, persuading the most susceptible to their deaths. Werther shows the powerful effect fiction can have on the imagination to induce human beings to carry out potentially self-destructive acts on their flesh and blood, but we should not forget that fiction can also inspire a great deal of good.

c. Manfred vs. Faust

Goethe's contemporary, Lord Byron attempted to express the same primordial rebellion in his dramatic poem, *Manfred* (1817), mentioned earlier. Manfred is supreme dark hero, a self-divinized *magus*, who defies both the deistically interpreted transcendent God as well as demons. He proclaims to the *genius*, who comes to take his soul to hell, "I have not been thy dupe, nor am thy prey – *but was my own destroyer*, and will be my own hereafter" (Italics mine).¹³⁷³ Michael Allen Gillespie, in *Nihilism Before Nietzsche*, points out that *Manfred* became the dark Romantics' new model for a tragic hero, supplanting Goethe's *Faust*.¹³⁷⁴ Riasanovsky confirms

¹³⁷¹ René Girard, *Deceit, Desire & the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*, trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1965) 53.

¹³⁷² *Thelxis*, 150-151.

¹³⁷³ Lord (George Gordon) Byron, "Manfred," Act III, in *Lord Byron: The Major Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, 2000) 313.

¹³⁷⁴ Byron published *Manfred* in 1817, and had been inspired by Goethe's Dr. Faust.

the self-destructive nature of the Romantic model and cites a classic assessment by Virgil Nemoianu:

The core of the romantic model and purest form – the possible – impossible expansion of the self to a seamless identification with the universe – is unstable and explosive... The paradisiacal recovery of unity, the obliteration of analytical division, cannot be maintained long in purity, not even as an impression or as an aim. The brew does not age well, not because it is too weak, but because it is too strong. The almost mystical intensity of core romanticism cannot survive long. The model is too ambitiously designed. This explains why early death becomes almost a norm. *Core romanticism results in suicide, misadventure, disease, drugs, madness, and the guillotine* as exemplified by Kleist and Shelley, Byron and Novalis, Keats and Hölderlin, and Saint-Just – or alternatively deterioration and silence.¹³⁷⁵ (Italics mine)

We will not go into the long history of the legends of the infamous Dr. Faustus here, but only that Goethe finished the first part of his masterpiece in 1808. He completed the second part in 1832, eight years after the death of Byron in 1824, showing that the theme captivated him for the greater part of his later life. For many Romantics, Goethe's *Faust*, Part II was a disappointment. Even though they, as well as Byron, admired the first part, many felt that Goethe had caved in to Christian morality as death approached. From *Ecce Homo* ("Why I am so clever," § 4), we gather that the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche was of the same mindset as his contemporary Romantics.

I must be profoundly related to *Byron's* Manfred: all these abysses I found in myself; at the age of thirteen I was ripe for this work. I have no word, only a glance, for those who dare to pronounce the word 'Faust' in the presence of Manfred. The Germans are *incapable* of any notion of greatness; proof: Schumann. Simply from fury against this sugary Saxon, I composed a counter-overture for *Manfred* of which Hans von Bülow said that he had never seen anything like it on paper, and he called it rape of Euterpe.¹³⁷⁶

First, to recall Goethe's story, the magician and alchemist Faust wants not just to know everything, but also to experience everything. In order to gain his prize, he wagers with Mephistopheles, or the devil, in order to achieve his aims. Faust is never satisfied and his wager hinges on his supposed infinite desire or will, which for a magician is a sign of his divinity. This aspect of Faust's personality is known in heaven and to Mephistopheles, "a spirit of perpetual negation."¹³⁷⁷ Mephistopheles remarks to the Lord: "On all the joys of earth he wants to feed/and pluck from heaven the very brightest star. /He searches high and low, and yet however far /he roams, his restless heart returns dissatisfied."¹³⁷⁸

¹³⁷⁵ Quoted in *The Emergence of Romanticism*, 81.

¹³⁷⁶ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 701-702.

¹³⁷⁷ Cf. *Faust* I, "Faust's Study: Faust enters with a poodle," Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: First Part of the Tragedy*, trans. John R. Williams (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1999) 38ff.

¹³⁷⁸ Cf. *Faust* I, "Prologue in Heaven," 20ff.

After the first encounter between Faust and Mephistopheles, when Faust is presented with the possibility to experience all there is to experience, Faust himself proposes that should Mephistopheles find some pleasure where Faust's desire lingers, that is, his desire fails to be divinely infinite, then, Mephistopheles can obtain his immortal soul. Knowledge has become tedious; he now wants to explore the heights and depths of passion and sensuality.

Reveal your wonders and your miracles to me
Behind impenetrable veils of mystery!
We'll plunge into the headlong rush of time,
Into the whirling turmoil of each day.
Let pain or joy, the monstrous, the sublime,
Success or failure, triumph or vexation
Follow each other as they may;
Such restless striving is our true vocation.

(*Faust I*, "Faust's Study: Faust and Mephistopheles")

At the end of Faust's life, he has experienced everything, from the anguish of being the cause of the death of his lover Gretchen as well as his child by her to the sensual pleasures of being married to Helen of Troy. Only after realizing a scheme to reclaim land from the sea in order to create a utopian paradise on earth, which would be considered as Faust's legacy to humanity, does he dwell on his accomplishments. "Then to the moment could I say:/Linger you now, you are so fair!/Now records of my earthly day/ No flight of aeons can impair -- /Foreknowledge comes, and fills me with such bliss, / I take my joy, my highest moment this." Upon this statement, Mephistopheles wins the wager and claims Faust's soul. "Him would no joys content, no fortune please,/And thus he wooed his changing fantasies./ This wretched, empty moment at the last / He sought, poor wretch, to grasp and hold it fast."¹³⁷⁹

However, instead of allowing Mephistopheles to take his soul to hell, a chorus of angels descends and recaptures Faust's soul. He is taken to heaven, where he is reunited with Gretchen. Although *Faust I* was greatly admired for its audacity and even blasphemous shade, *Faust II* was seen as a failure on the part of Goethe to come to the edge of the abyss and, like the Presocratic philosopher Empedocles, jump into the fiery alchemical forges of literary self-destruction.

For many, Byron's *Manfred* far better encapsulated their heroic values against traditional morality and Christianity. As Gillespie explains, "That Faust should be saved seemed the height of absurdity. In their view, Faust was an imperfect hero, insufficiently devoted to absolute subjectivity and freedom, too concerned with reconciliation with the world, too banal in his

¹³⁷⁹ *Faust II*, Act V, "The Great Outer-Court of the Palace," Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust: Part Two*, trans. Philip Wayne (London: Penguin Books, 1959) 267ff.

ultimate aspirations and finally too petty in his evil to serve as their model for a higher humanity.”¹³⁸⁰ Instead of making Faust even more demonically inspired and evil than Manfred, Goethe seemed to recoil in *Faust II*, realizing that his journey was leading towards self-destruction, regardless of its almost irresistible attraction. In fact, the dark Romantics rejected Goethe’s rejection of self-destruction.

Manfred and Faust are similar, however, their fundamental understanding of good and evil are different. “Like Faust, Manfred recognizes the inadequacy of all traditional knowledge and seeks a deeper understanding of the world through magic. Such knowledge is attained not through the observation of the natural world or the deductions of logic, but through immediate intuition of feelings which are connected to the ‘spirits of the unbounded universe’ (1.1.29). Such intuition, however, is constrained by social mores, and it is thus only when these bonds have been broken that we can grasp the truth. Only then can we feel truly. Manfred attains such superhuman knowledge and freedom but only at a terrible price. To know the world in all its depths, he must shatter its most sacrosanct barriers.” For Goethe, good will eventually triumph over evil, for Byron, evil retains its *status quo* in the balance of the Totality. Like Faust, knowledge was not enough for Manfred. However, in *Faust II*, Faust himself reconciles himself with the world and in a sense with God, who is more than himself. Manfred, on the other hand, “is thoroughly isolated from the world and other men. He is his own hell, and a hell that he cannot escape or even want to escape, because escape can be achieved only by sacrificing his superhuman freedom and knowledge, by giving up the supremacy of the I that his crime established.”¹³⁸¹ He sets out to plunge the heights and depths of sensual experience, regardless of who gets in his way.

But grief should be the instructor of the wise;
Sorrow is knowledge: they who know the most
Must mourn the deepest o’er the fatal truth,
The Tree of Knowledge is not that of Life.
Philosophy and science, and the springs
Of wonder, and the wisdom of the world,
I have essayed, and in my mind there is
A power to make these subject to itself – but the avail not ...
Good, or evil, life
Powers, passions, all I see in other beings,
Have been to me as rain unto the sands,
Since that all-nameless hour. I have no dread,
And feel the curse to have no natural fear,
Nor fluttering throb, that beats with hopes or wishes,

¹³⁸⁰ Michael Allen Gillespie, *Nihilism before Nietzsche* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995) 122.

¹³⁸¹ *Nihilism before Nietzsche*, 123.

Or lurking love of something on the earth.—

(*Manfred*, 1, 1, 9-26).

In *Faust*, Part II, the *magus* Faust becomes humbled towards the end of his life, and acknowledges the beauty of the world and human achievement. In contrast to his days of juvenile disdain and impatience with the world, he realizes that he desires to linger on earth. The *magus* Manfred, however, retains his titanic pride and aura of “nobility” in the “difficult air of the iced mountain top” where he lived (Cf. *Manfred*, 2, 2, 63). Unlike Faust, he remains indifferent to the created world and disdains human accomplishment. Gillespie says that “*Faust*, as we have noted, is at best a sentimental tragedy. *Manfred*, on the contrary, is the supreme tragedy of Romanticism, the tragedy of the I in its search for absolute freedom and knowledge. This tragedy is not the result of some dark and incomprehensible fate, nor is it the result of some flaw of character. Manfred wills his tragedy, wills his suffering and destruction. He and no one else makes him a monster. It is precisely this willed character of his fate, however, that reveals the height of the new possibility for greatness that he represents.”¹³⁸² Manfred only brings to a logical conclusion the sentiments of *Cain*, discussed a bit earlier. As Byron’s Cain laments: “Life! – Toil! And wherefore should I toil? -- Because my father could not keep his place in Eden. What had I done in this? -- I was unborn, I sought not to be born; nor love the state to which that birth has brought me.”¹³⁸³ Laurence Senelick, in *The Prestige of Evil: The Murderer as Romantic Hero from Sade to Lacenaire*, explains this mindset more clearly:

Cain, the primal slayer, destroyed a quarter of the world’s population by his wanton act, and thus became the first rebel, the first pariah, the first murderer. It is this Judaeo-Christian tradition which informs the modern European attitude towards murder as the worst of offenses. It is associated with Satan, whose responsibility for the eviction of Adam and Eve carried over to his consequent responsibility for their mortality. The loss of life cannot be compensated in this world, so that murder is the greatest personal injury; it deprives society of a member, so that it is the greatest public injury. But most important, murder is the supreme affront to the Creator.¹³⁸⁴

By the nineteenth century, suicide, euphemistically understood as self-sacrifice, became the primary mode of expressing one’s own divine titanic will and equality to the *cosmos*. Gillespie says, “Both Faust and Manfred seek to become something more than human, both come under the spell of the demonic, both are dominated by it, and both are driving into the vilest iniquity. Despite his crimes, Faust can be saved because the spirit of negation which entices him is always

¹³⁸² *Nihilism before Nietzsche*, 125.

¹³⁸³ “Cain,” Act I, 885.

¹³⁸⁴ Laurence Senelick, *The Prestige of Evil: the Murderer as Romantic Hero from Sade to Lacenaire* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1987) vii – viii.

in the service of the good. Manfred, on the contrary, is doomed beyond all hope of redemption because the demonic force that empowers him is inextricably linked to evil.”¹³⁸⁵ In the end, Byron himself was unable to live up to his own *Übermenschlich* ideal and died a rather ignoble death in Greece, while being sucked of his life-blood by leeches. Ironically, Byron went to the land of the ancient gods in order to organize his own heroic death; however, according to Jerome J. McGann:

Byron’s final trip to Greece would quickly assume mythic proportions in an already profoundly mythological life. There can be little doubt that Byron went to Greece either to emerge a hero from the struggle or to die a hero in its cause. In the event, he died in a military cot in an obscure room in a small town in western Greece – of fever and the complications it induced in a body already debilitated by a life lived always at extremes and in excess. He never saw battle, and in his own mind he would have judged his later fling at heroism an utter failure.¹³⁸⁶

¹³⁸⁵ *Nihilism before Nietzsche*, 122.

¹³⁸⁶ Jerome J. McGann, “Introduction,” *Lord Byron: The Major Works*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, 2000) xxii.

APPENDIX II

Bachofen's Theories of Matriarch and Patriarchy

A. The Matriarchal/Patriarchal Dialectic

Now we will turn to the theories of Johann Jacob Bachofen (1815-1887) on the development of human culture. Although little known today, his dialectical understanding of reality has had a tremendous influence on our contemporary culture, especially the streams of the feminist and New Age movements, which are Jungian progeny.

According to Richard Noll, Bachofen was the notable progenitor, or better, formalizer of the theory that the origins of human society were matriarchal.¹³⁸⁷ Today, Bachofen is hardly studied, but his theories were highly influential and well-known in the late 19th century. Although he was the first person to clearly express the theory, we must add that fragments of it were already floating around in the early 19th century. Bachofen claimed that he developed his theory of the origins of prehistorical society through his study of Roman tombstones. In *Versuch über die Gräbersymbolik der Alten* (1859), the same year that Darwin published his *Origin of Species*, he posited the rather pedant theory that overt symbols cover ideas that are “not overtly present in them.” As a kind of bio-sexual perennialism, he claimed that underlying the present “patriarchal” civilization was a predominantly “matriarchal” one, where sexual promiscuity was the norm. Structurally similar to Haeckel, the rudiments of the sexually promiscuous matriarchal society had been covered by a sexually prohibitive patriarchal dogmatic Christianity. In this we see the embryo of the idea that in order to recover the pathos and sexual libido of the original religion of humanity, one would need to excavate below the prudish Judeo-Christian sediment that had covered it.

In his *Mutterrecht und Urreligion* (1861), Bachofen proposed another theory that civilization had passed through three phases. His theory was remarkably similar to the “Hegelian theory of development through dialectical evolution,” who wrote his *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes* in 1807. At present, human history found itself in the patriarchal stage of human development, which he associated with the Greek sun god, Apollo. In his view, human pre-history began with a “tellurian phase,” a period associated with the earth or the chthonic realms. It was the period of hunting and gathering, which was also called the “hetaerist phase.” In this phase, human beings practiced something like a “communal marriage.” Everyone was allowed to

¹³⁸⁷ Richard Noll, *The Jung Cult: Origins of a Charismatic Movement* (New York: Free Press Paperbacks, 1994) 160-178.

have sex with everyone else, without any social constraints or cares about paternity.¹³⁸⁸ According to Bachofen, in this phase, females did not know who the fathers of their children were¹³⁸⁹ and marriage or fidelity to one partner was interpreted as a “deviation from the natural law.”¹³⁹⁰ In short, although called “matriarchal,” it was a macho man’s paradise as in a juvenile male wet-dream. In *Mutter Recht*, Bachofen claims that at a certain time, the situation became intolerable for women, because they were continually harassed by men. Hence, they were forced to bind together against the men and create a new society.

Bachofen’s matriarchal-patriarchal dialectic is structurally similar to the occult dialectic mentioned earlier and the destructive and creative processes of alchemy. This dialectic is also perceptible Bruno’s *Gli Eroici Furori*, where Tansillo says: “But he who is quick, both seeing and hearing, and who, considering evil and good, estimating the one and the other as variable, and consistent in motion, mutation, and vicissitude, in such wise that the end of one opposite is the commencement of another, and the extreme of the one is the beginning of the other;...”¹³⁹¹

By reaching the lowest ebb of one phase, the next phase of cultural history is brought about. Hence, after the “hetaerist phase” hit rock bottom, a so-called “matriarchal phase” would be launched, where “women took over the rule of society as well as the exclusive ownership of children and property.” Bachofen associates this phase with the moon and the Eleusian mysteries of Demeter and her chthonic daughter, Persephone or Kore. In Bachofen’s own words:

Traced back to the prototype of Demeter, the earthly mother becomes the mortal representative of the primordial tellurian mother, her priestess and hierophant, entrusted with the administration of her mystery. All these phenomena are of a piece, manifestations of one and the same cultural stage. This religious primacy of motherhood leads to a primacy of the mortal women; Demeter’s exclusive bond with Kore leads to the no less exclusive relation of succession between mother and daughter; and finally, the inner link between the mystery and the chthonian-feminine cults lead to the priesthood of the mother, who here achieves the highest degree of religious consecration.¹³⁹²

As the dialectic goes, the beginning of matriarchy signaled the transition from hunting to agriculture. On a sexual level, male members of society are still free to have various sexual relations, without really being forced to take responsibility for their progeny. Ultimate

¹³⁸⁸ George Boas, “Preface,” *Myth, Religion, and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J. J. Bachofen*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967) xiii – xviii.

¹³⁸⁹ Richard Noll, *The Aryan Christ: The Secret Life of Carl Jung* (New York: Random House, 1997) 85.

¹³⁹⁰ J. J. Bachofen, “Mother Right,” *Myth, Religion and Mother Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967) 95.

¹³⁹¹ Giordano Bruno, *The Heroic Enthusiasts: an Ethical Poem*, Part I and II, trans. L. Williams (London: George Redway, 1887) 57. Tansillo goes on to say, “whose spirit is neither depressed nor elated, but is moderate in inclinations and temperate in desires; to him pleasure is not pleasure, having ever present the end of it; equally, pain to him is not pain, because by the force of reasoning he has present the end of that too. So the sage holds all mutable things as things that are not, and affirms that they are no other than vanity and nothingness, because time has to eternity the proportion of the point to the line.”

¹³⁹² “Mother Right,” *Myth, Religion and Mother Right*, 86-87.

responsibility for children was the “mother’s right,” while the men were free to do as they pleased. Bachofen writes in a mythmaking style, devoid of any actual historical evidence, other than a few terracotta figurines and decontextualized tombstone markings. He praises this matriarchal period before “patriarchy” associating it with Presocratics like Pythagoras. Showing his sympathy with Haeckel and other 19th century occult-scientists, he also hails it as a period of “justice and peace” – at least, as we will see, for men. Despite rampant and ironically patriarchal negligence for children, “Matriarchy becomes a sign of cultural progress, a source and guarantee of its benefits, a necessary period in the education of mankind, and hence the fulfillment of a natural law which governs peoples as well as individuals.”¹³⁹³

B. The Intermediary Dionysian Period

Furthermore, the matriarchal period has two sides: the Demetrian and the Dionysian. The side that corresponds to Demeter is the side of matriarchy that “erupts” out of the earlier chthonic or hetaerist phase. The side that corresponds to Dionysos is what some commentators call the “transitional phase” between Demeter and “patriarchy,” which is the purely Apollonian phase. It is clear from Bachofen’s writings that he sees “the Dionysian” as the flip-side of “Amazonian matriarchy,” and located between Apollonian “patriarchy.” Ironically, it is also an extreme period of feminine belligerence, and he associates Dionysos with Aphroditic-hetaeric motherhood.¹³⁹⁴ Beyond simple logic, although Bachofen associates Dionysos with an overemphasis on the “male principle”¹³⁹⁵ -- meaning the phallus -- and the beginning of “father right,” the Dionysian is properly considered as “matriarchal.” It resembles the former hetaerist or tellurian period of chaos and free-sex. Ironically, the Dionysian is a reaction to feminine oppression, i.e. by the mothers of all the illegitimate children, and is the transitional phase that brings about “patriarchy.”

In an attempt to explain the popularity of the Bacchic religion and women’s devotion to the phallic god, Bachofen claims that “the stricter the law of maternity, the less woman was able to sustain the unnatural grandeur of her Amazonian life. Joyfully she welcomed this god whose combination of sensuous beauty and transcendent radiance made him doubly seductive. The enthusiasm of women for his cult was irresistible. In a short time the Amazonian matriarchy’s determined resistance to the new god shifted to an equally resolute devotion; the warlike women,

¹³⁹³ “Mother Right,” *Myth, Religion and Mother Right*, 91. In other words, the sign of cultural progress was the ability of “matriarchal” macho men to freely hop around from bed to bed like rabbits, without ever having to justify their behavior to angry wives or take full responsibility for the care of children, who resulted from these “free” unions. In pagan “matriarchy,” men were allowed to remain children, doing whatever pleased them, while in Judeo-Christian “patriarchy,” they had to grow up.

¹³⁹⁴ “Mother Right,” *Myth, Religion and Mother Right*, 102, 109.

¹³⁹⁵ “Mother Right,” *Myth, Religion and Mother Right*, 100, 150.

formerly locked in struggle with Dionysos, because his crusading army of heroes. One extreme followed the other, showing how hard it is, at all times, for women to observe moderation.”¹³⁹⁶ According to Bachofen, under the “disintegrating influence of the Dionysian religion,” life eventually became insufferable. The “Amazonian-type” women in power realized that they could not maintain control of both the family, the state as well as wage war, while the men were off “enjoying themselves.” According to Bachofen’s dialectic, Demetrian matriarchy gave way to Dionysian-Aphroditean matriarchy, which eventually – at its nadir -- brings about the reign of our present phase of “patriarchy,” with a belligerent-matriarchal Dionysian period of chaos in between. This Dionysian situation finally deteriorated, magically provoking our present system.¹³⁹⁷ Although Bachofen admits that society basically disintegrates, because in his view women had hoarded all of the responsibility for society, his seductive writing style makes the ensuing period of barbarism attractive and something to be desired, or at least to be joyfully accepted as inevitable:

The symbols of Demetrian regulated maternity, the ear of grain and the loaf of bread, gave way to the Bacchic grape, the exuberant fruit of the virile god; mild, honey and water, the chaste sacrifices of the old time, ceded to wine, the inducer of sensual frenzy; and the religion of the lowest tellurism of swamp generation with all its products, its animals as well as plants, gained preponderance over agriculture and its gifts... The Dionysian cult brought antiquity the highest development of a thoroughly Aphroditean civilization and lent it that radiance which overshadows all the refinement and all the art of modern life. It loosed all fetters, removed all distinctions, and by orienting people’s spirit toward matter and the embellishment of physical existence, carried life itself back to the laws of matter. This sensualization of existence coincides everywhere with the dissolution of political organization and the decline of political life. Intricate gradation gives way to democracy, the undifferentiated mass, the freedom and equality which distinguish natural life from ordered social life and pertain to the physical, material side of human nature.¹³⁹⁸

This magical character of the Dionysian provides us with some clues to interpreting the Bachofenian dialectic. Bachofen was a cyclical thinker and affirmed the monistic, magico-mythical worldview of the Presocratics. Because the Dionysian was equivalent to the first “hetaeric phase,” we assume that the period before this “first” cyclical round of chaos was an androgynous one. Given the Dionysian’s function as “transitional” as well as the god Dionysos’ own androgynous character, we might see the “Dionysian” as the hetaeric-androgynous period between any matriarchal or patriarchal cycle. According to the Bachofenian dialectic, then, a

¹³⁹⁶ “Mother Right,” *Myth, Religion and Mother Right*, 100.

¹³⁹⁷ “Mother Right,” *Myth, Religion and Mother Right*, 101. Bachofen admits that the “phallic lord” exerted a “magic power” over women, which was in turn connected to the “magic of nature in the luxuriant south.”

¹³⁹⁸ “Mother Right,” *Myth, Religion and Mother Right*, 102.

reversal of the patriarchic-Apollonian phase occurs through Dionysian chaos, prompting the return of new synthesis of Demetrian matriarchy.¹³⁹⁹

Bachofen's matriarchal-patriarchal dialectic is structurally related to the alchemical law of inversion, which asserts that one must go against the order of nature (*opus contra naturam*) in order to transfigure nature. That is, one must go backwards in order to go forwards, or one must dissolve "old forms" of being into their original state (*prima materia*) before they can evolve to newer, higher or more desirable forms.¹⁴⁰⁰ According to Bachofen, patriarchy was brought about by the disintegration of "matriarchy" into androgyny, and Demetrian matriarchy will return again after the disintegration of patriarchy, but through the chaos of the "phallic lord." Of course this new matriarchy would be a "higher synthesis" of matriarchy, which can only be brought about by the alchemical dissolution of patriarchy into the *prima materia* of Dionysian androgyny, *ad nauseam*. The obvious attraction of "matriarchy" to males with occult leanings like Jung, would be the acceptance of the concept of sex without responsibilities.

C. The Influence of the Presocratics

George Boas explains that Bachofen came to interpret the world like the Presocratics, as the "interplay of opposing forces," showing that Bachofen was more interested in "philosophy" than he was in "history." According to him, "the fundamental duality of existence was observed in the opposition of male and female, of the active and the passive (reflected even in grammar), of heaven and earth, of the sun and the moon. Such duality could not be left unresolved. Otherwise the *cosmos* would break in two, and that was unthinkable if there actually was a *cosmos*." For Bachofen, this resolution occurred through a "third" something, which is simultaneously the source of both opposing "sides" of reality. Therefore, the duality of nature should be seen as being connected by "phases of a single process which is more real than either."¹⁴⁰¹ The understanding of a "third thing" that unifies the two is not only derived from the Presocratics, but also from alchemy, which in Antiquity was already associated with the philosophy of the Presocratics. From Boas, we gather that for Bachofen, the source of reality is Dionysian chaos. This phase lies between Demetrian matriarchy and Apollonian patriarchy. Noll claims:

The myth of matriarchy was tied to the past, esoteric and elitist, and mixed with the most exceptional sun, blood and death cults. It was consciously aimed against an established academic science (and the academic business too). It had the character of a secret doctrine, whose

¹³⁹⁹ "Mother Right," *Myth, Religion and Mother Right*, 103. Bachofen says, "History has repeatedly shown how the earliest phenomena in the lives of peoples tend to reappear at the end of their development. The cycle of life returns to its beginning."

¹⁴⁰⁰ *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 108.

¹⁴⁰¹ "Preface," *Myth, Religion and Mother Right*, xiv-xv.

proponents did not think about being enlightened or politically effective but trusted the personal magnetism of the 'initiate' and 'knowing'.¹⁴⁰²

¹⁴⁰² *The Jung Cult*, 175. Quoted from Sombart, "Max Weber and Otto Gross," p. 139.

APPENDIX III

Parsifal: Wagner's Teutonic Mystery Religion

A. Wagner's Aryan Christianity and Anarchy

Although Jung was attracted to the Völkish anti-Semitic rhetoric and racist science of Haeckel, his own anti-Semitism was aggravated by his rivalry with Freud. He came to believe that his "Phylogenic Unconscious" contained the biological proof of the existence of the "Aryan" origins of Christ. For him, Aryan meant the supposedly original Iranian (i.e. Zoroastrian) and Indian (Brahman or priestly) origins of the Teutonic races. Because it was difficult for so many sons and daughters of Protestant ministers to completely deny or totally annihilate their Christian history, they needed to reinterpret the history of Jesus to suit their own religious agendas. This included the creation of a new Germanic paganism with Christian overtones.

The new myth of the "Aryan Christ" was carefully constructed to keep the many still culturally nostalgic Germanic Christians, but who nurtured anti-Semitic sentiments, from defection. The authority of traditional or dogmatic Christianity, as it had been interpreted by the Church Fathers, needed to be undermined and promoted as "phantasmata" or an aberration from the more authentic esoteric tradition. In fact, this process began already at the Reformation through the Reformers often subtle undermining of the position of the tradition of the Church Fathers to the advantage of their own positions and interpretations, especially when the early Fathers contradicted their own positions. This is especially obvious in the Eucharistic controversies, but also in their discussions on the priority of certain canonical texts, e.g. the relationship of the Pauline letters to the letter of James, the Deuterocanonical texts, etc. Later, a more overt attack on "dogmatic Christianity" was based on a magical "reversal" of the ancient orthodox argument that the Gnostic tradition was a deviation from the original Church. Ironically, this could only have been achieved through the success of the Reformers themselves. That is to say, the success and legitimation of the Reformers' separation from the source of the western Christian tradition in order to form a new tradition, created a model to follow and to be overcome.

As suggested, the idea that Jesus was not *really* Jewish had been playing strongly amongst the anti-Semitic, anti-traditional-Christian Völkish, i.e. pro-Germanic culture groups, who also idolized the music dramas of Richard Wagner. For example, Wagner's moving dramatic opera, *Parsifal*, was the prototype of this new paganized Germanic Christianity. The Episcopal minister, Rev. Albert Ross Parson's praise of the opera, in *Parsifal: The Finding of Christ Through Art or Richard Wagner as Theologian* (1889), shows how many ministers in

some Protestant churches accepted Wagner's brand of Christianity as normative.¹⁴⁰³ Wagner's *Parsifal*, whose first performance was at the Bayreuth Festival of 1882,¹⁴⁰⁴ can be seen as an early attempt to re-interpret what they deemed as a too "Semitic Christianity" into a more "spiritualized" and "Aryanized" version. According to Wagner's biographer, Robert Gutman, *Parsifal* was Wagner's allegory of the fall and redemption of the Aryan or Teutonic race,¹⁴⁰⁵ and as such, it is one of the most successful nineteenth century anti-traditional Christian attempts to re-interpret traditional Christianity as a form of paganism, which took a wrong turn. This "wrong turn" was associated with traditional, and especially, Roman Catholic Christianity, playing into the hands of less suspecting, albeit anti-Catholic Pietist Protestants. The opera *Parsifal* has strong Rosicrucian and Templar overtones,¹⁴⁰⁶ which points to a connection with the originally, Lutheran, German Templar Freemasonry, founded by Karl Gotthelf von Hund in the mid-18th century,¹⁴⁰⁷ or his rival August Starck, who established the "Clerks of the Temple."

According to Gutman, for a long time, Wagner had been playing with the idea that Christ contained a kind of redemptive "superblood" which, through self-sacrifice, was able to refresh the original Aryan bloodline. This originally virile "Aryan breed" had become degenerate because of its commingling with inferior breeds, namely, the Jews. In Wagner's theology, the Crucifixion provided the formula to rescue the Aryan bloodline from further decline.¹⁴⁰⁸ Wagner, a rabid anti-Semite, constructed *Parsifal* as an attempt to "redeem" Jesus from his Jewish origins. For example, in an article entitled "Public and Popularity" (1878), Wagner begins to separate the "redeemer" from the "tribal God of Israel."¹⁴⁰⁹

In the opera, Wagner reinterpreted the concept of the "redeemer" more gnostically, as the sexually ignorant fool and good *magus*. He defeats the evil *magus*, Klingsor, by "becoming wise

¹⁴⁰³ Albert Ross Parsons, *Parsifal: The Finding of Christ Through Art or Richard Wagner as Theologian* (Montana, Kissinger Publishing Company). This is a facsimile of a lecture given in 1889 to All Souls Episcopal Church in New York City.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Ernest Newman, *The Wagner Operas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949, 1991) 666-667.

¹⁴⁰⁵ Robert W. Gutman, *Richard Wagner: The Man, His Mind and His Music* (San Diego, New York, London: Harvest/Harcourt Brace Javanovich, 1968, 1990) 227.

¹⁴⁰⁶ *Richard Wagner: The Man, His Mind and His Music*, 432.

¹⁴⁰⁷ Peter Partner, *The Knights Templar and their Myth* (Vermont: Destiny Books, 1990) 116.

¹⁴⁰⁸ *Richard Wagner: The Man, His Mind and His Music*, 425.

¹⁴⁰⁹ Richard Wagner, "Public and Popularity," *Religion and Art*, trans. W. Ashton Ellis (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994) 77-78. "Science makes God the Creator more impossible each day; but from the beginning of the Church the God revealed to us by Jesus has been converted by the Theologians from a most sublime reality into an ever less intelligible problem. That the God of our Saviour should have been identified with the tribal god of Israel, is one of the most terrible confusions in all world-history. ... To what is the preacher bound fast in the pulpit, but to compromises between the utmost contradictions, whose subtleties must necessarily confound our very faith itself and make us ask: Who now knows Jesus? -- Historical criticism, perchance? It casts in its lot with Judaism and, just like every Jew; it wonders that the bells on Sunday morn should still be ringing for a Jew once crucified two thousand years ago. How often and minutely have the Gospels been critically searched, their origin and compilation exposed beyond a doubt; so that one might have thought the very evidence of the spuriousness and irrelevance of their contradictory matter would at last have opened the eyes of Criticism to the lofty figure of the Redeemer and his work."

through pity.”¹⁴¹⁰ Along with Alberich in *Rheingold* and Hagen in *Götterdämmerung*, Klingsor is perhaps Wagner’s archetype for the Jew, although this has been challenged by some commentators. Nevertheless, Alberich, Hagen and Klingsor represent the dark, or “shadow side” of God. This is clear since Alberich, as Michael Tanner has noted in *Wagner*, “exists in intimate relationship to Wotan, who is referred to as ‘Licht-Albercht’.”¹⁴¹¹

In Wagner’s opera, the main protagonist Parsifal must recapture the legendary magic spear, which was said to have been the same spear that the centurion used to pierce Jesus’s side on the Cross. “But one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water.” (John 19:34) St. Augustine interpreted this passage, in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (CXX, XX, 2) as the beginning of the Church. That is, he interpreted the water and the blood that flowed out of Jesus’s side as origin of the two sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. “His side, or anything else, but ‘opened;’ that thereby, in a sense, the gate of life might be thrown open, from whence have flowed forth the sacraments of the Church, without which there is no entrance to the life which is true life.”¹⁴¹² According to Wagner’s interpretation, in order to reverse the magical curse of Semitic-Christianity, Parsifal needed to recapture the spear and touch the wound of Amfortas, the Christian priest-knight and guardian of the Grail. Earlier, Amfortas had been wounded by it in a fight with the evil “Jewish” prototype, Klingsor. The spear serves as a *pharmakon*, in Greek, an ambiguous term meaning either medicine to heal or poison to harm. Only by magically retouching the wound with the same instrument as its cause could Amfortas’ wound be healed. In alchemical logic, the magical antidote for any curse is a step-by-step return to the origin of the curse, which brings about its inversion. The fact that Amfortas’ healing is necessitated by the same reversed action evinces its magical character.

As the play goes on, after almost being seduced by Kundry -- the reincarnation of a Jewess who had laughed at Jesus on the Cross and who is now under Klingsor’s curse -- Parsifal realizes the nature of Amfortas’ wound, i.e. sexual weakness and, symbolically, flirtation with Judaism. He has pity on Amfortas, who symbolizes the traditional Christian. At this moment, he achieves something like Buddhist *satori* and is enlightened. Simultaneously, Klingsor realizes that his power is now threatened by Parsifal’s newfound *gnosis*. He throws the magic spear toward Parsifal, who catches it in midair and waves it -- like a magic wand -- over the head of Klingsor into the sign of the Cross. By an act of “white magic,” Parsifal brings Klingsor’s

¹⁴¹⁰ Cf. *The Wagner Operas*, 635ff; Ed. John Warack and Ewan West, “Parsifal,” *The Oxford Dictionary of Opera* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 540-541. In January, 2005, I was also privileged to see *Parsifal* at the Wiener Staatsoper, under the direction of Simon Rattle.

¹⁴¹¹ Michael Tanner, *Wagner* (London: Flamingo, 1997) 28.

¹⁴¹² Saint Augustine, “Homilies on the Gospel of John,” *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 7, trans. Rev. John Gibb (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1999, 1888) 434.

domain crashing down upon his head and severs the pure and revitalized Aryan Christianity from its decadent and Semitic connections that Wagner deceptively and magically associates with “black magic.” After his victory over “sorcery,” the sorcerer Parsifal returns to the Hall of the Grail. After being appointed as new king and high priest of the Grail, he baptizes Kundry and heals Amfortas by “returning” the spear to origin of the wound. Amfortas, the symbol of old Christianity, docilely accepts Parsifal as the new leader. The Knights, who are visibly dismissive of their old king Amfortas, are now gung-ho to go into battle for Parsifal. Parsifal raises the Grail, supposedly the chalice from which Christ drank at the Last Supper, and all of the knights worship him, singing the enigmatic lines: “Höchsten Heiles Wunder! Erlösung dem Erlöser!,”¹⁴¹³ or “Highest Wonder of Salvation, the Redemption of the Redeemer!”

At this moment, Kundry drops dead, supposedly, released from her cycle of birth and death. Not much attention is given to her collapse on stage, however, Parsifal and all of Grail Knights live on revitalized. Although the text says that the “new” type of saviour is redeemed and himself redeems through “pity,” he also “redeems” the Germanic Templar Knights by annihilating Klingsor with “white” magic. By recapturing the pagan Roman sacred spear that wounded the side of the Jew Jesus and, as St. Augustine attested, began the flow of water and blood that were to become the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist, Parsifal returned to the origin of the Church and “reversed” the flow so to speak. He, unlike the decadent Amfortas, resisted the temptation of Judaism -- symbolized by the seductress Kundry. By murdering the “evil black” magician, Klingsor, Parsifal annihilates the root of Christianity, i.e. Judaism, and revives the bloodline of the order of the Templar Knights. Although they were in a state of decay, because of their “old” Christian leader Amfortas’ betrayal and weakness, their magical order could now go forward, stronger. In occult language, by negating the negation, spoken of as a “return,” or “reversal” or “inversion,” something “new” or “higher” can supposedly emerge out of the same. This is otherwise expressed as an alchemical *coniunctio oppositorum*.

Although the destructive side of *Parsifal* is couched in flowery language and sumptuous music, it remains true to Wagner’s life philosophy, which advocated not just the destruction of Jews, but also the destruction of Paris and even the world.¹⁴¹⁴ In Wagner’s younger days, he became heavily involved in the anarchist movement of Michael Bakunin and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon. Originally, anarchism was a revolt against the oppressive nature of the industrial revolution. The idea was that when society reached a certain level of reason and civilization, it would outgrow its leaders and create a society based on voluntary co-operation. For Proudhon,

¹⁴¹³ Cf. Richard Wagner, *Parsifal: Ein Bühnenweihfestspiel in Drei Aufzügen* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 1950) 61.

¹⁴¹⁴ *Richard Wagner: The Man, His Mind, and His Music*, 126, 282-283n, 309.

the existence of government and property is the cause of conflict and must therefore be eliminated. When everyone had full access to resources and the fruits of their own labor, a utopian society would emerge, where conflict became a thing of the past.¹⁴¹⁵ Bakunin proposed that his anarchistic program must be achieved through the creation of a *secret society* that destroyed the rights of inheritance, the concept of marriage and family, promoted the absolute equality of women, encouraged the adoption of children – whose families were destroyed in order to liberate men and women from the slavery of marriage – by the whole of society, and the *obligation* to work for the “good” of the world,¹⁴¹⁶ at least for the good, as the Anarchists themselves interpreted

B. Speeding Up the Processes of Nature

The ideas of Proudhon and Bakunin were dealt with in Fyodor Dostoevsky’s *Besy* or *Devils* (1871), and reach their culmination in a series of deaths and suicides. One of the most dramatic is that of the activist and atheist, with strong Messianic inclinations and nostalgia for the “good man” Christ, Aleksei Nilych Kirillov. Based on his acceptance of atheism, Kirillov makes the extreme assumption that because God does not exist, then, he himself must be God. By overcoming his two-fold fears of death and pain, through consciously committing the greatest act of self-will, suicide, he will show to all that God does not exist, simultaneously causing a physical transformation of the cosmos. However, as Michael Katz explains, Kirillov’s “absurd individualism leads to self-annihilation,”¹⁴¹⁷ which he earnestly believes should be followed by a massive world-scale *imitatio Kirillov*.

As did Kirillov, most 19th century occultists also believed that the desired transformation of the new future society was occurring too slowly for their liking. They themselves (as self-realized gods) must help speed up the sluggish evolutionary processes of Nature. Although Anarchism originally promoted a peaceful transformation, this soon changed under the leadership of Bakunin, whose burning desire was literally to see Europe burn to the ground. An avid reader of Hegel and a “realistic” Gnostic, Bakunin believed that the totality of present society was evil. In order for a new socialistic society to rise out of the ashes, the old must be swept away.¹⁴¹⁸ In his younger years, Wagner wholeheartedly shared these same desires of absolute destruction with Bakunin. This same desire is evident in the concluding scene of the *Götterdämmerung*, where the

¹⁴¹⁵ Bryan Magee, *The Tristan Chord: Wagner and Philosophy* (New York: Henry Hold and Company, 2000) 36.

¹⁴¹⁶ Michel Bakounine, “Société Internationale Secrète de l’Émancipation de L’Humanité,” *Bakounine: Combats & Débats* (Paris: Institut d’Études Slaves, 1979) 215.

¹⁴¹⁷ Michael R. Katz, “Introduction,” *Devils* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) xi.

¹⁴¹⁸ *The Tristan Cord*, 41.

only thing left standing is Wagner on the conductor's podium.¹⁴¹⁹ Bryan Magee gives us a good summary of Wagner's own account of the paradox of Bakunin's personality:

He found Bakunin 'a truly likeable and sensitive person' who had nevertheless solemnly dedicated his life to bringing about destruction on a mind-numbing scale. 'In this remarkable man the purest humanitarian idealism was combined with a savagery utterly inimical to all culture, and thus my relationship with him fluctuated between instinctive horror and irresistible attraction. I frequently called for him to accompany me on my lonely walks, something he was quite glad to do not only because he then didn't have to worry about meeting his pursuers...' The glimpses Wagner gives us Bakunin's conversation include this: 'The annihilation of all civilization was the objective on which he had set his heart; to use all political levers at hand as a means to this end was his current preoccupation, and it often served him as a pretext for ironic merriment...

Was any of us insane enough to believe he would survive after the goal of annihilation had been reached? It was necessary, he said, the picture the whole European world, with Petersburg, Paris and London transformed into a pile of rubble: how could we expect the arsonists themselves to survey these ruins with the faculty of reason in tact?' When Wagner tried to tell him about his projected stage work to be called Jesus of Nazareth, Bakunin 'requested me with great vehemence to make certain Jesus would be represented as a weak character. As to the music, he advised me to compose only one passage but in all possible variations: the tenor was to sing 'Off with his head!', the soprano 'To the gallows!' and the basso continuo 'Fire!, Fire!'¹⁴²⁰

In a few short years, Hitler almost achieved Bakunin's dreams of the total destruction of the European continent by fire. Although it is not clear whether Hitler was directly influenced by Bakunin's ideas, he was certainly confronted with a filtered version in Wagner's operas, whom he considered to be his favorite composer. Although Wagner originally meant for the purely Teutonic *Nibelung Ring Cycle* (which included the operas: *The Rhinegold*, *The Valkyrie*, *Siegfried*, and *The Twilight of the Gods*) to be the basis of the new German religion, *Parsifal* proved more effective to incite the Germanic people to collective self-destruction or mass suicide, which gave the illusion that a strong remnant could be saved.

As discussed, in the opera, the sacred spear is a *pharmakon*, that is, both a medicine and a poison. In the mind of Wagner, so were the Jews. Like the spear, the Jews had wounded or had tainted the pure Aryan blood of the German people, and only their total wounding or sacrifice (*holocaust*) could heal them and their world. Where the *Götterdämmerung* -- insisting on total destruction -- went too far and made people stop at the brink, *Parsifal* was more clever and seductive, playing on a complex of nationalism, heroism, chivalry and nobility. *Parsifal* is designed to incite a whole generation of young men to willingly sacrifice themselves in order to

¹⁴¹⁹ Since I started this dissertation, I have suffered through two Ring cycles, the longest operas in the history of opera, in order to better understand Wagner's philosophy. After a long time of reflecting, I realized that in the Ring Cycle, Wagner encourages the annihilation of everything – humans and gods – except himself. This is a message that was not lost on the National Socialists. In fact, the theme of destruction and death runs through all of Wagner's operas and, as history has shown, was attempted by the National Socialists.

¹⁴²⁰ *The Tristan Cord*, 39.

get rid of “cancerous elements” and revitalize their blood and race, while allowing their leaders (Parsifal/Wagner) to remain standing. Like the world weary Kundry, the rest should just lie down and die. *Parsifal* was Wagner’s Gospel of world annihilation, where but a few elect remain.

It has often been stated that many Nazi’s rejected *Parsifal*, because it was too “Christian.” However, the fact that some Nazi’s did not like *Parsifal* can perhaps be better explained by the fact that in his later years, Wagner rejected the concept of “Total War,” or the concept of the total destruction of the country including oneself. As we have seen, despite the beauty of the music, the underlying theology of the opera *Parsifal* is a direct affront to traditional Christianity. Noll says, “*Parsifal* is a Völkish epiphany and the highest dramatic expression of the longing for an Aryan Christ. And Bayreuth itself, the only place where one could see a full performance of *Parsifal* before 1913, was hailed by Völkish enthusiasts as the new Mystery-cult site where the great Aryan mysteries would reach their full expression.”¹⁴²¹ According to biographer Gutman, *Parsifal* is a Black Mass, under the guise of a heroic Christianity. This rendered the opera acceptable to a great many Germans, who like Kirillov, no longer believed in the Christian God, but still nostalgically longed for something that resembled his religion and a good excuse to die:

In *Parsifal*, with the help of church bells, snippets of the Mass, and the vocabulary and paraphernalia of the Passion, he set forth a religion of racism under the cover of Christian legend. *Parsifal* is an enactment of the Aryan’s plight, struggle, and hope for redemption, a drama characterized not only by the composer’s natively obscure and elliptical literary style, but also by the indigenous circumlocutions of the allegory, the calculated unrealities of symbolism and, especially, the sultry corruptions of decadence. The temple scenes are, in a sense, Black Masses, perverting the symbols of the Eucharist and dedicating them to a sinister god. And the Black Mass, so fascinating to the *fin de siècle* decadents, was but one of their obsessions weaving its spell around the aging Wagner and his *Parsifal*.¹⁴²²

Houston Steward Chamberlain, Wagner’s son-in-law, Cosima Wagner’s Bayreuth “propaganda minister” and Nazi “historian,” carried on these views in his *Die Grunlagen des Neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (1899), where he suggests that Christianity has too many “Aryan” elements in his religion, a code word for Mithraic or Zoroastrian, to be Semitic. His claim was based on his own interpretation of philological and archeological evidence, showing the existence of other races in Galilee during Jesus’s time. According to him this meant that “the probability that Christ was no Jew, that He had not a drop of genuinely Jewish blood in his veins is so great that it is almost equivalent to a certainty.”¹⁴²³ In line with his father-in-law’s Messiah, *Parsifal*, he promoted the

¹⁴²¹ *The Aryan Christ*, 145.

¹⁴²² *Richard Wagner: The Man, His Mind and His Music*, 432.

¹⁴²³ Quoted in Noll, *The Aryan Christ*, 144.

idea that “Christ ... became the God of the young, vigorous Indo-Europeans.”¹⁴²⁴ Jung was born into this cult mindset and was its subtle advocate. It shows that with time and consistent repetition, formally marginal ideas can achieve a broad acceptance.

¹⁴²⁴ Quoted in Noll, *The Aryan Christ*, 145.

APPENDIX IV

Jung's Aryan Christ

A. Two Enlightenment Theories of the Origin of Religion: Solar or Phallic Worship

The early Enlightenment perennialists were divided between those who believed that the origin of religion was the worship of generative powers, or the phallic origin of religion, and those who believed that the origin was sun worship, or the solar origin of religion. The former was associated with the religion of Dionysos and the latter, with the religion of Apollo. We could interpret Nietzsche's Dionysian and Apollonian dialectic in the *Birth of Tragedy* as an attempt to reconcile both theories with each other. At the beginning of the Enlightenment, one of the early proponents of the solar theory was Charles François Dupuis. In his *Histoire du Ciel* (1739-1741) and *L'Origine de tous les cultures, ou religion universelle* (1795), he places Christianity as one religion amongst other religions and traces the origin of all religion "through the twelve signs of the zodiac." According to Joscelyn Godwin, for Dupuis "Jesus Christ, in a word is the sun, and his life is nothing but an allegory of the sun's course through the zodiac, from birth, through crucifixion on the cross of the solstices and equinoxes, to resurrection. Thus, the Christian religion is just another distorted representative of the great, original religion of Nature."¹⁴²⁵

Since the publication of former Catholic priest, Ernest Renan's (1823-1892) *Vie de Jésus* (1863), many scholars and even Protestant ministers took to handling the life of Jesus as a merely historical fact. There was already a tendency with a certain stream of Protestantism, starting with Böhme, to interpret doctrines or dogmas associated with the "historical Jesus" as merely "astral phantasy" as opposed to the supposedly "true," i.e. unmediated, experience of God already in us. At first the positivist style of Renan and, earlier, David Friedrich Strauss' (1808-1873) *Das Leben-Jesu* (1835) shocked the 19th century world; nevertheless, it quickly became the popular method of biblical exegesis.

Aside from being a "scientist," "historian" and classical philologist, Renan also believed that the first people worshipped the sun. Based on his friend Max Müller's (1823-1900) solar theory of the origin of religions, Renan believed that the all worship could be traced back to the worship of the sun, especially in the original natural religion of the "Aryan peoples." Müller was also creator of discipline of the "comparative study of religions" and exerted great influence over both academics and esotericists during this period. Müller and Renan's ideas about the solar origin of religion could be traced back to the 18th century, when enlightened scholar-pagans became fascinated with the origin of religions and began to theorize about it.

¹⁴²⁵ *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, 34.

By the 19th century, renowned academics like Müller and Renan believed that the traces of the original Aryan (Indo-European) rudiments could be found within the German language. This began the 19th century German obsession with bizarre etymologies,¹⁴²⁶ perhaps reaching its climax in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger. As occult sympathist, Jean-Michel Angebert states in *The Occult and the Third Reich: the Mystical Origins of Nazism and the Search for the Holy Grail*, “Hitlerism found some unexpected support in the great French writer rarely recognized as a precursor of Nazism. Ernst Renan, the author of the *Life of Christ* ..., reveals in that work a lesser-known side of himself, that of a racist and of a confirmed esotericist.” In confirmation of this, Angebert quotes from Renan’s, *Dialogues Philosophiques* (1876) (Italics are Angebert’s):

A broad application of the discoveries of physiology and of the principle of selection could bring about *the creation of a superior race*, having the right to govern others, not only by reasons of its knowledge, but by *the very superiority of its blood*, intelligence, and determination. That we would have would be *species of gods or divas*, beings worth ten times what we are worth who could adapt themselves to artificial environments. The viable is inherently implicit within the context of general conditions; but science will be able to extend the limits of viability. ... We can, therefore, conceive of the possibility of beings (somewhere beyond our planet) in comparison with whom man would have roughly as little significance as animals do when compared with man. Much in the same way that mankind came from animality, so also divinity would come from mankind. There would be beings who would use man, as man uses animals. ... *But I repeat, intellectual superiority brings religious superiority. We should think of these future masters as incarnations of the Good and True; there would have to be total submission to them.* ... Gods paradise, hell, spiritual power, monarchy, nobility, legitimacy, racial superiority, and supernatural powers can be reborn through human action and thought. I would guess that *if such a solution ever happens to any extent anywhere here on earth, it will happen in Germany.*¹⁴²⁷

B. Breeding Opposites

Like many occultists of his day, Renan’s dream was the creation of a superior race of superhuman beings, which would be realized through the breeding a superior race of the purest blood. Aryan blood was considered the “purest.” For example, Friedrich Nietzsche’s idea of the *Übermensch* was not unusual and can perhaps be better understood within the context of the 19th century occult revival, which had an academic and scientific flavor to it. This shows that contrary to the myth of “scientific objectivity,” it was not uncommon for renowned atheistic academics and positivists to have occult inclinations and support racially and religiously motivated theories like the “solar origin of religion.” For the most part, however, there was an attempt to reconcile the two theories, such as Johann Bachofen’s theory of “Matriarchy and Patriarchy.” For Bachofen, Matriarchy had two sides: the side of Demeter, or the great womb, and the side of Dionysos, who

¹⁴²⁶ *The Aryan Christ*, 109-110.

¹⁴²⁷ Jean-Michel Angebert, *The Occult and the Third Reich: The Mystical Origins of Nazism and the Search for the Holy Grail*, trans. Lewis A. M. Sumberg (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975) 179-180.

he considered to be the “phallic lord.” Patriarchy was an expression of the solar deity, Apollo. According to Richard Noll, “The Aryanist and occultist theory popular in bohemian circles was that the universe had been created from a primordial fiery chaos out of which the first two principles to emerge were the Masculine and the Feminine. Only from the eternal tension between these opposites, the eternal joining and separating of the two, could the creative force, the primal energy of the sun or fire be released. On the individual level, only the integration of the Masculine and Feminine principles with the soul could restore the connection with the internal solar fire. In the writings of ... Völkish mystics, this blazing primal energy was also associated with the blood.” In order to create the new super race, eugenics was promoted. After separate male and female prototypes were created, they could produce “higher offspring.”¹⁴²⁸ This should be seen as a kind of biologization of alchemy. Eugenics was justified by the politically influential Völkish Aryanites and National Socialists by the belief that “god” is *within* each individual, which is symbolized by the sun. Just as the sun is the center of the solar system, the “God within” is the center of the human being. Destruction, or abortion of weak and unwanted examples, was merely the necessary phase before creating a superior, superhuman, race.

C. The Jungian Solution

Based on Muller’s totalizing view of world religions, i.e. that all pre-Judeo-Christian religions could be traced back to the worship of the sun, Carl Jung, like many other Völkish Germanic nationalists, also attempted to develop a new cult or new Mystery Religion of solar worship. He developed his ideas using the current knowledge of ancient pagan religions, but catered to modern solipsism. The belief that everyone already contained divinity within themselves was supported by a particular interpretation of ancient mythology, especially the myths of the solar gods. Like Nietzsche’s Dionysian/Apollonian dialectic presented in *The Birth of Tragedy*,¹⁴²⁹ Jung wanted to reconcile the solar with the phallic. Through associative techniques, Jung came to express a literal analogy between the terms, sun, star, fire, God. Based on the microcosm/macrocosm analogy, God was the sun and the sun was the fire or life-force within each individual. This life-force was associated with the sexual drive or the libido. Jung attempted to unify the two theories couched in psychological terminology. Noll explains that “Jung viewed these ancient myths as historical records of the transformation of the libido, and maintained that the most apt metaphor for this spiritual-sexual energy or life-force is the sun. ... God is not the

¹⁴²⁸ *The Aryan Christ*, 117-118.

¹⁴²⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 2000) 33. Nietzsche begins this book with his concepts of the Dionysian and the Apollonian, *BT*, 1.

distant, transcendent, absolute god of Judeo-Christianity, but instead is the libido that lives *within* us all.”¹⁴³⁰

Furthermore, in order to justify the transformation of the Semitic Christ into the Aryan *Übermensch*-Christ, Jung took texts from Böhme and other Pietistic role models like Count Zinzendorf and Schleiermacher, where they referred to the “experience of the ‘god within’ as a burning fire.” By using accepted Pietist texts, Jung was making his secularized version of psychological Christianity acceptable to cultural Protestants. Jung claimed that whoever had experienced the sun within himself as God was immortal like the sun. Therefore, the new version of “solar religion” -- that was meant to be a new mutation of secularized modern Hermeticism that would eventually replace dogmatic Christianity --, must be constructed in such a way to help its “believers” discover the immortal sun, or God, *within* themselves. As stated, this “sun” was understood as the *life-force* or as phallic *sexual energy*.

Another way that believers were taught to discover their own “inner sun,” or divine sexual drive, was through the analysis of dreams or visionary travels. In fact, Jung’s visionary *praxis* was an adapted form of a well-known occultist technique, which strongly resembles shamanism, but which he re-crafted to look more scientific and “archaeological.” As Noll points out, like “Blavatsky and the initiated Theosophists” he believed that “the ancestral past could be contacted directly through the imagination.”¹⁴³¹ Under the subtitle of “Method of Proof,” in an essay entitled, “The Concept of the Collective Unconscious,” Jung writes:

Consequently, we must look for motifs, which could not possibly be known to the dreamer and yet behave functionally in his dream in such a manner as to coincide with the functioning of the archetype known from *historical sources*. Another source for the material we need is to be found in ‘active imagination.’ By this I mean a sequence of fantasies produced by deliberate concentration. I have found that the existence of unrealized, unconscious fantasies increases the frequency and intensity of dreams, and that when these fantasies are made conscious and the dreams change their character and become weaker and less frequent. From this I have drawn the conclusion that dreams often contain fantasies which ‘want’ to become conscious...¹⁴³²

Jung’s goal was to substitute the “old” Jewish Christ with his own version of the new Aryan Christ, made in his own image and likeness. He himself would be the new role model that his disciples should follow. The way that he planned to achieve this was by changing or transforming the content of the Germanic religious imagination. His de-semiticized version of Christ would correspond to the characteristics of the various sun-gods of ancient mythology, but

¹⁴³⁰ *The Aryan Christ*, 106.

¹⁴³¹ *The Jung Cult*, 178.

¹⁴³² Carl Gustav Jung, “The Concept of the Collective Unconscious,” *The Portable Jung* (New York: Penguin Books, USA, 1976) 67-68.

especially the self-sacrificing Germanic hero-gods, about whom he goes to lengths to show their connection to solar worship.¹⁴³³ He also saw a self-sacrificing connection between the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and the slaying of the bull by the Persian god, Mithras – which Jung strongly connects with Nietzsche and Zarathustra. Jung saw the Mithraic bull as the *alter ego* of Mithras and, hence, a symbol of Mithras' slaying himself.¹⁴³⁴ It is important to understand that the bull is also a symbol of Baal and Dionysos, which given his dependence on Nietzsche, would have strengthened Jung's idea that Dionysos was merely the alter ego of Jesus Christ. Self-sacrifice then is equivalent to alchemical self-destruction and Jung sees Jesus's death within the same model as Mithraic bull slaying. For Jung, the idea of the self-sacrificing god is prototypical when their deaths appear to be voluntary and yet involuntary at the same time. This means that for Jung, "gods" orchestrate their own murders.

¹⁴³³ *The Aryan Christ*, 107; *The Jung Cult*, 116.

¹⁴³⁴ *The Aryan Christ*, 135.