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## Western esoterism : Ultimate Sacred Postulates and Ritual Fields

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**LARS STEEN LARSEN**

**WESTERN ESOTERISM: ULTIMATE SACRED POSTULATES AND  
RITUAL FIELDS**



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Western esoterism: Ultimate Sacred Postulates and Ritual Fields

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## **Preface**

My thanks and gratitude primarily goes to my advisor Prof. Tord Olsson - and his 'team' at the Department of History and Anthropology of Religion at Lund University. By team I mean the group of current and former Ph.D. candidates who are all part of and sharing in a unique academic atmosphere created by Tord Olsson.

It is an environment of freedom, friendliness, esprit and ingenuity. Most important to me has been the intellectual inspiration provided. Prof. Olsson's graduate seminars have had a tremendous impact on this thesis along with my earlier publications. This particular intellectual milieu is characterized by its simplicity and lucidity. Two minor events may serve as illustrations. At one of the first seminars I attended Tord Olsson presented his field research from Gwanyebugu in Mali. In a straight and pedagogical manner (which astonished me) he explained his ideas of ritual fields and of rituals able to create beliefs. "Therefore", he concluded, "the number of people being Christians, Muslims and adherents of indigenous religions in Mali sums up to at least 130 percent". Later that day, when travelling back to Copenhagen from Lund, I thus realised that the additive practice/use of religion in Mali and Denmark – and particularly Copenhagen and the village of Gwanyebugu - has much in common. The other event occurred shortly thereafter. Pierre Wiktorin, now a Ph.D. doing research on Harry Potter, presented what he called "Two Small [papers]" on his field research in Buddhism in Thailand. Surely, measured in quantity the number of pages would not exhaust any reader. However, the information received was truly significant, and in return for a bottle of whisky I managed to 'borrow' central parts of his paper. Likewise such exchange occurred in the case of Philip Halldén, Kristina Myrvold, Åsa Trulsson and Peter Habbe, to whom I am also extending my thanks.

Tord Olsson's research in Mali, the different Ph.D. projects presented and a seminar introducing Roy A. Rappaport have transformed my understanding of religion entirely. Therefore, it is not by accident that the main method of this thesis is applied anthropology on a historical project. For me it has been an experiment and an intellectual journey that I inevitably had to make.

## Preface

Thanks to Tove E. Kruse, assistant professor in history at Roskilde University for her close reading of Paracelsus and his alchemy (Chapter five). Years ago when discussing Paracelsus and astrology she gave me very important tools to understand and interpret Paracelsus. I also want to express my gratitude to Jørgen Podemann Sørensen, assistant professor in history of religion at Copenhagen University. Chapter four, 'Hermetism as a foundation for esotericism', is to a high degree an extract from my graduate project at Copenhagen University. Here, as my advisor, Jørgen Podemann Sørensen not only accepted that I wrote about the role of astrology in Hermetica but also offered his immense knowledge of Hermetism. His natural friendliness has been second to none.

The most difficult part of this thesis has been to write it in English. I want to thank my sweet and compassionate sister, Lone Ann Gribble, for spending hours trying to teach me English grammar. She has corrected many sentences while patiently explaining why. Without her help, I could not have written this thesis in English. Further, thanks to Tony Duncan, a rock musician, composer and retired air engineer living in Tenerife, who did the final proofreading. He also made the cover and has been very helpful with the layout.

Thanks to my family and friends in Denmark. It is impossible to mention all, but Erik Michael, Peter H. Fogtdal, Per K. Rasmussen, Bjørn Poulsen, Finn Wandahl, Peter Hertz, Stefan Koeller, Karina Rasmussen and Poul Christensen have all supported this thesis - using different arguments - and encouraged me to write it.



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# WESTERN ESOTERISM:

## ULTIMATE SACRED POSTULATES AND RITUAL FIELDS

### The purpose of this study

The purpose of writing the thesis is in general to contribute to the establishing of Western esotericism as a science of *religion*.<sup>1</sup> In a more specific sense this thesis wishes to promote a special branch within esotericism defined by five matrices. The five matrices can be found in Hermetism and in esoteric literature up to the present.<sup>2</sup> In other words: a long stretch in history exists from Hermetism up to and including New Age. In fact, Western esoterism is as real as Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism or other recognised religions. This thesis also makes clear that concepts from foreign religions are transformed when assimilated into Western esoterism.

### The main thesis

The following *matrices* define and constitute an important *branch* within Western esoterism. The five matrices must manifest simultaneously:

- I: Purpose (*pronoia*), rather than karma or sin.
- II: The dialectical relationship between Man and God (or the divine), including the healing of other people, society and/or the Earth.
- III: An interdependence between dualism and monism, including the mind and/or the world as a stairway to heaven
- IV: Scientific laws to be synonymous with spiritual principles.
- V: A 'holistic' Cosmos, including the concept of 'sympathy' between its parts.

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis the word 'esotericism' denotes the academic study of esoterism. It is, however, not always that easy to differentiate between 'esoterism' and 'esotericism'.

<sup>2</sup> However, as we shall see later, classical Hermetism is rather a 'root to', or a foundation for, Western Esotericism than a part of it.

The main thesis of this book is formulated as a set of abstractions called matrices. The five matrices are what Roy Rappaport identifies as “Ultimate Sacred Postulates” (USP). These abstractions have no empirical reality, even if believers claim otherwise, and they are impossible to falsify. A part of Western esotericism has its own continuing USP. Together with different cosmologies and codes of conduct, the matrices produce and develop, in co-operation with some additional USP, many religious variations in Western esoterism. There are many religions in Western esoterism, and Wicca is one religion and Theosophy is another:<sup>3</sup> one might say they are ‘offspring’ or ‘currents’.

In an older edition of the Concise Oxford Dictionary, the word ‘matrix’ is defined as: “Womb; place in which things are produced or developed...; prob. f. *mater*, mother.” Today the word has been adopted into many fields of knowledge. In mathematics a matrix is used to simplify complex calculations. Throughout this study a matrix means: *A mental womb in which religious ideas are produced, developed or simplified.* The expression ‘matrix’ (comparable to USP) was in my mind before reading Rappaport, who often writes with an excessive intensity and concentration, but he does have a lot to offer when dealing with the question of religion. He compares religion with certain neo-Darwinistic cybernetic mechanisms like ‘adaptation’. “Ultimate Sacred Postulates” (USP) enable a religion to survive when lower levels in the hierarchical liturgical order are conflicting with the environment. Later this thesis will make use of Rappaport’s theory in much detail.

The matrices alone are unable to create a framework for *a* religion. Anyone who has encountered a young wicci performing her rituals and a little later a theosophist sitting in a kind of library surrounded by religious classics, semi-scientific and scientific books, can only assume the existence of two very

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<sup>3</sup> Wicca is not analysed in this thesis. Therefore, it is only an assertion to claim that the five matrices generally are met in Wicca. However, SilverFaery, a Danish leader of a network and a ‘coven’, acknowledged the five matrices during interviews held in 2003. For a description of Wicca in Denmark, ‘holism’ and ‘life as a process of learning’, see Larsen 2004b: 63 - 68; Larsen 2004a: 172 - 175.

different religions. Yet both agree on the five matrices. Both consider the universe to be a kind of holistic organism where parts communicate with other parts and with 'wholeness'. Both believe in reincarnation and a master plan for the future development of consciousness, which even the worst sin cannot retard.<sup>4</sup> Both believe that their efforts draw down divine energy and consciousness to the Earth, to the benefit of other human beings. Both believe that their religious commitments will accelerate the coming of a new age. Both perceive the universe as basically monistic, but still there exists a slight dualism maintained by human ignorance and/or sin giving evil forces a space and an opportunity to operate within that space. Finally, both recognise that scientific laws are in principle synonymous with spiritual principles. So, are Wicca and Theosophy different religions? Yes, in one respect, the rituals are at least very different, as are their gods, their cosmology and their codes of conduct. Yet, they are part of, or aspects of, an important branch in Western esotericism/esoterism that can be labelled *dialectical esoterism*. The reason being that matrix number two, with its dialectical relationship between 'low' and 'high', is the most expressive of the five matrices. If matrix number two is encountered in Western esoterism it is most likely that other matrices are there also.

The reader can look forward to meet other topics as well. For example the 'Theory of Ritual Fields' created by Tord Olsson, a theory which generally explains a specific relationship between 'beliefs' and ritual practice. Stated briefly, rituals are 'contracted' or condensed expressions of beliefs. Conversely, beliefs are modes of cognition resulting from participation in ritual activity. Rituals and 'beliefs' are complementary and totally dependent on each other. Other topics encountered in this thesis are for example the additive use of ritual fields, astrology, alchemy, the clairvoyant ritual field, magic, Neoplatonism, secularisation and much more.

### **Previous studies**

During the period 1971 - 75, while studying to become a schoolteacher, I met many people with an interest in western occultism telling me to read this or that book. I found the subject interesting in the beginning, but after 4 - 5

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<sup>4</sup> Reincarnation is not always a part of Western esoterism.

years encountered a feeling, when reading new literature of western occultism, that in one way or another I had heard it all before. At that time my interest began to decline, and it first surfaced again in the period 1991 - 94 while preparing to write several chapters on an astrological history project.<sup>5</sup> Once again, it was necessary to cope with figures from Western esoterism, e.g. Paracelsus, and to understand the use of astrology in alchemy. In the years after the publication of the project, the matrices began to appear in my mind and I signed a contract in the beginning of 1999 to write a book with the Danish title “Vestens Spiritualitet” (i.e. Spirituality of the West). In 1999 I was sure I was the first person tracking down the similarities between many of the occult writers in western history, but was surprised to discover this wasn't true.<sup>6</sup> Already in 1994 Antoine Faivre had published an English edition of *Accès de l'ésotérisme occidental*, a definitive book on the demarcation of the new science of Western esotericism. In his introduction, Faivre sets up his definition of esotericism. Faivre prefers the word 'esotericism', but admits that it is very difficult to find the right word to label this new field of research. Faivre puts four intrinsic and two secondary characteristics forward as criteria of Western esotericism:

- (1) The idea of correspondence, or “as above, so below”.
- (2) Living nature.
- (3) Imagination and mediations.
- (4) The experience of transmutation.
- (5) The practice of concordance: an acceptance of other traditions.
- (6) Transmissions: the idea that one is not initiated by oneself alone.

We will deal with Faivre's 4/6 – schema later in this book. The above criteria are only presented here to give the reader a notion as to the similarity of Faivre's and my own way of thinking. I agree partly with Faivre's criteria, but the problem is that they are expressed too concretely. These criteria need to be more abstract in order to gain the status of USP. Faivre's criteria are

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<sup>5</sup> Larsen et al. (1995), *Astrologiens idé. Fra Babylon til Big Bang-teorien*. Translated into German language with the title: *Astrologie. Von Babylon zur Urknall-Theorie* (2000).

<sup>6</sup> However, the second matrix is described in Larsen et al. 1995: 56 & 96; 2000: 58 & 97. Holism is mainly described as 'sympatheia' throughout the book.



formulated more as a specific cosmology - or derived from a too specific kind of cosmology. Cosmologies are exposed to change, and they come and go in the history of Western esotericism. There are other central figures in the science of esotericism, here I shall mention only J. Wouter Hanegraaff. He does not define the characteristics of Western esotericism, but has recently outlined an historical definition. Hanegraaff has also contributed much significant methodological discourse, particularly on methods *not* to be used, when studying this new field of religion. Both Hanegraaff and Faivre are very concerned with applying a correct terminology, with finding the right words for many topics. I fully agree: terminology and method are of the utmost importance. Western esotericism is still very young and fragile, an infant science still requiring much care with, and attention to, all of its aspects.

This thesis has not been written to oppose Antoine Faivre's schema or some of the methods recently recommended by Hanegraaff. It has been written simply as an attempt to promote the five matrices, and nothing more. In this attempt this thesis makes substantial use of the theories of Rappaport and Olsson because these theories are simply the best I have encountered. I also hope this study, at least in part, can justify this statement by demonstrating the applicability of their theories. By the intensive use of these theories this thesis also becomes *applied ritual theory*. By using anthropological theories on a historical project, it has become evident that some methods used or recommended in the study of esotericism are deficient and often erroneous. The main error is a widespread philosophical attitude when dealing with esotericism or religion in general. Both esotericism and religion are perceived and analysed as 'pieces of philosophy'. But neither religion nor esotericism are 'philosophy'. Basically, as we shall see, they are each dynamic interactions between 'doing' and 'cognition'.

### **Further remarks on the matrices**

The matrices were in 1999 sent as a 30-minute lecture-tape to lecturer Steffen Johannessen. The purpose was to discuss 'New Age' as an item in connection with a newly-written contract on a series of books about religion and philosophy intended for education. At that time I had some reservations about 'New Age' because the movement did not seem to deal with

‘suffering’. Considering the first matrix, ‘Purpose (pronoia) rather than karma or sin’, I added: ‘absence of suffering’. These days I do not consider ‘New Age’ to be a ‘cool religion’, or ‘dangerous’, or a religion for individuals caring only for themselves and their own spiritual and mental development. New Age is as a whole very optimistic, and it has a kind of ‘everything is alright’ attitude to life. Theoretically such an attitude can for sure diminish the ability to recognise suffering when it appears in the lives of others. However, shortly after sending the tape, I discovered that more and more New Age groups found on the Internet did advertising and small projects for Red Cross or other humanitarian organisations. New Age is an example of an additive approach to religion, i.e. ‘new agers’ are to a high degree also Christians. To criticise a supporter of New Age is thus more or less the same as to criticise a normal Christian. I write this because attacks on New Age very often come from and are financed by Christian groups. Furthermore, during an interview with a psychologist highly placed in the school system and known for her observations of New Age, I asked: “What is the purpose of being born in Africa and dying of starvation as a nine-month-old baby”? She immediately replied: “It is a way to move on”. Then while preparing the next question a very polite sixteen-year-old girl entered the room and the psychologist said: “This is my daughter”. A little while later the girl left the room and the psychologist added, looking happy and proud: “I adopted her twelve years ago while I was a young psychologist working in a home for mentally-handicapped orphans, but now she is doing fine in school and in her private life.” Embarrassed, I passed on further questions reflecting any kind of suspicion of the ethical standards of New Age adherents. A planned chapter in one of the books with the title ‘New Age and the absence of suffering’ was definitively cancelled.

*I: Purpose (pronoia) rather than karma or sin*

In the hermetic writings, most explicit in *Corpus Hermeticum*, one finds stoic concepts as *pronoia* and *heimarmenê* often translated as ‘providence’ and ‘fate’. In stoic philosophy, providence and fate are part of God’s *logos*, or his rationality, and both concepts are two qualities of this *logos*. God’s arrangement of the world is *pronoia* (lat: *providentia*), but the world viewed as a process, as a chain of events, is *heimarmenê*. The Greek word

*heimarmenê* is maybe derived from *heirmos*, meaning a chain. Past, present and future are connected, as are links on a chain. An event is caused by an earlier one, but at the same time the event unleashes new events. *Heimarmenê*<sup>7</sup> is *Logos* (rationality) or God *in* the world. One may say that God has a purpose, a plan or an intention with the world, and this is *pronoia*, but the intention manifest - *in* the course of the world – is *heimarmenê*. Fate is thus *Logos through* time. Maybe it is metaphorical to say that God has a purpose or a plan in the world. It is perhaps more correct to say that when creating the world, God planted seeds of rationality (*logoi spermatikoi*) which *in nuce* contain the course of the world. Whatever the formulation, the consequence is that “nothing happens in the world, which evades the divine law and the great harmonium.”<sup>8</sup> Later this study will deal much more with *pronoia* and *heimarmenê* in a hermetic context. The answer of the psychologist (see above), suggests a New Age attitude not far away from the stoic doctrine of fate as an expression of a divine plan (*pronoia*) *with* the world.

In *Hermetica* there is also a concept of fate similar to ‘karma’ than to *heimarmenê*. The wrongdoer may be punished in different ways, for example by getting a new incarnation as an evil human being or even risk rebirth as an animal. Actually, there seem to be various kinds of punishment proportionate with the sin. Maybe this is still a part of *pronoia*, but it also suggests a kind of action-reaction maturation of sin comparable with karma, as it is understood in Buddhism or Hinduism. Today New Age does not deny karma, in fact it is considered to be law, but providence seems to play a more significant part of the mechanism behind fate. A divorce for example, is only to a certain degree a result of karma; it is also an opportunity to move on. The purpose of the divorce is essentially part of a plan to learn something, to develop oneself, and/or to move into a new direction of life. The divorce also serves a purpose.

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<sup>7</sup> In this thesis Greek or Latin words are only written in *italics* the first couple of times they appear, then as normal words.

<sup>8</sup> Johansen 1991: 579 (my translation).

*II: The dialectical relationship between man and God or the divine, including the healing of other people, society and/or the Earth*

This matrix came to my mind reading the hermetic *Korê Kosmou* and then suddenly remembering Alfred Lehmann's interpretation of Cornelius Agrippa's *De Occulta Philosophia Libri Tres*.<sup>9</sup> Agrippa uses three occult laws, which he considers an explanation of all occultism and all connections in the universe:

1. The world is an organic wholeness.
2. The higher acts on the lower, but the lower also acts back on the higher although to a lesser degree.
3. Everything is attracted to its equal and attracts the powers of the equal by all of its nature.

Agrippa's book has been very incentive for this study, not least the dialectic possibility in the second occult law: that the lower can influence the higher (divine), i.e. strengthen the divine, which in return can influence the 'lower' to an even a higher degree. To the best of my knowledge Man can also affect God in Christianity and Islam through prayers or offering or otherwise, but in the end it is up to God to decide whether to be influenced or not. According to Agrippa, it is the *law* of sympathetic attraction between the lower and the higher that makes an impact on God or the divine possible. Maybe it isn't easy to affect the divine, but there *are* secret methods which this study will later reveal. It is the trust in the reality of such methods that constitutes an important key in understanding Western esoterism.

In *Korê Kosmou* and in some other hermetic writings one finds the same trust. Ritually it is possible to influence the divine, to draw its nature and forces closer to the earth, and ultimately it is possible to heal the world. Again, as for Agrippa, this is a question of understanding the *sympatheia* that connects heaven and earth. The word *sympatheia* is explicitly mentioned in *Korê Kosmou*, and later I will argue intensively for the existence of ritual connected with a belief in *sympatheia*. I intend to make clear that one finds rituals in *Hermetica* designed to draw down divine forces and qualities to

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<sup>9</sup> Lehmann 1968: II; 100-102.

earth. To pull down divine energy is not only to maximise gnosis (for the ritual practitioners), but in a broader sense to 'heal the world'.<sup>10</sup> 'Healing of the world' was also a part of Renaissance alchemy and important projects for Marsilio Ficino and Giordano Bruno.<sup>11</sup> Many New Agers work on the same project; they also want to heal the world and accelerate the much-heralded dawn of a new age. There is a magical component in matrix number two that will be briefly discussed later.

*III: Dualism and absolute monism are inter-dependent, including the mind and/or the world as a stairway to heaven.*

Normally scholars label a religion as either monistic or dualistic. This is also the case when dealing with the hermetic writings, especially those of *Corpus Hermeticum*. Some tracts are considered to be dualistic in their approach to life while others are considered to have a monistic view of life. This thesis will present a third consideration: that dualism and monism are inter-dependent or inter-related. Some hermetic writings are both monistic and dualistic in their attitude to life and this seems to be a persistent quality of Western esoterism also. The point is that monism and dualism are not mutually self-exclusive. Consider the above-mentioned 'healing of the world'. The world in an unhealed state is dualistic, but the world in a healed state is monistic. *Korê Kosmou* and maybe *Asclepius* have this item as a major theme. Additionally, in *Corpus Hermeticum* one finds traits of a cyclic cosmos, where at the 'top' of the cycle cosmos is in a monistic state and at the 'bottom' of the cycle cosmos returns to a dualistic state. It is probable that Hermetists combined planetary cycles and the myth(s) of Isis and Osiris to comprehend the cosmic drama of degeneration and resurrection. Monism and dualism were at an epistemological level complementary, but at an ontological and existential level monism had a far greater potency and attraction than dualism.

One can of course introduce certain steps from dualism to monism and the corresponding inner steps in the development of consciousness. No matter

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<sup>10</sup> Larsen et al. 2000: 58; 1995: 56.

<sup>11</sup> Yates 1964. Ficino draws down the virtues from the planets, especially from 'the Three Graces', Sol, Jupiter and Venus. Bruno wanted to improve the planets primarily with the help of sigils in order to heal the world.

the number of rungs, the mind of the practitioner is on a stairway to higher level of insight and consciousness. Often the Earth or the Cosmos itself has to cycle through the various levels between relative dualism and absolute monism.

*IV: Scientific laws are synonymous with spiritual principles*

As has been pointed out by Thorndike, Frances A. Yates and others, there was in Renaissance to some degree a peculiar connection between Science and Hermeticism<sup>12</sup>. In several hermetic writings, one finds the same idea, especially in Stobaeus' *Hermetic Excerpts*, and in New Age there is a stream of books dealing with this topic. Even David Bohm's idea of an enfolded order can be viewed as a New Age project, where scientific laws are viewed as synonymous with spiritual principles.<sup>13</sup> In these modern times of globalisation, this trend may also be found in other religions. For example, Buddhism is often introduced as a scientific topic both in its psychological, philosophical and cosmological aspects. Even fundamentalists in Islam share this same concept, and modern scientific laws can thus be found in the Koran. Despite a general and world-wide respect for natural science in this age of globalisation, Western esotericism has gained distinction by its consistent attachment to science over several centuries. Sometimes it even uses scientific language as *its* symbolic language for spiritual processes and realities. Though feeling rejected by Science today, New Agers hopefully believe scientists will soon realise their mistake and confess that science and religion are two sides of the same coin. In Hermeticism the overall picture was the same. However, warnings were issued about dissecting everything into incoherent pieces and then forgetting to recompile the cut pieces into an all-embracing wholeness. Generally, Hermetists became suspicious when the discriminative intellect took over at the expense of the smoothing and reconciling qualities of the spirit (nous) in man.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Hermeticism is not equal to Hermetism. Hermeticism is a label for later currents interpreting classical Hermetism. Often, however, Hermeticism is used as a synonym for Western esotericism.

<sup>13</sup> Kruse 1996: 21 - 40.

<sup>14</sup> For example, *Korê Kosmou*, 42 - 46.

*V: The holistic cosmos, including the “sympathy” between its parts*

In a holistic system even a small part of the wholeness reflects the wholeness. The parts ‘mirror’ and ‘communicate’ with the wholeness, which in turn reacts to the impact of small parts by sending a new communication out to all the parts. Wholeness is at the same time something in itself (Oneness), and at the same time wholeness is made up of thousands of millions of parts. Wholeness is both ‘one and many’. Parts mirror and communicate with other parts, obeying more- or less-complicated sets of rules. These rules are often based, for example, on similarities in form, colour, hierarchal placement, or even distance. Thus, for example, the stars believed to have a similar distance from the Earth are in the same class and have a strong sympathia for each other. The Sun and Gold have strong sympathia for each other; both share the same colour, yellow, and as the Sun hierarchically is the first among the planets, so is Gold the first ranked among metals. Sympatheia due to hierarchical placement, i.e. the ranking order in a sequence, seems to be a very important rule in Western esotericism. Thus ‘number two’ in an order is in strong sympathia with ‘number two’ in other rankings. The Moon is the Queen, the number two in a ranking of the celestial bodies and is therefore in strong sympathy with Silver, the second metal after Gold in value and appreciation.

‘Strong sympathy’ is exchangeable with ‘identification’. Under certain conditions, for example, the Sun *is* Gold, the Moon *is* Silver, and Venus *is* Copper. Though in the *Order of Things* he in many respects offered a very detailed analysis of the many complex rules for sympathia<sup>15</sup>, Foucault was probably mistaken when he overlooked the fact that total identification,<sup>16</sup> for example between the Sun and Gold, was only present in ritual situations. When, for example, alchemy is turned into a ritual practice, planets become identical with metals. Outside a ritual situation, Sun is Sun and Gold is Gold, but there still exists a strong sympathy between Sun and Gold. In this respect the ritual effect found in Western esoterism does not differ from rituals in other religions. A ritual identifies and connects parts which are normally separated.

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<sup>15</sup> Foucault 1992: 17 - 44.

<sup>16</sup> Foucault 1992: 24. Foucault writes about *the identity of the things*.

Oddly enough, the idea of holism viewed as communication shows many parallels to modern double or two-sided communication. It is similar to modern management where good leadership is considered to be an ability to create communication between all parts of an organisation. Everything, even the smallest part, has a voice. However, in order to be heard it is best to follow special rules for communication and to have someone higher up in the system to communicate with.<sup>17</sup> The exact type of holism differs, and any type can be categorised as either *vertical* or *horizontal* holism. The former is hierarchical, frequently-used during the Renaissance, and even found in the writings of Madame Blavatsky. The latter, horizontal holism, is rather democratic, making everything equal. The Sun, for example, is in line with Saturn. Communication between parts occurs directly and a higher ‘connection’ is not necessary as an intermediary.

### Texts selected

The following texts and/or authors have been selected as they all, for different reasons, are central or highly relevant to Western esotericism. Additional information on this topic is given in separate chapters.

#### *Cornelius Agrippa*

Agrippa’s *De occulta philosophia* is a *survey* of Renaissance ‘occult philosophy’, as the title reads. Its status has been reinforced by Compagni’s study which analysed the numerous sources from which Agrippa compiled his immense knowledge. However, Agrippa added his own attitudes and ideas, and his occult philosophy does not concur with that of Ficino or other writers.

#### *Hermetica*

According to different scholars, for example Hanegraaff, Faivre, van den Broek and Quispel, classical Hermetism is considered part of Western

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<sup>17</sup> Håkansson 2001. John Dee communicated for years with angels using different methods in a search for a “natural” language of angels through which he could discover a direct understanding of Man, Nature and God. Håkansson manages to display aspects of holism *as* language and communication. At one level the language and communication of occultism are symbolic, and at another level they are direct and primordial.



esotericism (or Hermeticism). For this reason, it is very relevant to analyse Hermetism. One of the conclusions of this thesis is that Astrology, as a huge ritual field, emerged from classical Hermetism.

*Paracelsus*

Paracelsus is mentioned in nearly all literature dealing with Western esotericism, for example by Hanegraaff, Faivre, Kochu von Stuckrad, Henrik Bogdan and Carlos Gilly.<sup>18</sup> To Faivre, Alchemy is one of the cornerstones of Western esotericism and this thesis will demonstrate that Paracelsus's Alchemy became so ritualised that it became an alchemical ritual field.

*Blavatskian Theosophy*

Different scholars, for example Hammer, Hanegraaff and Brendan French, have dealt with Blavatsky, Steiner (the founder of Anthroposophy), Leadbeater or Bailey which are perhaps still the most influential modern theosophical writers. They were all 'dialectical esoteric writers' though Blavatsky was somewhat ambiguous. Theosophy became so dependent on 'clairvoyance' that it established a new powerful ritual field in modern esoterism.

*Redfield and Tolle*

The last texts analysed are recent best-sellers of James Redfield and Eckhart Tolle. Their books are translated into numerous languages and both have been number one on the New York Times' bestseller list. Hanegraaff has explicitly requested students of esotericism to analyse Redfield's *The Celestine Prophecy*, and it will be demonstrated that both Redfield and Tolle are 'dialectical esotericists' deeply involved in the clairvoyant ritual field.

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<sup>18</sup> Gilly 2000b: 386 - 425.

## CHAPTER 1

### USP - Western esoterism as 'sameness'

In these times of postmodernism, it is hardly possible to postulate any kind of continuity from Hermetism to New Age. In 1929 AD a historical and economical magazine, *Annales d'histoire économique et sociale*, was published, and its task was to rewrite history where social, economical and mental structures were integrated into a wholeness. Generally, it is accepted that the 'school of Annales' in fact succeeded at least to describe periods and locality in history, especially the Mediterranean in The Middle Ages, as a 'long stretch' of cultural homogeneity (lasting several hundred years). Another French writer, Michel Foucault, turned to history in a similar fashion later and held the view that different 'histories', i.e. of sexuality, madness, medicine, imprisonment and 'the science of man' revealed 'epochs' lasting several hundred years before they totally collapsed. Each epoch in each field was upheld by cognitive structures lying behind daily and scientific thinking. Foucault is generally considered a 'post-structuralist' writer. There is no need to say that neither Foucault nor the school of Annales offers a good defence in postulating a continuing homogeneity of patterns in thought, as displayed in this thesis. In some details both, especially Foucault, are not without interest, which will be dealt with later, but much more justification for this study can be found in the last book of Roy A. Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the making of Humanity* (1999).

In this last book of Rappaport the science of religion has been augmented with an outstanding work. On the negative side, the book is unfinished and not always consistent in its terminology. However, when Rappaport argues clearly and unequivocally, he offers the reader highly inventive ways of looking at and explaining the many dimensions in rituals as well as in 'faith' (or the conceptual side of religion). Religion is not reduced to either sociology or semiotics or otherwise. Durkheim is essential to Rappaport's study, but neither he, Peirce, Bateson nor other central figures are allowed to 'reduce' religion, and their thoughts are mostly used as inspiration.

Humans and animals are different beings, says Rappaport. The former has lost its instincts and has to create its own senses in behaviour and language, while the latter can rely on instincts, knowing how to act and 'communicate'. Man's survival is very dependent on created values, which can offer survival when man submits to accepted values. The members of a group voluntarily submit to common viewpoints and meaning, and value and culture are joint concerns. Thus, man survives through culture and here, according to both Rappaport and Durkheim, religion offers survival for the group for as long as its followers voluntarily submit to it. At its most abstract level religion contributes with Ultimate Sacred Postulates (USP), as for example the "declaration of faith called the Shema (Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One) and the Creeds of Christians."<sup>1</sup> Other Ultimate Sacred Postulates are, for example, 'There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet', 'Jesus is the Son of God' or 'Everything is suffering' (the first noble truth in Buddhism).

Next level postulates are cosmological axioms and these are not only the fundamental structure of the universe, but also opposites like men/women, low/high, cold/warm, moist/dry, mortal/immortal, which can only be mediated through rituals.<sup>2</sup> At a third, and now much more concrete level, one may have specific rules "governing the conduct of relations among the persons, qualities, conditions and states of affairs whose oppositions are decreed by cosmological axioms (e.g. between men and women, men and 'cold' foods, etc.)."<sup>3</sup> Returning to the Ultimate Sacred Postulates (USP) they are distinguished from cosmological axioms in four major ways:

1. USP are devoid, or close to devoid, of material significance, i.e. they have no empirical reality and cannot be verified (or falsified).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Rappaport 1999: 263. NOTE: Here, perhaps, one ought to write "[...] the expression of the Ultimate etc". However, the square brackets [...] are omitted in the beginning of quotations - except when dealing with longer quotations.

<sup>2</sup> Rappaport 1999: 264.

<sup>3</sup> Rappaport 1999: 265 - 266.

<sup>4</sup> Rappaport 1999: 280. Essential for Rappaport is that material evidence can never falsify USP, which are seldom material, but even when there is some material substance in USP, for example pharaohs incarnate Horus, falsification is impossible. "On the other hand they can be verified neither objectively nor logically. *And yet they are taken to be unquestionable*"; Rappaport 1999: 281.

Cosmological axioms are more sensible, i.e. determining for example what is hot or cold, and are more manifest in physical and social affairs.

2. USP are more related to ritual, whereas cosmological axioms are implicit in much daily life.<sup>5</sup>
3. USP are either devoid of explicit social content or only very vague in this regard. A consequence here is, of course, that USP can survive in different historical epochs - understood in the sense Foucault defines the term epoch.
4. USP are very remote from social life as opposed to cosmological axioms, which serve as the logical basis from which rules of conduct and the proprieties of social life can be derived. USP sanctify all lower level postulates but do not provide cosmological axioms (or rules of conduct) with any kind of logical foundation. Cosmological structures and codes of conduct can be modified without challenge to USP.<sup>6</sup> USP are (therefore) arbitrarily connected to cosmological axioms and codes of conduct.

USP have or may contain great powers of survival: "The Shema of the Jews may have endured for 3,000 years; the Nicene Creed has remained unchanged since AD 325."<sup>7</sup> According to Rappaport USP do not require an explicit formulation to gain the status of USP. There is nothing in his study that states that explicitly stated USP have more power than those implicitly expressed. Based on his study of the Maring people of Papua-New Guinea Rappaport writes:

"No such creed or declarations is made explicit by the Maring, but postulates concerning the existence and power of spirits are implicit in the highly stylized addresses to those spirits occurring in all major rituals."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Rappaport 1999: 265. See more below.

<sup>6</sup> Rappaport 1999: 266.

<sup>7</sup> Rappaport 1999: 269.

<sup>8</sup> Rappaport 1999: 263.

Thus, USP can survive for a considerably long span of time and USP do not have to be formulated explicitly (as the five matrices). Rappaport defines the hierarchical dimension of liturgical orders as made up of three levels: Ultimate Sacred Postulates, cosmological axioms and conduct.<sup>9</sup> The term 'liturgy' can refer to a class of rituals where no or very few variations are allowed or expected, or the term can be used when describing rituals in Christian churches. In most religious studies scholars leave the term 'liturgy' to Christian theologians, but for Rappaport it is synonymous with religious ritual, probably to distinguish this class from non-religious ritual. According to Rappaport, the second dimension, i.e. the hierarchical, of liturgical orders is the least well-understood, being largely ignored or overlooked.<sup>10</sup>

Rappaport uses, as most anthropologists do, the method of induction and concludes from the specific to the general and especially, he concludes, from the Mares to religion in general. Some caution is necessary anyway in such a process, but it is important to pass a few comments before progressing. First of all, the religion of the Mares was an established religion; it had existed for a considerable time. Inversely, Western esoterism has never been at rest, i.e. it has seldom crystallised into a single religion with organised priests, temples or churches, a calendar with religious holy days and rituals for death and marriage etc. It is sufficient to point to the fact that esoterism has only fragmentarily developed a clear theology and codes of conduct. It takes some time for the 'hierarchical liturgical order' to manifest itself and to create rules of conduct (mainly derived from a constant cosmology).

### **The five matrices as USP**

Before examining further details about USP and how they adapt to their surroundings through cybernetic and neo-Darwinist mechanisms, it must be emphasised that it is the main object of this thesis to treat and compare the matrices with USP. The Ultimate Sacred Postulates crowning the corpus of understanding represented in liturgy, are devoid of concreteness, low in social specificity and most importantly, they are only randomly or arbitrarily connected to cosmology and other low-level understanding. This is the true resilience that USP earn by these positions and functions. Cosmologies may

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<sup>9</sup> Rappaport 1999: 170.

<sup>10</sup> Rappaport 1999: 170.

break down; rules of conduct, food, clothes, etc. may vanish but USP can remain more or less untouched by history. So long they are agreed upon (or accepted) by a group, by a community, the USP survive.<sup>11</sup>

Looking at how Rappaport distinguishes USP from cosmological axioms we can make the following statement:

1. Matrices cannot be verified or falsified; they are devoid of material significance. Cosmological axioms are more real and can be at risk of being verified or not - hence cosmological axioms are more prone to challenge and eventual transformation. In the history of Western esoterism cosmologies appear and disappear, but the five matrices (or other important USP) remain.

Lower dimensions of the hierarchal liturgical order are more specific and hence at risk of being falsified, i.e. there exists empirical data (or a strong consensus) able to refute the assertion.<sup>12</sup> One of the main matrices in this study concerns holism. According to Hanegraaff the word 'holism' was originally invented by the South African political leader general J.C. Smuts, who in 1925 wrote *Holism and Evolution*. In this connection Hanegraaff writes:

"However, it is important to emphasize from the outset that the term 'holism', in a New Age context, does not refer to any particular, clearly circumscribed theory or worldview. [...]. I will argue that holism can be conceived in abstract terms as: 1. based on the possibility of reducing all manifestations to one '*ultimate source*'; 2. based on the *universal interrelatedness* of everything in the universe; 3. based on the universal dialectic between complementary *polarities*; 4. based on the analogy of the whole of reality, or of significant subsystems, with *organisms*."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Rappaport 1999: 439.

<sup>12</sup> Some religious assertions, for example 'women cannot be priests', are probably more disproved through consensus than through empirical data.

<sup>13</sup> Hanegraaff 1998a: 119 - 120.

Now, as Hanegraaff puts it, holism is not a clearly circumscribed theory or worldview. This suggests that 'holism' is an USP and not a cosmology. Earlier holism was described in different terms as correspondences, sympathia or in other terms. Essentially, Hanegraaff's remarks also fit Western esoterism although some nuances must be added later.

2. Matrices are either devoid of explicit social content or only very vague in this regard.

Remembering that USP are slogans like 'Jesus is the son of God' or 'There is no god but Allah and Muhammad is his prophet', it is no wonder that matrices are devoid of explicit social content or only vague in this regard. An important implication is that the matrices can be exported into foreign cultures still sticking to their traditional codes of conduct. Alternatively, many values can be imported to the West without disturbing the five matrices. Further, this indicates that adherents of Western esoterism throughout history can be organised into different groups with little in common. Even single members of a group at a given time and location can stick to their own private codex of behaviour if they prefer and still agree on the five matrices. This rule applies even more in the absence of officials, priests, broadly-accepted institutions and a well-defined dogmatism in esoterism.

3. Matrices are arbitrarily connected to cosmological axioms and structures.

The above statement is of utmost importance if one wants to understand Western esoterism and its history. Not only does this rule offer a general explanation as to how some of the five matrices have survived for approximately 2000 years. This rule also explains the existence of the many different cosmologies encountered in Western esoterism. It also implies that matrices as USP may make way for other theories like secularisation as put forward by Hanegraaff, the different episteme and epochs elaborated by Foucault, or other theories or observations concerning Western esotericism. Rappaport writes:

“It follows that it is possible to distinguish transformations of different degrees of profundity. ‘Low-order’ transformations, transformations of the [bold] internal structure of specific subsystems, may be occurring more or *less continuously* [...]. High-order transformations, transformation in the structure of more inclusive systems, are rarer and, of course, their effects are more profound.”<sup>14</sup>

Dealing with religion in adaptation, Rappaport makes it clear that low- or high-order transformations can happen without altering the religion in question. Secularisation may be categorised as a low-order influence occurring continuously while Foucault’s episteme, or Kuhn’s paradigm, represent a high-order transformation.<sup>15</sup> Rappaport could maybe have described dramatic biological changes such as the abrupt extermination of the dinosaurs held by most scientists to have occurred due to a sudden catastrophe on Earth.<sup>16</sup> However, as far as secularisation and new paradigms intervene in cosmologies (or codes of conduct) USP, i.e. here the five matrices, are still intact. Actually, it is the changes in the subsystems which preserve the ‘whole system’ (see more below).

### **Adaptation**

It is Rappaport’s aim to raise our understanding of the nature of religion and of religion in nature.<sup>17</sup> In chapter 13, *Religion in adaptation*, Rappaport unfolds in great detail cybernetic and neo-Darwinistic ideas with the intention of transferring these to the field of religion. Religion is a ‘living system’ and in all living systems, including animals and organic life, survival requires a special kind of flexibility. Adaptation is not only observed in the life of primitive organisms but also in complex societies. Whether or not one can decode correctly the extraordinarily-detailed and

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<sup>14</sup> Rappaport 1999: 495, note 7 (my italics).

<sup>15</sup> It is one of the conclusions of this thesis that secularisation causes a low-order influence on Western esotericism without much profound effect. For empirical arguments, see chap. 8 and 9 below.

<sup>16</sup> Modern neo-Darwinist theory implies that a sudden and radical change of environment entails extermination for many species.

<sup>17</sup> Rappaport 1999: 1.



complex language used by Rappaport on this topic, at least some extracts may be taken from it. Rappaport makes a clear distinction between Man and animals. The latter are entirely dependent on 'homeostatic' adaptation constituted by genetic information, but Man adds symbolic components as being far more important. The adaptive system for humanity becomes symbolic-organic in its expression and adaptation is defined in the following manner:

"I take the term 'adaptation' to designate the process through which living systems of all sorts maintain themselves, or persist, in the face of perturbations, originating in their environments or themselves, through reversible changes in their states, less reversible or irreversible transformations of their structures, or actions eliminating perturbing factors."<sup>18</sup>

Adaptation can thus run from minor internal corrections, for instance the healing of a broken leg, to a total and irreversible transformation of the structure (but Rappaport does not say the entire system). Rappaport gives an example of irreversible transformation by referring to the emergence of the amphibia from the lobe-finned fish during the Devonian period. The fish transformed their heavily-boned fins into legs and were thus able to survive in waterholes and when drying up, the fish (now amphibia) were able to locate other waterholes, and thus they survived. Rappaport is rather philosophical and asks a highly central question: "*What does this change maintain unchanged?*"<sup>19</sup> The answer is:

"The parable of the transformation of the lobe-finned fish into amphibia indicates that they are hierarchical in the unavoidable and irreducible sense of wholes made up of parts: the changes in *subsystems* preserve the continuity of the system as a whole living entity."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Rappaport 1999: 408.

<sup>19</sup> Rappaport 1999: 7.

<sup>20</sup> Rappaport 1999: 7.

It is quite clear that Rappaport's strategy is to introduce the three 'hierarchical levels' (USP, cosmology and codes of conduct) as advantageous for adaptation and hence survival. The three hierarchical levels are most appropriate for an adaptation preserving the 'whole living entity', i.e. a religion as such. This happens by making changes in a religion's 'subsystems', i.e. in codes of conduct or even in cosmology, while maintaining the USP.

Viewing religions in that light, one can give a simple example and say that Islam and Christianity are the same religions whether or not Muslims or Christians believe in a flat or round Earth. From a philosophical standpoint, Rappaport could be on thin ice because the question of 'sameness' depends on conceptual acceptance. Is a man who has lost his left leg in a car accident the same or not? Philosophically one could argue in the style of the Buddhist philosopher Nagarjuna and reply: 'the man is neither the same nor different'. Rappaport wisely does not consult philosophers on the subject of 'change' but turns to cybernetics and neo-Darwinism. In these fields he finds the answers he is looking for, i.e. a system must make adjustments or transformations to its subsystems to maintain the system itself. Rappaport wasn't able to draw examples from recently-advanced computer systems, as for example Microsoft's Windows XP. This operating system maintains itself by making continuous adjustment to, for example, newly-installed programs or by organising, temporarily, necessary - and then later unnecessary - files. Windows XP is also a cybernetic system designed for controlling computers. I mention this because Rappaport likes to give examples from the computer world.

### **Man as a hermeneutic being**

Man adds symbolic components that become dominant, "for better or worse."<sup>21</sup> Man can quickly adapt to a new situation through symbolic interpretation while animals are dependent on their genetic material. As long as man agrees on a given consensus, often USP, the system, i.e. a religion, is maintained. In his argument Rappaport now makes his next strategic move: a given consensus has to be flexible, which means that it has to leave room for

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<sup>21</sup> Rappaport 1999: 411.

individual interpretation of the symbolic meaning. Without flexibility, a group that predetermines everything may become unable to adjust, and the situation locks up, preventing adaptation. For a group there must at the same time be an agreement on consensuses and a space (or possibility) for interpretation, i.e. flexibility in understanding.<sup>22</sup> This study does not postulate that the five matrices and different cosmologies specified are perceived in the same way by different individuals or groups.<sup>23</sup>

On the negative side, man can also add too many symbolic components and a given consensus can be too loose. This implies that there is no relation between a symbol and its meaning or between 'sign' and things. "*Flexibility is neither versatility nor a simple transformation or product of versatility. It is a product of versatility and orderliness.*"<sup>24</sup> To put it more simply: there has to be versatility in the consensus, and at the same time a certain amount of order constituted by agreement. Agreement and versatility seem to be two keywords in understanding Rappaport's 'symbolic-organic' adaptation. Too little versatility and too much agreement (consensus) create too little adaptation, and too much versatility and too little agreement (consensus) create a kind of havoc transforming the situation into a lie or confusion (Babel). In the last chapter of his book, *The Breaking of the Holy and its salvation*, Rappaport issues a warning to post-modern society as being in danger of breaking religion up into an unbalanced consensus. It may - exactly like the relation between versatility and agreement - develop into two different types of situations: one situation with jihad/holocaust/fundamentalism and the other situation with 'materialism', or 'relativism', causing a breakdown of the holy. Not much needs to be said regarding jihad and holocaust being based on assumptions, as by definition we are right in every detail. If the reader for a moment agrees that the five matrices are accepted by modern esotericists, it becomes rather obvious that Western esoterism has a great potential for survival in decades to come. A part of esoterism, then, simply combines a degree of agreement based on the five matrices and versatility primarily-based on great openness towards new or old cosmologies.

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<sup>22</sup> Rappaport 1999: 427.

<sup>23</sup> See chapter 10, 'Summary and some future prospects'.

<sup>24</sup> Rappaport 1999: 418.

### **Rappaport as a theologian**

Rappaport's question, "What does this change maintain unchanged", so highly important for his whole approach to religion, draws with his answers attention to his perception of the nature of religion. USP point, insofar as they point to anything, to the sacred; they are simply sacred postulates of the highest order. However, in reality Rappaport more or less makes USP synonymous with the holy, the sacred or the divine. As far as a religion can maintain itself when its subsystems change or transform, religion is equal to the sacred; in reality religion is equal to its USP. This thesis does not share this view.

In the introduction, Wicca and Theosophy were considered two different religions - no matter that they share the same USP. Where is the limit for the number of changes in subsystems before 'wholeness' is no longer the same? Some things may endure only a certain amount of change before they are considered something else - despite Rappaport declaring that 'the changes in subsystems preserve the continuity of the system as a whole living entity' (see quotation above). The paradox is that Rappaport in using two theories, cybernetics and neo-Darwinism, may have promoted a theological understanding of religion rather than an anthropological understanding. In the eyes of a Christian theologian, Rappaport's viewpoint can be seen as confirmation that only *one* Christian religion exists. As far as Christian groups share the most important USP, they establish Christianity. In this way it is very easy to define Christianity, Islam, Buddhism etc., but in the real world religions are much more differentiated in classification than Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, etc., suggest. As already mentioned in the introduction, there are many religions or currents in Western esoterism. Wicca is one religion and Theosophy is another, regardless of whether they share the same USP. Rappaport does not explicitly claim that USP constitute a religion, but as Rappaport states, "the expression of the Ultimate Sacred Postulates does identify those who accept them, thereby distinguishing them from those who do not."<sup>25</sup> Thus USP provide identification for a group and thereby distinguish it from other groups. Rappaport also declares that it is

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<sup>25</sup> Rappaport 1999: 439.

possible for different groups to share the same USP - and such groups can even be at war against each other.<sup>26</sup>

### **Similarities – and the many esoteric currents**

This study is primarily an investigation into similarities and not differences, and the matrices provide identification for the followers, in the same way USP do. Crucial to this study is that the matrices are the right ones - or are at least very accurate - but this does not exclude some esoteric religions (or currents) from having additional USP. This thesis does not postulate that the matrices are the only ones in the branch of esotericism described and as we shall see, Faivre's and Hanegraaff's notions, on imagination and evolution respectively, are fully recognised as important USP.

Furthermore, as USP are randomly-connected to cosmologies and lower-level hierarchical orders, esoteric currents can have the same matrices, but different cosmologies or values for codes of conduct. In this sense, New Age is not identical with or similar to esoteric currents during the Renaissance or classical Hermetism. By recognising that different currents can have additional USP and different cosmologies and values as well, this thesis does not promote the idea that only 'sameness' exists during the course of the history of Western esoterism. It focuses on homogeneity in order to demonstrate that 'sameness' in the form of the five matrices exists on the most abstract level in the hierarchical liturgical order, i.e. the five matrices belong to the domain of USP.

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<sup>26</sup> For Rappaport, it is possible for different groups to share the same USP (1999: 439). However, he is referring to different groups within the Maring people.

## CHAPTER 2

### Rituals, USP – and ritual fields

One of the basic criticisms of the contemporary intention to establish Western esotericism could be that the topic is to a great degree conceived of as a ‘form of thought’ or ‘a vision of the world’.<sup>1</sup> This is not to deny that religion is also a vision of the world, but it seems that Western esotericism emphasises ideas much more than rituals. Numerous books about Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and other religions are at one’s disposal without any hints to rituals. Many books have been published with informative sections about important rituals in the religion being considered, but very few books are available where rituals are integrated into the vision of the world. Therefore, one has to ask: *what is the relationship between USP and rituals?* The object of asking the question is to connect ‘forms of thought’ to rituals. The matrices must ‘attract’ certain rituals (and the rituals certain visions of the world) or to put it in other words: do rituals in themselves reveal something about USP found in a religion?

Astrology, for example, seems to be one of the most persistent topics in the history of Western esoterism. There can be different explanations, but astrology viewed as a ritual could be something needed by ‘holism’ as a form of thought. Astrology is holistic in its vision of the world and in the technology it uses for prediction.<sup>2</sup> Not only is man as a microcosm connected to the macrocosm through signs (Aries, Taurus, etc.), the planets (Sun, Moon, Mercury, etc.) but ‘things’ and phenomena are connected to each other through different astrological rules. Even abstractions such as countries relate to signs<sup>3</sup>. Astrological symbols of the Sun and Moon appear in many ritual practices, for example in alchemy, probably with the intention to invoke or affirm the everlasting holistic composition of the entire universe. As will be shown later, astrology can actually fit into other

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<sup>1</sup> These terms are often used by Faivre. See for example Faivre (1998a: 7) and Williams-Hogan (1998: 217).

<sup>2</sup> For example: the ‘progressed horoscope’ is found by calculating as many days ahead from the birth date as one is years old, this means 1 day = 1 year, e.g. a person born 2.7.1980 has her/his 22nd year calculated by looking at the date 24.7.1980.

<sup>3</sup> See for example *Tetrabiblos*.II.3; Ptolemy 1980: 128 - 160.

matrices as well. One can also ask: is it a coincidence that astrology (and/or its symbols) occurs repeatedly in Western esoterism, or is it simply because it backs up the concept of holism? One can ask the same question with magic: is magic also a reoccurring item, because it as a ritual practice reminds the exerciser of the important holistic dimension? Does holism, as an USP, simply need and attract ritual practices such as astrology and magic? Before trying to answer these questions at least hypothetically, some comments on Faivre's approach to esotericism could be suitable. Faivre had, at least earlier, a particular attitude to esotericism. Here Hanegraaff sums up Faivre's earlier approach to esotericism (the cursive used is my emphasis; what is underlined here is in cursive in Hanegraaff's writing):

“[...] an ‘*idea complex*’, in the sense of a cluster of *related ideas recognisable* over time by virtue of family resemblance. An esoteric tradition, on this foundation, may be defined as a historical continuity in which individuals and/or groups are demonstrably influenced in their life and *thinking* by the esoteric *ideas formulated* earlier, which they use and develop according to the specific demands and cultural context of their own period. A diachronic study of such an esoteric tradition, recognising the irreversibility of historical time, must be genetic: it traces the *filiation of ideas* over time, not with the prior intention of demonstrating their trans- or meta-historical similarity or unity, even less with the intention to demonstrate historical ‘anticipations’ of cherished ideas, but with the intention of clarifying the complex ways in which people process – *absorb, (re)interpret, (re)construct etc.* – *the ideas* of the past accessible to them. Such a genetic approach nevertheless leaves room for the recognition of relatively constant factors: certain type of religious experiences, certain inferences which are likely to be drawn from such experiences, the ‘*logical pressure*’ of ideas and basic assumption, and various pre-rational factors [...].”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Hanegraaff 1998b: 43.

Perhaps Hanegraaff exaggerates a bit when summarising Faivre's approach to Western esotericism as being purely mental. Faivre does not totally exclude rituals, but primarily mentions those found in Freemasonry without going into further details.<sup>5</sup> According to Faivre, some Freemasonry lodges contain Christian or Western esoteric rites (of a medieval and chivalric type).<sup>6</sup> Recently, Henrik Bogdan has published a study of rites of initiation in Freemasonry, the Hermetic order of the Golden Dawn, Modern Pagan Witchcraft and Wicca.<sup>7</sup> However, this study confirms indirectly that it is not that easy to find ordinary rituals outside Freemasonry prior to Blavatsky's theosophy. My proposal is that what Faivre calls 'practices' (see below) are ritual fields (see below) able to explain a 'ritual foundation' for Western esotericism. Despite Henrik Bogdan's recent study in rites of initiation, Western esotericism is at risk of becoming a sort of history of mentality or ideas. Pure cognitive approaches raise problems of demarcation or limitations of esotericism. Are art, poetry, novels, architecture or other items as psychology, philosophy and movies also topics, which must be studied in order to understand Western esotericism and its impact on western culture? The answer is no doubt 'yes', but this raises problems of limiting and demarcating not where esotericism begins - but where it ends. However, it must be highly emphasized that Faivre also stresses that Western esotericism must be viewed as 'practices'. He distinguishes between *currents*, *spiritual attitudes* and *practices* in the following way:<sup>8</sup>

Pure Currents: Hermetism,<sup>9</sup> Christian Kabbalah, Paracelsism, Rosicrucianism and Theosophy.

Currents, which are also *practices*: Alchemy, Astrology,<sup>10</sup> Magic, and Occultism<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> See for example Faivre 1994: 78 - 81; 102 - 104.

<sup>6</sup> Faivre 1994: 79.

<sup>7</sup> Bogdan 2007. Bogdan concludes that rituals (of initiations) *mirror* esoteric beliefs. Material from Bogdan's study is included when analysing Leadbeater's initiation into the Great White Brotherhood (see appendix 1).

<sup>8</sup> Faivre 1998b: 1 - 10.

<sup>9</sup> Faivre's 4/6 schema as well as the concept of 'esotericism' originally applies from late 15th century, but here Faivre includes 'Alexandrian hermetism' as a current in Western esotericism.



Pure spiritual attitudes: Hermeticism (i.e. not classical Hermetism) and Gnosis.<sup>12</sup>

What Faivre calls ‘practices’ should, and it is the point here, also be considered to be *ritual practices*. The issue is not whether Faivre’s categories are precise and adequate, but he makes a substantial point in stressing the importance of ‘practices’ in Western esotericism outside the narrow circles of Freemasonry. Accordingly, he recognises that the academic study of esotericism also concerns ‘doing’ and not only ‘thinking’. This thesis *expands* Faivre’s viewpoint by conceiving ‘currents which are also practices’ as ritual practices, i.e. practices that have been strongly ritualised. Later, as we shall see, some ‘currents which are also practices’ can also be viewed as ritual fields.<sup>13</sup> The purpose in the following is to examine the relationship between rituals and beliefs. Roughly speaking two different scenarios could be the result:

- a. Rituals are more or less arbitrary connected to faith (beliefs).
- b. Rituals are, indeed, under special circumstances, connected to specific USP. For example, astrology, alchemy and magic are in their ritual aspects in Western esotericism to a very high degree synonymous with holism, i.e. the fifth matrix in this thesis.

It is, of course, (b) that is of real interest, and a discussion follows as to a likely connection between ritual as an ‘act’ and ‘beliefs’ as a noetic function of the ritual by applying Tord Olsson’s theory. His theory states that rituals

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<sup>10</sup> Faivre only minimally addresses astrology in his writings, and in his *Access to Western Esotericism* in total only 4-5 pages. In a review article concerning different contributions to Western esotericism one of Kocku von Stuckrad’s conclusions is: “Almost entirely missing is astrology, which is astonishing given the fact that this discipline is one of the cornerstones of Esoteric culture (besides alchemy and magic).” von Stuckrad 2002: 213.

<sup>11</sup> To Faivre occultism is esotericism adapting to materialism and science, i.e. to secularisation. Faivre also includes ‘perennialism’ as both a current and a spiritual attitude.

<sup>12</sup> ‘Gnosis’ includes ‘gnosticism’ in the beginning of our era, but not exclusively. Some currents in Western esotericism, but not all, rely to a high degree on ‘gnosis’ as an inner experience.

<sup>13</sup> This thesis will make explicit use of four ritual fields: an astrological, an alchemical, a magical and a clairvoyant ritual field.

create beliefs and that ritual elements and ‘beliefs’ are expressions of each other. Continuing, one can argue in a manner similar to Rappaport by stating that USP are realised *through* and *in* ritual activity, because USP receive substance *in* and *from* the ritual. Without rituals USP are almost ghost-like abstractions ready to blow away. It should now be understandable why Faivre’s idea of ‘practices’ is very useful when conceived as ritual practices. Topics such as alchemy, astrology and magic are - as far as they are rituals - expressions of ‘holism’ (matrix number five). In return, these ritual practices give additional *assurance* and *knowledge* of the qualities in holism. Maybe one can say, using the language of daily life, that USP *need* rituals to gain substance. In their turn, rituals *stimulate* and *elaborate* noetic qualities of the USP in question. Rituals and USP are thus highly dialectical in their interactions.

### **USP, canonical messages and rituals**

Unfortunately, a close reading of Rappaport does not give much information concerning a more exact *relationship* between USP and rituals. One of the few statements is the following:

“The proprietous expression of the latter (i.e. USP) is largely confined to ritual, whereas the expression of the former (i.e. cosmological axioms) is implicit in much of daily life.”<sup>14</sup>

Rappaport states that USP are largely confined to ritual, i.e. expressed in rituals. It is, of course, understandable that USP, so important for a religion’s survival, must manifest through rituals. For a moment one can look at something as simple as the baptismal service performed in the Danish church. The priest pours a little water over the top of the head of the child three times while saying: “I christen you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” Seen from the point of view of the child, he or she now encounters at the first meeting with the Church’s four important USP: the doctrine of the Trinity, God as Father, Jesus as the Son of God and the

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<sup>14</sup> Rappaport 1999: 265 (my parentheses).

presence of a Holy Spirit. I do not think it coincidental that the child now receives Christianity's such important USP *through* a ritual.

In the first part of *Ritual and Religion in the making of Humanity* Rappaport does not refer to USP,<sup>15</sup> instead he speaks of 'canonical messages'. It's a little peculiar, but all-in-all one can conclude that canonical messages are very similar to Ultimate Sacred Postulates. Rappaport writes:

“Canonical messages, which are concerned with things not confined to the present in time or space, which may even be conceived of as standing outside the time-space continuum altogether, and whose significance may be, indeed, usually are spiritual, conceptual or abstract in nature, are and *can only* be founded upon symbols (i.e. signs associated by law or convention with that which they signify) although they can employ, secondarily, icons and even make limited use of indices.”<sup>16</sup>

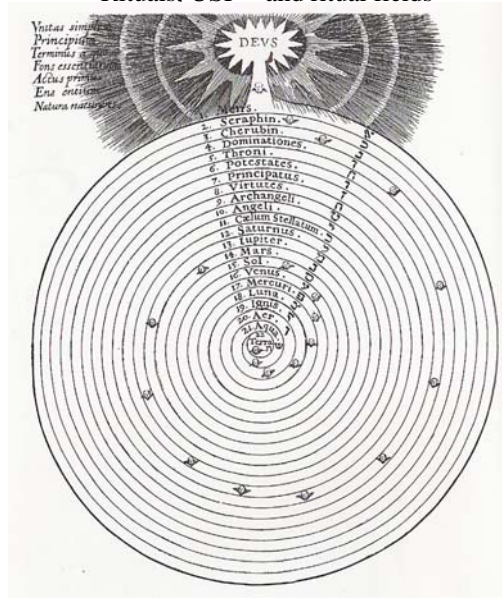
Regarding canonical messages as USP, one can substitute the expression 'canonical messages' with USP. USP are not confined to the present in time and space, for example is God as Son (Jesus) not a truth only in, e.g., Jerusalem, or a truth at a given time, e.g., the year 1866 AD. USP can be conceived to stand outside the time-space continuum insofar as they are abstractions and stand above cosmological axioms in the liturgical order. Thus, USP can employ icons as the serpent *Ourabouros*, which “may be an icon of eternity, but before it could become so eternity had to have been conceived in words, i.e., symbolically.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Actually, the word 'USP' is mentioned once (page 53).

<sup>16</sup> Rappaport 1999: 54.

<sup>17</sup> Rappaport 1999: 474; note 16



Above an example of an icon which according to Rappaport can communicate canonical messages and hence also USP. Here the drawing of Robert Fludd (1574 -1637 AD) supports or communicates part of matrix number three: Dualism and monism are interdependent, including the mind and/or the world as a stairway to heaven. There are numerous icons of this type. Looking carefully one can see that the spirit or soul makes a heavenly journey through a Ptolemaic cosmos shown by the succession of the planets, Luna to Saturnus. The same succession of the planets is found in *Poimandres* from *Corpus Hermeticum*. Influenced by Christian Kabbalah, probably from Pico della Mirandola (1463 - 1495 AD), some additional heavens are added up from the heavenly stars, *Caelum Stellatum*, to *mens*, pure spirit, where the last step leads to God.<sup>18</sup>

### *Indexical messages*

<sup>18</sup> This icon is found in Roob 2001: 46.

Still speaking about the transmission of USP through rituals, it could theoretically be a purely symbolic transmission. According to Rappaport, a pure symbolic transmission would be without any ‘force’, i.e. without any impact or appeal, if not accompanied by something else, which is the indexical message. Therefore, *in* the performing of rituals, USP receive force when accompanied by indexical factors which by nature are not purely symbolic. Sometimes indexes can be natural, i.e. understood by outsiders and maybe even by members of other cultures and religions. Rappaport refers to an index as “a sign which refers to the Object it denotes by being affected by that Object.”<sup>19</sup> In order to differentiate his conception of an index from that of Peirce, Rappaport gives some examples of indexes. One being, that the Rolls Royce or sable coat indicates the wealth of its owner.<sup>20</sup> In extreme cases an index *is* its object, i.e. a (very) dark cloud equals rain (at least in many parts of the world).<sup>21</sup> Indexes depend on transmitters, i.e. participants, *here and now* in the ritual moment and indexes are able to transcend mere symbolic signification.<sup>22</sup> Indexes can be folding hands, kneeling, standing, painting or decorating the body, bowing, dancing, mental and emotional expressions such as joy or anger and much, much more. Some indexes are not symbolic, but rather expressive in nature. Generally, it is these kinds of non-symbolic messages, which make a ritual powerful and give it ‘force’. Under the marriage ceremony in Denmark, for instance, the couple has to kneel in front of the priest, and this special kind of posture is probably understood as a kind of humble respect by many foreigners accidentally seeing the marriage ceremony - for example through television. Religious indexical messages cannot be transmitted in any other way than through rituals and canonical messages are devoid of any force or even *nonsensical* without indexes.<sup>23</sup>

Rappaport’s point of view entails, to recapitulate, that the proprietous expressions of USP are largely confined to rituals. Thus, USP do not solemnly survive through mental agreement (consensus) by a group, but

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<sup>19</sup> Rappaport 1999: 54.

<sup>20</sup> Rappaport 1999: 55.

<sup>21</sup> Rappaport 1979: 179.

<sup>22</sup> Rappaport 1999: 54.

<sup>23</sup> Rappaport 1999: 58.

rather by ritual activity due to indexical messages. The indexical messages interfere with USP in the ritual process and provide USP with power and sensibility. Because indexical messages are bound to time and space, common sense affirms that they are much more prone to adjustments than USP.

#### *USP in Rituals*

USP in rituals can be viewed from a twofold perspective: from the viewpoint of USP and from the viewpoint of the ritual. This distinction is rather important, being one Rappaport *de facto* makes, and is parallel to the distinction made by Olsson speaking of ‘beliefs’ and rituals as expressions of each other. The following two statements are to be read in *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion* and *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity* respectively:

“Sacred postulates are unfalsifiable and numinous experiences are undeniable. In ritual, the unfalsifiable message of the liturgy partakes of the undeniable quality of the numinous: the most abstract and distant of conceptions are bound to the most immediate and substantial of experiences. The unfalsifiable supported by the undeniable yields the unquestionable. This transforms the dubious, the arbitrary, and the conventional into the correct, the necessary, and the natural.”<sup>24</sup>

“At the end of the last chapter I called attention to the remarkable structure embodied in the Holy and realised in ritual: the unfalsifiable supported by the undeniable yields the unquestionable, which transforms the dubious, the arbitrary and the conventional into the correct, the necessary and the natural.”<sup>25</sup>

In both statements, Rappaport maintains that the unfalsifiable supported by the undeniable yields the unquestionable, which transforms ‘the dubious, the arbitrary and the conventional into the correct, the necessary and the

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<sup>24</sup> Rappaport 1979: 217.

<sup>25</sup> Rappaport 1999: 407.

natural'. This understood in a more pragmatic sense means that rituals are the 'proof', or the 'empirical material', of USP. As we have seen, USP can neither be verified nor falsified. They are - from an etic point of view - "mysteries, and their paradoxical or otherwise irreducible cryptic character declares that discursive reason cannot by itself comprehend them."<sup>26</sup> But *in* the ritual process - seen from an emic point of view - they are correct and natural. The holy, denoting the total religious phenomenon, consists of four elements, the sacred, the divine, the numinous and the occult, is *generated* in ritual activity.<sup>27</sup> Of this reason, one cannot speak about the holy as something remote from, and independent of, ritual activity. If USP are anything from an etic point of view, they are foundations and discursive elements as far as they belong to the domain of language.<sup>28</sup> During ritual activity USP become natural, evident and sensible when experienced as the unquestionable. The numinous, which plays a role in the first quotation above, "denotes religion's non-discursive, affective, ineffable qualities."<sup>29</sup> Whether the numinous partakes in the transformation of the dubious, the arbitrary and the conventional or not (or Rappaport just forgets to mention it in *Ritual and Religion in the making of Humanity*) the result stays the same. The decisive point is that ritual participation generates numinous experiences having an encouraging effect on the perception of the USP involved.

*Comment:* Rappaport is a master in blending etic and emic viewpoints and it is impossible to envisage him not bearing this in mind. He is far beyond any discussion whether to use an etic *or* an emic approach to religion and rituals. In the same sentence Rappaport can start his deduction from an etic point of view to make his conclusion purely emic (or visa versa). He can also maintain the same viewpoint from beginning to end. When the 'unfalsifiable' (one side of USP) ends up by being the 'natural' - through the 'unquestionableness' (another side of USP made topical by agreement and

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<sup>26</sup> Rappaport 1999: 391.

<sup>27</sup> Rappaport, 1999: 23.

<sup>28</sup> Rappaport 1999: 391.

<sup>29</sup> Rappaport 1999: 23.

expression)<sup>30</sup> - it is an example of a perfect shifting of viewpoints, i.e., in this case from the etic to the emic perspective, in the same sentence. The kind of argumentation and analysis done by Rappaport require and depend on subtle mixtures of emic and etic considerations.

The concept of the holy is thus nothing *a priori*, nothing just existing ‘out there’, not a pure metaphysical category, but rather ‘something’ created in ritual activity. From this point of view the ritual *creates* the holy being an ‘end product’ (see below), not a beginning.<sup>31</sup> Rappaport distinguishes between the holy and the sacred, and between the sacred and USP, but the last two seem more or less the same. When exemplified the sacred becomes USP because Rappaport equals the ‘unquestionableness’ with both USP and the sacred.<sup>32</sup> Now, at the risk of oversimplifying Rappaport the following statements can be made:

- a. USP are unfalsifiable nor can they be verified.
- b. During ritual activity, the unfalsifiable nature of USP alters to be the unquestionableness (which is the essence of the sacred).<sup>33</sup>
- c. During ritual activity USP are transformed into being the correct, the necessary (not in need of more) and the natural (from which, as a total process, the holy emerges).

*A possible dialectic process – or Rappaport’s paradox?*

Considering Rappaport as a possible foundation for a cognitive approach to religion, it is evident that such a study is impossible without understanding the noetic aspects created in ritual activities. Not only the holy but also the sacred (and USP as natural expressions) is a product of ritual activity. For Rappaport rituals are of the uppermost importance, and the holy is not the starting point of religion but rather the end product, “a difference which

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<sup>30</sup> “There are, then, two bases for the unquestionableness of Ultimate Sacred Postulates. On the one hand, there is their acceptance *by* subjects, on the other, the certainty of their expression.” Rappaport 1999: 286.

<sup>31</sup> Rappaport 1999: 3.

<sup>32</sup> Rappaport 1999: 286.

<sup>33</sup> “*Insofar as the quality of unquestionableness is the essence of the sacred, the sacred itself is a product of the very form which is ritual [...].*” Rappaport 1999: 286.



makes difference.”<sup>34</sup> In another sense, when established, there exists a *possible* dialectic process: USP need rituals in order to get reality and to be a part of the experience of the holy - and rituals need USP. Otherwise, rituals have nothing substantial to transform (or rituals are only able to transform cosmologies and rules for conduct into the unquestionable). This indirect argument for a possible dialectic relation between ritual and USP is not particularly satisfying. For Rappaport the essence of religion lies in ritual performance *per se*, and USP or sacred postulates do not really have any existence ‘outside’ a ritual situation. Unfortunately, however, Rappaport can also openly state that the ritual is a medium or a transmitter:

“To say that ritual is a mode of communication is hardly to suggest that it is interchangeable with others modes of communication. It is a special medium peculiarly, perhaps even uniquely, suited to transmissions of certain messages and certain sorts of information.”<sup>35</sup>

So, what is a ritual: is it a ‘medium’ *for* the holy and for USP, or is it the ‘producer’ *of* the holy and of USP as the ‘unquestionableness’? The difference is paramount. The paradox or the very blurred situation is that USP, for instance the *Shema*, can survive for 3000 years. USP not involved in a ritual are reduced to ghost-like oddities, being “mysteries, and their paradoxical or otherwise irreducible cryptic character declares that discursive reason cannot by itself comprehend them.”<sup>36</sup> There is a paradox here further stressed in the following contradiction between the following arguments:

1) Cybernetic argumentation rests unambiguously on the existence of different levels of organisation and logical information, which must not be mixed. Inspired by Bateson, for Rappaport the different levels, from the concrete to the more abstract, are something like cell-organism-man-society-ecology. In the liturgical order USP are abstractions as opposed to low-level

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<sup>34</sup> Rappaport 1999: 402.

<sup>35</sup> Rappaport 1999: 52.

<sup>36</sup> Rappaport 1999: 391.

postulates, being nearly ‘material’ or very concrete by nature. Accordingly, ‘abstraction’ gives the potential for survival, not the ‘concrete’.

2) USP are dependent on ritual activity, as they otherwise would remain ghost-like oddities, because the ritual adds concreteness, blood and flesh to USP (through participants and their indexes).

Does Rappaport give the reader a very subtle description of USP gaining reality in the ritual situation and being mysterious oddities without contact to rituals? The idea as such may be right, but the argumentation becomes peculiar: it is difficult to see ‘mysterious oddities’, i.e. USP without rituals, being the crowning result of an intelligent (flexible) neo-Darwinist evolution. Actually, it seems more likely that Rappaport has ended up in a clash between a theological and an anthropological approach to religion (perceiving rituals as formative foundations). It should be emphasised, however, that ‘Rappaport’s paradox’ is rather useful. In one respect it states that USP survive as ideas survive, e.g. as philosophical ideas survive through books, educational institutions and the like. In another respect it states that USP survive through rituals (as long as they are performed). *Finally, it is not impossible that USP alternately survive through books/institutions and through ritual commitment.*<sup>37</sup> In any case, studies in Western esotericism can benefit substantially by considering its ‘forms of thought’ as USP.

### **Tord Olsson’s ritual theory**

There are five main reasons for introducing Tord Olsson’s ritual theory:

- a) Beliefs and ritual are complementary but supportive and ‘motives’ for each other.
- b) Ritual activity is the centre of religion and ultimately ritual activity creates faith or belief.

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<sup>37</sup> This issue is parallel to Rappaport’s statement that USP survive when they are ‘agreed upon’. Rappaport does not make it clear whether he speaks of an agreement based on ‘faith’ or an agreement obtained by ritual commitment.

- c) The concept of a 'ritual field' incorporates ritual practice and faith into a wholeness with existential freedom (the double authorship) as a central dimension for the ritual-faith relationship.
- d) In a close environment, there can be different ritual fields, which can be used additively, and participation in several fields offer an experience of spiritual, mental and ethical wholeness.
- e) My own experience with Olsson's theory based on some empirical research showed to me how workable the theory is, and how easy it is to obtain empirical validation for it.

*A dialectical relationship between rituals and 'beliefs'*

Olsson's theory summarised above is developed gradually over more than 27 years of field-research in Maasai-religion, Sufism and Bambara. Olsson focuses in a clear and straightforward way on the relationship between faith and ritual activity, and enlightens and reveals a relation that is both remarkable and astonishing. To put it in others' words: *ritual and faith reflect and are expressions of each other*. The following quotation sums up a central viewpoint of the Maasai concerning ritual and faith:

"Elements from ritual action and symbolism furnish a vital fundament for belief. This observation is not based on the form of my query leading to indigenous exegesis of medical and other rituals, but the fact that the Maasai themselves constantly rely on traditional elements of ritual for evidence in support of a 'belief' or when arguing in favour of a given metaphysical opinion.

If, from my discussion with the Maasai, I have rightly understood this elusive problem, it is not only that a ritual element is considered as a contracted expression of a 'belief' or a complex of ideas; they also tend to regard 'beliefs' as mental modes or attitudes resulting from participation in ritual...

To the Maasai, moreover, such favourable disposition towards asserting or accepting attitudes expressed by ritual, results from participation in the performance itself. 'Belief' is not only a motivation for performing a prayer or a rite; the latter are also considered as motives for holding 'beliefs'.

Besides ‘belief’ as a mere intellectual assent, such as ‘belief’ in the existence of God, which the Maasai consider as *eyiolounoto*, ‘knowledge’ or ‘recognition’, the dimension of ‘faith’ or ‘trust’ appears in itself to involve traditional ways of action. This attitude implies a distinctive way of discussing philosophical and religious matters and providing evidence for the embracement of certain ‘notions’, ‘beliefs’, ‘faiths’, ‘norms’ etc. If possible, a Maasai will thus prefer to argue by means of adducing empirical examples from traditional oral and ritual behaviour rather than by referring to states of mind or offering theoretical reasons (Olsson 1989:243f.).”<sup>38</sup>

Generally speaking religion, exemplified above through evidence from the Maasai, is a mode of *eyiolounoto* as well as a mode of action. It is a mental *and* a physical mode, and religion is neither an area of pure ‘thinking’ nor pure ‘doing’. The ritual itself contains elements of ‘contracted’ beliefs and simultaneously beliefs are mental modes or attitudes resulting from ritual participation. Further, ritual participation and ‘believing’ act as motives for each other: the motivation for participation in ritual activity is to demonstrate certain beliefs, and to have a ‘belief’ is the motivation for engagement in different ritual activities. Viewed generically, Olsson accentuates ‘doing’ more than ‘thinking’, ritual activity more than ‘beliefs’ - without neglecting the interdependent relation. He sees ritual as the *modus operandi* in faith. Rituals are a *primus motor* in fostering religious ideas, and again he draws this viewpoint from the Maasai now listening to the old Ole Kisio:

“Ole Kisio, den gamle maasaimannen, förde med en smidig handrörelse flugviskan uppåt mot den ändlösa himlen. Flugsvärmen skingrades.

- Jo, vi tror att Gud är i himlen eller finns däruppe i himlen, eftersom vi stänker mjölk uppåt, uppåt mot himlen när vi offrar til honom.

Så löd svaret på min enkla fråga om Guds vistelsesort. Den gamle bjöd på snus ur sin dosa av buffelhorn. Jeg spelade in hans ord på band och skrev ner dem i min dagbok.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Olsson 2000: 58, note 1

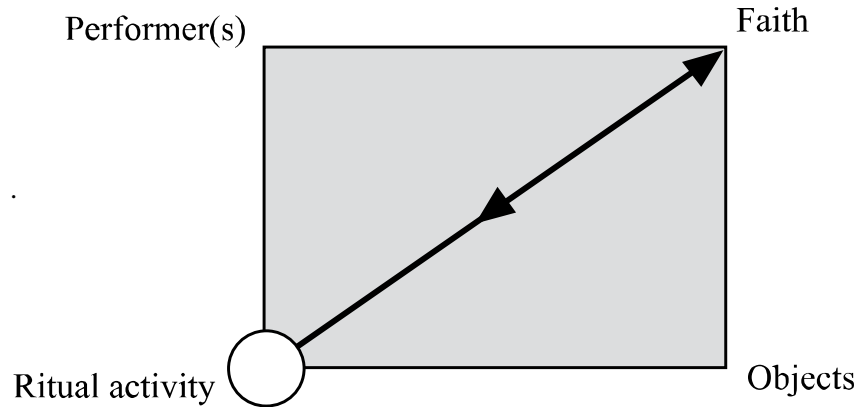
<sup>39</sup> Olsson 2000: 9.

God is in heaven because the milk is thrown up in the sky, rather than milk is thrown upward since God is in heaven. Olsson wants to debate the relationship between ritual and belief. Normally, or very often, historians of religion and theologians take for granted that rituals are constructions done in accordance with already existing dogmas or beliefs. That is not to deny that this can be the case, but not much understanding has been achieved concerning the creative power of rituals, a power so significant that rituals actually create, develop and maintain beliefs. It seems to me, as I will argue later, that the creative qualities in rituals are easy to demonstrate - especially in an area more or less devoid of heavy dogma controlling every aspect of faith and liturgy. Rituals are the foundation of religion, according to Olsson, and rituals shape and form the conceptual side of religion. This happens through a kind of communication, transmitted at a level deeper than normal language and thinking are immediately able to express. A ritual is like a 'living text' for Olsson, but a 'text' which can only be read - more than understood - at an expressive level prior to normal language and thinking. This is not to deny the existence of possible symbolic elements in rituals that can be decoded in a more usual way, i.e. with a first-hand knowledge of the symbols applied. The expressive level of rituals can be read in a way similar to reading body language. Sometimes the symbolic element can even be almost absent according to Olsson,<sup>40</sup> and the mainstay in ritual communication is an expressivity primarily based on pre-reflective qualities. The expressive elements in rituals are not only embedded in the technical performance of a ritual, but also rest on the physical register of the performer. Ole Kiso's whole body representation encapsulates years of ritual knowledge and experience contributing significantly to the expressive elements in the ritual communication. Below is a graphic representation of Olsson's ritual field, a concept to be explained below:

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<sup>40</sup> Olsson 2000: 16.

MODEL – ritual field



First, the reader must notice the arrows. They signify the two components already mentioned, ritual and faith (or beliefs) and their mutual effect on each other. Needless to say that a theologian would likely make the arrow from 'faith' to 'ritual activity' much larger. Operatively, rituals have an effect on an object like a person, a season or a text. Many consider rituals to have a transforming effect and though this is not the concern of Olsson, I have incorporated this dimension for later use. More important is to distinguish between the ritual as a stipulated action and the performer(s) ability to contribute with expressive qualities.<sup>41</sup> The separation of ritual (as a sequence of actions or verbal utterances) and the performer also leave room for a kind of existential freedom called 'the double authorship' by Olsson. The expressive qualities when best are aroused through a kind of existential paradox, where the performers are bound to fulfil "external processes or objects which they do not create themselves".<sup>42</sup> However, at the same time performers can simulate the ritual themselves by interpreting it through mimic or other subtle body language signals, also including pronunciation and accentuation in verbal ritual expressions. If Olsson is right, a very

<sup>41</sup> Olsson 2000: 17.

<sup>42</sup> Olsson 2000: 56 (my translation).

serious defence for this existential situation can be found in one of Søren Kierkegaard's writings.

*Comment:* In Kierkegaard's *The Sickness Unto Death*, several 'opposites' have to be avoided in order to maintain mental health, or else despair in different forms breaks through. One pair of opposites is freedom/necessity, and the lack of one of the opposites creates despair. A person only having freedom, but no necessity in life, lives in despair and the same applies to a person lacking freedom. Despair is also a process arising, for example when a person willingly, by intention, tries to cut off freedom in favour of necessity. Another important category is the intention of exclusively trying to 'be a self' and the process of trying 'not to be a self'. It is a polarity between 'self' and 'other'. Trying 'not to be a self' equates to trying to be someone else, or 'being like all the others'. In the ritual situation (or process), if Olsson is right, the double authorship is thus an existential mechanism holding an equilibrium when dealing with opposites as long as the performer does not lose his freedom or his 'self' (the ritual act open to interpretation through mime, etc.). If a ritual act only reflects a condition of 'necessity', it would be a purely-mechanical act and the performer would be reduced to a kind of Golem-monster solemnly controlled by ritual prescriptions. From an existential point of view, 'the double authorship' transforms ritual performance into an existential health which is able to reduce (existential) despair. A reasonable balance between 'freedom' and 'necessity' (or between 'self' and 'other') is established. It is here worth noting that Rappaport warns against two possibilities in post-modern society: fundamentalism (lack of freedom, all is given, everything becomes necessity) and too much secularisation (lack of necessity, lack of consensus and lack of socialisation).

#### *Ritual fields*

The above drawing can be seen as a 'ritual field', a key-concept in Olsson's thinking, and the term is inspired by Bourdieu's definition of a 'field', but in a less martial sense and more as a field of articulated beliefs. Especially, it is a field rooted in body expressions concerning social interactions between human beings and between man and the supernatural. Power and social

positions are also elements in a ritual field and it is to a certain degree a field of competition. One ritual field can be competing with other ritual fields, but at the same time ritual fields can be used *additively*, i.e. a participant can move in and out of a field and participate in different ritual fields. Theologically speaking, the additive use means that one can be involved in more than one religion. Olsson's research is primarily based on the conditions he found in a village, Gwanyebugu, in Mali with approximately five hundred inhabitants. Here, nobody were Christians or Muslims but joined three different ritual fields at the same time: the ritual field of farmers, the ritual field of hunters and the ritual field of jinès (Bambara: *jiné*, meaning spirit). The word comes from the Arabic *djinn*, but has its own meaning in Bambara of Mali. The jinès have some familiarity with humans, they live together in families, belong to different tribes and some are small, some tall and meagre, some can live for many hundred of years. The most powerful and outstanding have a knowledge and insight far superior to human beings, which sometimes can be useful. In a state of obsession, a medium can receive insight, important information and power from certain jinès also benefiting the 'farmers' and the 'hunters' participating in that ritual field of jinès.

### **Ritual fields in Western esotericism**

Based on Rappaport and Olsson, I have formulated a connection between USP and rituals. Later, some additional considerations based on my own research will be incorporated:

1. The five matrices *need* rituals to attain credibility and actuality, and rituals *need* matrices (or other sacred postulates or sacred ideas). Matrices are *vitalized* by ritual activity.
2. A ritual is a 'contracted' expression of 'beliefs', and 'beliefs' are mental modes or attitudes resulting from participation in a ritual (Olsson).<sup>43</sup>
3. Ritual activity creates belief (Olsson), thus, one can expect fields with heavy ritual activity such as for example alchemy, magic, astrology, healing, numerology and tarot to be centres of innovation and new religious ideas.

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<sup>43</sup> As we shall see later, one ritual can express different beliefs at the same time. The same ritual can communicate 'different partial pictures of reality'. Olsson 2000: 56.



4. Rituals used in Western esoterism have both a symbolic and an expressive quality whether coming from bodily experience (Olsson) or indexes (gestures, Rappaport). There are both freedom and necessity in the ritual performance. Taking the lack of dogmatism and established priesthood into consideration, one can expect more ‘freedom’ than ‘necessity’, i.e. rituals in Western esoterism have both a ‘loose’ or an untraditional character (or are highly innovative).

*Some examples from different ritual fields: beliefs and ritual activity*

I have chosen to exemplify the above through interviews done with different practitioners, which all took place during July and August 2002. The intention was to examine the somewhat provocative viewpoint that rituals create beliefs and to get more experience with ritual fields in a new context, partly that of New Age. Because of the convincing nature of the task undertaken, the concept of ritual fields was published in a pedagogical context.<sup>44</sup> It is simply a useful method in the field of education.

The first extract is from an interview with a Danish healer, Henrik Nielsen, living on an island, Langeland, now connected with a bridge to the mainland. He was a part-time healer and mainly earned his living as a welder. For him healing was something experimental, he was self-educated with no books, teachers or courses as background. For five or six years he had carried out his part-time practice. In the telephone he was told that the purpose was to “look for a connection between his faith and his practice”,<sup>45</sup> and surprisingly he immediately explained that in his case faith had developed from his practice and its result.

One day performing his newly-begun healing, he explained in the interview, that when healing the client, a kind of intuition or impulse made him bend and kneel at the bed where the client lay. Thus, he could touch the floor with his left hand and with his head, he explained, he picked up and passed energy to his right arm and further on to the client. While doing so, he felt a strong energy pouring into the client, and a week later the client confirmed that the healing had been very helpful to him, motivating HN to

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<sup>44</sup> Larsen 2004a: 32 - 36; 196 - 197. Many additive examples of the use of religions and currents in Denmark can be found in: Larsen 2004b.

<sup>45</sup> All participants were told exactly the same.

continue this technique or practice. He explained that other healers never draw energy from the earth (floor) but only from heaven. Both 'earth' and 'heaven' were called in - maybe not surprisingly for a man living together with his family in the countryside surrounded by horses, hens, many cats and even fish swimming around in a homebuilt water basin. Touching the ground was his 'trick', *his* invention, and he explained that his belief in a kind of 'twin-energy' developed from performing his practice. In brief, he explained, man needs both earth and heaven. The contact with earth offers a down-to-earth attitude, tolerance for other beings and capaciousness, where the contact with heaven has more to do with strengthening the will and clearing the intellect. God is itself a perfect balance between opposite energies and qualities from heaven and earth. Without balance everything will disappear - even the whole universe. At that time in the interview, I asked:

- Do you have books about yin and yang?
- I think I have a book where you can read about it, but I have not read it.
- So, the belief you have is not something you formed by reading about it?
- Absolutely not.

Actually, the above illustrates a ritual field, which I have labelled the 'clairvoyant ritual field'. The healing viewed as a ritual, discussion follows, has the client as object. The ritual or the healing technique is distinct from the healer HN, allowing him to have his own body expression and interpretation of the ritual elements involved (Olsson), or allowing him to express his own indexes. Not least, the interview illustrates that 'faith' can grow out of a ritual practice and that a ritual, once established, is a 'contracted' form of belief. There is no reason to doubt HN's declaring that his faith developed from his practice. It is also obvious that HN's mental modes resulted from participating in (his own) ritual. This is still not to argue that a ritual like the one created by HN will necessarily culminate in a belief like his. Not much commonsense is required to imagine that an African healer would voice a different faith if he too had an urge to touch the ground with one hand. Hence, evaluated retrospectively, his belief in God as

energy is typical found in New Age, and there is here an element of cultural influence in his belief.

In the above the two words, ‘practice’ and ‘ritual’ have been used as substitutes for each other, and one has to ask: is a practice, for instance a healing practice like HN’s, a ritual? I hope the reader is tolerant enough to accept this viewpoint, not necessarily taking all practices for rituals, but it is of uppermost importance for this thesis that certain practices, at least under certain circumstances, can be viewed as rituals. There are different definitions for ‘ritual’ and checking Rappaport’s, one can read:

“I take the term ‘ritual’ to denote *the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers.*”<sup>46</sup>

Concerning the healing-method created by HN one can argue, that a) it is a performance, b) it consist of the same procedure i.e. of more or less invariant sequences, c) his practice is formalised by himself as ‘the right way of doing it’, i.e. once established, the practice can be passed on to others. This implies that they, in their turn, will not entirely encode the different elements. Thus, this thesis claims that some practices can be so ritualised that they constitute a ritual. *Therefore, the term ‘ritual practice’ in this thesis refers to practices that have been strongly ritualised, and encoded with or related to different religious beliefs.*

Before continuing with further reflections, a brief extract from an interview with a well-known Danish Hindu-astrologer, Finn Wandahl, follows. He declares after more than twenty-five years of practice with ‘Jyotish’ and especially Nadi-astrology that ‘Brahman is time’.<sup>47</sup> Earlier he practised Jyotish astrology but as he says, “I was confused and chaotic, believed in reincarnation, and believed in, no, I have not really bought it.” FW is an owner of different collections of nadis and he mostly uses these in his consultations. As a writer on different topics of Hindu-astrology, he finds the

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<sup>46</sup> Rappaport 1999: 24.

<sup>47</sup> Jyotish is very similar to western astrology, i.e. with planets in signs, houses, aspects etc. Nadi is also called palm-leaves astrology, where the owner of a collection normally finds a palm-leaf with a prediction written believed to be customisable for the client.

technique behind different types of nadis only partly based on Joytish-principles and much more on different time-cycles able to repeat patterns of destiny. From Jupiter's and Saturn's 59-year cycles, i.e. the meeting of the two planets in nearly the same degree of the zodiac every 59th year, different time cycles can be deduced, and most important is the ten-year cycle. He has observed the validity of his belief in the repeating of patterns of destiny during his astrological practice. During the interview he gives many examples, here only to mention a single one. FW, also educated as a classical musician, speaks about a colleague during a time when both were teachers:

- Let me give an example. I knew NN at the time we taught lessons at the school. He was married and when he was 27 years old his house burned down and they became homeless, and they had nothing, he and his wife and their five children, at 27 years of age! The house was gone, and they were mentioned in Ekstra Bladet (a newspaper) simply because they lost everything they owned. Then when ten years had elapsed and he was 37 his wife died of cancer of the uterus leaving him alone with his five children. Maybe this is a cycle: the repetition of great loss.

Actually, FW's belief in time *as* Brahman is not his own invention, rather something he once read in 1996, and grounded in his astrological practice and his many experiences with time-cycles. He continues a little later:

- I encountered while reading old sanskrit-texts some slokas, e.g., *Hora Ratnam* by Balabhadra, concerning information on time, and I was totally taken aback, and in different places I could read that Brahman's nature is time. Time *is* God.

In this case the practice or ritual did not in itself create a belief, but as one can see, FW's astrological practice *captured* the belief that time is God. Further, on the other hand, his astrological practice, which continuously deals with time cycles and repeated patterns of destiny, expresses itself as a 'contracted' form of the belief that Brahman's nature is time, i.e. the essence of the universe is time. Stated another way, FW's belief is a mental mode

resulting from participation in his astrological practice. FW follows a normal procedure when finding the nadis useable: he calculates the birth chart and horoscope of the moment (Sanskrit: *prashna*) and especially notices the zodiacal placement (Aries, Taurus etc.) of the planets and ascendant. He now tries to find a horoscope in his collection with the same placement and normally the reading is correct, if he can find at least three or four concordant zodiacal placements. He then starts the reading in front of the client usually sitting at a small table in a little room in his department only used for readings. One can argue that the whole arrangement consists of “the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers” (Rappaport). According to FW his practice is in accordance with commonly-used methods to be found among nadi-astrologers in India. Simply stated, nadi-astrology is a divination method of sorts, and hence it can be perceived as a ritual.

The last extract from an interview given here to illustrate some mechanism in Olsson’s ritual field, is an interview with Ulrik Golodnoff who has more than thirty years of experience with Tarot. He is an author of the book, *Tarot ABC*, reprinted in several editions. He became attracted to Tibetan Buddhism in his youth and was involved up to 1985, where he began to feel some kind of dissatisfaction. Good karma, he explains, attained in a meditation must be given to all beings in the universe. However, at that time in 1985 he felt that he could benefit other people more by giving advice using his Tarot. Subsequently, he started a school and many people attended, he explains, to have readings done with the help of Tarot. UG emphasised that he stopped practising his meditations, but also “I could hear myself using some key concepts such as karma, reincarnation and meaning during my consultations.” During the interview, UG explained that he had become dedicated to the study of Kabbalah and outlined how the 22 Major Arcana in Tarot equal 22 paths between the ten sepheroth often used in Kabbalah.<sup>48</sup> The following extract from the interview contains a peculiar detail illustrating how the ritual (or practice) forms ‘faith’ dealing with different phases of life. This idea also plays a role in astrology, where such phases are *calculated* in advance from birth to death depending on different methods.

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<sup>48</sup> Major Arcana are the ‘big cards’ in Tarot with a distinctive name, such as Justice, Hermit, World, The Fool, Fortune etc.

Dealing with phases of life UG takes apart the Major Arcanas, shuffles them, selects randomly a certain number and puts them on a table in order to make an interpretation.

- What about the 22 phases we must go through, is that something you do in one life?
- *What irritates me the most is that they do not come in an ordered sequence. I mean, they hit on us at different times.*
- You don't mean they are ordered?
- *No.*
- Is that to say that when interpreting, when making a reading with Tarot, you never get a specific sequence?
- *You never get that.*
- Because you are shuffling the cards?
- *Yes, that's the only way lively-enough to be able to describe a living being.*
- It is obvious that the phases cannot be fixed, because you don't manipulate the cards to come up. They come up as they come up.
- *Exactly, it is similar to Life because we can't manipulate Life either.*
- What do you mean?
- *Life seems to be arbitrary and there we can't have a working system if the process is too rigid. My mind works that way, and when I choose to focus on something, then, it is real. It is on the agenda.*

In the case of UG and his Tarot, it is obvious that the ritual creates a belief in non-ordered sequential phases of life, as opposed to those found and calculated in astrology. Phases of life are not organised but depends on the preoccupation (or orientation) of the mind of the client. This example illustrates that the cards of Tarot generate 'beliefs' somewhat different, especially concerning details, from that of astrology. It is the ritual practice of Tarot, which *creates* (Olsson) and forms independent beliefs and for this reason, I have labelled it the 'ritual field of Tarot'.<sup>49</sup> Again, it is possible to argue that the procedures used in Tarot are "performances of more or less

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<sup>49</sup> Larsen 2004a: 34.

invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers” (Rappaport). UG demonstrated different techniques during the interview. One method, for example, is to lay down twelve cards after mixing all seventy-eight Tarot cards in a circle, and then interpret them as the twelve houses in a horoscope.

The above extract from the three interviews must not be taken as ‘proof’ of Olsson’s ritual fields but only as illustration, but hopefully it illustrates ritual’s ability to create or form beliefs. Commonsense naturally indicates that the belief created or captured by a ritual is very dependent upon its cultural placement. One cannot predict the kind of faith created from or attached to a ritual. However, this does not negate the previous examples of how a ritual’s elements are ‘contracted’ forms of specific beliefs.

Faivre is right when trying to pinpoint certain important practices in esotericism. It is a fruitful way of thinking, but he owes his readers a more detailed explanation: *why* is it fruitful? It is simply fruitful because astrology, magic and alchemy are practices *vitalising* the USP of Western esotericism. These practices are huge *ritual fields* creating, maintaining and picking up different kinds of beliefs, that become part of Western esotericism and its canonical messages. In the case of UG for example, he was able to maintain a belief in karma, but now ‘controlled’ by the practice of Tarot. Hence phases of life, i.e. karmic patterns, become a reflection of the mind’s agenda. Actually, this is not a traditional view of karma, even maybe only a fully-awakened Buddha understands how karma manifests. In UG’s interpretation it is the mind itself that generates, or reflects, fate. As shown by others, concepts like karma and reincarnation have different qualities in New Age compared with those in Hinduism and Buddhism.<sup>50</sup> Actually, UG found it a bit annoying that his Tarot only randomly showed phases of life. Maybe he had a conflict between belief in a highly ordered universe and belief derived from his practice of Tarot.

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<sup>50</sup> Hanegraaff 1998a: 283 - 290.

*The matrices and astrology as a ritual field*

Some brief examples follow below on how astrology can vitalise and be seen as a ‘contracted’ form of some of the five matrices. It is necessary to clarify different types of astrology. Faivre distinguishes between at least two types of astrology. One type is a technical astrology found in typical handbooks and another type is ‘esoteric’, i.e. with many spiritual principles.<sup>51</sup> Actually, it is not always easy to distinguish in such a way, because normal handbooks often reflect some esoteric elements, in particular the idea of a kind of progression inherent in the zodiac. Thus Aries is the first step, Taurus the next and so on, and by progressing one accumulates more and more spiritual qualities. Paradoxically, the idea of the ‘Age of Aquarius’ relies on a reverse sequence. Culturally and spiritually, man has progressed through the ages of Taurus, Aries and is now living in the era of Pisces, soon to enter the heralded coming of the era of Aquarius. Not only the Mind but also the Earth is subject to a gradual development (matrix number three). Despite this apparent discrepancy, the zodiac is still interpreted as a sequence of *steps* in a development leading toward a specific goal guided by *teleos* or a divine providence (the first and third matrix). The following text from a popular book can serve to illustrate the idea of *teleos*:

“Taurus, on the other hand is a *negative* Sign, possessing all the Aries qualities in latency [...]. All that is involved in Aries and Taurus finds expression in Gemini [...]. The next sign, Cancer, is totally different from any of the first three, starting as it were a fresh round: the Maternal Trinity (Cancer, Leo and Virgo) inaugurating an entirely new phase of experience (on a higher level)”<sup>52</sup>

Probably, one finds the same idea in Agrippa’s *De occulta philosophia*, i.e. a progression through the different signs of elements. Agrippa writes: “so, Aries possesses the beginning of Fire, Leo the progression and increase, and

<sup>51</sup> Faivre distinguishes three forms of astrology: astrology as mantic art and “in an esoteric sense” as vision of the world, and a gnoseological or soteriological practice. The last form of astrology is a combination of astrology as a practice and a vision of the world (as I understand it), which manifests in different ways in modern Western esotericism. Faivre 1998: 7.

<sup>52</sup> Leo 1970: 297 - 298 (my parenthesis). The first edition of *Astrology for All* was published in 1905 and the latest reprint is from 2006.



Sagittarius the end. Taurus the beginning of the Earth [...]”.<sup>53</sup> Another astrological bestseller worth quoting is *Astrology, Karma & Transformation*, wherein the author repeatedly exemplifies how insight transforms karma. Each of the planets Uranus, Neptune and Pluto offers a special lesson to be learned and, until fulfilled, the three planets continue to activate their special patterns of destiny. By quoting Jung, a foundation is laid for transforming ‘karma into dharma’ (the first matrix):

“As Jung points out, ‘The psychological rule says that when an inner situation is not made conscious, it happens outside, as fate.’ That is to say, when the individual [...] does not become conscious of his inner contradictions, the world must perforce act out the conflict and be torn into opposite halves”.<sup>54</sup>

Now, such textbooks full of rules and examples are intended to be used by practising astrologers, thus establishing a huge ritual field where the experiences of one astrologer’s practice (or ritual activity) is handed over to other astrologers. Actually, Stephen Arroyo, holding an MA in Psychology and the California State License in Marriage, Family and Child Counselling, and former Assistant Professor at JFK University, gives many examples from his psychological and astrological practice of a nearly ‘empirical nature’, i.e. matrix number four.<sup>55</sup> The ‘scientific’ nature of Western esoterism is a feature very easily communicated to followers through astrology due to its astronomical and mathematical components. The second matrix, ‘the dialectical relationship between man and God (or the divine), including the healing of other people, society and/or the earth’, is absent in the usual technical handbooks. In older astrological handbooks one does not find all the matrices, but usually numbers four and five. It is hard, for example, to argue that Ptolemy, probably the greatest astronomer in Antiquity, did not perceive astrology as something scientific. The same is

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<sup>53</sup> Agrippa, Book I, chap. viii.

<sup>54</sup> Arroyo 1978: 8.

<sup>55</sup> This is not to postulate that all astrologers believe astrology to be scientific in nature. Some do, others do not. Some will claim that it is the astrologer which makes astrology work. Munk 2007: 114; Pdf.-version.

true of al-Kindi, ‘the Philosopher of the Arabs’, and his *On the Stellar Rays*.<sup>56</sup> Undoubtedly, Arab philosophy and astrology (and perhaps religion) have influenced Western esoterism to an extent still not clarified.<sup>57</sup>

### **How beliefs and rituals can interrelate in religious texts**

The following example concerns a hermetic text found in the Nag Hammadi collection often given the title, *The Discourse on the Eight and Ninth*. The chosen text can illustrate the usefulness in viewing rituals as ‘contracted’ beliefs and beliefs as mental modes or attitudes resulting from participation in ritual activity. *The Discourse on the Eight and Ninth* is a text Fowden and others take as a high-level instruction on gnosis. The student has already received much instruction and passed earlier steps gradually transforming his soul into spirit. Therefore, he is ready, as his teacher promised him, to follow Hermes Trismegistos, his teacher, into the Eight and Ninth (sphere or level). The details of the instructions are not the subject matter here, but the student’s main task is to actualise the ‘power’ already planted in him as a seed. After a successful lesson and a successful ascent into the Ninth - the pupil must write the name of the instructions, *The Eight Reveals the Ninth*, for the temple in Diospolis, i.e. Diospolis magna (Theben) with the many temples or Diospolis parve (little D.) near Nag Hammadi:

“O my son, write this book for the temple at Diospolis in hieroglyphic characters, entitling it ‘The Eighth Reveals the Ninth’.”

“I will do it, my <father>, as you command now.”

“My <son>, write the language of the book on steles of turquoise. O my son, it is proper to write this book on steles of turquoise, in hieroglyphic characters. For Mind himself has become the overseer of

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<sup>56</sup> Al-Kindi 1993. *On the Stellar Rays* is not a technical astrological handbook in the usual sense though it concentrates on the seven planets, but rather a philosophical treatise explaining *how* and *why* ‘rays’ (latin: *radius*), equivalent to *sympatheia*, work. It can be classified as ‘natural philosophy’ and is highly comparable, I think, to Agrippa’s *De occulta philosophia*. According to Compagni, several passages in *De occulta philosophia* are to be found in *De radiis* by Alchindus (al-Kindi).

<sup>57</sup> Al-Kindi’s 9<sup>th</sup> century Arabic treasure was translated into Latin and known as *De radiis* in ‘the Latin Medieval culture’. It was intended to demonstrate “the radical interconnectedness of all parts of the universe.” (Travaglia 2005: 59).

these. Therefore, I command that this teaching be carved on stone, and that you place it in my sanctuary. Eight guardians guard it with [. . .]<sup>58</sup> of the Sun. The males on the right are frog-faces, and the females on the left are cat-faces. And put a square milk-stone at the base of the turquoise tablets, and write the name on the azure stone tablet in hieroglyphic characters. O my son, you will do this when I am in Virgo, and the sun is in the first half of the day, and fifteen degrees have passed by me.”

“O my father, everything that you say I will do eagerly.”<sup>59</sup>

The Danish scholar Søren Giversen has made a few comments on this passage and notes that Mercury (Hermes Trismegistos), according to Ptolemy, is in its own ‘house’ (*oikos*) when in Virgo or Gemini.<sup>60</sup> The planets were rulers of certain parts of the zodiac in Greek astrology and Mercury was the ruler of Gemini and Virgo. Further, Mercury was elevated (having *hypsôma*) in Virgo. Every planet had a sign where it was elevated and Greek astrology speaks of *hypsômatikon zôdion*,<sup>61</sup> i.e. sign of elevation, a rule imported from Babylon. The Greek word *hypsôma* means something like ‘high thing’, or ‘high place’ or maybe ‘lifted up’. Why does the text refer to Mercury’s 15 degrees position in Virgo? Actually, Firmicus Maternus when describing the birth of the universe, called *thema mundi*, mentions this position. Each of the seven planets occupied 15 degrees of (one of) its own ‘houses’ in the moment of the creation of the world.<sup>62</sup> Here, one finds Mercury 15 degrees in Virgo. Firmicus says that he has his *thema mundi* from hermetic astrologers and the passage could play on three rules:

- a. Mercury is strong in its own sign Virgo. In Greek astrology: *oikos*, house, today sign)
- b. Mercury is in its *hypsômatikon zôdion*, i.e. elevated, lifted up or highly placed.

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<sup>58</sup> Text missing.

<sup>59</sup> Robinson 1977: 296.

<sup>60</sup> Giversen 1983: 167.

<sup>61</sup> Neugebauer and Hoesen 1959: 199 (Greek glossary). See also *hypsôma* and its references to horoscopes.

<sup>62</sup> *Mathesis* (III, 1). A later work from the fourth century AD.

c. Mercury is in the position it occupied in the moment of creation (*thema mundi*).

Mercury following the Sun in its orbit will thus every year in August or September occupy 15 degrees of Virgo, and astrologers could calculate the exact day(s) from year to year. Now, there are different ways to go with this passage, one being to ignore it, and another is to try to go deeper into it using the relationship between ritual and beliefs outlined above. USP need rituals implying that Hermetists actually had rituals, in order to vitalise their canonical messages. To sum up, scholars today acknowledge more and more the existence of rituals in classical Hermetism, for example van den Broek and Mahé, who both recognise rituals as ceremonies, hymns, prayers and holy kisses.<sup>63</sup> Søren Giversen has probably proposed the most extensive coverage of the amount of rituals in Hermetica by reading certain passages rather literally. He argues that prayers, hymns, baptism, holy meals, temples and holy books were part of a community life.<sup>64</sup>

Concerning the request to write ‘The Eighth Reveals the Ninth’ there are different possibilities: (a) Hermetists actually did it, (b) this was forever an intention, (c) it was a mental exercise, a *mundus imaginalis*,<sup>65</sup> (d) only the square milk-stone engraved with the title ‘The Eighth Reveals the Ninth’ was to be placed in a temple of Hermes.

a) If the newly-initiated Hermetists succeeded in writing the revelation on steles of turquoise and placing it in the temple of Hermes, it occurred, astrologically speaking, at a proper time.

b) Even as a pious hope, Hermetists may have thought of the day that Mercury reached 15 degrees of Virgo as a very special day. Maybe they regarded this as a time of yearly renewal and regeneration: the force of gnosis (Hermes) was attentive and penetrated the whole earth on that

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<sup>63</sup> van den Broek 2000: 82 - 88; Mahé 1998b: 83 - 85. Mahé perhaps goes a step further than van den Broek by being open to baptism and sacraments.

<sup>64</sup> Giversen 1989: 49 - 53.

<sup>65</sup> Faivre’s third criterion. “[T]he teaching of Hermes Trismegistus consisted of ‘interiorising’ the world in our mens”; Faivre 2000: xxiii.

particular day. The Sun is in the first half of the day, i.e. signifying daytime, as a day was measured from sunrise to sunrise, maybe suggesting many hours of activity, lessons and meditation.

c) The erecting of steles protected by frog- and cat-faced guardians was a mental practice, a *mundus imaginalis*, whether done individually or together in a group, carried out when Mercury reached its maximum strength in 15 degrees of Virgo. Van den Broek sees this passage as a magical and astrological practice, and such practices were quite common in circles where the philosophical Hermetica flourished.<sup>66</sup>

d) A milk-stone is composed of a mixture of organic and inorganic substances and is rather soft and easy to carry. According to Giversen, the text can read 'learned letters', 'master letters' or 'writing letters' instead of hieroglyphs.<sup>67</sup> Again, it is astrologically a propitious day to place such a milk-stone in a temple of Hermes.

It is not the place here to give any analysis of the whole text, but a single comment follows. There are several passages concerning 'power'.<sup>68</sup> The main structure in the text is that the powers already received as a seed in a womb gradually become more and more integrated into the mind through ascension. Finally, when seeing God as 'I',<sup>69</sup> power transforms into light. Symbolic the *Eight*, the home of saved souls,<sup>70</sup> equals Mercury in Virgo, i.e. in its own house (*oikos*). The ascent is synonymous with Mercury in Virgo as *hypsôma* (high place or maybe lifted up). Finally, the *Ninth* is as an ontologically-level equal to Mercury's position in primordial time. Looking at the ritual practice as a 'contracted' form of beliefs we get:

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<sup>66</sup> van den Broek 2000: 80.

<sup>67</sup> Giversen 1983: 166.

<sup>68</sup> Robinson 1977: 293 - 296.

<sup>69</sup> van den Broek 2000: 94.

<sup>70</sup> Peste 2002: 96.

Belief	Astrological practice	Astrological meaning
Ascent (powers integrated)	Mercury in Virgo	At home' ( <i>oikos</i> ) or <i>hypsôma</i>
Seeing God as 'I'	Mercury 15 degrees Virgo	Creation of the universe

The above is a presentation of a very likely relation between ritual/practice and 'beliefs' in the given literary context. That Hermetists watched the sky including the orbit of Hermes while interpreting his movements into an astrological framework, is beyond any doubt.<sup>71</sup>

### Summing up the relationship between rituals and beliefs

Summarised, the relationship between rituals and beliefs are as follows:

1. USP (the five matrices) *need* rituals to attain credibility and actuality, and rituals *need* matrices (or other sacred postulates or sacred ideas) to establish the holy. USP (matrices) are *vitalised* by ritual activity.
2. Rituals are 'contracted' expression of beliefs, and beliefs are mental modes or attitudes resulting from participation in ritual activity. There is a dialectical relationship between 'doing' and 'recognition'.
3. Ritual activity *creates* beliefs and one can expect fields of ritual activity such as for example alchemy, magic, astrology, healing, numerology and tarot to be centres of innovation and new religious ideas.
4. Religious texts, as far as they deal with both beliefs and rituals/practices, simply mention rituals or ritual practices because they vitalise important USP and are 'contracted' form of beliefs.

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<sup>71</sup> This will be outlined in detail in chapter 4 below.

## CHAPTER 3

### Cornelius Agrippa and the five matrices

Sic enim inferiora ad superiora invicem connexa sunt, ut influxus ab eorum capite prima causa, tanquam chorda quaedam tensa, usque ad infima procedat, cuius si unum extremum tangatur, tota subito tremat et tactus eiusmodi usque ad alterum extremum resonet ac moto uno inferiori moveatur et superius, cui illud correspondet, sicut nervi in cythara bene concordata.<sup>1</sup>  
(Agrippa: Book I, chapter xxxvii.)

In such a way, thus, are lower things reciprocally<sup>2</sup> joined to higher things: an influence flows from their top, the first cause, as a certain string stretched out, all the way down to the lowest. If any such (string) is plucked in one end, the whole vibrates at once and a similar touch always resonates in the other end, and by motion of the inferior alone, the higher, which responds to that, is also moved, like the strings in a well-tuned cythara.

Cornelius Agrippa (1486 - 1534 AD) renowned both today and briefly posthumously is honoured and well spoken of by many followers of Western

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<sup>1</sup> Brill's Latin edition, page 155, lines 12 - 17. V. Perrone Compagni (ed): 'Cornelius Agrippa *De Occulta Philosophia Libri Tres*', E. J. Brill, 1992. The Latin edition is only referred to as 'Brill' in the following chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Invicem: 'in their turn' or 'reciprocally'. According to the context superior things affect inferior things and the inferior also affects the superior, therefore 'reciprocally'. I have translated all Latin quotations based on an English translation from the free website *esotericarchives.com* owned by Joseph H. Peterson. The English translation is a little 'peculiar' by being originally a text printed in 1651 AD translated by a 'J.F'. Peterson's edition is a transcription based on J.F.'s translation and Brill's Latin edition. Peterson's transcription is a living document still leaving room for improvement and awaiting completion. Irrespectively, Peterson's free edition is the foremost English translation. A French edition from 1976 AD, *La Philosophie Occulte ou La Magie de Henri Corneille-Agrippa*, is based on an older French translation from 1727 AD. A German translation from 1916 AD, *Agrippa von Nettesheim: Magische Werke* (In the series: *Geheime Wissenschaften*) is based on a Latin edition, but on another MS than the Brill-edition. Whenever a passage is either very important or Peterson's edition is unclear, I have used Brill's Latin edition.

esoterism. However, the remarkably few academic works on him written within the last centennium are very critical of him. His credibility is disputed, and the attention of the few scholars trying to understand his life and writings has been directed mostly towards his biographical data in order to deal with a man able to write both *pro et contra* on magic and occultism. Two of Agrippa's writings are compared especially with each other, *De occulta philosophia* and *De vanitate scientiarum*. In the latter, Agrippa rejects any credible religious knowledge except that found in the Holy Scriptures.<sup>3</sup> This is indeed paradoxical keeping in mind that *De vanitate scientiarum* was written (1526) and published (1530) at a time when Agrippa still elaborated his momentous book on occult philosophy (1533). The reaction from scholars to this contradiction has ranged from a deep mistrust, labelling him a charlatan, to a belief in a tactical 'safety-device' set up by Agrippa.<sup>4</sup>

Some adherents consider Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia* the most important work (or book) to be found in Western esoterism. From an academic point of view, however, such a view may or may not be sustainable. To quote Paola Zambelli: "This encyclopaedia of magic, this systematic treatise *more germanico*, this compilation, is not after all so original, but is of great historical importance."<sup>5</sup> Frances A. Yates holds a similar opinion when she states that Agrippa's compendium is neither a textbook of magic nor a profound philosophical work. "Nevertheless", she says, "the *De occulta philosophia* provided for the first time a useful and – so far as the abstruseness of the subject permitted – a clear survey of the whole field of Renaissance magic."<sup>6</sup> The last major book assigned to a study of Agrippa is *Agrippa and the crises of Renaissance Thought* by Charles G. Nauert Jr. from 1965. Based on Eugenio Garin's suggestion, "that belief in magic and corrosive doubt about the validity of human reason and about contemporary civilisation were merely two aspects of the same mentality",<sup>7</sup> Nauert tries to solve the dilemma between *De occulta philosophia* and *De vanitate scientiarum*. He analyses the former on the presumption that "Agrippa's

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<sup>3</sup> Concerning astrology for example, Agrippa does not reject astrology, but his standpoint is that one cannot make a certain science of astrology and probably never can. Nauert 1965: 211.

<sup>4</sup> Yates 1664: 131.

<sup>5</sup> Zambelli 1976: 71.

<sup>6</sup> Yates 1964: 130.

<sup>7</sup> Nauert 1965: 262.



mind drifted uncertainly between intellectual despair on the one hand and a sort of omnivorous, generalised credulity on the other.”<sup>8</sup> Bearing this in mind it is not surprising to find a somewhat disapproving attitude to *De occulta philosophia*. In one of Nauert’s major conclusions one can read:

“Anyone who attempts to present a somewhat orderly exposition of the world view of *De occulta philosophia* must note that in the last resort Agrippa himself failed to give unity and order to his own development of that view. *De occulta philosophia* set out to become a synthesis; and it has been called the *summa* of medieval magic; the magical counterpart to the *Summa theologica* of Thomas Aquinas. But it was not a summa. It was more like a book of sentences, for the collection of the opinions of authorities has almost smothered the attempt to create a synthesis. Its chapters tend to become not orderly expositions but mere chains of alleged facts, all having some connection, however slight, with the topic announced in the chapter title.”<sup>9</sup>

Is Nauert right - and Agrippa a poor writer? Well, at one level *De occulta philosophia* is simply a compilation of many viewpoints taken from numerous sources. V. Perrone Compagni has also accentuated this by identifying many of Agrippa’s unnamed sources.<sup>10</sup> Yet, Nauert overlooks the fact that Agrippa collects his material, compiles it and comments on it, often through his chapter titles, to demonstrate, to repeat Rappaport, certain ‘canonical messages’. Nauert obviously overlooks the fact that Agrippa’s tendency to slide off into mere practical operation is caused by the need to *vitalise* certain USP. Nauert also ignores the fact that *De occulta philosophia* is a religious, not a philosophical work. It is unfair to criticise a religious text for a lack of factual stringency and logical order. This unfair attitude is common in research papers by scholars who examine their subject through the glasses of a philosopher, a logician or as a follower of modern science. Nauert (and others) also overlooks the fact that behind the apparent ‘syncretism’ Agrippa sets forth new canonical messages, i.e. the five matrices and other USP.

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<sup>8</sup> Nauert 1965: 200.

<sup>9</sup> Nauert 1965: 261.

<sup>10</sup> Compagni 1992.

Taken separately, *De occulta philosophia* is not a pessimistic book, but rather an optimistic survey of human potential.

Hanegraaff and Faivre, two of the major writers on Western esotericism, have made some short remarks. According to Hanegraaff, occult philosophy was “pioneered by Marsilio Ficino and provided with a standard textbook by Cornelius Agrippa in 1533.”<sup>11</sup> According to Faivre, Agrippa is the author of the most characteristic work of Renaissance magical literature. Agrippa follows Ficino, says Faivre, when he accentuates the concept of imagination and places it in a cosmological framework.<sup>12</sup> However, the most positive and maybe accurate evaluation of *De occulta philosophia* in general is to be found in Compagni’s introduction in Brill’s Latin edition. She restores Agrippa’s credibility by emphasising the many new ideas and attitudes in *De Occulta Philosophia*.<sup>13</sup>

### **The textual structure of *De occulta philosophia***

A key concept for Agrippa is the term *virtus*.<sup>14</sup> Everything in the universe is a *virtus* or has certain *virtutes* depending on the context. According to Agrippa cosmos is three-fold and divided into an elementary world, a celestial world mainly consisting of the planets and stars in heaven and an intellectual world, i.e. a world of ideas and the divine (God). Each world receives an influence from the world above, and the *virtues* of God descend from the intellectual world to the stars and planets and further down to the elemental world consisting of the four elements, animals, plants, metals and stones.<sup>15</sup> The task of the *magus*, which equals the most elevated philosopher, is to recognise the virtues inherent in all things. By *natural magic* the magician recognises and pulls in the virtues of things belonging to the elementary world. By *celestial magic* the magician pulls down virtues from the stars and planets and by *ceremonial magic* the magician uses rituals and different religious concepts. The three types of magic correspond epistemologically to three types of knowledge (or philosophies): the ‘philosophy’ of physics,

<sup>11</sup> Hanegraaff 1998a: 392.

<sup>12</sup> Faivre 2000: 101.

<sup>13</sup> Compagni 1992: 17.

<sup>14</sup> *Virtus*: power, character, virtue, excellence. Agrippa mostly uses the term in the sense of ‘power’ and ‘quality’, sometimes as ‘essence’.

<sup>15</sup> Agrippa Book I, chap. i.

mathematics and theology. By physics, Agrippa means knowledge about the four elements and medicine. Mathematics is for Agrippa in reality astrology, magical squares and numerology, and ‘theology’ is a rudimentary type of Neoplatonism mixed with some Aristotelian, Hermetic, Christian and ‘pagan’ principles. The skilful magician trained in all three types of magic and their related philosophies not only recognises the proper *virtues* in common things. He is also able to ascend to the highest levels to gain a keen and practical insight into the virtues of the planets, stars, angels and even God. As an overview, the table below is an illustration and serves to demonstrate the correspondences and the schematic trend found in Agrippa’s thinking:

<b>Ontology</b>	<b>Epistemology</b>	<b>Magic</b>	<b>Book</b>
Intellectual sphere	Theological insight	Ceremonial	III
Celestial sphere	Mathematical insight	Celestial	II
Elementary sphere	Physical insight	Natural	I

In Book I Agrippa describes natural magic, requiring an insight into nature and the human body, first based on an Aristotelian concept of the elements (fire, earth, air, water) and their qualities (hot, dry, cold, moist). Then Agrippa introduces a type of Platonism in order to explain how the planets and zodiacal signs relate to the human body as well as to different things found in nature such as animals, plants, stones and metals. Agrippa explains “[h]ow the operation of several virtues pass from one thing into another, and are communicated one to another.”<sup>16</sup> In Book II, Agrippa introduces a new type of cosmology based on numbers, and especially the first twelve numbers (1 to 12) are significant. Book III concerns the highest kind of magic, ceremonial magic, primarily based on an insight into how to ascend to the uppermost levels. However, ceremonial magic does not differ much from the

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<sup>16</sup> Heading; Agrippa, Book I, chap. xvi.

other two types of magic, but when ascending, the mind of the magus gains a deeper insight, making magical operations more keen and powerful.

*The contents and textual structure of Book I*

Keeping the textual research strategy developed in the preceding chapter in mind it is now possible to understand the way Agrippa dealt with canonical messages and the related practices. To repeat the strategy: One can expect that religious texts, as far as they deal with both 'beliefs and 'rituals/practices', simply mention these rituals or practices, because they vitalise important USP and can be perceived as a 'contracted' form of beliefs. By using this textual analysis method, it becomes easier to understand the structures of *De occulta philosophia*. Concerning Book I the structure is:

Chapter 1: The 'canonical messages' concerning the relationship between the three kinds of ontology, epistemology and magic are outlined.

Chapter 2: As a religious thinker Agrippa makes the 'canonical messages' much older than they are. Therefore, 'occult philosophers' as Apuleius, Zoroaster, Moses, Eudoxus, Mercurius Trismegistos, Porphyrius, Iamblicus, Plotinus, Proclus, Apollonius of Tyana, Empedocles, Democritus, Pythagoras and Plato shared the same canonical messages as found in *De occulta philosophia*. Typical of his time Agrippa believed Hermes Trismegistos to be a historical person. In nearly every chapter there are references to 'historical writers', for instance to Moses, believed to be 'transmitters' of the same canonical messages.

Chapters 3 - 8: The four elements and their qualities as found in the natural, the celestial and the intellectual world. The four elements encompass all three worlds and link the different ontological and epistemological levels. Agrippa is rather original here being probably the first in Western esoterism to integrate the four elements into every aspect of cosmos. The four elements exist not only in heavens, the stars, daemons and angels, but also in God

himself: *Quomodo elementa sunt in coelis, in stellis, in daemonibus, in angelis, in ipso denique Deo.*<sup>17</sup>

Chapter 9: The virtues found in the natural world depend upon the qualities of the elements (dry, wet, warm, cold). Virtues in nature are also alchemical and physical processes as for instance maturing, digesting, hardening, burning and congealing.

Chapters 10 - 21: Agrippa describes virtues related to the stars, the soul of the world (*anima mundi*) and the spirit of the world (*spiritus mundi*), which actually seems to be the same as the soul of the world. Virtues are also Platonist *ideas* found in the intellectual world transmitted to objects in the celestial and elementary world by way of similitude, i.e. resemblance in form and/or properties. Agrippa illustrates his canonical message, that ‘like attracts like’ through resemblance, colour or characteristics (in animals, organs, things etc.) by referring to a variety of folk medicine and folk beliefs:

“So also it is said,<sup>18</sup> that the right eye of a frog helps the soreness of a man’s right eye, and the left eye thereof helps the soreness of his left eye [...]. Thus, the foot of a tortoise helps them that have the gout in their (foot) [...]. After this manner they say that any animal that is barren causes another to be barren [...]. Therefore, they report that a women shall not conceive if she drinks every month urine of mule [...]. In the like manner to increase boldness, let us look for a lion or a cock and from these let us take the heart, eyes or forehead [...].”<sup>19</sup>

The above is an example of medical and/or magical practice which *vitalises* the important canonical message that ‘like attracts like’, i.e. by form, proportion, colour, affection, characteristics, etc. It should be noted, however, that it is also possible to view the many practices as the platform from which Agrippa extracts his rules of sympathia. Further, Agrippa mentions a law that may be labelled ‘the law of enmity’. Agrippa does not give it a special

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<sup>17</sup> Heading; Agrippa, Book I, chap. viii. Brill, page 101, line 10 - 11.

<sup>18</sup> Very often Agrippa uses phrases as ‘it is said’ or ‘so they report’ and the like.

<sup>19</sup> Agrippa, Book I, chap. xiv (my parenthesis).

name, but writes that “everything has something that it fears by being horrible, inimical and destructive (to it).”<sup>20</sup> Fire and water are inimical to each other as are air and earth. Agrippa only briefly deals with enmity, and his seems quick to assure that in the midst of enmity friendship is always present.<sup>21</sup>

Chapters 22 - 35: These chapters are devoted to astrology and how the seven planets and certain stars rule the ‘character’ of man, plants, herbs, minerals, stones, animals and countries. The disposition of man is under the influence of the planets and stars, but *Mens*, the spirit in man, stands above fate and is part of the divine providence - a topic to be discussed later.

Chapters 36 - 45: These chapters primarily describe the benefit of magic, and “[h]ow we can receive not only celestial and vital, but also certain intellectual and divine gifts from above.”<sup>22</sup> According to Agrippa, this important canonical message of drawing heaven down to earth is confirmed by ‘the whole school of Platonism’, by ‘St. Augustine in his *De Civitate Dei*’ (forgetting that Augustine writes against such matters) and by Hermes Trismegistos. The possibility of animating even dead matter becomes reality and is a sign of true harmony in the world.<sup>23</sup> Agrippa is thus able to explain how certain stones due to their affinities with the stars have certain powers, for example how the moonstone is able to draw down divine powers to the images of gods. As in Platonism the planets have both a physical and a spiritual aspect, i.e. they are a kind of beings with intelligence and reason, and further they represent divine proportions through their supposed distances from the earth.

Chapters 45 - 74: The last chapters are mostly concerned with the mind and its role in magic where human passions and imagination itself affect the

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<sup>20</sup> Agrippa, Book I, chap. xvii. *horribile* is an adjective and not a verb. Peterson’s edition has: “every thing hath something it fears & dreads, that is an enemy, and destructive to it.” The Latin text reads: [...] *omnis res habet aliquod timendum et horrible, inimicum et destructivum*; Brill, page 117 - 118, lines 26 & 1.

<sup>21</sup> Agrippa, Book I, chap. xvii.

<sup>22</sup> Heading, Agrippa, Book II, chap. xxxviii.

<sup>23</sup> Agrippa, Book I, chap. xxxviii.

world, though many topics are mentioned too, e.g. colours and different kinds of divination.

*The contents and textual structure of Book II*

Book II follows the same patterns as encountered in Book I. Canonical messages are frequently displayed in chapter headings followed by a listing of writers believed to have held the same message. Agrippa lists practices from numerous sources confirming the canonical message in question. Celestial magic includes knowledge about arithmetic, music, geometry, optics, astronomy and the mechanical arts. In reality, however, these subjects are replaced by numerology and astrology. Numbers govern and connect everything in the universe. Agrippa uses the first twelve numbers to classify everything existing and introduces classifications different from those established by the seven planets, the four elements and *ideas* (forms) described in Book I. Agrippa finds many arguments for the importance of numbers and the 'The scale of number twelve' can be used as an example. In the original world, twelve names of God correspond to twelve blessed spirits in the intellectual world. In turn, these correspond to the twelve signs of the zodiac in the celestial world, which in turn correspond to the twelve months, again in turn corresponding to different types of plants and stones in the elementary world. Finally, all this corresponds to twelve parts of the human body in the lesser world and to twelve 'devils' in the inferior world.

SCALA DUODENARII

Nomina Dei duodecim litterarum			שׁוֹמֵר Sanctus	בְּרִיךְ Benedictus	הַקָּדוֹשׁ Ipse				אֲבִי בֶן יוֹדוּ הַקָּדוֹשׁ Pater, Filius et Spiritus Sanctus			In Arche typo	
Nomen magnum in duodecim vexilla revolutum	יְהוָה	יְהוֹשֻׁעַ	יְהוֹנָתָן	יְהוֹרָם	יְהוֹרָם	יְהוֹרָם	יְהוֹרָם	יְהוֹרָם	יְהוֹרָם	יְהוֹרָם	יְהוֹרָם		
Duodecim ordines bestiarum spirituum	Sera- phim	Cheru- bin	Throni	Domi- nationes	Potesta- tes	Virtutes	Prin- cipatus	Archan- geli	Angeli	Inno- centes	Marty- res	Confes- sores	In mundo intelli- gibili
Duodecim angeli praesidentes signis	Malchi- dai	Asmo- del	Ambriel	Muriel	Verchiel	Hama- liel	Zurriel	Barbiel	Adna- chiel	Hanael	Gabriel	Barchiel	
Duodecim tribus	Dan	Ruben	Iehuda	Manasse	Asser	Symeon	Isachar	Benia- min	Neph- thalim	Garl	Zahu- lon	Ephraim	
Duodecim prophetæ	Mal- chias	Aggae- us	Zacha- rias	Amos	Oseas	Michas	Ionas	Abdias	Sopho- nias	Naum	Abacuk	Iohel	
Duodecim apostoli	Mathias	Tha- dæus	Symon	Iohannes	Petrus	Andreas	Harpro- lemacus	Philip- pus	Iacobus maior	Thomas	Mattha- eus	Iacobus minor	

The above is a partial print from Book II of *De occulta philosophia*. Agrippa lists more corresponding examples than mentioned above. Here one can see the twelve archangels, the twelve tribes of Israel, the twelve (greater) prophets, and the twelve disciples of Jesus, all belonging to the intellectual world.

Further, book II deals with the numbers associated with the letters in the Latin and Hebrew alphabet. Agrippa also relates numbers to planets, sigils,<sup>24</sup> characters,<sup>25</sup> images<sup>26</sup> and magical squares (see below). The only exception in Book II is a few chapters on music and the proportions of the human body. Again, like in Book I, practical matters are very much in focus. According to Karl Anton Nowotny, Agrippa is probably rather original in the way he creates his version of magical squares.<sup>27</sup> There is a relation between the magical squares, sigils, characters and secret numbers. Agrippa's approach is rather mathematical and speculative. Saturn is associated with

<sup>24</sup> Principally, sigils are figures constructed from the magical squares by drawing lines from '1' to '2', from '2' to '3', from '3' to '4' etc.

<sup>25</sup> 'Characters' of the planets is also called 'letters'. These are actually a kind of 'mystical letters' and can be seen in Book I, chap. xxxiii.

<sup>26</sup> Concerning 'images', see Agrippa, Book II, chap. xxxvii - xlvii. 'Images' are human portraits of the planets, for example Mercury is a handsome and bearded young man.

<sup>27</sup> Nowotny 1949: 46 - 57.



number 3 (see the reason below). From a *natural* square with three numbers in the side (fig. 3, below), Agrippa constructs a magical square and from this he constructs a sigil and a magical number. The following is an extract from Nowotny's article. The natural square for Saturn (fig. 3) is rotated 45 degrees (fig. 4). The numbers in the corners of the natural square (4, 2, 6, 8) are kept in their position while the others are mirrored vertically and horizontally. The result becomes the magical square of Saturn (Fig. 2). Saturn's contains nine cells, the sum along each line in Saturn's magical square is 15, and the *sum of all numbers* is 45 (total), which is the secret number of the spirits dwelling in Saturn.

4	9	2
3	5	7
8	1	6

Fig. 2

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

Fig. 3

		1		
	4	■	2	
7	■	5	■	3
	8	■	6	
		9		

Fig. 4

Repeating the same process, i.e. keeping the edge-numbers fixed but now without rotating the natural square, based on number '4' (fig. 6), one gets Jupiter's magical square (Fig 5):<sup>28</sup>

<b>4</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>13</b>

Fig. 5

<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>13</b>

Fig. 6

<sup>28</sup> The numbers in the 'middle' (7, 6, 10, 11) are kept in their same position like the 'middle' number '5' in Saturn's square.

	<i>No. of units in a side</i>	<i>No. of cells</i>	<i>Sum along any line<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>Total</i>
<b>Saturn</b>	3	9	15	45
<b>Jupiter</b>	4	16	34	136
<b>Mars</b>	5	25	65	325
<b>Sun</b>	6	36	111	666
<b>Venus</b>	7	49	175	1225
<b>Mercury</b>	8	64	260	2080
<b>Moon</b>	9	81	369	3321

The above is also from Nowotny's article. In a footnote, he provides the mathematical formulae for Agrippa's 'sum along any line' and 'total sum of all numbers' of a magical square.<sup>29</sup> Whether or not Agrippa knew these formulae, it is clear from his text that he calculates the total numbers,<sup>30</sup> i.e. he does not count them one by one. The lowest number of units in a side has to be three, as it is impossible to construct a magical square consisting of only two units in a side. The order of the planets (Saturn, Jupiter...Moon) is the reverse of the old astronomical order approved by Ptolemy. By using Hebrew letters and the numerical values attributed to these letters, Agrippa constructs certain names, e.g. the name Agiel for *Intelligentia Saturni* and Zazel for *Daemonium Saturni*. The magician must use the 'total' number. For example, when constructing a talisman for love (Venus) the number 1225 must be engraved in a silver plate (at a time appropriate for Venus).<sup>31</sup> Numbers are *archai* or building-stones, as developed by Pythagoreans and Neoplatonists, with a symbolism enabling interpretation of all objects in the mind and nature by transferring the qualities of the numbers to these objects.

<sup>29</sup> It is  $\frac{1}{2}n(n+1)$  and  $\frac{1}{2}n^2(n+1)$ , i.e.  $n^2 = n * n$ .

<sup>30</sup> Agrippa, Book II, chap. xxii.

<sup>31</sup> Agrippa, Book II, chap. xxii. The planet in question must be strong according to traditional astrological rules. Book II, chap. xxx. Stated otherwise, the planet must be 'fortunate' placed in the sky (Book II, chap. xxii). See also Book I, chap. xvii for a description of traditional astrological rules.

*The contents and textual structure of Book III*

“Now”, writes Agrippa, “it is time to turn our pen to higher matters and to that part of magic which teaches us to know and perfectly understand the rules of religion.”<sup>32</sup> The ‘rules of religion’ are, as a whole, a type of mysticism, a way of knowing God. It is also knowledge of how to prepare for ascension by avoiding carnal affections, materialistic inclinations and superficial judgments:

“And therefore (it is) necessary<sup>33</sup> for us, that we who strive to attain to so great a height should especially meditate in two (ways): first how we should leave carnal affections, frail senses and material passions. Secondly, by what way and means we may ascend to pure intellect joined with the qualities of the gods - without which we shall never happily ascend to the scrutiny of secret things and to the power of wonderful workings or miracles. Indeed, in this consists all dignificatio, which excels nature by rewarding a certain religious art.<sup>34</sup> Natural dignity is the best disposition of the body and its organs, not obscuring the soul with any grossness and being without all distemper. This comes from the situation, motion, light and influence of the celestial bodies and spirits which dwell [versantur] in the nativities of everyone, i.e. those whose ninth house is fortunate by Saturn, Sun and Mercury.<sup>35</sup> Mars in the ninth house also commands the spirits. However, we have largely treated these topics in the books of the stars; but for whom not being such a one,<sup>36</sup> it is necessary that he compensates for that defect of nature by education and by the best direction

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<sup>32</sup> Agrippa, Book I, chap. i.

<sup>33</sup> *Oportet nos itaque [...]*. Brill, page 407, lines 8 - 9.

<sup>34</sup> *In his enim tota consistit dignificatio, quam praestant natura, meritum et ars quaedam religiosa*. Brill, page 407, lines 15 - 16. *dignificatio* is not a Latin word, but a Celtic-Latin word. See web: [journals.eecs.qub.ac.uk/DMLCS/frameset\\_letter\\_D.html](http://journals.eecs.qub.ac.uk/DMLCS/frameset_letter_D.html). Its meaning is probably: what is dignified.

<sup>35</sup> The meaning is that natural dignity and magical skills are given to those born with Mercury, the Sun or Saturn in the ninth house.

<sup>36</sup> I.e. not having his Mars, Saturn, Sun or Mercury in the ninth house.

[regimine]<sup>37</sup> and prosperous use of natural things, until he becomes complete in all intrinsic and extrinsic perfections.”<sup>38</sup>

The above is once more an example of a practice ‘suddenly’ appearing in Agrippa’s text, in this case astrological rules concerning the ninth house, i.e. the house of religious matters. Agrippa relies on juridical astrology and by connecting his canonical message to an astrological practice he *vitalises* the canonical message. To Agrippa, or his readers, a well placed Mars, Saturn, Sun or Mercury in the ninth house in the birth chart means a ‘contracted’ belief. It indicates that the nativity is born with strong religious inclinations and is best suited to exercise magic (he has the ability to command spirits). Not surprisingly, Book III is composed like his two earlier books frequently with headings containing canonical messages and texts with examples of practices. The contents may also consist of long lists of wise men and philosophers believed to have explained the same principles or practices earlier.

Different topics ranging from divine emanations and divine names (chap. 10 - 17) to evil devils, their spirits and bodies and how to avoid them (chap. 18 - 21), the threefold guardian angel (chap. 22), and to how angels communicate (chap. 23), are treated in Book III. The remainder consists of detailed descriptions of practices, as for example cabalistic names and sigils used to evoke God’s grace and different spirits emanating from God.

### **The matrices and *De occulta philosophia***

The reader has been introduced to some aspects of *sympatheia* connecting the three worlds, the elementary, the celestial and the intellectual world. In a broader sense *sympatheia* also link a number of items such as the human body, stones, metals, plants, the zodiac, the seven planets, numbers, letters, secret names and sigils - whether based on forms, colours, proportions,

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<sup>37</sup> *Rigimine* (*rigimen*), here ‘direction’ as Agrippa probably means ‘the best direction of life’, i.e. towards a spiritual goal. *Rigimen* (Brill, page 407, line 24) can also mean ‘control’ and ‘steering’.

<sup>38</sup> Agrippa, Book III, chap. iii (my brackets).

magical squares or sounds.<sup>39</sup> Thus the criteria of matrix number five concerning holism should be met.

*I: Providence (pronoia) rather than karma or sin*

Concerning the first matrix, it is worth noticing that Agrippa sees *providence* as something different from *fatum*. The first emanates from God, while the latter has its roots in the soul of the world. The concept of providence is presented in Book II, *Celestial Magic*, together with five other laws governing the universe (see below). Initially, justice is a fourfold law made up by providence, fate, natural laws and the prudence of man. Later, however, in Agrippa's description of 'scale of number four' (Scala Quaternarii) six ontological levels and six corresponding laws are set up as follows:<sup>40</sup>

In mundo archetypo:	lex providentiae (law of providence)
In mundo intellectuali:	lex fatalis (law of destiny)
In mundo coelesti:	lex naturae (law of nature)
In mundo elementali:	lex generationis et corruptionis (law of generation and destruction)
In mundo minore: <sup>41</sup>	lex prudentiae (law of prudence)
In mundo infernali:	lex irae et punitionis (law of anger and punishment)

Man's fate is caused by the interplay of a number of factors ranging from divine providence to the cleverness of man. Agrippa does not perceive *lex providentiae* or *lex fatalis* as having anything to do with 'karma'/sin.

Providence, to examine this phenomenon first, is benevolent, controlled by God's wisdom and sometimes manifests itself as miracles. It is a force serving not only the whole earth, but also countries, kings, ordinary men and

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<sup>39</sup> There are analogies between sounds and planets and in a mantra-like fashion it seems that certain sounds (like music) have strong affinity with divine qualities, see especially Agrippa, Book II, chap. xxv-xxvi.

<sup>40</sup> See tables in Brill, page 266 - 268.

<sup>41</sup> This is the 'human world'.

even plants and stones.<sup>42</sup> Providence ‘secures and ends’, i.e. it represents a purpose with a finality, coming to human beings in the form of good spirits. “Indeed”, says Agrippa, “no leader or any important man could be safe, nor any woman continue uncorrupted, no man in this valley of ignorance could come to the end appointed to him by God, if good spirits did not secure us”.<sup>43</sup> Providence is a threefold good demon guiding Man by the aid of worldly leaders, divine beings and good spirits.<sup>44</sup> Providence, manifesting itself as the threefold good demon, offers the human soul direction, positive thoughts and good advice - by speaking to us:

“This (threefold good demon) guides the life of the soul and will always make good thoughts visible in the mind, being constantly active in illuminating us, although we do not always observe it. However, when we are purified and live peacefully, then it is perceived by us, then it is as though it speaks to us and communicates his voice to us, (though) previously being silent, and (now) constantly eager to bring us sacred perfection. And also by the aid of this demon we can avoid the malignity of fate: [...]”<sup>45</sup>

Providence is also a gift, a possibility humans may choose to receive or reject. Providence provides protection, leading men to spiritual perfection, and when stuck or in trouble providence is the finger of God pointing in the right direction. In Agrippa’s pragmatic and ‘magical’ way of understanding providence it is offered by, and identical with, guardian angels (or spirits) with secret Hebrew names and symbols. The speech of man divided into different languages is a manifestation of divine providence, and the most sacred language of all is that of the Hebrews equalling the voice of God.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Agrippa, Book III, chap. xvii.

<sup>43</sup> Brill, page 460, lines 6 - 9. Agrippa, Book III, chap. xx.

<sup>44</sup> Agrippa, Book III, chap. xx - xxii.

<sup>45</sup> *Hic vitam animae dirigit cogitationesque bonas menti semper exhibet, assidue agens in nobis illuminando, quamvis non semper animadvertimus; sed quando purgati sumus atque tranquille vivimus, tunc a nobis percipitur, tunc quasi nobiscum loquitur suamque nobis communicat vocem, antea silentio praesens, studetque assidue ad sacram nos adducere perfectionem. Huius quoque daemonis auxilio possumus malignitatem fati devitare: [...].* My parentheses; Brill, page 465, lines 4 - 10. Agrippa, Book III, chap. xxii.

<sup>46</sup> Agrippa, Book I, chap. lxxiv.

Thus, cabalistic magic using Hebrew letters represents the highest kind of magic. Consequently, as a paradox, providence is at the same time something given from God and something controlled by the magician.<sup>47</sup> Ultimately, the mind recognising providence is no longer affected by fate from the heavenly bodies.<sup>48</sup> By recognising or listening to divine providence, the magician obtains control over it, or becomes a part of it.

*Fatum*, on the other hand, is, like providence, also an order (or a kind of *logos*) pointing not only to the past but also ahead, i.e. into the future. Inspired by Hermetism Agrippa offers a definition of *fatum* very close to the concept of *hiemarmenê*:

“By three (as *Tresmegistus* said) is the world perfected: by *hemarmene*, necessity and order - i.e. successively concurrence of causes, which many call fate and the execution of the seed<sup>49</sup> and also destined distribution of consequences (or broods).<sup>50</sup> The whole measure of time is concluded in three, the past, present and future.”<sup>51</sup>

The clue in understanding fate as something inferior to providence lies in Agrippa's anthropology: man's mind (*mens*) with illuminated reason (*ratio*) and imagination (*idolum*) exist *in* providence, which is more influential than fate. Agrippa explains in further details:

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<sup>47</sup> Henry Cornelius Agrippa sendeth greetings to a certain friend of the Kings Court. This letter is included in Peterson's edition in the end of the third book. Here, a magician must know about the elements, heaven, fate, nature, providence and God in order to exercise his magic.

<sup>48</sup> Agrippa, Book III, chap. xliii.

<sup>49</sup> *foetum*, i.e. from *foetus*, foster, is here translated as seed, i.e. what is planted (by an action or already planted by God).

<sup>50</sup> My parenthesis. Another possibility is to translate 'foeturae' (from *feturae*) as 'offspring' (from the seed) instead of 'consequence'.

<sup>51</sup> [...]; tribus (ut Trismegistus ait) perficitur mundus, hemarmene, necessitate et ordine – hoc est, conventionem causarum adinvicem, quam plerique fatum dicunt, et executione ad foetum ac foeturae debita distributione. Tota temporis mensura ternario concluditur, videlicet praeterito, praesenti, futuro. Brill, page 261, lines 4 - 8. Agrippa, Book II, chap. vi.

“Man’s soul consists of mind, reason and imagination: the (higher) mind<sup>52</sup> illuminates reason, reason flows into imagination, all is one soul [...].<sup>53</sup> But the mind is in providence above faith,<sup>54</sup> therefore not affected either with the influences of the heavenly bodies nor the qualities of natural things; therefore only religion can cure it. On the other hand, imagination is in fate, above nature, which in a certain way is an assembly point of body and soul, (but nature is) below fate (and) above the body [...].<sup>55</sup> And therefore man, by the nature of his body, is below fate. The soul of man by the imagination in fate moves nature, in fact the mind (existing) in the order of providence is above fate. However, reason is free to make its own judgment, therefore the soul thus follows the well-known parts<sup>56</sup> (mind, reason and imagination); whereas the soul (guided) by reason ascends in the mind where it is filled again with divine light;”<sup>57</sup>

On one hand, and explained in simply terms, providence emanates from God (and the hierarchies close to him) and penetrates everything including plants and minerals. On the other hand, fate emanates from the celestial world downward to men and nature. As far as man has a body, i.e. is part of the natural or elementary world, he is subjected to *fatum*. His life is at the same time ordered and guided by divine providence as well as a fate coming from the stars and from the law of nature (birth and decay). What complicates the understanding of this is Agrippa’s approach to magic. In one sense magic works mechanically or automatically. In another sense it is dependent on the spiritual level of the magician and his ability to ascend and recognise God. Magic is also a mental practice reinforced and maybe impossible without faith: “Therefore sacred words have not their power in magical operations

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<sup>52</sup> Actually the text only reads *mens*, but the word ‘mind’ in English does not necessarily have anything elevated related to it. The expression ‘higher mind’ is more in accordance with Agrippa’s perception. Elsewhere, Agrippa divides mind (soul) into three parts: an intellectual, vegetative and sensitive part. Agrippa, Book II, vi; Brill, page 261, line 12.

<sup>53</sup> Brill, page 538, lines 8 - 9.

<sup>54</sup> i.e. in the sense ‘superior to’, but literary the text reads ‘above’. Probably, Agrippa had ontological levels in mind when writing this part.

<sup>55</sup> Brill, page 540, line 28 to page 541, line 2.

<sup>56</sup> ‘*illas partes*’, Translated as a demonstrative pronoun, i.e. ‘the well-known parts’.

<sup>57</sup> Agrippa, Book III, chap. xliii; Brill, page 541, lines 12 - 18 (my parentheses).



[...] but in the occult divine powers working by them in the minds of those who by faith adhere to them”.<sup>58</sup> Regarding *mens*, one can also argue that it only creates an effect on the world, i.e. has a real essence and potency, as far as it is enlightened by God.<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, every human being has a mind regardless of the degree of enlightenment. Maybe the ‘canonical message’ reads like this: the more enlightenment, the more the mind rests in and is part of divine providence, the more the lower soul, *anima*, is transformed by being lifted up into divine light by the illuminated mind - and the less is man subjected to *fatum*.

Agrippa has no teaching like ‘karma’ in *De occulta philosophia*, and it is unclear whether he believed in reincarnation or not. He knew about transmigration ‘delivered’ by wise men from India, Persia, Egypt and the Chaldeans. However, transmigration did not grant man an immortal soul.<sup>60</sup> Agrippa did not associate transmigration with ‘karma’, which he actually could have done by referring to the *Enneads*. Plotinus states that a person committing rape in one life is going to be reborn as woman who exists to be raped in the next.<sup>61</sup>

According to Agrippa sin and its divine punishment, whether in hell or in this life, do not play any major role at all, and are rarely mentioned. Furthermore Agrippa, familiar with the hermetic writings from Ficino’s Latin translation, could have used the role of punishment of sin as expressed in *Corpus Hermeticum*. Here, souls performing evil actions return to an existence as reptiles, the lowest level of development.<sup>62</sup> Additionally *fatum*, deriving mainly from the heavenly bodies, is thus more or less synonymous with the degree of influence of juridical astrology. Agrippa relies on astrology, for example, when finding the right time for making a talisman for love (Venus). He also relies on ordinary astrology when determining a person’s qualifications to perform magic (i.e. for example humans born with Mars in the ninth house). It is not the degree of fate that is the concern, but the nature

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<sup>58</sup> Agrippa, Book III, chap. xi.

<sup>59</sup> Nauert: 1965: 281.

<sup>60</sup> Agrippa, Book III, chap. xlv.

<sup>61</sup> Plotinus, *The Enneads*, III. 2.12. Agrippa must have known Ficino’s translation into Latin in 1492 AD. Plotinus is mentioned and referred to several times in the *De occulta philosophia*.

<sup>62</sup> C.H. X.7 - 8.

of destiny. Destiny is formed by divine providence rather than by the 'past', i.e. by sin or karma. What distinguishes Western esoterism from Buddhism and Hinduism is a belief in destiny, whether labelled providence or fate, guided by a purpose and a future. It is not a question, as we have seen, of either *providentia* or *fatum*, because both are linked to the future and not only to the past. Even considering *fatum* as 'causes' (karma) it is in any case superseded by providence. Thus to repeat the arguments for the validity of the first matrix of this thesis in Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia*:

1. Both *providentia* and *fatum* serve a purpose and are viewed as leading into the future to a higher extent than 'karma' or 'sin' (as consequences from the past).
2. Providence is superior to fate (*fatum*) and man is subjected to fate as long as his body is *in* nature, but his (higher) mind (*mens*) is superior to fate and rests in (or is part of) providence.
3. Agrippa could have quoted Plotinus' belief in 'karma' (III, 2, 12) or C.H. X, 7 - 8 where the amount of sin committed in this life determines the destiny of the life to come.

*Comment:* From a logical standpoint religious texts are contradictory, but not necessarily from an existential standpoint. By normal logic one will make a statement A and its negation not-A as: A *or* not-A, for instance, 'it will rain today' *or* 'it will not rain today'. Religious texts often apply *and*, i.e. A *and* not-A, for example man has a free will *and* is also subjected to fate, or magic works independent of the mind *and* magic works dependent of the mind, or providence is given by God *and* providence can be captured by magical skills. Actually, in Western esoterism free will together with providence, prudence, fate and magical skills are often in focus. Such opposite concepts are difficult to explain. However, religion is probably rather an existential phenomenon similar to Kierkegaard's dual way of thinking, i.e. life is both 'freedom' and 'necessity'. Using Kierkegaard's terminology, Agrippa deals with both freedom (stemming from *ratio*) *and* necessity (*fatum/providentia*) in his *De occulta philosophia*.

*II: The dialectical relationship between Man and God (or the divine), including the healing of other people, society and/or the Earth*

This matrix is rather important, as mentioned in the introduction, because of a somewhat magical relation between the ‘upper’ and the ‘lower’ world. To Agrippa a purely mechanical universe based on sympathia (or magic) exists together with a concept of God. Actually, one discovers a vision of a purely magical universe coexisting with a God able to ‘listen to’ human prayers.

Agrippa’s metaphor, a string stretched out throughout the entire universe,<sup>63</sup> where the ‘lower’ affects the ‘higher’, in Agrippa’s interpretation, is a well-understood picture of a living organic universe. This metaphor can be found in the writings of Giovanni Pico Della Mirandola, Marsilio Ficino and the Stoics, among these especially Posidonius (or also spelled Poseidonios).<sup>64</sup> The ability to affect the totality, including its zenith, is a soteriological aspect in Western esotericism with many implications. It clears the way for a fresh re-interpretation of ‘wholeness’, i.e. on other people, on society, on earth or the whole universe. To Agrippa and many others, as we shall see, it becomes a healing process for people, society or earth. The first step for the magician is to restore his own mind, darkened and ignorant, by the assistance of occult practices, supported in one way by divine grace. The ultimate in this process is to experience a mystical union, where divine light flows through *mens* into *ratio*. Bearing in mind the powers gained by the magician, Agrippa turns to praising its social aspects that for him includes the strength of nature, the health and well-being of his fellow man, and specifically the acceleration of time, i.e. the maturing of what is coming.

“For holy religion purges the mind and makes it divine, it helps nature and strengthens natural powers as a physician helps the health of the body and a farmer the strength of the earth.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> See the quotation at the beginning of this chapter.

<sup>64</sup> Cassirer 1942: 338.

<sup>65</sup> Religio enim sacra mentem purgat redditque divinam; iuvat etiam naturam naturalesque roborat virtutes, quemadmodum medicus corporis iuvat sanitatem et agricola terrae virtutem adiuvat. Brill, page 402, line 15 - 18. Agrippa, Book III, chap. i.

“So devoted men and those elevated by these divine virtues command the elements, drive away fogs, raise the winds, cause rain, cure diseases, raise the dead [...].”<sup>66</sup>

“Occult ingenuities, which can, without offending God, or injuring faith or religion, preserve kingdoms, dive into counsels, overcome enemies, deliver captives, increase wealth, obtain the good will of men, expel diseases, conserve health, prolong life, and restore strength of youth.”<sup>67</sup>

And from *De incertitudine et vanitate Scientiarum*:<sup>68</sup>

“For magicians, as the most accurate explorers of nature, employing that which are prepared by nature by applying active and passive (virtues), often produce effects before the time ordained by nature, which the vulgar think are miracles, which indeed are natural works, the intervention of a season only being temporary.<sup>69</sup> As if anyone should produce roses in the month of March, and ripe grapes or sowed beans or make parsley grow into a perfect plant within a few hours. And cause greater things as: clouds, rains, thunders, and animals of diverse kinds, and very many transmutations of things [...].”

In view of the above, magic has a collective effect: helping and strengthening nature like taking away fog, making rain and accelerating the processes of ‘maturing’, i.e. the bringing forth of what is to come, for example parsley and roses. Here, the process is similar to the process in alchemy and in modern esotericism, for example as seen in Alice Bailey’s belief in the acceleration of the heralded coming of the epoch of Aquarius, to come about only by correct preparation. At a social level, magic helps governments (preserve

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<sup>66</sup> Agrippa, Book III, chap. vi.

<sup>67</sup> Henry Cornelius Agrippa sendeth greetings to a certain friend of the Kings Court, quoting Peterson’s translation. This letter is not included in the Brill edition.

<sup>68</sup> The Latin text is taken from the French archive, *Gallica*, website: gallica.bnf.fr. *De incertitudine et vanitate Scientiarum*, page LIII. An English translation of this extract can be found as an appendix at the back of Book III of *De occulta philosophia* at [esotericarchives.com](http://esotericarchives.com).

<sup>69</sup> *Præuentione*. Difficult to translate, maybe literally: ‘belonging to the day before’.

kingdoms), and at a more personal level it cures sickness, prolongs life and restores youth.

The dialectical relationship between high and low is also expressed by ‘drawing down’ divine virtues from the celestial, intellectual or original world. An example is the construction of talismans by the setting up of magical squares to calculate the magical numbers and secret names of the planets. This enables the magician to draw down planetary (or divine) energies to earth. The magician (the ‘lower’) can also manipulate the higher - and even virtues and providence from God can be ‘drawn down’ - as we have seen. The process may require certain Christian virtues like faith, hope and love,<sup>70</sup> but the ‘lower’ in the form of man has the potential to ‘draw down’ divine energies, just like certain stones or plants can pull down divine forces.<sup>71</sup> In the opening chapter of *De occulta philosophia* Agrippa makes clear that the purpose of magic is to enjoy the already existing virtues and to draw new virtues from above. In a natural continuation of the aforesaid, the arguments for the validity of the second matrix in *De occulta Philosophia* (and with a little help from *De incertitudine et vanitate Scientiarum*) are summed up, viz.:

1. As a string in a lute vibrates even when plucked at the ‘lower end’ so also the inferior moves the superior at the ‘higher end’.

2. Natural substances like stones, plants and metals are capable of ‘drawing down’ *virtutes* from the celestial world. Numbers, letters and sigils can ‘draw down’ *virtutes* from the intellectual world and a skilful magician, preferably Christian, is able to ‘draw down’ *virtutes* directly from God.

3. Magic pulling down new virtues from above affects individuals, nature and society (kingdoms) alike. Additionally, it speeds up the manifestation of natural things to come, for example the harvesting of crops.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Agrippa, Book III, chap. vi. See more below.

<sup>71</sup> Agrippa, Book I, chap. xxxiv and chap. xxxviii.

<sup>72</sup> This is not to deny that black magic can create unnatural things or phenomena. However, Agrippa’s fundamental approach to magic is based on its healing aspects. Probably, magic is a

*III: An interdependence between dualism and monism, including the mind and/or the world as a stairway to heaven*

To repeat briefly, cosmologies encountered in Western esoterism are seldom monistic *or* dualistic, but rather a mixture where monism normally takes more over when the universe is in a healed condition. In Agrippa's universe there is not much room for the devil. Evil spirits do not pose a threat to man due to the protection from divine providence which puts pure spirits in charge near us.<sup>73</sup> As we have seen earlier, man is also protected by his allotted threefold guardian angel keeping away malignity. Those born with Mars, the Sun, Mercury or Saturn in the ninth house in the birth chart naturally command spirits and are able to command the elements. Man is not a passive participant in and observer of life, but rather an active ruler able to draw down the restoring *virtutes* from God. Man is able to heal and restore the universe by pacifying the dualistic elements and according to Agrippa, the best method for affecting the world is generally found in ceremonial magic. Here, one learns "how good spirits may be called up by us, and how evil spirits may be overcome by us."<sup>74</sup>

The relative nature of dualism offers a study of natural and celestial magic. The evil spirit of Saturn, *Daemonium Saturni*, can be called forth by the help of a magical square and the name Zazel engraved on a talisman. Actually, it is the magician who evokes the potential dualism in Saturn (or another planet). The magician can choose otherwise and instead evoke the good spirit of Saturn, *Intelligentia Saturni*. Accordingly, black magic stimulates a potential dualism while white magic regenerates and helps forth a potential monism.

It is also difficult to find a persisting anthropological dualism parallel to the predominantly monistic cosmos. "The dualism, which pits matter and spirit against each other at the beginning of this path to perfection, can be resolved and man will become a child of God, uniting himself with Him, transforming

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medicine of sorts and a magician is a physician able to apply his skills not only to the human body, but also to nature and the whole universe as well.

<sup>73</sup> See for example Agrippa, Book III, chap. xx.

<sup>74</sup> Heading, Agrippa, Book III, chap. xxxii.

himself ‘in eandem imaginem qua est Deus’,<sup>75</sup> and thus discovering himself to be a worker of miracles ‘in vertute Dei.’”<sup>76</sup> True religion makes the mind (*mens*) divine and strengthens all natural powers in the same way “as a physician helps the health of the body and a farmer the strength of the earth.”<sup>77</sup> Ultimately, it is by ascending the cosmic stairway that man best affects nature and transforms his mind. Wise men realise the possibility of ascending to the original world, to the maker of all, the first cause from where all appears.<sup>78</sup> It is a little unclear whether ascension through the celestial world follows a specific order of the planets. However, the Sun plays a significant role in ascension, and it is by addressing the soul of the Sun the magus becomes that soul or light.<sup>79</sup>

Nauert provides a rather detailed description of the many preparations necessary and the many rituals applied by Agrippa when ascending. The rituals are used additively, e.g. cleanliness of body and soul (Pythagoreans), the sacrament of penance, alms and baptism (Christianity) and possibly ritual cleanliness (Judaism).<sup>80</sup>

To sum up the arguments of the validity of the third matrix in *De occulta philosophia*:

1. Both a monism based on the all-pervading sympathia and a slight dualism based on evil spirits and devils exists. Monism and dualism exist side-by-side.
2. Through ascension and the enlightenment of the magus, the body of men and nature can be strengthened and devils neutralised, thus a cosmological healing occurs restoring monism at the expense of dualism.

#### *IV: Scientific laws to be synonymous with spiritual principles*

Principally, Agrippa exemplifies in *De occulta philosophia* the same attitude to ‘knowledge’ as found in Late Middle Ages where one extracted as much

<sup>75</sup> I.e. ‘in the same image, which is God’.

<sup>76</sup> Campagni 1992: 46. I.e. ‘in the safe sight of God’.

<sup>77</sup> Agrippa, Book III, chap. i.

<sup>78</sup> Agrippa, Book I, chap. I. Brill, page 263, lines 28 - 29.

<sup>79</sup> Agrippa, Book II, lx. Brill, page 396, lines 7 - 15.

<sup>80</sup> Nauert 1965: 288 ff. See especially Agrippa, Book III, chap. liii-lvii.

knowledge as possible from ‘science’ (philosophy, medicine, mathematics etc.) and when insufficient, a more religious attitude took over. Both physical and mathematical insight, i.e. the principles behind natural and celestial magic, are superseded by theological insight and the corresponding ceremonial magic. To Agrippa, physical and mathematical principles make up the foundation from which natural and celestial magic is built. *Virtutes* and *sympatheia* follow the same principles that apply to physics and mathematics. Many spiritual principles are not only synonymous with scientific ‘laws’, they are also based on, and derived from, scientific notions. When applying parts of Aristotelian physics for example, the whole universe, including God, acts in accordance with the four elements. Even theological insight can be utilised in such a pragmatic way, for example to find the secret names and the genius of the planets,<sup>81</sup> that it creates a direct (magical) impact on astral and earthy matters. Additionally, a part of theological insight concerns Cabala where the language of the Hebrews equals the voice of God, as we have seen. Accordingly, it is possible to create secret names and characters, i.e. mantra-like names, for example ååååå,<sup>82</sup> with an effect superior to other kinds of secret names and characters. To Agrippa this was possibly a sort of ‘science’, but if it were not so, matrix number four is encountered when dealing with natural and celestial magic.

### **The textual relationship between canonical messages and ritual practices**

Several examples were mentioned earlier of how Agrippa supports his canonical messages by continuously referring to rituals or practices. Conversely, these rituals and practices *vitalise* the canonical messages and can be seen as a *contracted* form of beliefs. *De occulta philosophia* is a complex work, as stated by Nauert. Yet, Agrippa’s book becomes much more legible if one understands the textual relationship between ‘beliefs’ and ‘practices’ mentioned. To stress the importance of this approach in reading Agrippa some additional examples follow:

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<sup>81</sup> Agrippa, Book III, chap. xxvi.

<sup>82</sup> Agrippa, Book III, chap. xi.



*Example 1 - the four elements and the zodiac*

In the beginning of Book I, *sympatheia* is based on an Aristotelian concept of the four elements and their corresponding qualities (hot, cold, dry, moist). Agrippa adds apparently irrelevant details when stating:

“Also, among the stars some are fiery as Mars and Sun; airy as Jupiter and Venus; watery as Saturn and Mercury is earthy and the Moon (also), which normally by many is accounted watery [...] so Aries posses the beginning of Fire, Leo the progress and Sagittarius the end. Taurus the beginning of earth, Virgo the progress [...].”<sup>83</sup>

What is the logical connection? The four elements have sympathy for each other, for example fire for fire, earth for earth, but there is also a sympathy to a certain extent, for example between fire and earth. Both are namely, according to the Aristotelian doctrine, ‘dry’. Because astrology incorporated the four elements in its teachings and methods,<sup>84</sup> Agrippa wants to demonstrate how the Aristotelian doctrine can be ‘proved’ in practice, i.e. by casting horoscopes.

*Example 2 - the Moon and Onthophagus Taurus*

In Book I Agrippa deals with the (white) Moon and its many sympathetic links to albumen, fat, silver, crystal and white pearls. He then, seemingly out of context, goes on to urge the reader to study the behaviour of the two-horned beetle. In nature one can observe the power of the Moon by watching the two-horned beetle:

“[...] named after the form of a bull, which digs under cow-dung and remains there for a period of twenty eight days, while the Moon measures the whole zodiac. And in the twenty ninth day, when it

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<sup>83</sup> Agrippa, Book I, chap. viii.

<sup>84</sup> According to Jim Tester the Greek astrologer Vettius Valens (Second AD) was the first to incorporate the four elements into astrology as used later, i.e. Aries as ‘fire’ etc. Tester 1987: 46 - 47.

thinks there will be a conjunction of the luminaries, it opens (the dung) and throws it into water, from where (new) beetles appear.”<sup>85</sup>

There are different species of the asymmetric two-horned beetle, but the proper Latin name is probably *Onthophagus taurus*, (‘named after the form of a bull’). A web search will confirm that *Onthophagus taurus*, found in temperate areas such as Europe and North America, is the first animal to be observed to orientate itself by polarised moonlight.<sup>86</sup> Depending on temperature, the hatching period of its eggs is four to five weeks. The observation of the *Onthophagus taurus*, if one was involved in such a practice, would *vitalise* the belief in the Moon’s effect on earthly matters.

*Example 3 – natural or ‘black’ magic*

As we have seen the planets can be used for either ‘white’ (natural) or ‘black’ magic, and from the magical square of each planet a number is derived, and in turn from this number two names to call forth the good or evil spirit of a planet. This must be done when the planet is in a good or bad position respectively. For example, to bring forth *Daemonium Saturni* one must engrave the name ‘Zazel’ on a plate of lead at a moment when Saturn is ill-positioned in the zodiac. This will cause ‘an unfortunate Saturn’ to prevent building and planting. Magic involving the demonic Mars causes discord and strife, chases bees, pigeons and fish away, and causes barrenness in men and woman.<sup>87</sup> The canonical message, ‘that there are good and bad spirits dormant in the planets’ must be seen in relation to astrological practice. Actually, it appears likely that this canonical message is directly derived from astrology where a planet yields ‘good’ or ‘bad’ results depending on its position in a horoscope.

*Comment:* The discussion of monism and dualism might lead the attentive reader to conclude that the universe is more dualistic than expressed earlier. To repeat, the argument against profound dualism in Agrippa is to be found

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<sup>85</sup> Agrippa, Book I, chap. xxiv (my parentheses).

<sup>86</sup> See for example the website:

[/www.spacetoday.org/SolSys/Moons/TheMoon/DungBeetle.html](http://www.spacetoday.org/SolSys/Moons/TheMoon/DungBeetle.html): “The novel element here is that the dung beetle is the first animal confirmed in its use of polarised moonlight as a guide.”

<sup>87</sup> Agrippa, Book II, chap. xxii.

in the voluntary act when making ‘black magic’. The planets do not create havoc unless manipulated. The cosmological speculations of Western esoterism are often strongly influenced by astrology determining a fluctuation of sorts between monism and dualism and their mutual interference. Such interaction can be found in Johannes Trithemius’ *De Septem Secundeis - id est, intelligentiis, sive Spiritibus Orbes post Deum moventibus*.<sup>88</sup> Trithemius (1462 - 1516 AD) was Agrippa’s mentor and inspirer and Agrippa dedicated a draft version of the *De occulta philosophia* to him.<sup>89</sup> Trithemius depicts a progression in the world, also mentioned by Agrippa, by consistently allotting 354 years and four months to each of the seven planets. According to this theory, Mars ruled the world from 1171 AD until to 1525 AD making many wars ‘all over the whole world’. The tight relationship between ‘beliefs’ and ‘practice’ can also be applied to Trithemius, though not the subject at this point, as far as his historical epochs are based on the days of the week.<sup>90</sup>

*Example 4 – the mind transfers virtues to ‘things’ and other minds*

An important USP for Agrippa is that mind itself is an object able to draw in the *virtutes* it investigates, believes in, or imagines. Imagination and passion have in themselves a certain power over the mind and the body. The following statement equals modern thinking and is at the same time one of Agrippa’s most striking psychological statements: “And it is verified among physicians that a strong belief and an undoubted hope and love towards the physician and the medicine add much to health,<sup>91</sup> yes, sometimes more than the medicine itself.”<sup>92</sup> Passions combined with fantasy make passions very intense, a combination that also can also affect the bodies and minds of other

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<sup>88</sup> “About secondary [causes] encircling – that is intelligences, seven spiritual spheres moving under God.” At ‘esotericarchives.com’ one can find an English translation of the work done 1647 by the English astrologer William Lilly, again in Peterson’s transcription.

<sup>89</sup> Compagni 1992: 1 - 3.

<sup>90</sup> The first reign is attributed to Saturn, i.e. the planet ruling Saturday in astrology, then to Venus (Friday), Jupiter (Thursday), Mars (Wednesday), Mercury (Tuesday), Moon (Monday) and Sun (Sunday). Maybe, symbolically speaking, by going back to Sunday, history will end by being back to creation – or at least to a very peaceful time.

<sup>91</sup> *Conferro*, i.e. add, bring, bring together, i.e. belief, hope and love together bring ‘sanitas’ (health or sanity). Brill, page 228, lines 15 - 18.

<sup>92</sup> This placebo effect is described in Agrippa, Book I, chap. lxvi.

people.<sup>93</sup> The strongest effect is achieved when assisted by “celestial opportunities”<sup>94</sup>, i.e. the use of juridical astrology. Agrippa’s psychological insight is more refined, with many more details than shown at this point. The central point is that the canonical message - ‘that mind (or soul) itself is an object able to draw in and transfer *virtutes* into other objects or minds as well’ - is *often connected to astrology*, i.e. a ritual practice. The Moon is connected with servitude, Venus with love, Mercury with persuasion, Saturn with quietness or sadness, Jupiter with religious worship and Mars with fear.<sup>95</sup> In general terms ‘passion + imagination + sigils<sup>96</sup> + right timing’ make up the ingredients empowering the mind to influence objects or other minds. The combination of passions, imagination, sigils and right astrological timing facilitates the meeting and interaction with the souls of the stars and other celestial ‘intelligences’:

“Especially, Arabian philosophers say that man’s soul, when it will be most attentive of any (magical) work through its passions and affections, is united with the souls of the stars and also with intelligences; [...].”<sup>97</sup>

Keeping in mind Agrippa’s statement that the human soul consists of mind, reason and imagination, Agrippa seems very consistent in his deductions by not only letting *ratio* and *idolum* be part of, but also instruments of, *mens*. When comparing this section to Book III (where the souls of the planets are also made up by mind, reason and imagination) the consistency of his thoughts becomes even more obvious. Imagination is one of Faivre’s intrinsic criteria and one can argue that this criterion is met in *De occulta philosophia*. However, the following must be stressed. First, passions seem as im-

<sup>93</sup> To Agrippa fantasy seems to be a lower variant of imagination, being ‘inward’, while *imaginatio* is a higher faculty of the soul and thus able to ascend.

<sup>94</sup> Quod passiones animi plurimum iuvantur ab opportunitate coelesti [...]. i.e. ‘how the passions of the soul are most helped by celestial opportunities’. Brill, page 227, lines 17 - 18.

<sup>95</sup> Agrippa, Book I, chap. lxiii.

<sup>96</sup> Sigils, figures, words and certain gestures also reinforce the magical effects; Agrippa, Book I, chap. lxvii.

<sup>97</sup> Dicunt philosophi maxime Arabes animum humanum, quando per suas passiones et affectus ad opus aliquod attentissimus fuerit, coniungi ipsum cum stellarum animis, etiam cum intelligentiis; [...]. Brill, page 229, lines 4 - 6. Agrippa, Book I, chap. lxvii. My parenthesis.

portant as imagination. Second, imagination is dependent on an astrological influx reinforcing, maybe rather significantly, the effect of imagination. Third, the possibility of ascension, a very important USP to Agrippa, depends very much on ‘faith, hope and love’, more than on keen imagination. In the case of Agrippa, the *vis imaginativa* is present as such, but reinforced by other factors. However, this does not entail that ‘imagination’ is an unimportant USP in Western esoterism - as will be summed up later.

*Comment:* This thesis is not a generic study of Western esoterism. However, Agrippa’s mentioning of ‘Arabian philosophers’ (see quotation above) suggests an influence on esoterism from Arabian sources, i.e. of a scientific, astrological, alchemical, philosophical and religious nature. Additionally, it is a possibility, though not likely, that certain branches of Sufism shared, or perhaps still share, the five matrices. In his introduction to *DGWE*,<sup>98</sup> Hanegraaff recognises that a focus on Jewish and Islamic ‘mysticism’ is part of a future trend that may end up transforming the understanding of Western, Jewish and Islamic esotericism.

### **Additive components**

One of the distinctive features of a ritual field, according to Olson, is its ability to play together with other ritual fields to obtain wholeness, whether of a mental, moral or spiritual character. Man’s ability to ascend is described in Book III in detail and nowhere else does Agrippa refer to so many rituals in *De occulta philosophia*. It follows that ascension, obviously an important USP to Agrippa, *needs* rituals. Agrippa uses all his knowledge of ‘ceremonies’, not by ‘mixing’ the used rituals, but simply by performing several rituals one after the other. To quote D.P. Walker:

“In a series of chapters towards the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Book on prayers, sacraments and other religious rites, he constantly places Christian examples side by side, and on a level, with pagan or magical ones.”<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*. Hanegraaff 2005f: xii.

<sup>99</sup> Walker 2003: 95.

Similarly, Nauert also outlines the complexity of ascension and stresses the use of astrological timing, of almsgiving, penitence for one's misdeeds, the use of rites such as baptism, aspersion, oblation, sacrifices, certain sacraments and ritual cleanliness.<sup>100</sup> It is evident that Agrippa uses all rituals at hand, and it can be argued with the words of Nauert that all these conditions in the last resort are preparations for the ascent of the soul to higher realms. As Walker puts it, all these ritual acts are used 'side by side' in an effort to reach illumination in God. This is simply an 'additive use' of different rituals although Agrippa also stresses the importance of intention when adopting 'foreign' rituals, i.e. intention is the crucial factor.<sup>101</sup> God does not reject but temporarily approves pagan cults and ceremonies, if practised with a will to serve God.

The use of foreign rituals and ceremonies suggests the existence of an additive approach. Agrippa encourages his readers to engage in different ritual activities ranging from Christian rituals to magic, astrology, numerology (as ritualised practices) and different foreign rituals. These rituals (or practices) can stand 'side by side' or they can be 'blended' as in the case of astrology and numerology (in Book II). Thus, both syncretistic as well as additive components exist in *De occulta philosophia*.

Theologically, Agrippa also reveals an additive approach by supporting both mono- and polytheism.<sup>102</sup> It is necessary for the magician to recognise the real God as well as 'the other gods or divinities' and without due veneration and offerings to these pagans gods no magician will gain any effect.<sup>103</sup> Perhaps Agrippa intended to assert the superior position of Christianity by stressing the "three guides which bring us even to the paths of truth and which rule all our religion, and in which it wholly consists, namely *Love, Hope and Faith*."<sup>104</sup> Only God can teach true religion. Yet, Agrippa's errand may have been different as he also states that omitting the use of physical and mathematical *virtutes* (i.e. celestial magic), whether a true Christian or not, is the most wicked sin.<sup>105</sup> Agrippa is a 'gnostic' in the sense that divine

<sup>100</sup> Nauert 1965: 289.

<sup>101</sup> Agrippa, Book III, chap. iv.

<sup>102</sup> It is well-documented that Agrippa was 'an earnest Evangelic'. Walker 2003: 91.

<sup>103</sup> Agrippa; Book III, chap. vii.

<sup>104</sup> Agrippa, Book III, chap. v.

<sup>105</sup> *impium scelus*. Brill, page 409, line 21; Agrippa, Book III, chap. iv.

providence and magical skills are dependent on ‘recognition’ and strengthened by ascension through the upper spheres. He is a Christian in the sense that providence is a gift from God and that magical strength is strengthened by (a Christian) faith.<sup>106</sup> Thus, these viewpoints show that Christianity and esoterism were used additively despite the appearance of different syncretistic elements. Agrippa is a Christian *and* a ‘gnostic’ despite his apparent favouring of the former.

### Summary

At one level Agrippa’s *De Occulta philosophia* is a syncretism composed of different ideas. Viewed from that level alone, the composition of the three books is somewhat vague without unity and order (Nauert). However, behind its apparent syncretism, it sets forth new canonical messages and most important is the presence of the five matrices as demonstrated above. The tight relationship between ‘beliefs’ and ritual/practice (the main textual method) occurring frequently suggests that many of Agrippa’s canonical messages are dependent on different rituals and practices. An astrological practice is of uttermost importance and his magic is probably inconceivable without astrology. For example, the belief in the presence of ‘intelligent’ and ‘demonic’ spirits in each planet is derived from ordinary astrology, where the planets can give ‘good’ or ‘bad’ results depending on their placement in the horoscope. The interactions between ‘beliefs’ and ritual/practice, as illustrated by Agrippa, make the textual structure of *De occulta philosophia* more clear and comprehensible. As a general rule, important canonical messages are shown in the headings of the chapters and illustrated in the section following by referring to practices able to communicate in a ‘contracted’ way the message in question. The field of astrology and magic are able to co-exist, interact and co-operate with other fields, for example the numerological field mentioned in Book II specifically. *Experience gained in one ritual field is transferred to other ritual fields.*

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<sup>106</sup> See for example Agrippa, Book III, chap. x - xi. From one point of view, his thoughts can be understood in a Christian framework (chap. x). From another point of view, it can be understood in a ‘gnostic’ framework, where the magician must ‘recognise’ for example the secret Hebrew names and characters of God (chap. xi).

The holism found in Agrippa is a hierarchical form of holism, in which the lower, man and nature, is ‘below’ the planets, and the intellectual world in turn ‘below’ God. Occasionally, a ‘democratic’ (or vertical) type of holism in which every part of the universe has the same status appears. Even God can be a part of the four elements. Holism is, in Agrippa’s own words, a complex network of communications.<sup>107</sup> Agrippa’s magic is based on sympathy + God’s grace + illumination occurring during ascension + imagination + timing. In other words, magic is reinforced by grace, gnosis, imagination and timing.

Providence is ‘above’ fatum and hence a much more significant factor. Mind (mens) is itself part of providence (or rests in providence), while the lower part of man, especially the body, is influenced by fate mainly emanating from the celestial world. Even fatum has nothing to do with ‘karma’ or ‘sin’.

The dialectical process between the ‘superior’ and the ‘inferior’, which is explicitly expressed, can be viewed in two ways in Agrippa’s *De occulta philosophia*. In one way as independent of God’s grace, i.e. it is a possible interaction based on sympathy and magic. In another way it is God’s ‘answer’ when correctly addressed, i.e. God’s grace *will* be shown. Both positions are different from the traditional Christian concept of influencing God by prayers or rituals, because it is up to God to be affected or not. Apparently, God needs man’s ‘calling’ in order to let his grace abundantly flow down into the inferior world. Even if God’s grace in *De occulta philosophia* is not shown, *sympatheia* in itself guarantees a dialectical response between the superior and the inferior.

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<sup>107</sup> The heading in Agrippa, Book I, chap. xvi reads, to repeat: “How the operation of several virtues pass from one thing into another and are communicated one to another.”



## CHAPTER 4

### Hermetism as a foundation for esotericism

*to gar theion hê pasa kosmikê sugkrasis phusei ananeoumenê;  
en gar tô theiô kai hê phusis kathestêken.*<sup>1</sup>

“For the divine is the entire combination of cosmic influence renewed by nature, and nature has been established in the divine”.<sup>2</sup>

#### Preface - Unity and diversity

The reader conversant with the philosophical Hermetica can hardly avoid noticing the many astrological elements in the hermetic texts.<sup>3</sup> These elements came from the contemporary Greek astrology developing rapidly in the first centuries of our era. Hermetic texts especially make use of the seven planets, the zodiac and decanates, i.e. a ten degree section of each zodiacal sign making up the total of 36 decanates in the whole zodiac. These elements

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<sup>1</sup> NF, CH III.4.8 - 9. The Greek texts used in this thesis are excerpted from the edition of Nock and Festugière (NF). Nock and A.-J. Festugière, ed. and trans. *Corpus Hermeticum*: Tome I-II, 1st ed. Paris: Belles Lettres, 1945. Sometimes the full reprinted edition from 1972 is used. *Corpus Hermeticum* is equal to *Traité I – XVIII* in this thesis, thus *Asclepius* and *Fragments extraits de Stobée* or other hermetic texts do not belong to *Corpus Hermeticum* (CH). Festugière alone edited and translated “Fragments – extraits de Stobée” (under the heading: *Corpus Hermeticum*, Tome III - IV, 1954). When referring to the *Hermetic Excerpts* of Stobaeus they are called SH, which is standard. When referring to the *Hermetic Excerpts* of Stobaeus Festugière’s Greek text is used and not the earlier edition of Walter Scott (Vol. IV of this anthology was later completed by A. S. Ferguson). Two hermetic excerpts from *Nag Hammadi Library* (NHC) are also included. When writing for example 4.8 - 9 it means section four (4) lines 8 to 9. Sometimes the number of the tractate is omitted, but only when its number is very clear from the context.

<sup>2</sup> Brian P. Copenhaver’s translation, p. 50 (1992, but here a reprint edition from 2000 is used). Copenhaver’s *Hermetica* only contains *Corpus Hermeticum* and the Latin *Asclepius*. Festugière translates: “Car le divin est l’entière combinaison cosmique renouvelée par la nature: car c’est dans le divin que la nature elle aussi a son assise.” When there is no real difference between Copenhaver’s and Festugière’s translations, as in this case, I have chosen to use Copenhaver’s translation.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Philosophical Hermetica’ is equal to ‘Hermetica’ in the following. When writing *Hermetica*, I mean all text mentioned in note 1. The newly discovered Armenian *Definitions* are not used in this chapter as a basic text. There are no astrological elements in the Armenian *Definitions*.

can be called ‘building blocks’ in a horoscope, and they are used in three different ways in the hermetic texts. Firstly, the heavenly bodies being conceived as superior gods established a reign over the world enforcing both destiny (*heimarmenê*) and order (*logos*). Secondly, these building blocks have a power to create topographical forms in species, determining the individual shape of the single (individual) man, animal and plant. Thirdly, as a consequence, topographical forms split up nature and cosmos into separate epistemological and ontological categories. On one level, this differentiation manifests itself as nature (i.e. nature is arranged categories), but on another level, it divides wholeness into false and confusing entities - blurring a true vision of Oneness. For some Hermetists, the influence of astrology became a stumbling block on the road to the highest gnosis without denying that astrology, from a relative point of view, was synonymous with differentiation expressed as *heimarmenê* and order (*logos*). In other words, from a relative point of view astrology is cohesion and nexus, but from an absolute point of view it is false and confusing. The influence of the astrological building blocks (planets, zodiac and decans/decanates) must be defeated in the same way, as one must get rid of demons in order to attain Oneness.

Actually, there is a fourth use of astrology or rather it is a consequence of the intrinsic nature of astrology perceiving time as something very real and with changing qualities. Time itself became a building block in nature; time became a kind of archê (beginning, origin, first cause). Time was very real and as gestalts time unfolded different qualities, for example Mondays were specific time-entities favouring specific enterprises while playing down other activities. New beginnings could be calculated by a technique called *katarchê*,<sup>4</sup> which calculated the right ‘moment’ to start building a house, to start travelling, to be married etc. The word *katarchê* implies to start totally from the beginning (kata-archê). In Greek philosophy time is never *archê*, as for example contrary to water, air or *apeiron*, and time as such has a kind of unreal, loose, secondary or ghostlike nature. In Plato’s *Timaios* the seven planets are time-rulers, but time is created as a product of their motions. Plato’s concept of time did not include shifting qualities, i.e. ‘time’ on

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<sup>4</sup> Neugebauer and Hoesen 1959: 142.

Mondays is as such the same as 'time' (passing) on Tuesdays. The discrepancy between the perceptions of time in Greek philosophy and time in astrology resulted in a somewhat astonishing but very significant compromise in Hermetism: nature and cosmos benefited through cyclic renewals. It is time itself as archê that renewed nature and cosmos. Nature (the lower) affects - as indicated in the quotation given at the beginning of this chapter - and renews the whole cosmos as well. This compromise opened a door for Isis and Osiris, the Egyptian gods for cyclic regeneration mentioned on different occasions in *Hermetica*.

Simply stated, on an epistemological level Hermetism deals extensively with the problem of unity and diversity. Knowledge about unity is primarily transformed into a gnosis of salvation able to transcend both diversity and ordinary time in order to attain unity with God. The position of astrology in the philosophical Hermetism has barely been touched upon in earlier research.<sup>5</sup> As will be demonstrated sequentially, astrology constituted a significant ritual field in Hermetism and its ritual elements, i.e. the 'building blocks', reflected important USP as 'contracted' beliefs.

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<sup>5</sup> The role of astrology in *Hermetica* has not been analysed by Festugière or Fowden. Both see a connection between philosophical and practical (or technical) Hermetism, but that is *not* the subject here. The question is: *how* did *Hermetica* use astrology, i.e. the 'building blocks' (the seven planets, to a lesser degree the fixed stars, the zodiac and the decanates). Festugière often gives detailed references to contemporary astrological manuscripts in his notes and also in the first book of his *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* (I - IV) when dealing with 'popular Hermetism'. Festugière tries to establish a possible link between philosophical and technical Hermetism, Fowden a more exact link. In an earlier work on the history of astrology, I developed the theory that Greek astrology (with houses and aspects) to a high degree was invented by Pythagoreans in the first century BC, and a whole chapter deals with that question (*Astrologie als pythagoräische Konstruktion*). The arguments shall not be listed here, but can be read in *Astrologie – Von Babylon zur Urknall-Theorie*, Böhlau, Wien Köln Weimar, 2000. See also appendix on '*Griechische Astrologie*', page 236 - 247. Danish: *Astrologiens Idé – fra Babylon til Big Bang-teorien*, Gyldendal, 1995. Additionally, it is my view that 'practical Hermetism' did not exist as an independent 'corpus' at least as concerns astrology. Technical or practical Hermetism is thus *included* in (philosophical) *Hermetica*.

**Astrology: On Rebirth and Poimandres**

In the Hermetic text, *On Rebirth* (CH XIII)<sup>6</sup>, an assurance is given when the pupil is ready, namely, that he will be born again in spirit and ultimately in God. The father, Hermes Trismegistos, explains to his son (Tat) that he himself ‘went out of himself’ and into an immortal body, *Nous* (spirit or mind). Requested by Tat to specify the nature of *Nous* Hermes answers:

“The unsullied, my child, the unlimited, the colourless, the figureless, the indifferent, the naked-seeming, the self-apprehended, the immutable good, the incorporeal.”<sup>7</sup>

*Palingenesia* (spiritual rebirth) happens, Hermes explains, when Tat really wants it to happen. At the same time - somewhat at odds with that wish - Tat also has to get rid of twelve vices, which take some time. The vices must be removed by ten virtues, which are specified by Hermes. Later in the text in section 12, the twelve vices are all of a sudden associated with the twelve signs of the zodiac and the zodiacal circle itself with a tent, which Tat must leave:

“To skênos touto, ho kai, hô teknon, diekselêluthamen, ek tou zôophorou kuklou synestê kai touto sunestôtos ek [arithmôn] dôdeka ontôn ton arithmôn, phuseôs mias, pantomorphou ideas, eis planên tou anthrôpou. Diazygai en autais eisin, hô teknon, hênômenai en tê praksei [...]”<sup>8</sup>

This tent from which we also have exited, my child, was constituted from the zodiacal circle, which in turn was constituted by [elements]<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The exact title is: “A secret dialogue of Hermes Trismegistus on the mountain to his son Tat: On being born again, and on the promise to be silent.” Copenhaver 2000: 49.

<sup>7</sup> Here in Copenhaver’s translation; (2000: 50). *Nous* is thus the undifferentiated as opposed to the zodiac mentioned a little later in section 12.

<sup>8</sup> NF, CH XIII 12.9-14.

<sup>9</sup> Nock puts in *arithmôn* (numbers) in the bracket, but Festugière nevertheless translates with ‘d’éléments’, i.e. he prefers *stoicheiôn* as used by Reitzenstein (see Copenhaver 2000: 191). As the single zodiacal sign are building-blocks in nature it gives more sense to use the word *stoicheiôn*.

that are twelve in number, of the same nature, with many forms<sup>10</sup> in order to confuse human beings. Disjunctions are in these (twelve), my child, but acting unified [...].

I have here translated *diazygai* as ‘disjunctions’ (or divisions, separations).<sup>11</sup> The idea is that the twelve zodiacal signs separate wholeness into twelve categories; the twelve signs break up oneness (or wholeness) and give it many forms, i.e. to the things ruled by the zodiacal signs. Subsequently humans are led astray by the zodiac and put into a misconception about true oneness. Epistemologically perception is affected by unnecessary categories and hence inclined to break up and separate things perceived. Ontologically the physical world, but not the real and spiritual world (Nous), is dependent on differentiation (and classification), and for that reason the zodiac may be a product of a demiurge not mentioned in the text. The zodiac is described as *zôo-phoros*, i.e. as ‘life-giving’. That unity is disturbed is evident from the antidote to the twelve form-producers, namely the decade, which is ‘the number of unity’.<sup>12</sup> So, *diazygai* is simply overruled by unity, which is mentioned for the first time in the text. The tent (*to skênos*), as Copenhaver points out, is usually a metaphor for the body lodging the soul, and in Greek astrology the zodiac rules certain part of the body,<sup>13</sup> hereby making the body

<sup>10</sup> In *Asclepius*.19 *Pantomorfos* (Omniform) is a god (again synonymous with the 36 decanates in the zodiac) responsible for creating individual forms in species, for example different forms (or shapes) of the human body.

<sup>11</sup> Festugière translates ‘in pairs’, “Parmi ces punitions il y a des couples, mon enfant, qui sont unis dans leur action [...]”, i.e. the zodiacal signs act together ‘in pairs’ - a possible translation. In Greek astrology a zodiacal sign could always ‘hear’ or ‘see’ another zodiacal sign, and by combined effort they create even more confusion. Copenhaver places a period after *ideas*, hence his translation is: “To mankind’s confusion, there are disjunctions among the twelve, my child, though they are unified when they act.” Copenhaver (2000: 52).

<sup>12</sup> [...] *hos tês henados arithmos* [...] (NF, CH XIII 12.19). Further, it is specified that oneness/unity (*henas*) contains the decade and the decade the *henas* (NF, 12.19-20). The word ‘decade’ is mentioned for the first time in (10), and refers to ten *dynameis*, introduced in (8-9), capable of removing the vices in man’s soul (whether or not it requires intervention from God). The ten *dynameis* are: knowledge of God, joy, continence, perseverance, justice, liberality, truth, the good, life and light.

<sup>13</sup> Already the Roman astrologer Manilius (who died around 50 AD) allotted parts of the body to the zodiac. Aries: head, Taurus: neck, Gemini: arms, Cancer: breast, Leo: Sides, Virgo: belly, Libra: loins, Scorpio: Groins, Sagittarius: thighs, Capricorn: knees, Aquarius: shanks and Pisces: feet. *Astronomica*, Book II, 453 - 465.

subjected to fate. In *On Rebirth*, the tent is perhaps associated with the zodiac, and on a macro-level the tent then becomes synonymous with the world of phenomena. Thus, 'going out of the body' (into Nous) is synonymous with 'going out of the zodiac' (i.e. leaving the world of phenomena) into pure unity (wholeness, God).

There is no reason to associate the twelve vices with any of the zodiacal signs and the text does not explicitly do that. In the text, it is only mentioned that vices use the prison of the body to torture the inward person with the suffering of the senses.<sup>14</sup> If one equals 'prison' with 'tent' the idea is, of course, that the zodiac contains the vices, yet this association is dubious. First, the section containing astrology does not mention the vices. Second, the vices mentioned much later in the text do not fit with astrological teachings in Antiquity. The twelve vices are: ignorance (*agnoia*), grief, incontinence, lust, injustice, greed, deceit, envy, treachery, anger, recklessness and malice (*kakia*). Now, *agnoia* is the vice par excellence in nearly all gnostic religions, and thus probably the reason for being placed in the beginning of this list of vices, i.e. the first mentioned must be the most important. The last vice, then associated with Pisces, is peculiar, as *kakia* more means 'badness' in a general sense. Maybe *kakophroneô* would be a better expression for a person bearing ill-will or being malicious. Definitely, this enumeration of vices comes from other sources than astrology. A careful study of different astrological handbooks from the early centuries AD provides no confirmation. For example, Vettius Valens depicts Arians as 'bright' people,<sup>15</sup> and the vices attributed to Arian people were mostly temper and lack of patience. Additionally, this incorrect astrological association of vices with the zodiac is not consistent with the proper coverage of astrology elsewhere encountered in Hermetica, indicating that CH. XIII is composed of different fragments. According to Scott, CH. XIII could have been concluded with section 7, but one or two addenda have been supplied to an original text.<sup>16</sup> The last argument for the proposition that section 12 is an inserted fragment is, to repeat, the fact that Hermetica elsewhere also describes the zodiac (or all 36 decanates) as a 'form-

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<sup>14</sup> Copenhagen 2000: 51.

<sup>15</sup> Valens 1993: 8.

<sup>16</sup> Scott 1926: 373.

producer' named *Pantomorphos*.<sup>17</sup> Hermetists seem to have agreed upon that subject.

*On Rebirth* contains an important canonical message in making the zodiac responsible for a world differentiated into many partitions, shapes and forms, confusing man's mind into a state of ignorance about oneness. The remedy against this delusion is to perceive all things as emanating from one unity or to see oneness (the decade) in multiplicity. Rebirth is defined again,<sup>18</sup> "This, my child, is rebirth: no longer picturing things in three bodily dimensions [...]."<sup>19</sup> There is no ascent of the soul through the planetary spheres in *On Rebirth* for the simple reason, as pointed out by van den Broek, that the soul is everywhere.<sup>20</sup> Rebirth is to recognise union with all things, instead of being attached to the misconception of a fragmented world.

### *Poimandres*

In *Poimandres*, maybe the most important tractate in *Corpus Hermeticum*, God is supreme Nous and androgynous, and manifests as life (*psychê*) and light. God engendered a demiurgic spirit (second *nous*) being *pneuma* and fire,<sup>21</sup> which in turn created the heavenly sphere (*sphaira*),<sup>22</sup> the seven planets and their orbits (*kukloi*).<sup>23</sup> The nature of the planets is not explicitly mentioned, but as created by the demiurge one must assume that they share the same nature, i.e. *pneuma* and fire. Their rulership is explicitly called *heimarmenê*.<sup>24</sup> A new kind of creation, or emanation, then happened when the demiurge, surrounding the orbits (*kukloi*), together with God's logos, actuated the orbits. As a result the motion of the planets generated (out of

<sup>17</sup> See note 10, above.

<sup>18</sup> Rebirth, *palingenesia*, is already specified once in section 10.

<sup>19</sup> Copenhaver 2000: 52.

<sup>20</sup> van den Broek 2000: 91.

<sup>21</sup> NF CH I.9.18. *Pneuma* means 'spirit' in the context. As a Stoic concept it was a higher material substance 'animating' or maintaining life. That role, however, seems to be given to 'fire' here. The meaning of the term *pneuma* is inconsistent in *Corpus Hermeticum*; Copenhaver (2000: 100 - 101). In the Platonic tradition the planets had a kind of intelligence. In *Poimandres* it is unclear whether that is the case too, or whether their rationality is due to logos surrounding the spheres.

<sup>22</sup> NF, CH I.13.22.

<sup>23</sup> NF, CH I.9.19.

<sup>24</sup> NF, CH I. 9.20.

air, water and earth)<sup>25</sup> all animals on earth. A primordial Man was now created by God and through a desire to be a creator himself, granted by God, primordial Man descended and fell in love with nature. Out of their sexual union, an amazing miracle happened: the birth of seven archetypical men whose nature corresponded to the seven planets. These men were androgynous being life and light (i.e. of the same nature as God). The seven archetypical men lived on earth for some time; then each divided into two, and men and women were born.

The next part of *Poimandres* to mention astrology is in section (24) where the soul of the deceased must ascend through seven zones (*zonai*) before attaining the presence of God. These zones are described as different vices, more precisely as negative astrological connotations of the planets. After death the body passes on to nature, the temperament (*ethos*) to the demon, and the body's senses, now being separated, join the energies. Next, during ascension the deceased has to surrender (or strip off) seven vices from the soul: to the first (zone) he surrenders the energy of 'increase' and 'decrease'; and to the second (zone) evil entrapment, cunning, (now) inactive;<sup>26</sup> and to the third the amorous seduction, (now) inactive;<sup>27</sup> and to the fourth the profane rulership, (now) free of excess;<sup>28</sup> and to the fifth impious audacity

<sup>25</sup> I.e. the remaining of the four elements, as 'fire' is the element found in the demiurge and the seven planets.

<sup>26</sup> [...], kai tē deuterā tēn mēchanēn tōn kaikōn, dolon anenergēton, [...] (NF, 25, 16-17). This sentence is somewhat cryptic. Copenhaver translates: "at the second evil machination, a device now inactive". In Danish, but translated here, Søren Giversen has: "and to the second the inclination to do evil, cunning." *Dolos* in an abstract sense means 'cunning' and in a more literal sense, it is also a device for deceiving or catching, i.e. for example 'the net in which Hephaestus catches Aries'; see the LSJ-dictionary at the website: [perseus.tufts.edu/lexica.html](http://perseus.tufts.edu/lexica.html). *Mēchanēn* is without doubt a 'mechanism', but here translated into 'entrapment', i.e. the intention of using a deceiving device of sorts.

<sup>27</sup> [...], kai tē tritē tēn epithymētikēn apatēn anenergēton, [...] (NF, 25, 18-19). *Apatēn*, nom. *apatē*, can mean seduction or deception. *Tō epithymētikov* is an erotic desire, hence my translation 'amorous seduction'; see C. Berg: *Græsk – Dansk ordbog*, 1978, (Reprint from 1885). Copenhaver has: 'the illusion of longing' and Søren Giversen (translated): 'the greedy deception'.

<sup>28</sup> [...] kai tē tetartē tēn archontikēn prophanian apleonektēton [...]. Copenhaver reads *hyperēphanian*, i.e. arrogance, instead of *prophanian*, and translates: 'at the fourth the ruler's arrogance, now free of excess'.



and presumptuous temerity;<sup>29</sup> and to the sixth the evil appetites that come from wealth, (now) inactive;<sup>30</sup> and to the seventh zone the deceitfulness that lies in ambush.<sup>31</sup>

#### *Astrology and gnosis*

After leaving the last zone of deceitfulness (*pseûdos*) the text continues:

Kai tote gumnôtheis apo tôn tês harmonias energêmatôn ginetai epi tēn ogdoatikēn phusin, tēn idean dynamin echôn, kai humnei sun tois ousi ton patera.<sup>32</sup>

“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 the father.”<sup>33</sup>

The Ogdoad is sharply contrasted to the sensual world in *Poimandres*. The Ogdoad is neither referred to as sphaira, kukloi (orbits) nor zonai (zones), but as the *ogdoatikê physis* (see quotation above), i.e. the nature, essence or universe of the Ogdoad.<sup>34</sup> It is the seven planetary orbits that surround the sensuous universe (*ho aisthêtos kosmos*),<sup>35</sup> but the Ogdoad is an intelligible world and is referred to as such (*en tô noetô*).<sup>36</sup> Here, as elsewhere in *Corpus*

<sup>29</sup> [...] kai tē pemptē to thrasos to anosion kai tēs tolmēs tēn propeteian, [...]. Copenhagen translates: “at the fifth unholy presumption and daring recklessness”. Festugière has: “à la cinquième l’audace impie et la témérité présomptueuse” (at the fifth impious audacity and presumptuous temerity). The Greek word *thrasos* means ‘courage’, ‘boldness’ or ‘audacity’. Note: in SH XXIX Mars is also depicted as ‘bold’, *thrasus Arês*. *Thrasus* means the same as *thrasos*. Festugière 1972: Tome IV; 99.

<sup>30</sup> [...] kai tē hektē tas aphormas tas kakas tou ploutou anenergêtous, [...]. Copenhagen translates: “at the sixth the evil impulses that come from wealth, now inactive;” Festugière has: “à la sixième les appétites illicites que donne la richesse, désormais sans effect;”

<sup>31</sup> [...] kai tē hebdomē zônē to evedreûon pseûdos. Here taken in Copenhagen’s translation. Festugière translates pseûdos with ‘lie’ (mensonge).

<sup>32</sup> NF CH I.26.4 - 5.

<sup>33</sup> Copenhagen 2000: 6.

<sup>34</sup> In the writings of Plato and Aristotle *physis* can also mean ‘universe’ (see Middle Liddell at [perseus.tufts.edu/lexica.html](http://perseus.tufts.edu/lexica.html)), i.e. man enters the universe of the Ogdoad (the eight) when leaving the planetary spheres.

<sup>35</sup> NF, CH I.9.19.

<sup>36</sup> NF, CH I.13.29.

*Hermeticum*, the sensual and the intelligible worlds are in contrast. The planetary spheres clearly belong to the sensuous universe - and thus to a lower form of ontology than the region of the Ogdoad. Now, taking the primordial Man into account one can expect that in the ascension process, the seven archetypes are joined into one, i.e. just like the primordial Man was 'one' before having intercourse with Nature. From an epistemological point of view, the canonical message is the same as in *On Rebirth* concerning the zodiac: astrology creates 'archetypes', it splits up oneness, it forms and has a role in creating the world, but the prize is a world of fragmentation, division and diversity. Hermetists could understand what structured and 'divided' the universe into different archetypes by studying astrology. The student or initiated learned that heimarmenê and logos were connected to the reign of astrology and provided regularity and order to Earth and cosmos. He could also learn that the planets and zodiac in the end divided the world to such an extent that the vision of unity was (nearly) lost.

*Comment:* There is fairly much astrology present in *Hermetica*, but with a marked difference. In a general sense, *Corpus Hermeticum* associates astrology with a number of negative characteristics such as ignorance, demons, fate and diversity, i.e. some Hermetists identified the reign of astrology with that of the demiurge. Outside *Corpus Hermeticum*, i.e. in scriptures as *Asclepius*, *Stobaeus' Hermetic Excerpts* and the fragments from Nag Hammadi, the generally trend is that astrology must be counted upon as part of a cosmology. For example, in SH VI.2, the student has apparently already received information about the zodiac, the five planets, the Sun and the Moon and different orbits belonging to a general discourse. "Je t'ai entretenu du cercle zodiacal, qui est dit aussi zoophore (*zôophoros*, i.e. tribute of animals), ainsi que des cinq planetès, du soleil, de la Lune, et de chacun de leurs circles."<sup>37</sup> In SH IV, the teacher (Hermes) now continues to teach on the decanates (*dekanoi*), i.e. 36 groups of fixed stars earlier used in Egypt to measure the time during nights. The 36 decans were assimilated into Greek astrology and arranged as ten-degree parts of the zodiac. Actually, the decanates have their own orbit around the Earth not quite equal

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<sup>37</sup> Festugière 1972: Tom III, 35 (my parenthesis).

to the zodiac. In SH IV, the decanates are interpreted, though apparently in their proper and original orbit outside the zodiac, as responsible for creating the rising of cities, earthquakes - and much more. Hermetists were repeatedly encouraged to study the sky with the many planetary and astral orbits (kukloi) and zones (zonai). This request to know the sky is also testified in *Poimandres*, CH II.6 - 7; CH III.1; CH IV.8; CH V.3; CH VIII.4; (CH IX.5: The motion of the cosmos); CH X.7; CH XI.7; CH XIII.12; CH XVI.13 - 16 and *Asclepius*.19. The study of the sky must have played a very significant role for the Hermetists, a sky which they continuously interpreted and related to the Earth and the religious questions of their own.

***The order of the seven planets in Poimandres***

Using the theory of ritual fields we can expect that a 'belief' is joined to a ritual (or a practice) at hand, i.e. a 'living' ritual through which one can gain personal experience. In turn, such a ritual is a part of a huge religious 'complex', and due to the dialectical relation between 'belief' and ritual, these are inseparable from contemporary religious beliefs. Logically, one must search contemporary astrology in order to find descriptions of the planets (zones) that match those given in *Poimandres* concerning the surrender of certain vices. Ptolemy and Vettius Valens referred to below were Alexandrians and belonged to the same environment as the Hermetists and the same time. They picked up and summarised astrological doctrines already in circulation.

*To the first zone: increase and decrease.*

This is the Moon. Reference, Ptolemy (100 - 184 AD).

Ptolemy writes: "The moon, too, as the heavenly body nearest the earth, bestows her effluence most abundantly upon mundane things, for most of them, animate or inanimate, are sympathetic to her and change in company with her; the rivers increase and diminish their streams with her light, the seas turn their own tides with her rising and setting, and plants and animals, in whole or in some part, wax and wane with her."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *Tetrabiblos* I.2; Robbins 1980: 7.

Comment: The phases (or light) of the Moon increase from the new Moon to the full Moon and decrease from the full Moon to the new Moon.

*To the second zone: evil entrapment, cunning.*

This is Mercury, i.e. in his negative role. Reference, Vettius Valens (ca. 120 - ca. 175 AD) and Ptolemy.

Valens writes:” [Denote] those who make their living through display, and furthermore through deception and wandering and confusion.”<sup>39</sup>

Ptolemy writes that Mercury when badly placed among other things denotes those who are fickle, prone to change their minds, sinful, liars, undependable and in general unsteady in judgement and inclined to evil deeds.<sup>40</sup> In Robert Schmidt’s translation based on the Boer edition published by Teubner, one can read that Mercury also signifies “those who deceive by false reckoning.”<sup>41</sup>

Comment: Mercury denoted ‘thinking’ and professions as for example philosophers, writers, orators, physicians, musicians, diviners and temple-builders.<sup>42</sup> Mercury was also the god of thieves, and thus he also denoted cunning, deceit and unreliability in Greek astrology.

*To the third zone: amorous seduction.*

This is Venus (or Aphrodite). Reference, Valens.

Valens writes: “Aphrodite is desire and erotic love [...]”<sup>43</sup>

Comment: Venus (or Aphrodite) signified primarily erotic desires in Greek astrology where the Moon signified marriage and the wife.

*To the fourth zone: profane rulership, not being covetous.*

This is Sun. Reference, Valens.

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<sup>39</sup> [...] planes kai aleteias kai akatastasias. *Anthology* I.1. Valens 1993: 5.

<sup>40</sup> *Tetrabiblos* III.13. Ptolemy 1980: 361.

<sup>41</sup> Ptolemy 1996: 60.

<sup>42</sup> *Anthology* I.1. Valens 1993: 5.

<sup>43</sup> *Anthology* I.1. Valens 1993: 4.

Valens writes: : “The all-seeing Sun, then, being truly fire-like and the light of the mind, the organ of perception of the soul, is significant at a birth for kingly office [...].”<sup>44</sup>

Comment: The Sun (and its sign Leo) is often associated with king, rulers or high officials.

*To the fifth zone: impious audacity and presumptuous temerity.*

This is probably Mars as far as the key word is audacity (thrasos). Reference, Ptolemy.

Ptolemy writes that Mars in a bad position denotes those who are “[...] savage, insolent, bloodthirsty, marks of disturbances, spendthrifts, loud-mouthed, quick-fisted, impetuous, drunken, rapacious, evil-doers, pitiless, unsettled, mad, haters of their own kind, impious (atheos).”<sup>45</sup>

Comment: Mars, the star of Ares, is generally full of courage and boldness.

*To the sixth zone: the illicit appetites that come from wealth.*

This is Jupiter in Greek astrology. Reference, Valens and Ptolemy.

Valens writes that Jupiter, the star of Zeus, signifies “[...] abundance, stipends, great gifts, plenty of food, inheritances [...] possessions and households.”<sup>46</sup>

Ptolemy writes that Jupiter in a negative position gives ‘love of pleasure’ instead ‘of the love of beauty’.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> *Anthology* I.1. Valens 1993: 1. Ptolemy does not describe the Sun and Moon, but only the other planets in Book III.13. Perhaps, the best testimony is Sextus Empiricus’ description: “The Egyptians liken the Sun to the king and the right eye.” (Empiricus 1933: 337). In CH XVI.5-10 the Sun is the creator binding heaven to earth, i.e. it is the ruler of the sky.

<sup>45</sup> *Tetrabiblos* III.13.167. Ptolemy 1980: 353. In the edition from The Golden Hind Press Mars is among other vices also ‘bold’. Ptolemy 1996:62. The match between *Poimandres* concerning the fifth zone and negative side of Mars is not perfect, yet, some words, i.e. impetuous, unsettled (Copenhaver: restless), impious and bold, come close to the meaning of the Greeks words in *Poimandres*.

<sup>46</sup> *Anthology* I.1. Valens 1993: 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Tetrabiblos* III.13; Ptolemy 1980: 349.

*To the seventh zone: deceitfulness that lies in ambush.*

It is not possible to find a properly-matching, real and convincing description for Saturn, here the last planet. Valens has Saturn as deceitful,<sup>48</sup> but Mercury can also be deceitful. Saturn as *pseudôs* rather hints at the sensuous world including the spheres of the planets as something unreal (or ‘pseudo’) compared to a world of nous and God. During descension from the Ogdoad, primordial Man entered a ‘pseudo’ world when entering the orbit of Saturn. Leaving Saturn at ascension is the same as leaving a world of deceit to enter a genuine world (of pure spirit).

The planetary sequence from Moon to Saturn is exactly the sequence authorised by Ptolemy.<sup>49</sup> Festugière’s suggestion that the vices are based on Irenaeus seems very unlikely.<sup>50</sup> It is possible that Hermetists (or the group behind *Poimandres*) resisted the influence of the planets by ethical preparation. The advice connected to each planet suggested that they avoided wealth, lived in celibacy, and avoided positions of power. Possibly, they even mastered mind control to avoid normal fluctuations of consciousness and feelings in order to reach the first zone of the Moon, i.e. to depart from ‘increasing or decreasing’ and finally avoided falling asleep.<sup>51</sup>

### **Sympatheia and the holistic cosmos**

By relying on astrology Hermetists also emphasised a strong holistic worldview and as Faivre has pointed out, Hermes is in possession of that *sympatheia*.<sup>52</sup> Now, this raises the question whether or not *sympatheia* could be withdrawn from the world. Further, if Hermetists identified themselves

<sup>48</sup> *Anthology* III.1; Valens 1993: 2.

<sup>49</sup> The sequence Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn was already known to Cicero (106 - 43 BCE) and was authorised by Ptolemy. For this and other planetary sequences see Neugebauer 1975: II; 691.

<sup>50</sup> The list given by Festugière, found at Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* I 29, 4) is: “Agnoia (ignorance), Authadia (wilful or complacent), Kakia (evil), Zelos (i.e. Zelus, a personification of competition), Phthonos (envy), Erinnyes (vengeance), Epithymia (goddess of desire).” My parentheses; Festugiere 1945: Tome I; 25, n. 62. For other suggestions, e.g. Scott’s list of seven male and seven female vices, see Copenhaver 2000: 116.

<sup>51</sup> In both SH XXIII and SH XXIX the Moon symbolises sleep. In SH XXIII, 9 ‘fear, silence, sleep and memory’ (given by the Moon) are burdens controlling man’s life, but a release is possible. Probably, the Hermetists were in possession of a rather varied psychology.

<sup>52</sup> Faivre 1995: 16. Faivre’s statement must refer to *Korê Kosmou*.13 where Hermes is the soul possessing the sympathetic link to the mysteries of heaven.

with Hermes, they could be the ones transferring sympathia to the Earth. Was sympathia in their hands, i.e. were Hermetists also responsible for a harmonic relation between earth and heaven? Actually, this is proven, but it also entails a clash between a mechanical concept of sympathia (as something given) and a more religious attitude where sympathia becomes a product of ritual activity. This ambiguous attitude is perhaps best testified in *Asclepius* by comparing the great apocalypse with the 'living statues'.

In a great vision or prophecy, the destruction of Egypt is delineated in detail. Divinity together with sympathia will be withdrawn from Egypt back to heaven and "this most holy land, seat of shrines and temples, will be filled completely with tombs and corpses." Egypt, the "image of heaven", the "temple of the whole world", the land to where heaven "was transferred", will be filled with barbarians preferring "shadows to light". Even the stars will "not cross heaven nor will the course of the stars stand firm in heaven."<sup>53</sup> The religious message in the apocalypse is that sympathia, the link between heaven and Egypt, will vanish too.

Sympathia as product of ritual activity is testified in the living statues, first mentioned in section 24 and again in section 38:

"And the quality of these gods who are considered earthy – what sort of things is it, Trismegistos?"

'It comes from a mixture of plants, stones and spices,<sup>54</sup> Asclepius, that have in them a natural power of divinity. And this is why those gods are entertained with constant power of divinity. And this is why those gods are entertained with constant sacrifices, with hymns, praises and sweet sounds in tune with heaven's harmony: so that the heavenly ingredient enticed into the idol by constant *communication* with heaven<sup>55</sup> may gladly endure its long stay among humankind. Thus does man fashion his gods.'<sup>56</sup>

<sup>53</sup> For these quotations see Copenhaver 2000: 81 - 82.

<sup>54</sup> Actually a better translation of *aromatibus* (NF, 38.1) is 'aromatic substances' or Festugière's 'd'aromates'.

<sup>55</sup> Festugière: "par la pratique répétée de rites célestes [...]." The Latin text is a little corrupted here and reads: " + caelestius + et frequentatione inlectum in idola [...]." Festugière prefers *caelesti usu* instead of Nock's *caelestius* and thus Faivre translates *caelesti usa et frequentatione* together; (NF 1954: Tome II, 396, n. 328). Copenhaver (following Festugière)

Evidently, if Copenhaver's translation is correct it is the statues, which communicate with heaven, i.e. the lower affects heaven. However incorrectly translated, it is contextually obvious that plants, stones, aromas, sacrifices, hymns, praises and sounds are offerings to the gods. By such acts the statues become loaded with power of divinity in order to affect humans. Egypt was an image of heaven influencing the whole world.<sup>57</sup> As Copenhaver writes: "terrestrial effects of celestial causes were thought to depend on the success of the rites, so in this sense heaven indeed came down to earth, and Egypt was the temple of the world because the gods lived there."<sup>58</sup> As far as the success of the rites determinates the transference of sympathia, it simply suggests an understanding of sympathia not exclusively dependent on astrology.

*Sympatheia in the hands of Hermetists*

The next question to be asked concerns the status of Hermes Trismegistos who possessed the sympathetic links to heaven (as stressed by Faivre). Was he exclusively a god? In *Poimandres* there is strong testimony that the 'I' speaking is both Hermes and a human teacher - as for example shown by Jonathan Peste.<sup>59</sup> It is possible to argue that Hermes in *The Discourse on the Eight and Ninth* was a human teacher giving his audience lessons.<sup>60</sup> There is properly more to it: so let us consult contemporary astrology. In *Korê Kosmou* ideal professions are righteous kings, genuine philosophers, founders and legislators, honest diviners, genuine herbalists, the best prophets of God, experienced musicians, perceptive astronomers, wise augurs and meticulous sacrificial priests. Now, all these professions except for a few are mentioned in Valens' *Anthology* when describing professions

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translates *frequentatione* with 'constant' and apparently *usa* with communication. He does not give any explanation here, but *usa* can also mean 'make use of' or here with ablative (*caelesti*): 'enjoy the friendship of'. So a possible translation can also be, that the idols 'joined a frequent (mutual) friendship with heaven'. Copenhaver's translation is probably the most correct by admitting the 'lower' to actively communicate with the 'higher'.

<sup>56</sup> Copenhaver 2000: 90 (my italics).

<sup>57</sup> Copenhaver 2000: 81.

<sup>58</sup> Copenhaver 2000: 240. Copenhaver here refers to Scott and Mahé.

<sup>59</sup> Peste 2002: 90 - 92.

<sup>60</sup> Peste 2002: 106; Fowden 1993: 159 - 161.



ruled by Hermes (Mercury).<sup>61</sup> Additionally, in *Korê Kosmou*.<sup>29</sup> Hermes promises always to help people born under his signs, i.e. Gemini and Virgo. Further, according to Ptolemy, Lower Egypt is specifically ruled by Hermes (Mercury) and his sign Gemini.<sup>62</sup> The Hermetists, and especially their teachers, most likely identified themselves with both Hermes Trismegistos and the planet of Hermes as well.

Returning to *Asclepius*, still arguing for sympatheia as being preserved by Hermetists - and not just something automatically ruled by the stars - an interesting passage is found in section 12 stating that a proper vocation for Hermetists is to clean the cosmos (here in Quispel's translation):

“Thus man has been made, this is his vocation: he has been appointed to serve the Cosmos and to worship Him. If he does so, if he keeps the Cosmos clean (*munde mundum servando*), venerates God devoutly [...]. If somebody with great application preserves and enriches the beauty of the Cosmos which is God's work, if he uses his body and dedicates his daily work [...]. Certainly that he, like our ancestors, as we hope and pray, and we too, please God, after having been released from our labour and discharged from our stewardship over the Cosmos, loosing the bonds of mortality [...].”<sup>63</sup>

Quispel's translation is a little different from Copenhaver's by stressing the task of keeping the cosmos clean (*munde mundum servando*). Quispel also reads the Latin text a little differently from Nock & Festugière who have *munde mundum servando*. Yet, the difference between *servando* (watch over, preserve, keep, guard) and *servando* (also keeping) is extremely slight. The key word is *munde*, i.e. adj. from *mundus* meaning 'clean, neat, elegant, refined or pure'. So, one must ask: How was it possible to keep the world clean, preserve it, enrich its beauty and finally to be released from a

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<sup>61</sup> Vettius 1993: 5.

<sup>62</sup> Ptolemy 1980: 155: “Of these peoples the inhabitants [...] and particularly of Lower Egypt are more closely familiar to Gemini and Mercury [...]; they are magicians and performers of secret mysteries and in general skilled in mathematics.” Ptolemy 1980: 141 - 143:

“Babylonia, Mesopotamia, and Assyria are familiar to Virgo and Mercury, and so the study of mathematics and the observation of the five planets are special traits of these peoples.”

<sup>63</sup> Quispel 2000a: 171.

stewardship over the world, if *sympatheia* was not in the hands of the Hermetists? By using passages from *Asclepius* in the fragments found in the *Nag Hammadi Library*, it is possible to argue even more clearly that *sympatheia* is a 'service' of men. Here, the restoration of nature is carried out by the pious, i.e. Hermetists, who strengthened nature and gods and are strengthened as well.<sup>64</sup> It is generally held that the Coptic fragment of *Asclepius* is closer to an original hermetic Greek text, now lost. Further, it is believed that the original *Teleios Logos* (The Complete Discourse) was written maybe as early as in the first century AD in Alexandria.<sup>65</sup>

It is obviously that *sympatheia* in the hands of Hermetists, as their responsibility and a way of serving God, demonstrates the dialectical relationship between 'low' (man) and 'high' (cosmos). There are, however, other statements in *Hermetica*, which are inconsistent with this viewpoint, which will be demonstrated in the following paragraph.

### **A dialectical process between heaven and earth?**

There is, as shown above, a clash in *Hermetica* between holism as something automatically sustained by the stars (or the universe), and holism connected to ritual activity. As Otto Neugebauer has pointed out, astrology represents a one-way holism.<sup>66</sup> The planets are the masters, the 'governors' as stated in *Poimandres*, and in such a star-dominated universe there is not much room for the 'lower' to affect the 'higher'. There are statements in *Hermetica* explicitly confirming this worldview where the 'higher' totally dominates the 'lower'. In the Hermetic Excerpts of Stobaeus one can read:

SH XI.28: "Il n'y a pas communication <des êtres du ciel à ceux de la terre; il y a communication> des êtres de la terre à ceux du ciel."<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> NHC VI.8: VI.74.5 - 10 and VI.68.30 - 35. Robinson 1977: 302; 304 - 305.

<sup>65</sup> It is generally accepted that *Asclepius* indeed is a 'complete discourse', i.e. it contains many of the most significant teachings found in Hermetism.

<sup>66</sup> Neugebauer 1951: 164. According to Neugebauer Greek astrology was, compared with 'magic and mysticism', pure science. It represented, as modern science, a mechanical perception of the universe.

<sup>67</sup> Festugière 1972: Tome III, 55.

SH XI.41: "Les êtres de la terre ne sont d'aucune utilité pour les êtres du ciel, les êtres du ciel sont de toute utilité pour les êtres de la terre."<sup>68</sup>

SH XI.28 is rather corrupt, but probably Festugière has it right and thus there is no communication between things on earth and those in heaven. SH XI.41 is rather explicit in its statement that things on earth are of no use for things in heaven.

In *Korê Kosmou* there is most likely a negotiation between the one-way sympathia and an effect from the 'lower' on the 'higher' (in this case the sin of man which soils nature). Now, there are different suggestions on how to read the textual sections, but the text of Festugière contains a sequence, which roughly speaking, tells a myth in the following summarised way. After a prologue (2 - 8), the world is created in an upper and lower - sad - world. The latter is now encouraged to connect by sympathia to the seven planets, which have just improved themselves in order to benefit the lower world as much as possible (9 - 30). Even in this acceptable situation, the human souls realise that they are imprisoned and condemned, and desperately ask for God's help (31 - 37). In return for their request, they are granted love and order, and they are appointed rulers in the world. The souls are also promised a new kind of punishment and in the future they may live in heaven, but being sinful means to inhabit the earth (probably through reincarnation). The lesser the sin the more elevated their single lives will be, such as kings and prophets, but greater sins (apparently done in a human body in the future) will result in a transmigration as animals (38 - 42). Humans (in bodies) now appear on earth, and God reminds the planets and heaven to do their best when governing the cosmos (43 - 52). Regardless, humans, in their ignorance, begin to attack, destroy and burn each other and in doing so, they soil the four elements fire, air, water and earth. In this way, the whole cosmos becomes 'polluted' including the zodiac and probably the seven planets too (53 - 54).<sup>69</sup> The stunted four elements want to recuperate and they plead God to be reinstated to their primal functions. God now sends out a new emanation in the forms of Isis and Osiris (55 - 64). The two gods

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<sup>68</sup> Festugière 1972: Tome III, 56.

<sup>69</sup> In SH XXIII.18 the zodiac is created by God's word, earth and water - and added *pneuma* the mixture is animated.

restore a peaceful and divine life on earth, for example by initiating temples, by offerings, by providing funeral rites,<sup>70</sup> by making inscriptions of Hermes' teachings on steles and obelisks - and by using these teachings to found science, art, philosophy, magic and medicine (65 - 70).

Hermes descended as the first emanation and Isis and Osiris represent the second emanation, but all do acts that require a human body. This again raises the question whether Hermetists also identified themselves with Isis and Osiris. Before trying to answer that question, some comments on the most important canonical message in sections 65 - 70 concerning sympathia follow. Due to the instructions of the demiurge the 'lower' must be in sympathy with the 'higher', and at the same time sacred actions on earth are implemented to be in sympathy with mysteries in heaven.<sup>71</sup> Using the textual analysis method developed in chapter two by relating 'belief' to rituals/practices (see also more below), it becomes obvious that the ritual practice mentioned in sections 65 - 70 is the carving of hermetic teachings on steles and obelisks. This suggests that these carvings not only served as a way of preserving doctrines, but also that steles and obelisks draw down divine virtues (or powers). It is again an example of the lower being able to affect the higher. The steles and obelisks are erected after the cosmos has been restored by a new emanation from God, and the erecting with engravings is *part of* that restoration. This also suggests the setting up of steles and obelisk was a ritual activity serving a purpose of maintaining the sympathetic link with heaven. In *The Discourse on the Eight and Ninth*, the engraving of hermetic teachings is also described as a ritual act.<sup>72</sup>

Turning to *Corpus Hermeticum* for additional traits of a possible dialectical relation between heaven and earth, tractate XVII, a very brief fragment, is

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<sup>70</sup> Taken literally, and remembering that sympathia is also in the hands of Hermetists, this denotes that Hermetists developed funeral rites.

<sup>71</sup> "Ce sont eux qui, ayant appris d'Hermès que les choses d'en bas ont reçu du Créateur l'ordre d'être en sympathie avec celles d'en haut, ont institué sur la terre les fonctions sacrées liées verticalement aux mystères du ciel." Festugière 1972: Tome IV; 22. The Greek text does not read 'vertically', only 'bound to'. Festugière uses the word to emphasise a sympathia between sacred actions on earth and the mysteries in heaven by referring to Posidonius and by stressing that Hermes (as quoted earlier by Faivre) is "*une âme*, qui possède le lien de sympathie avec les mystères du ciel." Festugière 1972: Tome IV, cxi & 49, n. 245.

<sup>72</sup> See Chapter 2, above.

probably solely credited to this dialectical process. A short passage given in Quispel's translation is quoted again here:

“(Tat): ‘Thus, these incorporeal ideas are reflected in bodies and conversely bodies are reflected in incorporeal ideas. In other words, the visible world is reflected in the spiritual world and the spiritual world in the visible world. For that reason, Majesty, do adore the idols, because they embody the forms that participate in the ideas of the spiritual world.’”<sup>73</sup>

This passage does not state that the lower affects the higher, only that it is ‘reflected’. Yet, it can easily be the meaning. Why else mention that the lower too is reflected in the higher? The discussion concerns statues probably having the function of drawing powers from heaven down to earth.<sup>74</sup> The spiritual world is a reflection, *antanaklases*, meaning ‘a reflection of light’ or ‘a bending back’, of the sensible (or sensual) world. As a verb, *antanaklaô* also means ‘bend back’ or even ‘cause to revert’.<sup>75</sup> In both cases the word *antanaklases* takes on a meaning where the ‘lower’ can also have an effect on the ‘higher’. The most explicit reference to a dialectical relation between heaven and earth in *Corpus Hermeticum* is found in CH III, quoted in part at the beginning of this chapter. Here, the whole universe is renewed by nature.

### Summary

It is not possible to conclude that Hermetists included without ambiguity a dialectical process between heaven and earth in their worldview. Arguments both pro and contra can be found:

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<sup>73</sup> Quispel 2000a: 204. The Greek text related to Quispel's translation does not have ‘ideas’ (*ideai*), but the word is mentioned earlier in the Greek text (NF, CH. XVII, line 5). Quispel's translation seems to be more meaningful (but less literary) than Copenhaver's: “[...] from the sensible to the intelligible cosmos that is, and from the intelligible to the sensible.” Copenhaver 2000: 62.

<sup>74</sup> According to Festugière this short fragmentary tract “constitue la fin d'un dialogue[...].” This stresses the canonical message that statues as parabolas pick up divine power to transfer it further out in the world.

<sup>75</sup> See LSJ-dictionary at the website [perseus.tufts.edu](http://perseus.tufts.edu).

Arguments pro (to repeat):

1. The divine is renewed by nature (CH III.4).
2. The visible world is reflected in the spiritual world and the spiritual world in the visible world (CH XVII).
3. Statues communicate with heaven (*Asclepius*.38).
4. Egypt is a temple of heaven, transferring sympathia to the whole world (*Asclepius*.24).
5. The sin of man (i.e. the lower) soils the whole universe and the zodiac as well (*Korê Kosmou*.53 - 54).
6. It is the task of man to keep the cosmos clean and pure (*Asclepius*.10).

Arguments contra (to repeat):

1. Things on earth do not affect matters in heaven (SH XI.28 and 41).
2. Generally, sympathia comes down from heaven in Hermetica, where the 'higher', primarily the heavenly stars, dominates, governs and affects the whole lower world.
3. The textual passage mentioning the 'living statues' in *Asclepius* is somewhat corrupt, rendering any 'correct' reading questionable.

### **Monism and dualism as interdependent ontologies**

Another central USP for Western esoterism is the interdependency between monism and dualism (i.e. from matrix number three). The world is neither monistic nor dualistic, but at its peak it is monistic or predominantly monistic to a degree where only a slight dualism exists. If one uses the definition of U. Bianchi, a dualistic cosmology is based on a dualistic cosmogony, where 'good' and 'evil' are co-ordinated, creating principles.<sup>76</sup> With such a definition, it should be obvious that no hermetic scripture is dualistic. The demiurge is not independent of God, but rather God in a creative aspect, for example as found in *Poimandres*. Here, the demiurge is the second Nous created by the first Nous (God). As pointed out by Dodd, the demiurge is actually the offspring of God.<sup>77</sup> Yet, scholars have classified some scriptures as expressing a pessimistic and somewhat dualistic view on the world, while other scriptures from Hermetica are monistic and positive in

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<sup>76</sup> Petersen 2003: 24.

<sup>77</sup> Dodd 1954: 138.

their worldview. Summarised, the clearest receptivity is, according to the best of my judgement, expressed by Roelof van den Broek. He states that the Hermetists' positive view of the world did not imply that he was optimistic about the fate of the soul in its earthly existence.<sup>78</sup> For a Hermetist, the world is transparent toward God and essentially divine, an idea absolutely inconceivable to a Gnostic.<sup>79</sup>

The question here is to determine what is understood by 'dualism' and 'monism' in Hermetism. Inspired by Festugière I have chosen to use the world *logos*. According to Festugière, *Korê Kosmou* in overall terms deals with a *logos* which can be intervened in and without this *logos* the world becomes 'anarchie primitive'.<sup>80</sup> *When the world is 'monistic' it directly represents logos (order, rationality, wisdom of God). When the world is 'dualistic' it represents a certain degree of anarchy (absence of logos) which in turn represents a digression from what it could be, i.e. the universe does not have an optimal function.* This definition for its use in classical Hermetism also makes it possible to construct an analysis in accordance with van den Broek's aforementioned point of view. Thus, hermetic cosmology is not connected with human destiny and happiness to the extent expected. Despite God's first restoration of a miserable world in *Korê Kosmou* helped by the improvement of the planets, humans still felt miserable. Then they revolted and soiled the earth by their misdeeds. Earth's and man's fate on earth was finally restored by God with the help of Isis and Osiris. The cosmology in *Korê Kosmou* is thus both monistic and dualistic, and the two are related to each other. If one accepts, as discussed above, that it was Hermetists who placed and engraved steles and obelisks, Hermetists ensured the reinstated *sympatheia* between heaven and earth. And in this sense they identified themselves with Isis and Osiris. It was the Hermetists who *maintained* the improved condition on earth. Thus, matrix number three is reconfirmed in *Korê Kosmou* and it is the Earth as well as humans who are healed in the end. By God's help both Earth and Man are put on a 'stairway

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<sup>78</sup> van den Broek 1998: 11.

<sup>79</sup> van den Broek 1998: 11.

<sup>80</sup> Festugière 1972, Tome III, clxxx. According to Festugière, it is Hermes who intervenes together with Isis (with some help from Osiris). This is explicitly mentioned in *Korê Kosmou*.66.

to heaven'. To reiterate, this matrix concerns 'an interdependence between dualism and monism, including the mind and/or the world as a stairway to heaven'. This conclusion is still valid even if Hermetists played no role in the restoration of the world. However, if there is no dialectical relationship between 'low' and 'high' (the second matrix), matrix number three loses its intended significance.

*Comment:* Gustav Wiberg has shown an interdependency between monism and dualism in the Gnostic *Trimorfos Protennoia* (NHC XIII.1). Here, dualism exists on a monistic background and in the end monism (in the form of light) prevails, but that level implies time must cease to exist. When time ceases to exist dualism also ends.<sup>81</sup> Hence the restoration of monism belongs to another world (without time), but this is not the case in *Korê Kosmou* where the world and time continue in a 'fresh manner'. The renewal created by the reinforced monism is an immanent factor in *Korê Kosmou* and not an eschatological factor pointing to a restoration of monism in a transcendent world without time.

#### *Time, monism and dualism*

In *Asclepius* there are earthly times based on seasons and heavenly times based on the return of the wandering stars to the same place.<sup>82</sup> The world is time's receptacle invigorated by the stirring of time.<sup>83</sup> Time is something very real, a kind of archê making the world a receptacle for time. Hence, it is stated in *Asclepius*, that order and time cause the renewal of everything in the world through alternation.<sup>84</sup> The concept of time as grounded in planetary cycles was a well-accepted idea in Greek philosophy. Archytas, an older contemporary of Plato, juxtaposed time with movements of and in the sky.<sup>85</sup> According to Plato, matter and change existed at least on a mythological level before the concrete 'time' came into being due to the movement of the seven planets and the sphere of fixed stars. The orbit of the

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<sup>81</sup> Wiberg 1987: 23.

<sup>82</sup> Copenhaver 2000: 85.

<sup>83</sup> Copenhaver 2000: 85.

<sup>84</sup> Copenhaver 2000: 85.

<sup>85</sup> Guthrie 1962: 336; 1966: 151.



Moon creates ‘a month’, the Sun in its orbit creates ‘a year’, the fixed stars a calendar day and the great cosmic year depends on all heavenly bodies returning concurrently to a given position.<sup>86</sup> The Stoics considered the duration of ‘The Great Year’, and they tried to measure the cycle of a great cosmic fire (the theory of *ecpyrosis*) both renewing and recreating cosmos. This Stoic idea was closer to the hermetic concept of time as a regenerative factor. However, no traits of ‘The Great Year’ are found in Hermetism, but rather joint statements on the coexistence of earthly and heavenly (planetary) time.<sup>87</sup>

So, time causes renewal of all things in *Asclepius* but one has to ask more specific: what is renewed or regenerated? Lamentably, the only text specifying an answer is CH III, a very brief tract which is somewhat corrupted. For sure one can only say, that what is ‘diminished’ will be renewed. Despite Copenhagen’s innovative translation of this passage,<sup>88</sup> the answer to what is ‘diminished’ is probably found earlier in CH III, quoting again from his translation here:

“{[...]}. The gods<sup>89</sup> sowed}the generations of humans to know the works of god; to be a working witness to nature; [...] to discern the things that are good; [...] to know divine power; to know the whirling changes of fair and foul; and to discover every means of working skilfully with things that are good.”<sup>90</sup>

If the above presumption is right gnosis is renewed too. It is then both logos and gnosis which are ‘diminished’ and then later renewed. In the same manner as the movements of the planets are cyclic so is everything renewed

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<sup>86</sup> *Timaios*.39C.

<sup>87</sup> In CH XI. 4 heavenly and earthly ‘time’ also coexist: “Becoming and time, whose natures are twofold, exist in heaven and on the earth: in heaven they are changeless and incorruptible, but on the earth they change and become corrupt.” Copenhagen 2000: 38.

<sup>88</sup> Copenhagen has: “{In the fame of seasons they will become dim, and, from every work born of quintessential flesh, from the sowing of crops to every work of industry,} what is diminished shall be renewed [...].” Copenhagen 2000: 14.

<sup>89</sup> In CH III the gods are the planets.

<sup>90</sup> Copenhagen 2000: 13.

periodically.<sup>91</sup> Probably, renewal does not only concern nature but also logos and gnosis.

### *Summary*

Two factors in Hermetica point to a concept of monism and dualism as interdependent. *Korê Kosmou* depicts a cosmology where the world swings to and fro and on the other, and different texts stress the continuous ‘renewal of everything of the world’. It is hard to know the extent of these renewals, but it points to a cosmology where the world needs periodical regeneration; if not, it would decline in some way or another. What Hermetica does not tell us, except in *Korê Kosmou*, is what happens if the renewals fail to occur.

### **Purpose (pronoia) rather than karma or sin**

In Agrippa’s occult philosophy, man has free will. However his destiny is also determined by external factors as fate (*fatum*) and God’s providence. In Hermetica, the different interpretations of fate are as follows:

1. Destiny is a consequence of disobedience (sin) against divine ethical rules and a kind of karma, sometimes including reincarnation.
2. Destiny is a consequence of astrological factors (planets, zodiac and decanates) interpreted as heimarmenê.
3. Destiny is a consequence of a providence stemming directly from God’s logos (and not from the planets).

### *Reincarnation and ‘karma’*

Despite Fowden’s silence on the topic of reincarnation, it is obviously a subject found and discussed in Hermetism, for example, as noted by Quispel. A central passage to Quispel, here in his own translation, is: “But to those who acted differently and lived a godless life, return to heaven is denied. They are condemned to a humiliating transmigration to other bodies. That is something which will never happen to a pious soul.”<sup>92</sup> The canonical message regarding reincarnation seems to be as a punishment for

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<sup>91</sup> In *Asclepius*.30, time “causes the renewal of everything in the world through alternation” and even God “stirs within himself” (31).

<sup>92</sup> *Asclepius*.12; Quispel 2000a: 171.

wrongdoing. Accordingly, a correct ethical life means an ascension leading to God or elevated places in the sky such as the fixed stars, constellations, 'thrones' or even by being close to the Moon. The most radical interpretation of reincarnation is probably found in CH X.7 - 8 where a correct life enables man to become a god, while indecent behaviour results in a regression to the level of reptiles. This passage seems to indicate that spiritual progress or involution is attained only slowly through several incarnations, which is somewhat at odds with other passages found in *Hermetica*, where deification may happen during one lifetime.

“In the General Discourses did you not hear that all the souls whirled about in all the cosmos – portioned out, as it were – come from the one soul of the all? Many are the changes of these souls,<sup>93</sup> then, some toward a happier lot, others the opposite. The snake-like change into water creatures; the watery change into things of dry land; the dry-land souls change into winged things; the aerial into humans; and human beings, changing into demons,<sup>94</sup> possess the beginning of immortality, and so then they enter the troop of gods,<sup>95</sup> which is really two troops, one wandering, the other fixed. [8] And this is soul's most perfect glory. But if a soul that has entered into humans remains vicious, it neither tastes immortality nor shares in the good but turns back and rushes down the road towards the snakes, and this is the sentence pronounced against a vicious soul.”<sup>96</sup>

<sup>93</sup> changes: *metaballousin* (NF 1945, Tome I, CH X.7.10). As a substantive *metabolê* means a rather radical change and Festugière translates it into 'metamorphoses'. The *métensômatose*, i.e. the body-changes, (see Festugière's note 29, p. 126) seems to be elaborated on the four elements in the following way: reptile → water-animal → earth-animal → air-animal (birds) → fire (humans, demons, gods). In *Hermetica*, for example in CH X.16 & 18, the human soul often puts on a tunic of fire when it leaves the body. The explanation is probably that 'fire' is the lightest of the four elements, going upward (cf. Aristotle's arrangement of the four elements). So, in the same sense fire goes 'up' in the same sense the human soul goes 'up' into cosmos dressed in a tunic of fire when the body dies or when the soul leaves the body.

<sup>94</sup> 'demons' must here be understood positively, i.e. as a 'higher spirits'.

<sup>95</sup> Festugière has "le chœur des dieux", i.e. the chorus of gods and not troops. The Greek text reads "[...] τὸν θεὸν χορόν." (NF 1945, Tome I, X.7.15 - 16). From the context, however, it is clear that the chorus of gods is the seven planets and the fixed stars.

<sup>96</sup> Copenhaver 2000: 31 - 32.

In *Korê Kosmou* one can also argue for reincarnation as a punishment. The good souls are promised to occupy heaven and its constellations while the more sinful souls must enter the Earth,<sup>97</sup> and the better among these can attain human incarnations as kings, prophets, musicians and perceptive astronomers. In extract XXVI of Stobaeus with entitled “De l’incarnation et de la réincarnation des âmes”,<sup>98</sup> one can also argue for reincarnation despite Festugière’s assurance that this extract is not a question of metempsychosis.<sup>99</sup> Souls temporarily relieved from their bodies dwell in regions in heaven according to their dignity (1). When the souls come back after a life on Earth, providence gives them the same dwelling place or maybe a higher one, if they have acted in a proper way when being on Earth. If they have acted against their own dignity providence will bestow on them a lower region in heaven. Progress happens when a soul lives in accordance with its dignity and judgement (7).

#### *Destiny as heimarmenê*

Fate is generally perceived as heimarmenê in Hermetica, a stoic doctrine coupled with the heavenly bodies since Posidonius (ca. 135 - 51 BC). In *Poimandres* the seven heavenly bodies are ‘governors’, *dioikêtai*, a word used to translate the Latin procurator.<sup>100</sup> The stoic concept heimarmenê suggests, as discussed in the introduction to this thesis, that fate works along the lines of a *teleos*, i.e. of a purpose, a future or a finality of perfection. ‘Karma’ and ‘sin’ as ‘causes’ are rooted in the past, while heimarmenê connects events as a chain into the future as well. Heimarmenê is basically considered a trans-personal term and for example in *Asclepius*.39 - 40 it is the world, and not personal fate, that is governed by heimarmenê. In CH XII.5 - 7, on the other hand, heimarmenê is related to a personal fate by discussing whether a person committing adultery must be punished or not. The conclusion is that a wise offender is innocent, but he or she must suffer as one being guilty. These examples show that at least some Hermetists conceived heimarmenê more or less as Stoics did. There are, however, other

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<sup>97</sup> *Korê Kosmou*.17.

<sup>98</sup> Festugière 1954: Tome IV, 80.

<sup>99</sup> Festugière 1954: Tome IV, 89, n.1.

<sup>100</sup> Dodd 1954: 138.

concepts of fate to be demonstrated below, for example that a wise man, one who has attained ‘gnosis’, is able to evade the strong effects of heimarmenê.

*Destiny as providence’s servant*

In Hermetism, two viewpoints are altered compared to the Stoic concept of fate (as described in the preceding section). First, fate is relative, it depends on the level of gnosis, i.e. in the end gnosis revokes fate. Second, sometimes providence is disassociated from heimarmenê and is perceived as something superior to fate. Fate (heimarmenê) as a relative phenomenon is described in CH XVI. The astrological influence at the moment of birth is the result of demonic powers (12 - 15). However, these powers need not affect those who have received divine insight (16). Another illustration can be found in SH XVIII.4 where the rational soul is released from a fate (heimarmenê) that can no longer capture the soul in question.<sup>101</sup> It must be noted that the ability to immunise oneself against heimarmenê through gnosis can be in accordance with parts of hermetic cosmology and maybe a consequence of it. Heimarmenê radiates from the planets (or the zodiac with decans), but these spheres are superseded by higher spiritual realms from which providence emanates. Thus, providence becomes superior to heimarmenê because it emanates from a higher ontological level. In SH XI.2 it is stated:

(46) pronôia theia taxis, anagkê pronôia hypêretis.

(47) tuchê phora ataktos, energeias eidolon, doxa pseudês.

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(46) Providence is a divine order<sup>102</sup>, necessity a servant for pronôia.

(47) Fate<sup>103</sup> is a wild spasmodic movement, the ghost of a force, a false notion.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Festugière 1954, Tome III, 80 - 81.

<sup>102</sup> I have here translated *taxis* as order, which is a rather common meaning of the word (see LSJ-dictionary, op.cit.)

<sup>103</sup> As one can see, the Greek word is *tuchê* and Festugière translates it into ‘Fortune’, but the word has many meanings concerning ‘destiny’: fate, providence, fortune, good fortune or ill fortune. Importantly, the term *heimarmenê* is used in extracts to come and SH XI-XIV all share ‘destiny’ as their main topic.

<sup>104</sup> I.e. an ‘illusion’. Festugière: (46) “La Providence est l’ordonnance divine, la Nécessité est la servante de la Providence. (47): “La Fortune est un mouvement aveugle et désordonné, le fantôme d’une force, une illusion mesongère.”

In SH XII.1 this topic is consecutively discussed and fate (*heimarmenê*), together with necessity, acts as *pronoia*'s servant. In the very short extract SH XIII (consisting of one single line) necessity is a decision-maker for *pronoia*, where SH XIV.1 states that *pronoia* rules the whole world while *heimarmenê* sets and keeps everything in motion. The world is first and foremost dependent on *pronoia*, which unfolds itself in heaven (2). All this suggests that *pronoia* is something 'more' or superior to fate. *Pronoia* is the 'lord', *heimarmenê* the servant and in the last resort *heimarmenê* is only mere illusion. This is in accordance with CH XVI.12 - 15 conceiving fate as equal to a 'demonic attack', which can be neutralised by the force of *gnosis*. Further, it is also in accordance with *Poimandres* and *On Rebirth* and their claims (according to this thesis) that the heavenly bodies and the zodiac (and hence *heimarmenê*) only have a relative, and not absolute, influence.

In the last of the tracts found in *Corpus Hermeticum*, CH XVIII, a somewhat disputed<sup>105</sup> story is told of a great cithara-player, who, in the midst of a competition, suddenly discovered a broken string. Because of his dedication to music and his ability to use himself as an instrument of God, divine providence "caused a cicada to light upon the cithara and restore the song, keeping the space where the string had been" enabling the musician to win the contest. The king is explicitly identified as the "good God" (8) and hence the canonical message seems to be that divine providence helps those who dedicate their work to God.

### Summary

Thoughts on fate are found throughout *Hermetica*, and although somewhat inconsistent (as are probably all subjects in *Hermetica*) it has been my main concern to clarify the role and extension of fate or destiny. There are karma-like tendencies of fate to be found in *Hermetica*, especially *Korê Kosmou* and CH X, which can be understood as a type of 'karma' or 'sin' caused by offending certain ethical principles. At the same time there is fate conceived in a stoic framework as *heimarmenê* binding occurrences together in a long

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<sup>105</sup> For Festugière this is a pseudo-tract with no connection to the rest of *Corpus Hermeticum*: "Sans rapport avec Hermès ou ses disciples, ce pseudo-traité XVIII [...]" NF 1972: Tome II, 244. Scott concludes as Festugière, but Noch is less categorical. For this information see Copenhaver 2000: 209.

chain to fit a purpose - maybe only understood by God. It is this type of fate for which individuals can hardly be responsible. They are only instruments of a heimarmenê (CH XII) coming to men as 'demons' entering their bodies, veins and brains (CH XVI). It is perhaps futile to discuss whether a purpose-like destiny prevailed over a karma-like perception, and as such matrix number one is maybe not fulfilled in Hermetism. Furthermore, and significantly, heimarmenê and maybe 'karma'/'sin' could be abolished by gnosis, and ultimately fate was maybe only an illusion (SH XI). There is also an attempt to regard heimarmenê as providence's subordinate servant (SH XI - XIV), and to regard providence as a protector sent from God whenever a faithful worshipper was in need (CH XVIII).

### **Hermetism and science**

As stated in the introduction, matrix number four, i.e. that scientific laws are synonymous with spiritual principles, is important in an emic sense. According to Rappaport, as we have seen, science is not necessarily inimical to religion. Generally, science and 'facts' belong to the lower liturgical levels and can theoretically be replaced or modified without harming the 'overall system', i.e. in contrast with USP, things 'concrete' are reversible in a 'religious system'. That scientific laws are synonymous with spiritual principles is confirmed in Hermetism for different reasons. For example, Hermetists may have conceived astrology to be the mother of all science. According to Festugière, lessons on astrology and astronomy belonged to a 'Lecons Générales'. As we also have seen, astrology is only a relative truth not an objective truth. Some Hermetists attitude to 'science' is very similar to that of Agrippa's. One used 'science' as much as possible to explain the world with its transcendent aspects - and when it wasn't possible to extract any more knowledge, intuition (or a more metaphysical inspiration) took over.

Astronomy seems to have been a highly valued science. The numbers of references to heavenly 'orbits' and 'circles' are astonishing, and the study of the sky must have played a very significant role for Hermetist in their education (paideia). In CH XI.7 there is a direct encouragement to observe the whole world: "Look (theasai) through me (di emou) on the cosmos lying there before your gaze [...] and see the seven hierarchies of the sky [...]"

each completing eternity in a different circuit.” In CH II.7 the student must learn to observe the Great and the Little Bear and he must understand why planetary spheres move in the opposite direction to the sphere of the fixed stars. To be an astronomer is in *Korê Kosmou* a sign of ‘good karma’ and a respected profession. All this suggests astronomy to be a central science for Hermetists. Further, they had to learn *arithmêtikê* in order to control the return of heavenly bodies to the ‘old places’ and ‘stations’ as calculated.<sup>106</sup> This indicates that they were able to calculate a horoscope. Astrologically, a ‘station’ is the place in the zodiac where a planet comes to a standstill, i.e. it neither moves forward, nor is it retrograde. Music was also a highly appreciated science – for no greater reason than to understand how divine reason allotted the correct sequence to all things.<sup>107</sup>

However, the Hermetists also stated explicitly that only the necessary scientific knowledge must be sought out, i.e. the purpose was to extract spiritual knowledge, not to be absorbed in scientific studies as such.<sup>108</sup> In addition a warning was issued against specific scientific activities, namely the uprooting of plants in order to examine their latex, the dissection of human or animal bodies, and the investigation of the central parts of sanctuaries.<sup>109</sup> The message seemed to be that science must serve a spiritual purpose and not be exercised for its own sake, especially when it investigated ‘parts’ and not wholeness.

### **Rituals and ‘beliefs’ - a textual analysis method**

As stated in chapter two, modern Hermetic scholars acknowledge the existence of certain ceremonies and maybe even rituals in Hermetism. Most agreed upon is the existence of praise, prayers and hymns, holy kisses and meals. Van den Broek has suggested a rather significant explanation of the holy embrace (*aspasmos*) involving a kiss as it appears in *The Discourse on the Ogdoad and the Ennead*. He writes:

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<sup>106</sup> *Asclepius*.13. The Latin text actually uses this Greek word. NF 1945: Tome II, 312, line 2.

<sup>107</sup> *Asclepius*.13.

<sup>108</sup> *Asclepius*.13.

<sup>109</sup> *Korê Kosmou*.45.



“However, the *ασπασμος* of Hermes and his pupil may have a deeper meaning than that of a ritual kiss after prayer only. It introduces the descent of the power of light that bestows upon the initiate his first vision of the ‘Power which is above all powers’. Possibly we are confronted here with the idea of the kiss as a means of spiritual fecundation.”<sup>110</sup>

Van den Broek’s suggestion fits quite well with the textual analysis method used in this dissertation (see also above) developed partly from Rappaport, but mostly from Olsson. Thus, ‘one can expect that religious texts, as far as they deal with both ‘beliefs and ‘rituals/practices’, simply bring up these rituals or practices, because they vitalise important USP and can be perceived as a contracted form of belief’. An important belief in *The Discourse on the Ogdoad and the Ennead* is the descent of light where the embrace and kiss of Hermes (teacher) both symbolise and express such a belief. Hermes, the divine messenger, brings that light, ‘wraps’ the pupil with it during the *aspasmos* and puts it into the mind as well (the kiss). This ritual is able to ‘communicate’ at an expressive level - especially by a skilled and experienced performer - both the reality and the function of that light.<sup>111</sup> The ritual becomes a contracted form of ‘belief’.

### Summary on the five matrices in Hermetism

Whether or not Hermetism is a natural part of Western esoterism, i.e. defined through the five matrices, is up for discussion here. The first matrix, ‘purpose (pronoia) rather than karma or sin’, can be doubted, as a more karma-like understanding of destiny could have been the most central for many Hermetists. In any case, many instructions are given on a fate understood as a chain of actions (*heimarmenê*), guided by a providence often perceived as something independent of and ‘higher’ than fate. Matrix number two, ‘the dialectical relationship between man and God (or the

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<sup>110</sup> van den Broek 2000: 86.

<sup>111</sup> According to Olsson as already outlined in chap. 2, the performer has a freedom as ‘author’, including subtle body language. Then we can expect that the teacher, maybe, embraced the pupil in a tender way ‘communicating’ that God sends his light (power) in a very caring way to those who are ready to receive it.

divine), including healing of other people, society and/or Earth', also applies but with a weak representation. Only in CH III the lower (nature) explicitly affects the whole universe, but the same seems to be the case in CH XVII where the lower (the corporal) is reflected in the spiritual, and vice versa. Outside *Corpus Hermeticum*, matrix number two is probably confirmed in *Asclepius*, with its statues able to draw down heaven on earth, but it depends somewhat on how one reads the corrupted text. In *Korê Kosmou* one can argue that the steles and obelisks were used by Hermetists to ensure sympathia between heaven and earth. To some Hermetists maybe sympathia or gnosis was reinforced yearly when Mercury reached fifteen degrees of Virgo (NHC VI.61 - 62).<sup>112</sup> The third matrix, 'dualism and monism are interdependent, including mind and/or the world as a stairway to heaven', is found in *Korê Kosmou*. Here 'monism' and 'dualism', defined as the power of, and weakening of, logos (keeping the universe in optimal condition) alternately prevailed over each other. The 'renewal of time' also points to a periodical rebirth of everything in cosmos strengthening the aforementioned logos and most likely gnosis too (CH III). The fourth matrix, 'scientific laws are synonymous with spiritual principles', is also met in *Hermetica*. Generally speaking, one can use science in a moderate form though it must never be exaggerated. The fifth matrix, 'the holistic cosmos, including the form of 'sympathy' between its parts', is met throughout *Hermetica*.

One great problem with *Hermetica* is how to read it. Simply stated, a modern and 'synthetic school,' especially represented by Garth Fowden and Jean-Pierre Mahé, sees *Hermetica* not as a fixed system but as a spiritual way. The way consists of certain 'steps' and most texts belong to general instructions, while a few texts represent the highest gnosis. This school primary sees the differences between the single texts as variations in the quality of gnosis. Interpreting it this way, *Hermetica* becomes a dynamic system, mirroring a process of increased insight enabling one to read the texts as an integral whole. In opposition to this 'synthetic school', there is an older 'analytical school', represented for example by Walter Scott and Festugière, where *Hermetica* forms a corpus of much differentiation. The

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<sup>112</sup> See chapter 2, pp. 41 - 45, above.

texts vary considerably in contents with contradictory issues, and even the single texts vary in turn with conflicting paragraphs. Scott writes: “What we have before us is a number of *libilli* written by a number of different men, each of whom had his distinct and separate point of view and mode of thought. There is in their teachings a certain general similarity, but there is also much divergence.”<sup>113</sup> Taking these two schools into consideration, though perceived simplistically, the conclusion is:

If the synthetic approach is a passable way of understanding Hermetism, the five matrices are found and they belong as instructions to certain stages on the road to immortality. If the analytical approach is the most correct, some matrices are only rudimentarily confirmed. Only ‘holism’ as a matrix is consistently agreed upon. Accordingly, Hermetism more constitutes ‘roots to’, or is a foundation for, Western esoterism than being a part of it.

It is not the purpose here to engage in any discussion whether an analytical or synthetic approach is the most correct. More important is the position of *Asclepius* seemingly confirming the five matrices except perhaps matrix number four, i.e. the position of ‘science’ in the spiritual road to gnosis.

*Asclepius, summary and few additional commentaries*

The Latin *Asclepius* has its own independent history in Western esoterism as *Asclepius* was known long before Ficino’s translation of *Corpus Hermeticum* published in 1471 AD. A new bibliographic study has provided further details to “Die Überlieferung des *Asclepius* im Mittelalter.”<sup>114</sup> Though part of this item has been well known for some time, Carlos Gilly concentrates his study of the reception of *Asclepius* from 11<sup>th</sup> to the 14<sup>th</sup> century. According to Gilly, the first author who not only made some comments on *Asclepius*, as for example Augustine already did, but was also affected by its

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<sup>113</sup> Scott 1924: 47. Festugière especially found some texts (CH V, VIII and IX) to contain a monistic worldview while others were clearly dualistic (CH I, IV, VI, VII and XIII) and the rest more or less in between. Festugière 1948: 10.

<sup>114</sup> Gilly 2000: 335 - 367.

contents and philosophy, was Thierry von Chartres.<sup>115</sup> Many other authors dealt with *Asclepius* too.<sup>116</sup> It is worth noticing that *Asclepius* contains four important matrices. First, *Asclepius* is rather explicit concerning his holistic worldview:

omnia unius esse aut anum esse omnia<sup>117</sup>  
(the all is from one or all are one)

Secondly, in *Asclepius* one also finds teachings on fate as heimarmenê, i.e. as a chain of occurrences also continuing into the future guided by providence.<sup>118</sup> Thirdly, the statues and Egypt as a picture of heaven transferring virtues to the whole world suggest that the lower can draw down heavenly 'virtues', i.e. the lower also affects the 'higher'.<sup>119</sup> Lastly, time as a factor determining a recurring regeneration suggests 'monism' and 'dualism' to be interdependent.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Gilly 2000: 340.

<sup>116</sup> For example Gilly writes: "Zu den grössten Kennern des *Asclepius* in der zweiten Hälfte des 12. Jahrhunderts gehörte auch der anfangs erwähnte Alain von Rijsel oder Alanus de Insulis, dem Quispel mit Recht eine entscheidende Rolle in der Geschichte des westlichen Hermetismus zugewiesen hat"; Gilly (2000: 341). Other authors more or less influenced by *Asclepius* are according to Gilly notabilities such as Meister Eckhart and Albertus Magnus.

<sup>117</sup> *Asclepius*.1.12. Festugière: "– tout est dépendant d'un seul et cet Un est Tout –" Quispel translates: "The All is from the One and All is One"; Quispel (2000a: 168). According to Quispel the author of *Asclepius* formulates here the basic tenet of his whole work. Copenhaver translates: "∴ all are of one or all are one [...]."

<sup>118</sup> *Asclepius*.19; 39 and 40. Heimarmenê is, as in *Poimandres*, the regime of the seven planets (19 and 39). However, in *Asclepius*.28 destiny is also perceived as a karma-like fate (or as a punishment for sin).

<sup>119</sup> *Asclepius*.24.

<sup>120</sup> *Asclepius*.30.

### Summary of astrology as a ritual field in Hermetism

In a ritual field, beliefs and ritual/practice are interdependent and affecting each other. The ascension in *Poimandres* and the conferring of specific vices to each planet is impossible to understand without involving contemporary astrology as a practice. This important canonical message gained its final design through ritual experience. Each planet, starting with the Moon, simply handed over certain vices in the birth-chart and through ascension the planets in the birth-chart, i.e. the whole horoscope, lost its power and one was freed from heimarmenê. Familiar with contemporary astrology attained through experience, Hermetists even identified themselves with the heavenly Hermes (Mercury) and praised occupations given by him. Further, maybe they brought milk-stones with an inscription to his temple when he reached the middle of the Virgin.<sup>121</sup> They had experienced that decanates rising (i.e. on the ascendant in the horoscope)<sup>122</sup> determined the appearances of their bodies, and in order to escape this form-producing effect they had to go out of the whole zodiac by attaching to Oneness. Their beliefs were to a high degree created or formed by astrology as a practice.

Lastly, it must be emphasised that modern research is more and more supportive of the view that astrology as a practice brought about much of the belief system of the Hermetists. In the Coptic treatise, *The Discourse on the Eight and Ninth*, mentioned above, the student must invoke the secret name of god at the end of a prayer. This name consists of seven repeated vowels and, according to Quispel, these are all based on the seven vowels in the Greek alphabet. “Why seven vowels? Because there are seven planets, Sol, Luna, Mars, Mercurius, Jupiter, Venus and Saturnus. They were gods. Each of them produced a tone. Together they produced the harmony of the seven spheres. The seven vowels in reality were musical tones.”<sup>123</sup> Another example concerns the same treasure. Here, Mahé states that the ascension consists in getting rid of the influence from the seven planets (*Ousiarchs*) all belonging to the inferior world. The lowest level of the superior world, the Ogdoad, therefore stays above the seven planets. This implies an ascension in a cosmos, which is a reinterpretation of the Egyptian Ogdoad (eight

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<sup>121</sup> Chapter 2, pp. 42- 43, above.

<sup>122</sup> *Asclepius*.19.

<sup>123</sup> Quispel 2000a: 208.

*Hehous*), originally eight pillars upholding the heavens.<sup>124</sup> Though this thesis prefers Hermetism to be a foundation for Western esotericism rather than being a genuine part of it, *the astrological ritual field emerged* for the first time together with the teachings of Hermes Trismegistos into Western esotericism.

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<sup>124</sup> Mahé 1998b: 81.

## CHAPTER 5

### Paracelsus - and his alchemy as a ritual field

*Mercurius Hermes Trismegistus says that he who perfects this Art creates a new world.*<sup>1</sup>

Alchemy is altogether a difficult subject. However, the last three decades of research has brought forth significant revisions to this complex subject resulting in an almost unanimous rejection of four related features of alchemy. Firstly, the notion that alchemy represents a monolithic tradition, i.e. it is unable to adjust to cultures and dynamic developments. Secondly, the notion that alchemy in essence is a psychological and a self-transformative endeavour (i.e. the Jungian approach).<sup>2</sup> Thirdly, the notion that alchemy is a ‘pseudo-science’, i.e. unable to contribute to scientific developments, and fourthly the notion that alchemy is different and distinguishable from chemistry. Alchemy consists of varied ‘positions’ and maybe one can speak of different ‘schools’ each with different practices and goals. Some alchemists sought to bring about metallic transmutations where other used their art to bring about medical improvement. Some were interested in establishing a chemical industry of sorts promoting the production of salt, metals and pigments, while others made their experiments

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<sup>1</sup> Paracelsus, *Concerning the Spirits of the Planets* (Vol. I, p. 85) in Arthur Edward Waite, *The Hermetical and Alchemical Writings of Paracelsus*, Kessinger Publishing Co. As usual, no year of publication is given by Kessinger Publishing, but the book was printed in Oct. 2005. ISBN: 1425454275. This is a one-volume reprint of Edward Waite’s two-volume translation originally published by de Laurence, Scott & Co., Chicago, 1910. In the following the abbreviation HAW will be used for this new print. Two other textual compendiums are used as well, and this is *Selected Writings* (Jacobi: 1979) and *Essential Readings* (Goodrick-Clarke:1999). At the Zürich Paracelsus Project, still in progress, a new, modern and critical masterwork is about to be launched. A German dictionary is partially-available online and can be found at: [paracelsus.unizh.ch/index.html](http://paracelsus.unizh.ch/index.html). I have chosen to give clear references to the many writings of Paracelsus by referring to his own titles.

<sup>2</sup> A rather informative article on the Jungian ‘mistake’ and influence on figures, as for example Joseph Campbell, Mircea Eliade and Betty J. T. Dobbs (*Foundation of Newton’s Alchemy* from 1990) can be found in Principe & Newman 2001: 401 - 415. It must be emphasised, however, that Jung did not claim Paracelsus to believe in psychological transmutations, but rather he considered Paracelsus as being responsible for converting alchemy into science.

in order to understand nature and/or the theological dimensions of reality. Very often, also, an alchemist could pursue several of these goals simultaneously<sup>3</sup> - and hence alchemy often includes an ability to cope 'additively' with 'beliefs' involved. Further, according to recent research, alchemy as a natural philosophy in nature harbours two significant notions. First and foremost, the world is perceived as a battleground in which the forces of the evil (matter) battled the forces of good (spirit).<sup>4</sup> Then, "like their ancient and medieval predecessors early modern alchemists accepted transmutation as an observable fact of life".<sup>5</sup> No need to argue then for the relevance of investigation matrix number three: Dualism and monism are interdependent, including the mind and/or the world as a stairway to heaven.

It is in the light of modern research that an additive cognitive approach becomes appropriate. An important recognition in recent research is that even heavily-allegorical alchemy texts may be decoded and read in a pure materialistic and chemical way.<sup>6</sup> What justifies an additive cognitive understanding between a piece of science and religion as a key approach, is also to be found in the works of A. G. Debus, who claims that Paracelsus consciously unified a chemical approach to nature based on alchemical, metallurgical and pharmaceutical information.<sup>7</sup> A third argument is that 'The Paracelsian chemists', who all favoured the application of chemistry to medicine, did not necessarily subscribe to its cosmic implications.<sup>8</sup> Whether or not Paracelsus made any chemical or medical inventions or progressions is not to be dealt with in this context.<sup>9</sup> However, this is a subject of controversy, and at one hand Paracelsus is counted among history's great doctors. On the other hand, his writings have never been "official textbook

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<sup>3</sup> Principe 2005: 12 - 15

<sup>4</sup> Coudert 2005: 46.

<sup>5</sup> Coudert 2005: 42.

<sup>6</sup> An illustrative example is El-Eswed (2006: 71-90). This article is fairly technical in nature, but highly informative. The author has identified different 'spirits' (*al-arwāh*) to be mercury, sulphur, ammonium chloride and arsenic sulphides. One place, for example, Jabir stated that the spirit '*nushadir*', ammonium chloride, could be distilled from hair. Today scientists know that hair is composed of a protein, keratin. Decomposed (i.e. dissolved in water) and distilled (during heating) keratin actually becomes ammonium chloride.

<sup>7</sup> Debus 1987: 235.

<sup>8</sup> Debus 1987: 195.

<sup>9</sup> Goltz 1998: 80.



teaching materials and the medical reform which he so vociferously advocated has never been realised.”<sup>10</sup> As visions Paracelsus’ ideas were inspirational, and Paracelsus is often recognised as the father of modern pharmacology, i.e. he produced ‘drugs’ or synthetic medicine. His idea of extracting the active medical principle is an important part of modern medicine, but with a great difference: to Paracelsus the active principle was a ‘virtue’, a power or a quintessence. Paracelsus regarded cosmos, nature (and the human body) as principally chemical in nature - and not, for example, based on mathematical principles.<sup>11</sup>

### **Paracelsus (1493 – 1541) in an esoteric context<sup>12</sup>**

In recent research alchemy is ‘naturally-philosophical in character’ understood in a broad and unbiased sense. Hence, one ‘side’ of alchemical texts, i.e. the religious and not the chemical, can perhaps be considered as belonging to esotericism. To Faivre, as we have seen, alchemy is one of the main currents and cornerstones in Western esotericism, being a notion and a practice as well. In his *Access to Western Esotericism* Faivre placed alchemy within the esoteric tradition mainly by stressing the theological similarities between Paracelsus and German theosophy. This includes, for example, the notion that “[n]ature emanated directly from the omnipotence of the Almighty.”<sup>13</sup> Later, it will be demonstrated that on a ‘religious level’, alchemical processes in the furnace, and the whole set-up, can be viewed as a ritual. Enclosed metallic transmutations can be compared to transformations often found in rites of passage.

*Comment:* A prevalent idea in alchemy is the concept of minerals being born and growing under the surface of the earth: they are organic and living entities. A new study proposes cautiously that alchemy in art can be divided into four main categories:<sup>14</sup> 1) images made within a proper alchemical context or culture; 2) genre images which portray alchemists and their

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<sup>10</sup> Goltz 1998: 80.

<sup>11</sup> Debus 1987: 1 - 28; 185 - 196.

<sup>12</sup> Paracelsus is a pseudonym for Theophrastus Bombast von Hohenheim.

<sup>13</sup> Faivre 1994: 62.

<sup>14</sup> Wamberg 2006.

environment; 3) Religious, mythological or genre images with a disguised alchemical symbolism and 4) images showing structural affinities with alchemy without an iconography alluding to it. The first category of particular interest in this context is mainly found in manuscripts and printed books to illustrate alchemical thinking and principles. Sometimes artists were hired by the alchemist or the publisher to create these images. An example from the first category can be an image illustrating the growing metals (making music in a cave beneath the surface of the earth).<sup>15</sup>

### **Paracelsus and the five matrices**

As pointed out by Debus, Paracelsus and Paracelsians had a deep belief in the truth of the macrocosm-microcosm analogy, and even man “could, in turn, affect the great world.”<sup>16</sup> In the following it must be taken into account that all matrices, except maybe number one, ‘providence rather than karma or sin’, more than less, has been testified to in different publications dealing with Paracelsus. Therefore, the main focus will be on matrix number one, but the other matrices will be analysed too.

### *Holism*

There is an all-pervading holism present in Paracelsus’ writings, and it is impossible to understand his organic, spritely, and communicative universe without this aspect. Paracelsus’ world is filled with a hubbub of words for those who can decipher them.<sup>17</sup> Not only herbs, plants and trees whisper their words, also minerals and metals “show their indications and signs which they have received at once from the *Archeus*<sup>18</sup> and from the higher stars, each one telling its genus by differences of colour and of earth.”<sup>19</sup> To Paracelsus, planets and metals are nearly identical, containing the same ‘spirit’, a kind of essence, and in the alchemical furnace, as we shall see

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<sup>15</sup> *Musaeum Hermeticum*; Wamberg 2006: 48; Roob 2001: 31. This engraving (from *Musaeum Hermeticum*) can also be found on web: [gnosis.art.pl/iluminatornia/alkimija/musaeum\\_hermeticum\\_frkf\\_1749.jpg](http://gnosis.art.pl/iluminatornia/alkimija/musaeum_hermeticum_frkf_1749.jpg).

<sup>16</sup> Debus 1987: 237.

<sup>17</sup> Foucault 1992: 27.

<sup>18</sup> *Archeus* is an agent impressing individual attributes upon the material world.

<sup>19</sup> Paracelsus, *De Natura Rerum* (I. xi. 387 - 9); *Essential Readings*, p.188. Note: I. xi. 387 - 9 refers to the notation in *Sämtliche Werke*. This German edition is not used in this thesis.

later, under the alchemical fire (identical with the Sun, which in turn receives its light from God), the ‘spirits’ of metals and planets become identical. Sun produces gold, Moon produces silver, Mercury produces common quicksilver, Venus produces copper, Mars produces iron, Jupiter produces tin and Saturn produces lead.

Man is the most elevated of all beings on Earth, equal even to angels. Man is created by God as a quintessence extracted from the four elements and from the essence of the stars consisting of wisdom and reason. These two essences, the elemental and the astral, are now blended with *massa*, also known as *limus terrae*, i.e. the mud (or primordial stuff) of earth.<sup>20</sup> Accordingly, man becomes the centre of the whole cosmos:

“Therefore man is the fifth essence, the microcosm and the son of the whole world, because he has been created as an extract of all creation by the hand of God [...].”<sup>21</sup>

Paracelsus’ belief in holism is so strong that he holds that there is an inner Mars, an inner Venus etc., that resides in the major organs of the body. In this way the Sun resides in the heart, the Moon in the brain, Venus in the kidneys, Mars in the gall bladder, Jupiter in the liver, Saturn in the spleen and Mercury in the lungs.<sup>22</sup> As an extract of all creation, man simply becomes a centre in the network of sympathetic communications, and due to his elevated position man’s sympathetic interaction with heaven is as an equal.

*To improve a defective world and matrix number two*

When dealing with Paracelsus’ view of nature one should focus more on nature as ‘good’ or ‘bad’, and what kind of ontological status and quality it represents. To Paracelsus nature does not leave much room for idealism - at

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<sup>20</sup> Paracelsus, *Astronomia Magna* (I. xii. 36 - 7); *Essential Readings*, p. 116. Man’s creation is similarly described in *The End of The Birth, And The Consideration of The Stars*. HAW, Vol. II, p. 289.

<sup>21</sup> Paracelsus, *Astronomia Magna* (I. xii. 39 - 40); *Essential Reading*, p. 117.

<sup>22</sup> Paracelsus, *Alchemy: The Third Column of Medicine*. HAW, Vol. II, p. 148. This treatise is the third chapter of *Liber Paragranum* or *Das Buch Paragranum*.

least not as much as to be expected. One can learn from the light of nature, and Paracelsus is rather explicit; nature simply needs to be improved:

“Nature is so keen and subtle in her operations that she cannot be dealt with except by a sublime and accurate mode of treatment. She brings nothing to the light that is at once perfect in itself, but leaves it to be perfected by man. This method of perfection is called Alchemy.”<sup>23</sup>

Epistemologically nature is, or can be, a teacher for those who understand to read the light of nature, but ontologically nature does not represent, or offer, any excellent quality. There is always a poison “concealed beneath the goodness in everything which man takes as his nourishment. That is to say, there is an *essentia* and a *venenum* (poison) in everything: the *essentia* supports him, the *venenum* causes him illness [...]”<sup>24</sup> Paracelsus separates nature’s epistemological and ontological qualities and thus he breaks with a strong tradition in Greek philosophy. Here, probably always, epistemology and ontology are so closely interlaced that they can be conceived as ‘twins’, for example, as described by Plato in his *Republic*<sup>25</sup> - and the same linkage is found throughout Hermetica. For Paracelsus the light of nature is not that difficult to explore. However he is ambiguous here as he is elsewhere.<sup>26</sup> It is Nature herself that instructs, but all she requires is the ‘attention’ of the students.<sup>27</sup> Nature offers epistemological opportunities that exceed what it

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<sup>23</sup> Paracelsus, *Alchemy: The Third Column of Medicine*. HAW, Vol. II, p. 148. Paracelsus uses the following metaphor: “Nature first produces the harvest; then Alchemy reaps, mills, and bakes it before it reaches the mouth [...]”

<sup>24</sup> Paracelsus, *Volumen Medicinae Paramirum* (I. i. 195 - 6); *Essential Readings*, p. 51 (my parenthesis).

<sup>25</sup> Here, one can draw on the Allegory of the Cave, but it is better to employ the Allegory of the Line (509D-511E). Imagine, says Plato, a vertical line divided into four pieces, all representing *ontology* on the right-hand side and *epistemology* on the left side. Four ‘pairs’ of ontology-epistemology connections are thus established. From the lowest part of the line and upwards: the ontological level of shadows (and mirror images) relates to presumption; the ontological level of physical phenomena relates to ‘beliefs’; the ontological level of mathematical objects relates to discursive thinking and axiomatic cognition; the world of ideas relates to philosophical comprehension.

<sup>26</sup> “*Lumen naturae* is a minor light, probably like Moonlight, but God will not abandon the light of Nature. The study of the light is given by Nature to those being amenable to it – just as knowledge of cures comes naturally to the born physician.” Pagel 1982: 58.

<sup>27</sup> Paracelsus, *Alchemy, The Third Column of Medicine*. HAW, Vol. II, p. 149.

offers on the ontological level. Translated into modern times, this compares modern biogenetic research that learns from nature including the human body, in order to improve it. Paracelsus also belonged to a Renaissance era with an increasing interest in nature and particularly in gaining control over it.<sup>28</sup> Man is also a ruler in Paracelsus' worldview, able to command both heaven and nature, if he is wise:

“The wise man can dominate the stars, and is not subject to them [...]. The stars compel and coerce the animal man, so that where they lead he must follow, just as a thief goes to the gallows [...]. And although he is the son of Saturn, and Saturn is his parent, still he can withdraw himself from him, and so conquer him that he becomes the offspring of the Sun, and can thus subject himself to another planet, and make himself its son.”<sup>29</sup>

Here Paracelsus advances Thomas Aquino's argumentations: astrology only affects the animal mind of man with its instinctual reactions, but never the rational mind. For Paracelsus it is also a question of leveraging the planets magically, and one can then choose the most elevated star, the Sun, as birth star. Even a worker slaving away in a mine can attain a lifestyle with no work but with 'plenty of food and drink'.<sup>30</sup> So confident is Paracelsus in the sympathetic powers that the lower world (represented by man) gains control over the higher (cf. matrix number 2):

“And as there are two worlds, the lesser and the greater, and the lesser rules the greater, so also the Star of the Microcosm governs and subdues the celestial star. God did not create the planets and stars with the intention that they should dominate man, but that they, like other creatures, should obey him and serve him.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Metzler 2006: 140.

<sup>29</sup> Paracelsus, *Concerning the Nature of Things*. HAW, Vol. I, pp. 174 - 175.

<sup>30</sup> Paracelsus, *Concerning the Nature of Things*. HAW, Vol. I, p. 175.

<sup>31</sup> Paracelsus, *Concerning the Nature of Things*. HAW, Vol. I, p. 176.

Another clue as to how man may affect heaven and nature, is to be found in Paracelsus' concept of imagination as a superior factor. Imagination supersedes the influence of the stars, and the imagination of the parents, or the mother alone, can suspend the influence of astrology. Even, "the superior strength of imagination of one partner as compared with the other decides the sex of the child begotten."<sup>32</sup> Further, by imagination one can control even distant objects through 'magnetic attraction' by manipulating the 'spirit' of the object.<sup>33</sup> Man can also build a heaven in his birth star by using his imagination.<sup>34</sup> Paracelsus also developed a kind of psychiatry where different passions, drawn in from a planet, and reinforced by imagination, were the cause of mental disturbances.<sup>35</sup>

Here, discussing matrix number two, 'the dialectical relationship between man and God or the divine, including healing of other people, society and/or the Earth', Paracelsus can also assure that the higher stars give the inclination to lower things<sup>36</sup> - and thus a dialectical relationship is established. From a more abstract point of view imagination was *coelum in homini*, i.e. heaven in man, by which man could magically manipulate the 'arcane', i.e. stellar virtues, located within all phenomena.<sup>37</sup> In the chemical philosophy of Paracelsus, one finds a dominant microcosm able to handle, deal with, affect and even manipulate nature and cosmos. Matrix number two is rather explicit in Paracelsus' alchemy, but primarily it is nature and Earth that are healed.

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<sup>32</sup> Paracelsus, *Liber de Generatione Hominis*. Pagel 1982: 124.

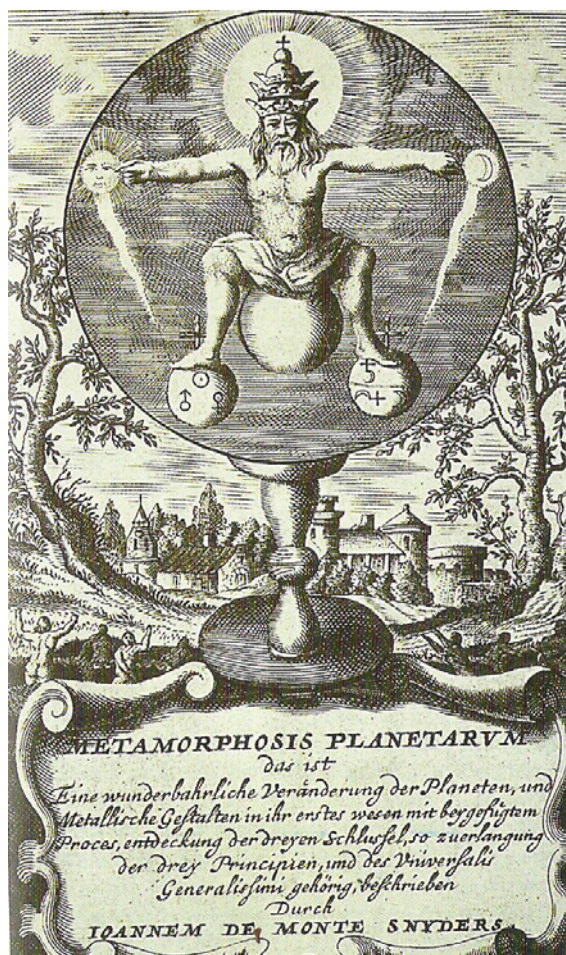
<sup>33</sup> Pagel 1982: 121 - 122.

<sup>34</sup> Paracelsus, *The End of the Birth, and the Consideration of the Stars*. HAW, Vol. II, p. 306.

<sup>35</sup> Pagel 1982: 123 - 124; 150 - 52; 179.

<sup>36</sup> Paracelsus, *Concerning the Nature of Things*. HAW, Vol. I, p. 176.

<sup>37</sup> Sculakowska 2006: 172.



The icon is the front-page illustration on J. de Snyder's: *Metamorphosis Planetarium* from 1663. The first part of the text reads: "The Metamorphosis of the Planets - this is a wonderful transformation of the planets and their initial metallic forms are subjected to a moistening process [...]"<sup>38</sup> As a result, the transformed planets act like a medical king able to transform and fecund the world again.<sup>39</sup> This icon supports the second matrix: The dialectical relationship between Man and God (or the divine), including the healing of other people, society and/or the Earth.

<sup>38</sup> Icon; Roob 2001: 481.

<sup>39</sup> For this information, see Roob 2001: 481.

*Dualism/monism – and the achievement of ‘coniunctio’*

It is necessary for some moments to discuss briefly some practical aspects of alchemy. First, the alchemists ‘dissolved’ matter into *prima materia*.<sup>40</sup> This was an undifferentiated yet potential state similar to ‘chaos’ (Paracelsus: Iliaster) - or the beginning of God’s creation (see more below). Next, he transformed the undifferentiated matter (*prima materia*) into a new and much more elevated kind of matter. This was characterised as a perfect union of purified opposites called ultimate matter, *coniunctio*.

The initial process in alchemy was that of the separation of elemental matter back into an ontological condition: Iliaster’s process. Separation was a big subject in alchemy. It was carried out in a number of ways: by distillation, resolution, putrefaction, extraction, calcinations, reverberation (filtering), sublimation, reduction, coagulation, pulverisation and lavation (washing).<sup>41</sup> It was a process of decomposition, and its fulfilment was *nigredo* or ‘blackness’. In this process ‘impurities’ were removed (by filtration or other means) and the remaining ingredients were ‘purified’ into a uniform black material. The alchemist carefully watched his alchemical vessel, which was made of glass in order to see the changing coloration of the chemical reactions. *Nigredo* was attained literally when the colours of the compound in the vessel were finally transformed into blackness. Colour phenomena in the vessel were ‘indices’ to the ontological levels achieved during the processes of transmutation.<sup>42</sup> The next two major stages after the achievement of *nigredo* were *albedo* (whiteness) and *rubedo* (redness). *Albedo* was attained by repeating alchemical procedures over and over again “and by the end of the *albedo* stage they were left with two elements viewed as though in polar opposition to one another.”<sup>43</sup> The last major state *rubedo*, was attained when the two *coincidentia oppositorum*<sup>44</sup> from the preceding *albedo* states were united in a stable unity referred to as *coniunctio*.<sup>45</sup>

<sup>40</sup> *Prima materia* is called “erste materien” by Paracelsus. Pagel 1982: 91, n. 242.

<sup>41</sup> Paracelsus, *Concerning the Nature of Things*. HAW, Vol. I, p. 163.

<sup>42</sup> Paracelsus believed in three basic principles, salt, sulphur and mercury. In the Paracelsian tradition these principles could manifest as ‘ash of the philosophers’, i.e. as a colour phenomenon resembling a dragon, in the alchemical vessel. Pagel 1982: 268.

<sup>43</sup> Voss 1998: 158.

<sup>44</sup> Voss 1998: 159.

<sup>45</sup> Voss 1998: 159.



Logically, the question comes to mind as to how dualistic nature was before the alchemists tried to perfect it in order to create a new world. Investigating possible sources of Paracelsus, Walter Pagel ascribes influences both from Gnosticism and from Neoplatonism. Maybe correctly so, but it is worth paying attention to Pagel's conclusion: Paracelsus' cosmology advocates a 'vitalistic monism'.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, it is very difficult to pinpoint Paracelsus' cosmology, if it must fit a priori into a static definition. In this thesis dualism and monism are interdependent and constitute a progress towards monism (i.e. the world in a 'healed' condition). Paracelsus does not perceive nature as dualistic in essence, but rather that it has some dualistic traits linked to processes in alchemy. Every single 'object' in nature is a carrier of an *essentia* and a 'poison' (or defilement). There are a few exceptions such as gold and perfect 'stones' hidden somewhere in nature. Man's stomach and inner organs (those linked to a planet) function as 'alchemists', and had it not been for their capacity to separate the 'unclean from the clean', man could not live on Earth. Each of the major inner organs is endowed with an 'essential force', *archeus*, which distinguishes between useful and toxic substances.<sup>47</sup> Also non-organic matter like minerals and stones contains an essential part and some defilement, which have to be 'separated'. Even medicine, though created by God, is not fully prepared or perfected.<sup>48</sup> Things in nature have not reached their 'perfection' (see above) and as such - from the point of view of perfection - they contain 'defilement' or 'impurity'. Alchemy is the art, says Paracelsus, that separates that which is useful from that which is not by transforming it into its ultimate matter and essence.<sup>49</sup> Nature will in time perfect herself - a process "which takes a very long time and may be reproduced in the laboratory at a much faster rate."<sup>50</sup> So even without the help of alchemy, nature strives for perfection into a state of elevation with no 'impurity'. Thus, nature by itself develops from a certain

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<sup>46</sup> "It is in such 'monistic' tendencies of Gnosticism rather than its original 'dualistic' position that its kinship with the ideas of Paracelsus emerges. For the latter advocated what has been called a 'vitalistic monism'." Pagel 1982: 208.

<sup>47</sup> McKee 1998: 293. For 'The Archeus as a principle residing in the Stomach', see Pagel 1982: 106 - 107.

<sup>48</sup> Paracelsus, *The Book of Alchemy*. HAW, Vol. II, p. 166.

<sup>49</sup> Paracelsus, *The Book of Alchemy*. HAW, Vol. II, p. 167.

<sup>50</sup> Pagel 1982: 107.

level of dualism into a state of ‘unity’ or *coniunctio*. Alchemy itself is able to create *a new world* (see the quotation at the beginning of this chapter) and by its strong and sympathetic links with nature, and the powerful idea of an all-pervading holism, it may be concluded that matrix number three is met, i.e. ‘dualism and monism are interdependent, including the mind and/or the world as a ladder’.<sup>51</sup> One could perhaps say that matrix number three rests on a massive foundation of evidence.

#### *Alchemy - as science and religion*

It is probable that nowhere during the history of Western esoterism have religion and science been so interweaved as they have in alchemy (i.e. matrix number 4), and it is still a puzzle whether Paracelsus was a man of science or a clever magician.<sup>52</sup> But dealing with that question is basically not the task of historians of religion, or anthropologists. It is better to accept that the borderline between religion and science is not always that clear. Instead, one should look to the religious dimension, for example in alchemy, and leave it to others, i.e. historians of medicine, general science and chemistry etc., to determine the actual degree of scientific evolution. At least it is recognised that some Paracelsians contributed to scientific progress, for example the Dane Peter Severinus.<sup>53</sup> Probably, Stephen Pumfrey has it right when he concludes that in Paracelsian epistemology all knowledge about the light of nature exists a priori in the human mind.<sup>54</sup> The light of nature is reason permeating both man and nature. “Everything that man does and has to do, he should do by the light of nature. For the light of nature is nothing other than reason itself.”<sup>55</sup> Paracelsus’ understanding of empiricism therefore differs from that of modern scientists, and in this respect man is no *tabula rasa* who requires a “mind reasoning with the evidence of sensory observation.”<sup>56</sup> Knowledge, or *scientia*, to Paracelsus, is a concept not

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Coudert when saying, that ‘transmutation is an observable fact of life’, i.e. a transmutation towards perfection (note 5 above; Coudert 2005: 42).

<sup>52</sup> Grell 1998 - is dedicated to that question.

<sup>53</sup> Grell 1998: 245 - 267.

<sup>54</sup> Pumfrey 1998: 43.

<sup>55</sup> Paracelsus, *Ein Büchlein (Philosophia) de generatione Hominis* (I. i. 306). *Selected Writings*, p.104.

<sup>56</sup> Pumfrey 1998: 43.

limited to man's mind, and hence not only a cognitive faculty, but also a 'force' found in the world and in the things of the world.<sup>57</sup> Paracelsus' research in nature became a project which wanted to prove a relationship between macro- and microcosm where man "possessed within himself all knowledge and all power of nature."<sup>58</sup> Such a view can only be possible if Paracelsus viewed scientific laws to be synonymous with spiritual principles, i.e. matrix number four. Thus in one sense, maybe somewhat surprisingly, Paracelsus tried to prove his religious worldview (seen from a modern point of view) by doing chemical, alchemical and medical experiments. Paracelsus' *experientia* are thus restricted compared with a modern understanding of the word, because *experientia* can never alter *scientia*, only confirm it, and Paracelsus' 'proof' becomes a typical religious proof. The strong correspondence between micro- and macrocosm, between man and signatures in nature, and the fact that knowledge is *recognising* of existing ideas (or relations), testify that matrix number four is met.

More research is needed when investigating the relationship between religion and science in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. One must not forget that Newton, for example, wrote on alchemy. Newton apparently believed in the growth of metals and that most of ancient Greco-Roman mythology was encoded alchemy.<sup>59</sup> Parts of Newton's alchemy are currently recreated in different laboratories. This justifies the question: did he associate science with religion? And if he did, why and more precisely where did he see a connection?

*Comment:* In the case of Newton many projects are now in progress, for example, the edition of all his alchemical, religious and philosophical writings can be found on the web, already - and continuously updated. It will be interesting to see how future researchers will annotate the following extract:

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<sup>57</sup> Pagel 1982: 356.

<sup>58</sup> Pagel 1982: 43.

<sup>59</sup> See William Newman, "Newton's alchemy, recreated" on web: [www.indiana.edu/~college/WilliamNewmanProject.shtml](http://www.indiana.edu/~college/WilliamNewmanProject.shtml).

“The purification of metallis is done by many operations. First the culinary fire separates the heterogeneities. Then the secret fire produces the same effect but more efficaciously by introducing a fiery spirit into the matter which pens inwardly the secret gate which subtilises & sublimes the pure parts separating them from the terrestrial & adust parts. The solution which follows by the addition of the astral quintessence which animates the stone makes in it a third depuration & the destillation completes it.”<sup>60</sup>

*Paracelsus’ concept of fate and time (matrix number one)*

As previously mentioned Paracelsus is at times difficult to understand and in dealing with the question of fate (matrix number one) this is particularly the case. At some point he declares free decisions to exist and in another context he does not admit of man any free will.<sup>61</sup> However, his proverb that the wise rules his stars together with his strong belief in imagination indicates that he, as did many of his contemporaries, believed in man and to a large extent in his free choice and will. Paracelsus’ ideas about prudence, free will, fate and providence are not that different from Agrippa’s. Here too, ‘fate’ is a compound made up of several factors.

Alchemy ‘speeds up’ what nature perfects over a much greater span of time and one of the most consistent interpretations of Paracelsus “is the *entelechia* which leads the individual to perfection, its ‘monarchy’ at a certain point in time [...]”<sup>62</sup> *Entelechia* is both a realisation and also an end or final goal.<sup>63</sup> The light of nature, which is not ignited and radiated by nature but a light permeating nature,<sup>64</sup> is also a light that pushes things and man ahead in the

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<sup>60</sup> Author: Isaac Newton, *Of ye first Gate* (c. 2800 words; ca. 1695). Keynes MS. 53. The NEWTON project; see result 45 under ‘Alchemical’ at: [www.newtonproject.ic.ac.uk/prism.php?id=82](http://www.newtonproject.ic.ac.uk/prism.php?id=82).

<sup>61</sup> “Thus God left the seed to the free decision of man, and the decision depends upon man’s will.” (*Das Buch von der Gebürung der empfindlichen Dinge in der Vernunft*, I. i. 254; *Essential Readings* p. 59). “Some like to claim that we have a free will. This is not true. We do not choose, God chooses.” (*Liber Prologi In Vitam Beatam*, II. i. 76; *Essential Readings*, p.148).

<sup>62</sup> Pagel 1982: 356 - 357.

<sup>63</sup> The verb *en-teleutaô* means ‘end in’, or ‘stop in’. The adjective *en-telês* means ‘flawless’, ‘perfect’ or ‘fully-grown’. Paracelsus’ alchemy was influenced by the Aristotelian idea that ‘things’ aspire to perfection or total realisation.

<sup>64</sup> Pagel 1982: 356.

right direction towards *entelechia*.<sup>65</sup> The course of time runs between the beginning and the end of the world and thus time is mainly conceived to be linear - though it could, during its course, take other directions too.<sup>66</sup> This view is corroborated in *The Prophecies of Paracelsus* in which the future of the world is predicted mainly by thirty-two symbolic and enigmatic images (woodcuts) each with a short text below.<sup>67</sup> It is unclear how many years this prophecy covered from 1530 AD as both 24 and 42 years are mentioned in the text. Maybe these were ‘mystical years’ covering a much greater time span. It is peculiar that thirty of the thirty-two step-by-step texts are addressed to the reader, to the ‘you’, and the many messages are related to a fate enveloped in spiritual and moral teachings. Adversity is a consequence of being self-willed and pretending understanding and wisdom. However, a new possibility of insight is offered and in the end a goal or heaven is reached where the ‘you’, after much work, may sleep in peace. A part of the last text simply reads: “Thou hast taken great trouble, therefore it is but just that after thy day’s work thou shouldst have rest and repose. Blessed is he that is born during sleep; he shall know no evil. For thou hast purified with great care, and hast endured much in thy days [...]”<sup>68</sup> In the preceding text to fig. 31 (showing children dancing in joy) time offers total renewal and man will be as children “that know nothing of the cunning and intrigues of the old.”<sup>69</sup> Fate is controlled by a *pronoia* leading to a goal of personal renewal and peace.

In Paracelsus’ writings of the Eucharist (the Last Supper) two important rules can be inferred: Nothing goes to heaven, which is not from heaven and man will go to heaven.<sup>70</sup> The gates of heaven are open for man. Even though Paracelsus’ later theological writings differ slightly from his earlier alchemical writings on providence, the guided working of man by

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<sup>65</sup> Pagel 1982: 356 - 357.

<sup>66</sup> Pagel 1982: 79.

<sup>67</sup> *The Prophecies of Paracelsus. Magic Figures and Prognostications made by Theophrastus Paracelsus about Four Hundred Years Ago*, translated by I. J. Kohn. William Raider & Son. London, 1915. The text was scanned and placed at [sacred-text.com](http://sacred-text.com), February 2003, and can be found at: [sacred-texts.com/pro/pop/pop00.htm](http://sacred-texts.com/pro/pop/pop00.htm). A reprint edition was published in 1992 by Holmes Pub Group Llc. ISBN: 1558181881

<sup>68</sup> Paracelsus, *The Prophecies of Paracelsus*, p. 92.

<sup>69</sup> Paracelsus, *The Prophecies of Paracelsus*, p. 91.

<sup>70</sup> Rudolf 1998: 192.

providence towards a goal, again transcends the significance of sin/karma. In the theological writings, the spirit of man is already refined and hence the soul needs no set time for perfection. “If the spirit stands in repentance only for a moment, this is enough because of its perfection”, says Paracelsus, and repentance stands in eternity.<sup>71</sup> Though diseases of the purgatorial kind (other diseases may be natural), are a punishment, diseases are sent from God in order for us to realise that all our knowledge is nothing.<sup>72</sup> Seemingly, this kind of illness strikes as a consequence of some sort of self-delusion or intellectual arrogance. There is a lesson to be learned, and once again fate becomes a learning principle offering a true understanding of life (or gnosis). According to Paracelsus, one should also know that all our diseases ought to abate in their own time, and that God provides sufficiently in maintaining life just as he provides for the birds.<sup>73</sup> Another factor modelling man’s destiny is faith, which strengthens and perfects imagination and consolidates the will. Faith also consists of three parts: A faith in God enables one to move even mountains and to provide what is wished for; a faith in the Devil and his powers also generates what is wished for - if the Devil can fulfil it. Lastly, a faith in the light of nature not only guarantees that nature supplies one’s needs, but in cooperation with imagination, also compels herbs to put forth their hidden nature, i.e. faith also reveals the curing effects of herbs.<sup>74</sup>

If anything is predestined, according to Paracelsus, it is the duration of life where only God knows ‘the end’. He advances the somewhat odd point of view that “[i]f a child is predestined to live but ten hours, its bodily planets will complete all their circuits, just as they would if it had lived for a hundred years.”<sup>75</sup> On the other hand, somewhat contradictorily, there is considerable literature from Paracelsus concerning preservation of life, and in *A Book Concerning Long Life* it is a more conventional doctor who is speaking. Prolongation of life relates to kingdoms, districts, states and valleys affording joy, fresh air and humours. In addition, one must count the

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<sup>71</sup> Pagel 1982: 80.

<sup>72</sup> Paracelsus, *Volumen Medicinae Paramirum*, I. i. 226 - 7; *Essential Readings*, p. 56.

<sup>73</sup> Paracelsus, *Volumen Medicinae Paramirum*, I. i. 226 - 7; *Essential Readings*, p. 56. For the Christian allegory of the birds, see: *De Honestis Utrisque Divitiis*, II. i. 241 - 3; *Essential Readings*, p. 159.

<sup>74</sup> Paracelsus, *Hermetic Astronomy*. HAW, Vol. II, p. 307.

<sup>75</sup> Paracelsus, *Volumen Medicinae Paramirum*, I. i. 206; *Essential Readings*, p. 53.

daily food and drink, and it is helpful to understand the beneficial influence from a healthy mind and the higher bodies, i.e. planets and stars.<sup>76</sup> In the case of plague dramatically threatening the duration of life, change of habits and diets were of no avail, instead ‘insulators’, i.e. amulets of different kinds to be worn around the neck were recommended. Especially helpful was the spirit of gold, a tincture, mixed with gems contained in sweet water. Such tinctures were from a modern point of view homeopathic, i.e. the alchemical purified gold was strongly thinned in a drinkable liquid, often oil or water. It is worth noticing that astrology was used according to the element of the Sun in which the plague erupted (i.e. by first observation). For example, if the Sun was placed in an earth sign (Taurus, Virgo, Capricorn), water lily, wild rue, rosemary or elixir of pearls would be helpful.<sup>77</sup>

In summary many factors, some contradicting, are at play when determining ‘fate’ and its constituent parts. It is foolishness, lack of prudence and spiritual insight that matters, and sin plays a lesser role. The more spiritual insight, faith and imagination, the more fate was overruled and intrinsic magical skills realised. Free will, together with an appropriate lifestyle in healthy surroundings, also decided one’s course in life. However, the major factor is the course of time in which spiritual and cognitive perfection will take place, a perfection created by the light of nature seated in the centre of the soul - and fortified by the providence of God.

#### **Paracelsus’ alchemy viewed as a ritual process**

The work of the alchemist is linked to different rituals in Chinese alchemy, and ultimately the alchemist is a conclusive part of the alchemical transformation. The ‘inner alchemy’ (neidan) is a reflection of ‘outer alchemy’ (waidan) and in transcending time and space the alchemist must take extreme care, for example by using a talisman and in setting up the laboratory and in arranging the instruments properly. The word ‘ritual’ has two different meanings as regards Chinese alchemy. The first consists of preliminary ritual rules related to transmission of the sacred texts, to protection of the compounds and to starting the alchemical fire. The second meaning relates to the invoking of the macrocosm with its supernatural, but

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<sup>76</sup> Paracelsus, *A Book Concerning Long Life*. HAW, Vol. II, especially pp. 113 - 116.

<sup>77</sup> Pagel 1982: 180.

dangerous impact on the alchemist and his equipment. Especially perilous was the acceleration of time during the alchemical process, i.e. during ‘fire-times’. It was believed that the alchemist could achieve in a few hours what nature took hundreds or maybe thousands of years to accomplish.<sup>78</sup>

From a more general point of view, there is no question that Mircea Eliade has demonstrated the religious nature of Eastern alchemy.<sup>79</sup> Additionally, another revealing and genuine study must be mentioned concerning a possible connection between the so-called “Pronoia Hymn” in the Gnostic *Apocryphon of John* (NHC II, 1) and the alchemical treasure *Dialogos philosophôn kai Kleophatras* (1 - 3 century A.D).<sup>80</sup> The following extract is of particular importance:

- a) The technical language in the alchemical source text is an allegorical (religious) language.
- b) The death (nigredo, blackness) and resurrection (albedo, brightness) of metals (or other substances) in the alchemical process is equivalent to baptism.
- c) The divine spirit descends from heaven, which is also the top of the apparatus.
- d) In both texts, a female figure Pronoia (Psychê in the alchemical treatise) ‘calls’ when entering Hades and ‘raises’ (humans or metals) and the task accomplished is called *oikonomia*.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> This information is found at Fabricio Pregadio’s website, *The Golden Elixir*, at: [venus.unive.it/dsao//pregadio/index.html](http://venus.unive.it/dsao//pregadio/index.html). Look for the section: Aspetti rituali dell’alchimia cinese (with its English summary).

<sup>79</sup> Eliade: 1978. Eliade’s comparative studies address religion as a ‘mode of being’. In his highly hermeneutical approach Eliade sees in alchemy hierophanies (as elsewhere in religion) such as *Terra Mater*, stones (rocks), the Sun and Waters. Minerals become ‘sacred’ because they grow in the belly of *Terra Mater* like embryos. Another, actual significant notion in alchemy is that metalworkers can intervene and speed up the growth of metals. Ultimately, as a consequence, alchemy ‘speeds up time’.

<sup>80</sup> Charron 2005: 438 - 456.

<sup>81</sup> Meaning ‘the management of a household’ (or of a family, thrift or husbandry). This is, of course, somewhat cryptic.



*The alchemical furnace as macrocosm*

Paracelsus' furnace is a model of the firmament, and it is by modelling and by imitation that it becomes efficient. The proportions must be correct to simulate the birth process of the universe as God created it. Then, and not until then, the alchemical fire in the laboratory becomes the Sun, the giver of life and endowed with a power that equals God's word (logos). There is something very ritualistic in the whole set up - and it resembles the preliminary ritual rules found in Chinese alchemy. Paracelsus writes concerning some of its practical details and religious implications:

“For in the same way as God created the heaven and the earth, the furnace with its fire must be constructed and regulated, that is to say, in the following manner: First, let a furnace be built at a height of six palms, with the fingers and thumb extended, but in breadth only one palm; [...].<sup>82</sup> Let holes be left open underneath, four fingers in breadth, and to each hole let its own furnace be applied with a copper cauldron, which contains water. [...]. This is compared to the firmament. And there is another firmament in this place, namely, the matter contained in the glass. After these things follows the form of the world. The furnace then is to be placed as the sun in the great world, which affords light, life, and heat to the whole furnace itself, and to all the instruments and other thing which it encloses.”<sup>83</sup>

“[...] Nature herself fulfils all the operations in the matter spoken of, and not the operator, only in a philosophical vessel, and with a similar fire, but not common fire. [...]. The reason why they could not compass their intention is that Nature refuses to be in this way dragged asunder and separated by man's disjunctions, as by earthly glasses and instruments. She alone knows her own operations [...] of which she brings about without the aid of any operator or manual artifice, provided only the matter be contained in the secret fire and in its proper occult vessel.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Here follows a description of the proportion of the furnace.

<sup>83</sup> Paracelsus, *Concerning the Spirits of the Planets*. HAW, Vol. I, p. 85.

<sup>84</sup> Paracelsus, *The Aurora of the Philosophers*. HAW, Vol. I, p. 67.

“Who does not see - I ask you, my brethren - that the form of the whole created universe has the similitude of a furnace, or to speak more respectfully, the form of that which contains the matrix of a womb [...]. These things are transparently clear, I will not say to philosophers, but even to boys, wherefore we will not insist upon them further.”<sup>85</sup>

The above three quotations clearly demonstrate how the furnace became identical with the macrocosm and the vessel, with the Earth performing as a womb.<sup>86</sup> Ordinary fire and vessel cannot accomplish anything, only an ‘occult’ or ‘philosophical’ fire and vessel can initiate the workings of nature. When the furnace imitated the heavenly firmament precisely, the vessel imitated the Earth (as a womb)<sup>87</sup> and the fire the Sun, the alchemical processes could start. At that moment fire was no longer ordinary ‘heat’ but a donor of life and light. Paracelsus makes it very clear that God himself burns in the Sun and that the vessel becomes a living and corporeal spirit. “But the sun receives light from no other source than God Himself, Who rules it, so that in the sun God Himself is burning and shining. Just so is it with this Art. The fire in the furnace may be compared with the sun.”<sup>88</sup> Therefore, an important clue in understanding Paracelsus’ alchemy lies in the following identifications:

I. Alchemical fire under the furnace = Sun = God’s presence.

II: The whole apparatus in form and proportion = macrocosm = Earth firmament = womb (= a living spirit able to be fertilised).

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<sup>85</sup> *De Transmutationibus Metallorum*. HAW, Vol. I, Appendix V., p. 284. This text appeared in the year of 1581 AD in Frankfurt and “it attempted to collect and digest into a single methodical treasure the whole substance of alchemy, as taught and practised by Paracelsus”. HAW, Vol. I, Appendix V., p. 283.

<sup>86</sup> In *The Aurora of the Philosophers* Paracelsus also stresses the right proportion of the vessel (as a womb) in order to “be governed by the heavenly bodies.” HAW, Vol. I, p. 68. See also Pagel 1982: 238 - 240.

<sup>87</sup> It is, however, not that easy to find or describe the exact form of the vessel. Paracelsus, *The Aurora of the Philosophers*. HAW, Vol. I, p. 69.

<sup>88</sup> Paracelsus, *Concerning the Spirits of the Planets*. HAW, Vol. I, p. 74.

It is important to understand Paracelsus' view of the creation of the world. In the beginning there was only the 'body of Iliaster', a cosmic vessel, where the contents were in a potential and not yet differentiated form. God is the greatest alchemist, and his second act in creation was to separate the potentials in the body of Iliaster. Three ingredients and principles, Mercury (mediator), Sulphur (form) and Salt (substance), are dormant in this body:

“This body He made up of three ingredients, Mercury, Sulphur, and Salt so that these three should constitute one body. [...]. In them lie the hidden mineral, day, night, heat, cold, the stone, the fruit, and everything else, even while not yet formed. [...]. So the body of Iliaster was a mere trunk, but in it lay hidden all herbs, waters, gems, minerals, stones and chaos itself [...].”<sup>89</sup>

God's third act was to separate the four elements which were co-producers of the world: for example fire produced all that was warm and dry. Then, God created heaven and Earth, the visible firmament and the water. God was an alchemist, who separated (and hence created) the world in a chemical fashion from a big vessel (or trunk).<sup>90</sup>

*Comment:* A major conclusion in the research project *Art & Alchemy* is the trustworthiness of many, but not all, alchemical images. However, sometimes the artists, interested in or employed to paint or engrave alchemical symbols or allegories, misunderstood their subject.<sup>91</sup> It is reasonable to assume that alchemical iconography delineates USP and ritual activity involved in the art of transmutation. *Alchemy and Mysticism* is a standard work of alchemical iconography, which must be categorised as depicting images “made within a proper alchemical context or culture.”<sup>92</sup> A series of images are labelled ‘Genesis in the retort’,<sup>93</sup> which in all likelihood is not a coincidence. In the alchemical glass vessel one sees God's creation.

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<sup>89</sup> Paracelsus, *Concerning the Generations of the Elements*. HAW, Vol. I, p. 204.

<sup>90</sup> Paracelsus, *Concerning the Nature of Things*. HAW, Vol. I, p. 160.

<sup>91</sup> Bäcklund & Wamberg 2006: 14.

<sup>92</sup> Bäcklund & Wamberg 2006: 13.

<sup>93</sup> Roob 2001: 124 - 153.

Alchemy thus emulates or becomes identical with creation (or the events in the body of Iliaster). Noteworthy is emblem number 2, where the alchemist prays to God (who himself is an alchemist wearing a hat in the form of the symbol for sulphur while holding a vessel in his left hand) and asks him for his presence in the work. Significant are engravings depicting the cosmos as a diagram shaped like an alchemical oven.<sup>94</sup> Peter Forshaw's publication on 'Alchemy in the Amphitheatre', an engraving reproduced in *Alchemy and Mysticism*,<sup>95</sup> is highly informative, and the engraving is easy to find on the web (key: amphitheatrum). The left side of the image with the kneeling alchemist is the realm of God while the right side (with no alchemist) is the realm of nature. Finally, the author suggests that the table in the centre "signifies Man as he relates to these two realms via Magic."<sup>96</sup> This suggestion is in accordance with the five matrices, i.e. in one aspect Western esotericism functions as an advanced kind of magic, which does not exclude, however, that the 'magician' can pray to God in a Christian manner.

#### *Alchemy as a ritual field*

On their journey to the highest transmutations, metals must 'die' in order to be reborn. Though Paracelsus did not describe this process as baptism (see above on the *Dialogue between Cleopatra and the Philosophers*) but as 'putrefaction' and 'generation', he emphasised that putrefaction was a process of 'death', which was the removal of the metal's bodily structure.<sup>97</sup> This process can be depicted in alchemical image art as the 'Torment of metals'.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, 'generation' can be depicted as a process of resurrection understood in a Christian framework.<sup>99</sup> A highly central question is whether the construction of the furnace with its vessel and fire can be viewed as a ritual? One can address this question by looking at Rappaport's definition and 'entailments' in the ritual form. I will argue that the 'objects' of the ritual, metals and herbs, are transformed as in 'rites of passage'.

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<sup>94</sup> See for example Roob 2001: 159.

<sup>95</sup> Roob 2001: 331.

<sup>96</sup> Forshaw 2006: 195 - 212.

<sup>97</sup> Paracelsus, *Concerning the Nature of Things*. HAW, Vol. I, p. 139.

<sup>98</sup> Roob 2001: 205 - 221.

<sup>99</sup> Roob 2001: 216 - 129.

To reiterate, Rappaport establishes a ritual as ‘the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performer’. According to this definition it is unclear if formal acts are sufficient or if a ritual also needs utterances. Probably, as nonverbal religious rituals do exist, the definition is complete because the structure is not totally encoded by Paracelsus (the performer) as far as he stands in the tradition of alchemy.<sup>100</sup> Looking at the logical entailments of ritual form, the ritual entails: (a) the establishment of convention, (b) the sealing of social contracts, (c) Logoi, (d) encoding with morality, (e) construction of time and eternity, (f) a representation of a paradigm of creation, (g) the generation of the sacred and sanctification of conventional order, (h) the generation of theories of the occult,<sup>101</sup> (i) the evocation of numinous experience, (j) the awareness of the divine, (k) the grasp of the holy, (l) the construction of orders of meaning transcending the semantic.<sup>102</sup> Now, the problem is to understand how these entailments are related to a ritual. Most likely Rappaport believed these to be related to a ritual *per se*, i.e. they are “features often associated” with rituals.<sup>103</sup> Scrutinising the entailments, it becomes obvious that some entailments do not fit to the ‘alchemical ritual’ while other entailments are at play, namely c, e, f, i and j:

c) Logos for Rappaport is “an ordering principle subordinating and binding all that exists into a coherent and enduring whole.” Further, it refers to the word ‘truth’.<sup>104</sup> *Logoi* (plural) refers to more than one cosmic order represented as wholes. It is unclear whether Rappaport requires one ritual to entail one or several cosmic orders at the same time or not. According to Olsson a ritual can respond to ‘different pictures of reality’ and hence it can entail different ‘truths’ and *logoi* at the same time. It should be obvious that the alchemical process in the furnace viewed as a ritual by its identification of the alchemical fire, vessel and furnace with Sun/God, Earth’s firmament

<sup>100</sup> See for example Bianchi 1994: 17 - 50.

<sup>101</sup> This category is rudimentarily developed by Rappaport. The ‘occult’ is an element of religion (p. 1 and 3) with a high degree of “efficacy”. Rappaport 1999: 50.

<sup>102</sup> Rappaport 1999: 27.

<sup>103</sup> Rappaport 1999: 26.

<sup>104</sup> Rappaport 1999: 348.

(womb) and heaven's firmament, binds everything into an enduring wholeness.

e) There is a strong construction of time and eternity in Paracelsus' alchemy elaborated in detail by Pagel.<sup>105</sup> Time for Paracelsus is qualitative as contrasted to a numeric perception. The attainment of prima materia is an imitation of the 'body of Iliaster' - as a condition 'out of time' or a priori to time (and as such a kind of eternity).<sup>106</sup>

f) Paracelsus' chemical philosophy offers, as we have seen, a myth on how the world and humans are created and part of that myth (Iliaster) is actually 'replayed' in the attempt to re-create prima materia.

i) The alchemical process offers a numinous experience as it is a 'proof' of the presence of God (see above for the identification of light, Sun and God). Further, the light of nature (including signatures) is an USP to Paracelsus constantly activated and present in alchemical experiments. As such, it is the alchemical process that transforms the light of nature into the real, the natural and the numinous.

j) The 'resemblance' or 'identification' of fire, light, Sun and God in the 'alchemical ritual' attests a clear awareness of the divine and its presence in alchemical processes.

These five points constitute, I think, alchemy as a ritual. Most significant is point f, and it is my experience that most scholars for that reason alone will recognise the alchemical procedure to be a ritual. A further argument is found in Victor Turner's outlining of Gennep's idea of rites of passage. For Turner a ritual is a 'process' more than a 'structure' creating a 'before' and 'after' difference between the 'objects' (single humans, society) involved. In Turner's version the in-between, the limen, is also a creative state known as liminality, where not only the 'objects', but also what surrounding them, i.e.

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<sup>105</sup> Pagel 1982: 72 - 82.

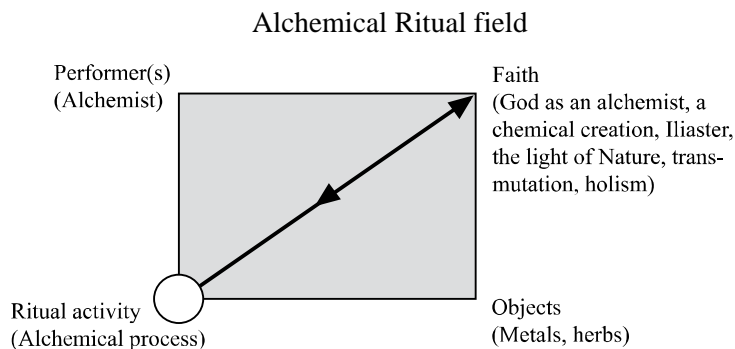
<sup>106</sup> "In this theological view, time is approximated to, if not identified with, eternity, for the latter is, according to classical definition, an 'eternal Now'." Pagel 1982: 80.

culture, is reduced to its fundamental parts, its ‘alphabet’. From the state of liminality, the ‘objects’ and the related ‘culture’ can now be re-created into new patterns, and liminality is thus not only a phase, but rather a room or a space of possibilities. It is evident that such a concept works best, or is most understandable, in small societies (which does not exclude its relevance in bigger societies).<sup>107</sup>

Now, the reader must imagine herbs and metals to be the ‘objects’ in the alchemical process viewed as a ritual. Next, that herbs and metals in this process are subjected to a transformation from the natural condition via nigredo to albedo (or rubedo). What is of concern here is the progress from natural physical object (the ‘before’) via nigredo (liminality) to albedo/rubedo (the ‘after’). It is not uncommon in religions to initiate ‘things’, for example statues, buildings or amulets, in order to transform them from ‘ordinary’ (profane) things into more sacred objects. More important, however, is the notion that herbs or metals are living entities with a ‘body’ and a ‘spirit’, which live and grow, and even planets are grown out of heaven according to Paracelsus. In such an animated worldview, it becomes understandable that metals and herbs can be held as ‘objects’ in a ritual process (as if they were human). Nigredo, the ontological state of Iliaster or prima materia, is in a rather literary sense a ‘space’ or ‘room’ for fundamental elements (a primordial alphabet) from which an innovative re-creation (towards albedo/rubedo) can take place. As God created nature from a vessel of potentials, so the alchemist can re-create metals and herbs into new combinations. This process in a broader sense also includes the ambitious task of the perfection of ‘society’ (nature) - due to the sympathetic links in nature. The ritual process has a spillover effect on nature, as rites of passage can have on even large-scale societies. Below is the diagram of the ritual field developed in chapter 2 depicted once again, but now with more proper expressions added in parentheses when dealing with alchemy as an ritual field.

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<sup>107</sup> For this brief summary, see Grimes 2000: 263 - 267.



A relevant question concerns whether or not Paracelsus reckoned the alchemist (the performer) to be involved in the ritual performance, as in Chinese alchemy. Unfortunately, it is substantially easier to simplify what can be found in a text than to explain what is not in the text. Again, examining Paracelsus' alchemical writings, there is no mention of the alchemist being a compulsory part of the alchemical ritual, nor is there any notion of a psychological (or spiritual) transmutation related to the alchemical transmutation.<sup>108</sup> Neither is there any warning issued against ontological or psychological dangers in performing this art, rather than perhaps a warning against sending money up the alchemical chimney. Actually, the elevated anthropological status of man negates the compulsory bond found in Chinese alchemy. Humans are, according to Paracelsus, created as a first hand 'chemical' product, a quintessence, the microcosm and the son of the whole world. Man is, in contrast to physical matter in the natural world, already 'transmuted' by God.

<sup>108</sup> There is, however, a transmutation of the *eternal* body before it can enter heaven. "For this body too will have to cast off all dross of earthy life, and it will have to go through an even more difficult test by fire [...]." Paracelsus, *Liber de podagricis et suis speciebus et morbis annexis* (II. i. 301 - 11); *Selected Writings*, p. 214. The physical body is mortal and 'will become a feast for worms'. The eternal body having been in contact with the physical body during life must be 'clarified' or 'transfigured' in order to enter heaven; Rudolf 1998: 192 - 193.



*Comment:* The absence of psychic transmutations parallel to metallic transmutations is somewhat delicate, as Faivre's typological definition of esotericism is somewhat questioned hereby. The fourth criteria, 'experience of transmutation' is for Faivre a 'metamorphosis', a transformation which deals with nigredo as a 'decapitation of the old man', albedo as a rebirth and rubedo as a spiritual crowning of perfection.<sup>109</sup> Faivre also includes Hermetism as a current in Western esotericism and thinks of alchemy as an original 'hermetic science', views that explain his confidence in spiritual transmutations as a criterion.<sup>110</sup> Contrary to human deification in *Corpus Hermeticum*, man never becomes God's equal nor is he able to enlighten himself. "And as regards man, he is nothing by himself, and what he fancies himself to be has no worth".<sup>111</sup> In the (theological) writings of Paracelsus, it is easy to miss the presence of a strong Christian piety apparently reducing the significance of hermetic components. Recent research in alchemy clarifies a distinction between 19<sup>th</sup> century occultist belief in a self-transformative spiritual alchemy and earlier religious alchemy. Pre-18<sup>th</sup> century alchemy, to which Paracelsus belonged, used extensive linguistic parallels between the chemical and religious aspects, but seldom between alchemy and self-illumination and psychic transformation.<sup>112</sup> As such, Faivre's idea of psychological transmutations is relatively modern.

Today the belief in spiritual transmutation is widespread, probably much reinforced by Jung's interpretation and the 'inner alchemy' found in Chinese sources, but it does not constitute a ritual field as outlined by Olsson. Two components are obviously lacking: the alchemical furnace (the ritual) and the built-in experience related to the ritual alchemical field. In rare cases, however, a modern alchemical ritual field actually exists,<sup>113</sup> but nowadays the popular concept of 'transmutation' is disintegrated from its original source. Though many adherents possess conceptual insight into

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<sup>109</sup> Faivre 1994: 13.

<sup>110</sup> Faivre 1998b: 110.

<sup>111</sup> Paracelsus, *Astronomia Magna* (I. xii. 231- 232); *Selected Writings*, p. 193.

<sup>112</sup> Principe 2005: 14

<sup>113</sup> See for example *Alchemy Journal*, Vol. 3 No. 2. It is available on web: [alchemylab.com/AJ3-2.htm](http://alchemylab.com/AJ3-2.htm). Here an American team claims to have transmuted the medical herb 'yerba santa' and the transmutation is related to spiritual transformation. In such rare cases, the reader ought to know that he or she is dealing with a modern alchemical ritual field.

transmutation, it is not derived from practising alchemy. The belief in spiritual transmutation has been ‘overtaken’ by other rituals in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, primarily but not exclusively, the clairvoyant ritual field.

### **Astrology and alchemy**

Paracelsus’ alchemical philosophy is centred on astrology with an impact so strong that it is likely there would be no alchemy without astrology. To Paracelsus nearly all significant things came from the stars. “The light of Nature in man comes from the stars [...]. In the stars lie all faculties, all arts, all crafts, all wisdom, all reason [...]. But what is in the light of Nature is subject to the influence of the stars. The stars are our school in which all these things must be learned.”<sup>114</sup> In medicine, prognostications based on critical days and astrology followed when the diagnosis was unclear, or when there was no obvious cure at hand.<sup>115</sup> Paracelsus criticised the school of Galen for using too little astrology, and he expanded the influence of astrology primarily as a tool for designing proper medical remedies. A planet does not create sickness in its related organ (see above), rather the cause lies in the ‘inner planets’ (synonymous with the inner major organs). A remedy can be found in herbs ‘signified’ - and not governed - by the celestial planet (the signifier). “Then it must be known what is the star of this disease, and what is the star in medicine (i.e. the herb and its related star) that operates against this disease”.<sup>116</sup> First, however, the herb must be purified by an alchemical process, i.e. transformed into its volatile nature by getting rid of its earthly or dense qualities, so that the heavenly planet can work on it.<sup>117</sup> When volatilised, the ‘vapour’ or ‘air’ from the herb was casually-influenced by the proper planet. When the alchemical furnace cooled, the vapour (spirit) became condensed and reunited with the ‘dead corpus’ of the herb, i.e. its cleaned earthly side, though often in a fluid state. The medicine was thus properly prepared.

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<sup>114</sup> Paracelsus, *Astronomia Magna* (I. xii. 22 - 23); *Essential Readings*, pp. 113 - 114.

<sup>115</sup> Demaitre 2003: 765 - 788.

<sup>116</sup> Paracelsus, *Alchemy, The Third Column of Medicine (Liber Paragranum)*. HAW, Vol. II, p. 151 (my parentheses).

<sup>117</sup> “Heaven does not rule it except these earthly elements be separated from it. If you have effected this separation, then Medicine is in the power of the stars, and is ruled and protected by them.” Paracelsus, *Alchemy, The Third Column of Medicine*. HAW, Vol. II, p. 150.

By attaining ‘conjunction’ during the alchemical process between the heavenly planet and the herb (labelled the ‘grown’ planet), the related disease may be cured.<sup>118</sup> This model makes use of an analogical as well as a casual view of astrology. The heavenly bodies do not affect physical matter, only the released ‘astral-body’ of all individual things. It is only the ‘spirits’ of the herbs that are casually affected by the stars. Between the heavenly bodies and nature, merely analogies and signatures may exist. Maybe, all medical remedies had to be transformed into their volatile states and placed in ‘conjunction’ with the planets at the right astrological moment due to the qualitative nature of time, i.e. when the signifier was strong, for example on its day or in its hour.<sup>119</sup> In this manner, Paracelsus primarily allowed the space for the alchemical experiment to take place by putting alchemy in charge, not the planets. If the planets had dominated the earthly herbs directly, they could be utilised immediately as medicine - without any alchemical purification. The planets that bring the disease can also cure it. “The higher stars weaken and cause death, but they also heal.”<sup>120</sup> Hereby, Paracelsus attempted to unite a casual (or deterministic) interpretation with an analogical understanding of astrology. The first point of view was very widespread in Hellenistic astrology, as for example in *Hermetica*, where the planets exercised their sway over the Earth. Plotinus, however, assumed the opposite viewpoint, denying the planets to be causes,<sup>121</sup> but instead he granted them an analogical role. The planets only ‘signify’ (*sêmainô*),<sup>122</sup> says Plotinus, “by the systematic use of analogy (*analogos*) - for instance, if one said that when the bird flies high it signifies some high heroic deeds.”<sup>123</sup> If Pagel is right in assuming that ‘Gnosticism’ and Neoplatonism equally inspired Paracelsus, then Paracelsus also overrode a conflict between a casual and an analogical mode of astrology. The light of nature emanating

<sup>118</sup> Paracelsus, *Das Buch Paragranum* (I. viii. 182 - 184); *Essential Readings*, p. 75.

<sup>119</sup> This becomes clear if one includes *Archidoxis Magica* attributed to Paracelsus, but the work was maybe written by Gerhard Dorn, or another advocate of Paracelsus, around 1570 AD. For an understanding of the ‘astrological timing’ described in *Archidoxis Magica*, see Larsen et al. 2000: 96 - 98.

<sup>120</sup> Paracelsus, *Alchemy, The Third Column of Medicine*. HAW, Vol. II, especially p. 149.

<sup>121</sup> Plotinus, *On Whether the Stars are Causes* (Ennead II. 3).

<sup>122</sup> I.e. ‘designate’ or ‘semeiotic action’. Berg: 1978.

<sup>123</sup> Plotinus, III 1.6 (my parentheses).

from the stars was not a casual light acting on physical nature, but a light illuminating man's mind so all elements (or things) in physical nature were made recognisable by indications and signs. Though Paracelsus, in a sophisticated way, took advantage of the astrological conflict between an analogical and a casual interpretation in order to make space for the necessity of 'alchemical perfection', it still does not reduce the influence of astrology. Astrology as a huge ritual field in Western esotericism also comprised much of Paracelsus' alchemy.

Recently, two professional publications mark two different opinions on the partnership between alchemy and astrology, one edited by William R. Newman and Anthony Grafton, the other written by Kocku von Stuckrad. Newman and Grafton find astrology and alchemy rather alien in nature because the "fundamental practices of the two fields were vastly different."<sup>124</sup> Stuckrad, on the other hand, declares astrology as standing in the centre of alchemy since Renaissance times.<sup>125</sup> Who is correct? Both definitively have a point, but Stuckrad, maybe, overlooks the free choice of the alchemist to decode alchemical religious language into plain chemical language. Hence, the alchemist had the option of ignoring astrology. Newman and Grafton probably fail to notice that alchemy and astrology both affirm and confirm the notion of holism. According to *Tabula Smaragdina*, a short alchemical charter, a link between heaven and earth has always been present in western alchemy.<sup>126</sup> Viewed as rituals, both alchemy and astrology are 'contracted' expressions (Olsson) of the same belief (in holism). No wonder then, that some alchemists considered alchemy and astrology to be a joint venture. On the other hand, however, astrology and alchemy as rituals also promote *per se* partly different USP. The light of nature (Paracelsus) together with its ability to perfect nature (with the help of the alchemist) was definitively an USP not found in earlier classical astrology, and in that sense Newman and Grafton also make their point.

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<sup>124</sup> Newman & Grafton 2001: 15.

<sup>125</sup> von Stuckrad 2000: 5.

<sup>126</sup> See chapter 8, below.

### Summary and some comments

The five matrices are met in Paracelsus' 'chemical philosophy', although one could perhaps argue that matrix number three rests on massive evidence. Matrix number four, religious principles conceived as scientific principles, has probably never been in such focus as they now are within alchemy. Though written in religious terminology, alchemical texts may be decoded and understood in terms of pure chemistry, according to recent research. This is somewhat challenging for theorists on religion, religious texts and ritual, and it seems that Olsson's notions on religious text as 'conglomerates' of different experiences, principles and thoughts, on additive applications and on rituals able to reflect different partial pictures of reality, are very striking. First, it seems very likely that alchemists could neglect different 'conglomerates' within the alchemical manuscript, for example those parts concerning transformation of different metals into gold. There is not much proof of Paracelsus being a gold-maker, rather he sought to purify or transform metals, plants and herbs into an essence of great medical potential. Next, there are different additive applications possible in alchemy. If one assumes that the decoded text was the starting point, then the alchemist could add (or not) a certain amount of cosmological superstructures to his worldview according to his needs and tastes. As Debus has pointed out, Paracelsians did not have to believe in Paracelsus' religious implications in order to make alchemical experiments. Thirdly, if one accepts that the alchemical process is a ritual, it can then reflect and serve as a focus of different religious concepts found amongst alchemists with their individualistic view of life. It is important for future research to uncover the *dialectical* relationship between the decoded level (i.e. the chemical level) and the religious dimensions in alchemy. In Paracelsus' alchemical writings, there is a clear dialectical relationship between the alchemical process (viewed as a ritual) and 'beliefs' involved, for example in those depicted above in the diagram of the alchemical ritual field. Beliefs in 'God as an alchemist', 'Iliaster' and 'a chemical creation' were derived from the alchemical process (ritual). On the other hand, the prevalent belief in holism also affected the alchemical ritual. The furnace had to resemble the heavenly firmament, the vessel the earthly firmament (a big womb) and the alchemical

fire the Sun (equal to God's presence). Then, and not until then, it seemed that great empowerment ensued.

As we have seen, Paracelsus' 'philosophical alchemy' belongs to Western esoterism and it seems very likely too that Paracelsian alchemy also met the criteria of the five matrices. It is, perhaps, most correct to label this branch of alchemy 'religious-technical alchemy' due to its very ritualistic nature, without denying the existence of both a 'philosophical alchemy' and a pure 'chemical alchemy'. Philosophical alchemy thus make use of, and interprets itself into, philosophical cosmological principles, for example those found in Aristotelian philosophy, without observing any ritual dimensions in alchemy. In Paracelsus' 'religious alchemy', the alchemical ritual's ability to reflect different beliefs, for example in holism, Iliaster and transmutations, explains why different USP from alchemy and astrology are able to join each other. Seen in that light, Faivre is right in pronouncing alchemy to be one of the cornerstones of esotericism. Alchemy became a powerful and fascinating ritual because of its ability to bring together and communicate very different 'partial pictures of reality': the reality of epistemological signals in nature, of transmutations, of ordinary chemical principles, of holism, of astrology, of a chemical creation and in the reality of mastering nature. Simply stated, and in an additive way, alchemy brought together principles from science, philosophy and religious beliefs.

It is impossible to understand Paracelsus (or Western esotericism) as any kind of '-ism', or coherent philosophy, for example as Neoplatonism, Aristotelianism or Hermetism. There are many contradictions found in the writings of Paracelsus because his religious texts - as other religious texts - consist of different experiences (Olsson) acting as conglomerates, for example those concerning destiny. Here, factors such as providence, imagination, free will, faith, healthy conditions, prudence, God's lessons (in the case of some sort of illness), fate (from the stars or manipulation of the stars), stupidity and spiritual insight have all played a role, as we have seen, in the lifecycle of man. All these factors are 'experiences', for example the experience that free will has an influence on man's lifecycle, or the experience that wise behaviour dominates the outcome of one's life. It is also an experience that occurrences can still be so radical that no-one can find a rational explanation for them, and for this reason, perhaps, many believe in a

fate controlled by the gods, the stars, or otherwise. Moreover, Paracelsus' experience of imagination playing a role in human life could have been adopted from medicine.<sup>127</sup> It has been and still is well-known in the history of medicine that imagination has an effect on health or sickness, i.e. the placebo-effect.

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<sup>127</sup> For Paracelsus' dependency of the concept of imagination in medicine, see for example Schott 2004: 99 - 108.

## CHAPTER 6

### **Theosophy, Anthroposophy and the clairvoyant ritual field**

As with New Age there is a controversy among scholars on how to evaluate and judge The Theosophical Movement. Some authors conceive it as a superficial form of esotericism while others recognise it as a genuine esoteric current. Daniël van Egmond is an example of the latter. For him, The Theosophical Society together with Golden Dawn and Mystica Mystica Aeterna (established by Steiner) formed the most influential western esoteric schools in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. He believes that the Theosophical Society founded in 1875 consciously pursued from the beginning a programme with five aims: 1) To awaken Anglo-American culture, 2) to prevent conversion of Hindus and Buddhist to Christianity, 3) to emancipate Indian people from the colonial system, 4) to fight against materialism and scientism and 5) to help students follow an authentic esoteric path of initiation.<sup>1</sup>

By Theosophy, Faivre understands older German versions as exemplified by Baader or Boehme. Thus the term 'Theosophy' is not well defined. Though Blavatsky's version of Theosophy apparently did not catch the interest of Faivre, he recognises her teachings as belonging to a specific branch, labelled "The 'Historical' Path".<sup>2</sup> This thesis will show that the early Theosophical Movement is a part of esotericism because of the presence of the five matrices. A few introductory comments and observations follow.

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831 - 1891 AD) managed in an effective way to accommodate strong tendencies in contemporary society. She integrated a strong belief in evolutionism and science into her variant of esoterism. Her macrohistory of the world can be categorised as a kind of 'Hegelianism'. Macrohistory is history perceived as a whole. It is a holistic approach to history viewed from a religious point of view and includes but exceeds that

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<sup>1</sup> van Egmond 1998: 311 - 322.

<sup>2</sup> In esotericism in the 20<sup>th</sup> century there were three paths, according to Faivre, a 'purist', 'historical' and a 'humanist' path. The historical path to which Theosophy belongs believes that tradition is 'one'. Faivre 1994: 39.



of metahistory (philosophy of history). In Western esoterism macrohistory is also open to, according to Trompf, humanity's purpose in the cosmos.<sup>3</sup> Blavatsky adds to human history (with a belief in lost civilisations such as Atlantis) a perception of the universe much larger than hitherto imagined in Western esoterism. She responded to modern cosmology, the theory of atoms, Darwinism, anthropology and history by integrating a macro-drama which began and finished in the divine. All this was done in an exaggerated fashion, with an effect, however, still traceable in modern esoterism. When she turned to oriental religions she sought lofty cosmologies that apparently confirmed her grand-scale vision of a divine return based on evolution. Blavatsky made use of amazingly large arithmetical numbers, for example a time span of 311,040,000,000,000 years called the Great Night. Such a number was probably used to make space for an evolution taking place simultaneously on a spiritual, biological, chemical, geological and astronomical level. Her perception of eastern religions was modelled by Western esoterism and her own project of revitalising society by spiritualising its positivistic programs. Stated briefly, she introduced an 'esoteric positivism'.

In the middle and second part of the nineteenth century many movements emerged, all believing in evolution, including Comte, Darwin, Spencer, Taylor and Huxley. The idea of evolution had actually originated approximately one hundred years earlier.<sup>4</sup> Even so, Blavatsky can be seen as an ambassador of evolution and thus a believer in human progress quite typical for her time. She can also be compared with Agrippa. Both had an immense amount of knowledge and both made use of their erudition eclectically to create a new synthesis with its own independent ideas. Especially noteworthy is Blavatsky's reference to Comte, Darwin, and Spencer who all launched different opinions on evolution. She relied on such names - and she challenged their views as well - relative to minor details, e.g. to Comte's 'pessimistic view' that it would be impossible to know the chemical composition of the Sun.<sup>5</sup> She utilised Laplace's theory of planetary

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<sup>3</sup> Trompf: 2005: 701 - 715.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example McCalla: 1998: 29 - 40.

<sup>5</sup> Blavatsky 1888: Vol. I, 528. IMPORTANT NOTE: *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. I + II (1988) is downloaded as *one* file, as an ASCII-file (i.e. ascid II -file) in zip-format. This means that

evolution in the solar system (see below), and the theories of Lamarck (see below) - just to mention a few more. Blavatsky thereby created a consolidating framework unifying the total breadth of these theories. From this platform, she (and her followers) could now effortlessly integrate even oriental ideas *into* an evolution, which took place simultaneously on a chemical, geological, biological, astronomical, philosophical and spiritual level.

Some notes on some of the names mentioned above are appropriate. *Auguste Comte* (1798 - 1857 AD) is regarded as the founder of 'positivism' and one of the first to reckon sociology as a science. Both human recognition (epistemology) and society pass through three phases of development. First, at the theological stage natural occurrences are explained as interactions of gods or divine beings, and society is characterised by militarism, feudalism (or royal power) and a deep belief in authority. Second, at the next stage, the metaphysical, natural occurrences are understood as formed by abstract ideas and forces, and society is characterised by egoism, unrest, democracy (as opposed to feudalism) and judicial power (as opposed to militarism). Third, at the last and future stage, the stage of positivism, recognition is derived from empirical observation and society characterised by organisation, rationality and technological production. According to Trompf, Comtist Positivists issued a trust in "the overall progress of consciousness".<sup>6</sup> *Pierre S. Laplace* (1749 - 1827 AD) created the theory (together with Kant) that planets in our solar system evolved from a globular mass of gas. This rotating mass cooled into a disc, which gradually stratified into belts and finally these belts condensed as planets. Laplace believed that the further the distance from the Sun, the older the planet. To Blavatsky this proved that the planets came from the same source, that each of the planets then represented a certain step in evolution and were interconnected as 'in a chain'. Already in 1803, *Jean-Baptist Lamarck* (1744 - 1829 AD) proposed that *nature* in favourable times, places and climates, multiplied her first germs given way

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the pages referred to concerning *The Secret Doctrine* are those in the ASCII-file found at: [www.theosociety.org/pasadena/tup-onl.htm](http://www.theosociety.org/pasadena/tup-onl.htm). However, Microsoft Word can open this unpacked text making it much more readable. The pages referred to are still seen in the text. All other references to Blavatsky are in the ON-LINE editions.

<sup>6</sup> Trompf 1998: 273. This trust in a progress of the consciousness is one of the main USP in Blavatsky's Theosophy.

to development in organisation and complexity. This theory was to Blavatsky a proof of the evolution of animals and plants.<sup>7</sup> Simply stated, it is understandable that Blavatsky created a religious system with so much trust in science and spiritual and material evolution.

### **Pronoia rather than karma or sin**

According to Blavatsky the seven planets are also subject to death and rebirth - as is the human soul. In Blavatsky's macrohistory there are seven such planetary 'rounds', i.e. seven death and rebirth processes for each of the planets, which happens more or less simultaneously. 'Seven' seems to be a universal number for Blavatsky. Man is also divided into seven parts or principles in Theosophy. The names differ a little, but the seven parts are something like: physical body, etheric double, prana (life principle), kama rupa (astral body), lower mind, higher mind (manus), buddhi (world soul) and Atman (highest spiritual principle).<sup>8</sup> The last two constitute the Monad. Now, only sub-parts of the present 'round' cover the history of humanity. At the present state in evolution, in order to experience different kinds of 'existence' (physical, emotional, mental etc.), the soul must also reincarnate in different 'root races'. Today most people belong to the fifth root race<sup>9</sup>. The first of the sub-races is the Aryan race, while the second is the Arabian race and the third is the Persian race. Incarnation in different sub-races gives different experiences necessary on the path of evolution and perfection. Countries and races are bound together in 'chains', like the planets are bound together in 'chains' when they 'live' through one 'round'. Everything is actually bound together in chains. Reincarnation through such 'chains' naturally leads to a belief in providence:

“The whole order of nature evinces a progressive march towards a higher life. There is design in the action of the seemingly blindest

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<sup>7</sup> Blavatsky 1888: Vol. I, 585.

<sup>8</sup> Diagram I; Blavatsky 1888: Vol. I, 153.

<sup>9</sup> The fourth root-race incarnated in Atlantis, and there are still people on Earth who belong to this race, e.g. Indians and Mongolians. The third root race incarnated in Lemuria with the purpose of getting used to own a physical body. The second race lived at the Hyperborean continent, which is assumed to have existed around the North Pole and like the first root-race, the Moon Ancestors, they did not live in a physical body, but in an emotional astral body.

forces. The whole process of evolution with its endless adaptations is a proof of this.”<sup>10</sup>

Reincarnation is mentioned in *Isis Unveiled*, but is much more in focus in *The Secret Doctrine*. Thus, reincarnation and karma became an important part of Theosophy. Yet reincarnation is not perceived in an oriental way, though Blavatsky pretends to follow oriental teachings. Different scholars have touched upon the difference between karma and reincarnation in an eastern context and in Theosophy. As a whole they agree that reincarnation and karma are understood in a framework of evolutionism and hence become positive factors in Theosophy.<sup>11</sup> Most important from our point of view is the conclusion of Garry W. Trompf, *where karma in its essence is perceived as providence*.<sup>12</sup> The following extract is taken from Charles Webster Leadbeater (1854 - 1934 AD), the chief ideologist following Blavatsky, and it demonstrates in its own way the positive view on reincarnation (and karma):

“A boy went to school. He was very little. All that he knew he had drawn in with his mother’s milk. His teacher (who was God) placed him in the lowest class, and gave him these lessons to learn: Thou shalt not kill. Thou shalt do no hurt to any living thing. Thou shalt not steal. So the man did not kill; but he was cruel, and he stole, - At the end of the day (when his beard was grey – when the night was come) his teacher (who was God) said – Thou hast learned not to kill. But the other lessons thou hast not learned. Come back tomorrow.

On the morrow he came back, a little boy, and his teacher (who was God) put him in a class a little higher, and gave him these lessons to learn: Thou shalt do no hurt to any living thing. Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not cheat. So the man did no hurt to any living thing; but he stole and he cheated. And at the end of the day – when his beard was grey – when the night was come – his teacher (who was God)

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<sup>10</sup> Blavatsky 1888: Vol. I, 277.

<sup>11</sup> Hammer 2000: 364; Hanegraaff 1998c: 378.

<sup>12</sup> Trompf 1998: 286. He writes: “The process of karma(-nemesi), for Blavatsky turns out to be the Providence which materialism threatened to exclude [...]”

said: Thou hast learned to be merciful. But the other lessons thou hast not learned. Come back tomorrow.

Again, on the morrow, he came back, a little boy. And his teacher (who was God) put him in a class yet a little higher, and gave these lessons to learn: Thou shalt not steal. Thou shalt not cheat. Thou shalt not covet. So the man did not steal; but he cheated, and he coveted. And at the end of the day – (when his beard was grey –when night was come) his teacher (who was God) said: Thou hast learned not to steal. But the other lessons thou hast not learned. Come back, my child, tomorrow.”<sup>13</sup>

The above story ought to speak for itself. In Buddhism, for example, good karma will sooner or later cease and even the gods in heaven will fall to a human existence. In the Leadbeater version, karma manifests itself as process of learning, like programs of education one finds in schools. So when one passes through second form no teacher will claim that the child has to return to the first form. Karma has become dharma, i.e. a process of learning. In Theosophy karma unfolds as if it were put into a cosmic classroom.

According to Blavatsky, providence was identical with Karma-Nemesis,<sup>14</sup> but without the qualities of ‘good’ or ‘bad’.<sup>15</sup> Blavatsky considered bad karma to be related to actions belonging to an ‘inferior’ level. A person on a high evolutionary level could not allow himself to do what people naturally did at a lower level. Thus, karma became a relative component in Theosophy. When acting improperly he broke the ‘law of harmony’ and even the atoms were disturbed.<sup>16</sup> Another central viewpoint held by

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<sup>13</sup> Leadbeater 1902: “Reincarnation”, in *An Outline of Theosophy*.  
See: [theosophical.ca/OutlineTheos.htm](http://theosophical.ca/OutlineTheos.htm).

<sup>14</sup> This is the same as karma, but Blavatsky apparently prefers the term karma-nemesis.

<sup>15</sup> “Karma-Nemesis is the synonym of PROVIDENCE, minus design, goodness, and every other finite attribute and qualification, so unphilosophically attributed to the latter. An Occultist or a philosopher will not speak of the goodness or cruelty of Providence; but identifying it with Karma-Nemesis, he will teach that nevertheless it guards the good and watches over them in this, as in future lives; and that it punishes the evil-doer -- aye, even to his seventh rebirth.” Blavatsky 1888: Vol. I, 643.

<sup>16</sup> Blavatsky 1888: Vol. I, 643. Atoms are conscious beings and in this way they pick up moral ‘disturbances’.

Blavatsky was that of providence as a divine emanation. Providence emanated from Logos (the divine level) and with providence came wisdom and virtue.<sup>17</sup> Since the Lemurian era, providence - as a guarding and caring function - could also be exerted by angelic beings having successfully completed the great cycle in an earlier planet-chain.<sup>18</sup> In Leadbeater's version, providence often took a very literal form and was seen as a positive interaction with different spirits, angels, devas and even developed human beings. When 'sending out love' to a specific person, higher beings were also activated and by their supernatural powers they could, for example, rescue a person in great danger. On the astral plane, newly-deceased mothers could ameliorate their child's life on Earth, through love.<sup>19</sup>

Rudolf Steiner also identified karma more-or-less with dharma, but his arguments differed somewhat. For Steiner, the big process of learning (dharma) happened after death, when the deceased would experience the consequences of exactly what he or she had done to others. After death the former earth-life would be relived in reverse, i.e. from 'effect' to 'cause'. This process of learning led to new capacities in the soul enabling the 'personality' in a future life to do much better and to deal with past mistakes. A more detailed discussion on karma and 'dharma' follows below on dealing with 'life after death' as related to an astrological or clairvoyant ritual field.

*Comment:* Though Rappaport does not go into a more detailed discussion on the internal ranks of different USP or canonical messages, i.e. the order of USP, some notions follow. In Theosophy 'evolution' has a higher ranking than karma, and hence we can expect that evolution at least to a certain degree *sanctifies* karma. The role of USP is to sanctify anything lower in the liturgical order. Such a viewpoint is in accordance with his cybernetically-inspired way of thinking. Rappaport writes: "Relations between the levels of any adaptive system do, or at least should, correspond to differences in the specificity of their goals or purposes."<sup>20</sup> Karma is an agent for evolution as

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<sup>17</sup> Blavatsky 1888: Vol. I, 350.

<sup>18</sup> Trompf 1998: 283.

<sup>19</sup> For this and many other examples of providence intervening in daily life, see Leadbeater 1915 and 1912: 39 - 53.

<sup>20</sup> Rappaport 1999: 423.

fate served providence in parts of Hermetica: “providence is a divine order; necessity a servant for pronoia”.<sup>21</sup> An important USP is probably able to sanctify a less important USP. Still, of course, a less important USP is capable of sanctifying cosmological axioms, corollaries, taboos and much more. In the Catholic Church, for example, is the everlasting virginity of the Holy Mother sanctified by the more important USP that Jesus is the Son of God? It seems reasonable to accept such a viewpoint. Another argument is that USP sanctify social and economic conditions.<sup>22</sup> It is generally accepted that the belief in karma sanctifies the Indian cast system. Does karma sanctify social differences according to Theosophy? To the best of my knowledge there are no such attempts, but in Blavatsky’s theosophy the belief in spiritual evolution sanctifies the (fictional) differences between ethnic races. This is a subject of controversy, but Australian Aboriginals simply do not belong to the first division of the fifth root race (i.e. Aryan race, the ‘noble’). This explains, according to Blavatsky, the discrepancies between Aboriginal culture and that of modern society. Aboriginals belong to the fourth root-race. Regrettably, but understandably, Blavatsky’s concept of different root-races gave rise to certain anti-Jewish sentiments in Nazi Germany among right-wing esotericists.<sup>23</sup> Redfield has a similar point of view, as we shall see in the next chapter, and spiritual evolution, not karma, sanctifies the new social order and economy as well. Hanegraaff really makes his point in declaring evolutionism to be one of the most important characteristics in New Age.

### **Scientific laws are synonymous with spiritual principles**

Olav Hammer has thoroughly discussed the relationship between faith and science in Theosophy.<sup>24</sup> As a discourse this is called *scientism* by Hammer meaning a pseudo-scientific discourse.<sup>25</sup> Hammer writes that ‘early hermeticists’ or magicians, as for example Bruno and Agrippa, i.e. before the

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<sup>21</sup> SH XI.5. For the discussion of providence as superior to fate (whether called *tychê* or *heimarmenê*), see chapter 4.

<sup>22</sup> Rappaport 1999: 431.

<sup>23</sup> Trompf 1998: 283 - 285.

<sup>24</sup> Hammer 2000: especially, 171 - 182 and 204 - 211.

<sup>25</sup> Hammer offers a very detailed discussion of how Theosophy and New Age applies different ‘modes of scientism’ in its rhetoric and literature. Hammer 2000: 184 - 198.

era of secularisation, never perceived 'science' as something to be confronted. No, maybe not, but they confronted such philosophical mainstreams as Platonism, Stoicism, Scepticism, Neo-Platonism, Aristotelian, Pythagorean, Epicurean teachings and the philosophy of Descartes. Many tried to adapt to a temporary mainstream and some examples can illustrate this. Agrippa expressed all his scepticism in *De vanitate scientiarum* (1526). For a period he was influenced by 'mainstream' scepticism - at least according to Rabelais, Copenhaver and Schmitt.<sup>26</sup> In one sense Agrippa tried to adapt his occult science to scepticism. Another example can be Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463 - 1494 AD), who, in the midst of his syncretism of Christianity, Cabalism and Neo-Platonism, rejected divinatory astrology. He rejected 'mainstream' judgment of character, destiny etc., without necessarily denying a physical influence on the body. Giovanni Pico is viewed as a rationalist by the expert Eugenio Garin.<sup>27</sup> Another example is Emanuel Swedenborg (1688 - 1772 AD) who tried to cope with Descartes' *res extensa* (the natural world) and *res cogitans* (the mental world).<sup>28</sup> The solution inherent in that disintegration was that *res extensa* and *cogitans* communicate by correspondences. These examples should be sufficient to illustrate that esoterism has continuously tried to adapt to cosmologies perceived as scientific realities. It has always been a strategy in esoterism, consciously or not, in the main to adapt to what can be labeled science (or philosophy). Rappaport would consider such a strategy to be normal. In the end, it is all a question of adaptation and assimilation.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Copenhaver & Schmitt 1992: 239 - 260. Rabelais depicts Agrippa as a cagey sceptic in his *Tiers Livre* (p. 244). According to Copenhaver and Schmitt, Erasmus of Rotterdam had much sympathy for scepticism. Later he became a spokesman for 'scepticism' and one who deeply caught the attention of Cornelius Agrippa. See also McCinica et al. (1993: 130 - 131) for Erasmus' dependency on Cicero who wrote about scepticism and Cornelius Agrippa's involvement in scepticism.

<sup>27</sup> "In other words, it is precisely Pico's effort to distinguish the rational element from the mythical element which is the centre of the debate. Pico tries, in many areas of learning, to isolate truly *scientific* aspects and methods from intrusion of any other kind; superstitions, mystical intuitions, relics of all kinds of beliefs." Garin 1983: 86 (my italics).

<sup>28</sup> Hanegraaff 1998a: 428.

<sup>29</sup> One must not forget that the Catholic Church especially in the Middle Ages incorporated several Aristotelian doctrines very much due to the influence of Thomas Aquinas. Earlier, Christianity also adapted to aspects of Platonism and Neo-Platonism as well.



### **Clairvoyance becomes an instrumental perception in order to establish a ritual field**

In order to understand the concept of ‘occult investigation’, some writings of Charles Webster Leadbeater follow. Leadbeater (together with Annie Besant, 1847 - 1933 AD) added details to Blavatsky’s many principles - often of a disparate nature. Together, they developed a methodology for occult investigation. This method is in its essence a method of pure observation that comprises a perception of physical things and an ability to ‘see’ (or register) ‘extensions’ from a physical object. This may be an energy level, or different kinds of ‘bodies’ surrounding the object. Simply stated, it is all a question of perception, whether called clairvoyance, clairaudience or astral sight. For Leadbeater, occult perception is the opening of new windows facing the unseen.<sup>30</sup>

In recent years in Denmark, many clairvoyance schools have mushroomed with their own technological specialities. It is still a question of seeing, feeling, hearing or smelling the unseen. The main purpose can very well be that of Leadbeater’s, namely, to see in earlier incarnations,<sup>31</sup> auras and chakras - different ways of measuring (by interpretation) the *degree of spiritual evolution*. There is much similarity between the learning of clairvoyance and meditation and hence - at least in its initial stages - the practice of clairvoyance becomes totally ritualised. The same body positions and gestures are repeated over and over again, for example sitting in a chair in a special position looking at selected spots in space, around or at an object (usually a person). The practitioner also makes repeated gestures such as opening and closing the eyes at regular intervals, and often also squeezes or touches sacred objects held in the hand. Furthermore, the communication involved seems to be very formalised. All-in-all, it looks like these “formal acts and utterances are not entirely encoded by the performers” (Rappaport)

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<sup>30</sup> “We are, as it were shut up in a tower, and our senses are tiny windows opening out in certain directions. In many other directions we are entirely shut in, but clairvoyance, or astral sight, opens for us one or two additional windows, and so enlarges our prospect, and spreads before us a new world, which is yet part of the old world, though before we did not know it.” Leadbeater 1895: 5. Web-edition.

<sup>31</sup> See for example C. Jinarajadasa: 1928. Jinarajadasa, later vice-president of The Theological Society, met Leadbeater 1894 AD in London. He describes in detail how Leadbeater used clairvoyance to investigate the astral plane and reincarnation.

and making the space for being “an author” (Olsson). Thus, the reader hopefully agrees that clairvoyance can be considered to be a ritual or a ritual practice - at least in its initial stages. Leadbeater’s own testimony as to why one must develop clairvoyant abilities is very revealing:

“When a man begins to develop his senses, so that he may see a little more than everybody sees, a new and most fascinating world opens before him, and the *chakras* are among the first objects in that world to attract his attention. His fellow-men present themselves under a fresh aspect; he perceives much with regard to them which was previously hidden from his eyes, and he is therefore able to understand, to appreciate and (when necessary) to help them much better than he could before. Their thoughts and feelings are expressed clearly before his eyes in colour and form; *the stage of their development*, the condition of their health become obvious facts, instead of mere matters of inference.”<sup>32</sup>

Leadbeater’s *The Chakras*, with 300,000 copies in print already as early as 1987 and reprinted in many editions, has sold more than all Blavatsky’s books combined.<sup>33</sup> Some comments on the chakras in Leadbeater’s version are necessary in order to understand how clairvoyance constitutes a ritual field. For Leadbeater chakras are *realities* attached to the physical body. This is somewhat different from the Tantra where yogis rather ‘create’ chakras through imagination as part of the meditation process.<sup>34</sup> In Leadbeater’s system each chakra is conferred a dominant colour,<sup>35</sup> and accordingly chakras become physical instruments to measure the degree of development and the clairvoyant becomes the technician who observes the instrument. The more activity and energy in the lower chakras the less developed the person. On the other hand, activity and bright colours in the higher chakras, connected to the throat or the head, portray a person at an advanced stage of

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<sup>32</sup> Leadbeater 1927: I (my italics). The quotation above is simply his first words in the introduction to *The Chakras*.

<sup>33</sup> Information from Blavatsky Study Center: [blavatskyarchives.com/thomas/jaqua.htm](http://blavatskyarchives.com/thomas/jaqua.htm).

<sup>34</sup> Hammer 2000: 73- 77; 142 - 155. Hammer offers the reader detailed insight on the chakras.

<sup>35</sup> See colour plates illustrating the dominant colour in each chakra; Leadbeater 1927: introduction.

his path of spiritual evolution. In addition, an 'aura' surrounds the body, and the colours in the aura, intensity and the size of the aura, are also instrumental in measuring the level of spiritual development. As discussed above, because clairvoyance may be perceived as a ritualised activity, it is a logical conclusion *that the ritual has transformed a belief* (in chakras) - exactly in accordance with Olsson's theory.<sup>36</sup> A historian working along the lines of these ideas can state that Eastern concepts have been imported to Western culture. However, such an approach often fails to take into account what actually happens with chakras when applied in Western esotericism. Most important, however, are *the interactions between clairvoyance (ritual) and evolution (probably highest USP) in the clairvoyant ritual field*. Today, a viable definition of clairvoyance is that it is an ability to see auras and chakras. Clairvoyance has doubtlessly established itself as a significant ritual field in Western esotericism. However, it is important to note that a belief in clairvoyance existed prior to Theosophy, i.e. it was not invented by Leadbeater or Besant. Clairvoyance as a practice is for example clearly documented in the writings of Mary Baker Eddy (1821 - 1910 AD), the founder of Christian Science in 1879.<sup>37</sup>

**The dialectical relationship between Man and God, or the divine, including the healing of other people, society and/or the Earth**

This important matrix is based on a very high degree of holism, i.e. sympathetic responses between 'high' and 'low'. In Blavatsky's theosophy there is a synthesis between linear time and grand Indian cycle series, kalpas, consisting of up to millions and trillions of years. This combination becomes a manifestation of all events *in* real time. In such a grand scale everything, such as atoms, Earth, cosmos and the human soul, must obey the law of involution followed by that of evolution. One can argue that the combination becomes "the most complex interweaving of neo-Gnostic myth and eclectic Age theory".<sup>38</sup> For Blavatsky the dialectical relationship between man and

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<sup>36</sup> This has been discussed earlier. A ritual can create, maintain or alter a belief. See chapter 2, p. 38, above.

<sup>37</sup> Eddy 1875: 80 - 2, 87, 89, 96, 153, 301, 411, 417. This first edition can be found on web: [mbeinstitute.org/SAH/SAH.htm](http://mbeinstitute.org/SAH/SAH.htm). There is no mention of chakras.

<sup>38</sup> Trompf 1998: 280.

supreme spirit is fairly unimportant. The reason being, one might suspect, that in speeding up spiritual progress it would destroy her grand-scale vision of evolution. Though Blavatsky developed the idea of ascended masters, many 'master' was also real human beings.<sup>39</sup> In 1890 Blavatsky created a new group called the Inner Group consisting of fourteen persons, and they became members by invitation only.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps, then, Blavatsky believed these living master could benefit a dialectical relation to the ascended masters. Blavatsky recognised a dialectical relationship between 'low' and 'high' as such.<sup>41</sup> For example, she credited the original 'Eclectic Theosophical system' founded by Ammonius Saccas for engaging in theurgy. Blavatsky explained that Theosophy in those days was divided into three 'heads', one being theurgy.<sup>42</sup> Theurgy is more or less synonymous with this matrix and its three aspects must be clarified. 1) The ability to invoke a god in order to materialise the god. 2) To invoke a god in order to know him. 3) To invoke the divine (or God) in order to collectively affect others, nature and/or the whole cosmos. Matrix number 2 is a *positive* variant of this third meaning. On the other hand, 'collective theurgy' could also be used to harm the wholeness, a possibility recognised for example by Agrippa.

Another testimony of matrix number two is Blavatsky's quotation and wording of the *Tabula Smaragdina* mentioned in the preceding chapter.<sup>43</sup> Unfortunately, Blavatsky does not give the reader much more insight than

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<sup>39</sup> Van Egmond 1998: 313.

<sup>40</sup> Van Egmond 1998: 320.

<sup>41</sup> "Theurgy being essentially the art of applying the divine powers of man to the subordination of the blind forces of nature, its votaries were first termed magicians -- a corruption of the word 'Magh', signifying a wise, or learned man, and -- derided." Blavatsky 1879: section 1. Web-edition.

<sup>42</sup> Blavatsky 1889: section 1. Web-edition.

<sup>43</sup> Blavatsky's version words: "What is below is like that which is above, and what is above is similar to that which is below, in order to accomplish the wonder of unity. As all things were produced by the mediation of one being, so all things were produced from this one *by adaptation*. Its father is the sun, its mother is the moon. It is the cause of all perfection throughout the whole Earth. Its power is perfect *if it is changed into earth*. Separate the earth from the fire, the subtle from the gross, act prudently and with judgment. Ascend with the greatest sagacity from the Earth to heaven, and then descend again to Earth, and unite together the power of things inferior and superior; thus you will possess the light of the whole world, and all obscurity will fly away from you. This thing has more fortitude than fortitude itself, because *it will overcome every subtle thing and penetrate every solid thing*. By it the world was formed." Blavatsky 1887: Vol. I, 507.

the quotation itself. Her only additional statement is that the mysterious ‘it’ in *Tabula Smaragdina* is ‘astral light’. In this context she deals with alchemy as a combination of a ‘vital’ (spiritual) and a physical force. However, her wording and her use of italics supports a serious belief in the tablet. The next generation of theosophists, especially Leadbeater and Bailey, were less patient and ‘positive theurgy’, i.e. matrix number two, became much more in focus.

*Leadbeater and his theurgy: Labora est orare*<sup>44</sup>

Leadbeater, no less creative and excessive in lifestyle than Blavatsky, focussed much more on speeding up his own spiritual progress as well as the progress of others. For him the responsibility of a theosophist did not only consist in propagating a knowledge of Theosophy but also in applying ritual innovations to accelerate the speed of evolution among humanity. His most ambitious plan was to bring in a World-Teacher, also known as Maitreya. A boy named Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895 - 1986 AD) was in 1909 introduced as the future ‘vehicle’ for that divine entity able to speed up evolution by his mere presence. In the Great White Brotherhood of ascended masters Krishnamurti was no less than the ‘Minister of Education and Religion’ (for the whole Earth). Krishnamurti left the Theosophical Movement in 1929 to start his own career as a spiritual teacher. Leadbeater, on the other hand, persistently engaged in new theurgical projects, especially in Australia.<sup>45</sup> A single quotation can illustrate Leadbeater’s confidence in an accelerated spiritual advancement.

“We have now entered upon a period in the world’s history in which progress at all levels of evolution can be very rapid, because the near Coming of the World-Teacher has set up so strong a tide of thought and feeling about spiritual things [...]. The student of occultism who sets before himself the idea of hastening his development will do well to remember that one of the necessities is good physical health. He

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<sup>44</sup> Meaning ‘to labour is to pray’. This proverb is passed on by Leadbeater in his *The Science of the Sacraments*, and it can very well illustrate the practical and dialectical aspects of his theosophy.

<sup>45</sup> French 2005: 685 - 686.

wishes to make in one life the progress which under ordinary circumstances would be distributed over twenty or more [...].”<sup>46</sup>

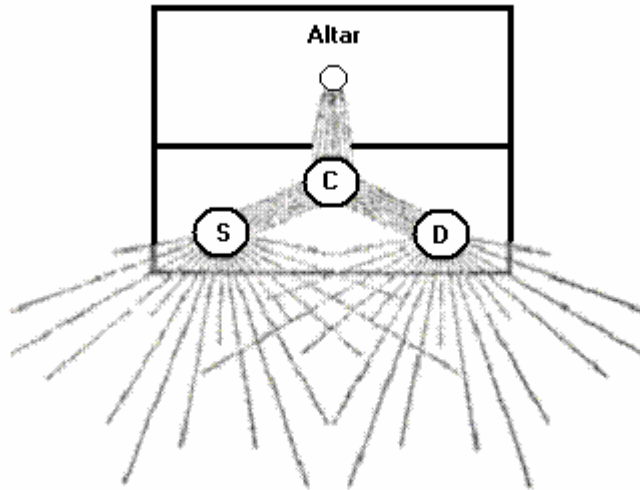
Leadbeater also became bishop in Liberal Catholic Church in 1916.<sup>47</sup> Leadbeater created new rituals, parallel to Catholic sacraments. Expressed in Leadbeater’s usual technical terms - borrowed from the science of engineering - his church became “a centre of magnetic radiation through which spiritual force can be poured out upon a whole district”. One drawing from his “Science of Sacraments”<sup>48</sup> can illustrate the detailed manner in how Leadbeater perceived (through clairvoyance) a dialectical connection between his church and the public.

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<sup>46</sup> Leadbeater 1927b: section ‘The Present Opportunity’. Web-edition.

<sup>47</sup> The Liberal Catholic Church is a reorganisation of the former Old Catholic Church.

<sup>48</sup> Leadbeater 1920: Diagram 2. Web-edition.



**DIAGRAM 2 - The Relation between the Celebrant and his Ministers. Their positions on the step before the Altar is indicated by circles. C is the celebrant, D the deacon, and S the sub-deacon. The lines show how the forces flow either from the the celebrant through his ministers to the public, or from the people through the ministers to the celebrant, and thence to the Elements on the Altar.**

His accompanying text (see above) on the Holy Eucharist speaks for itself. Central for Leadbeater was the idea of a Great White Brotherhood formed by masters ascended in order to guide and help humanity on Earth. He designed lengthy rituals of initiation into the Great White Brotherhood in order to speed up the spiritual evolution amongst humanity (see more below).

*Comment:* For Rappaport and Olsson it is the basic nature of religion that explains why rituals had to be developed in the wake of Blavatsky's enormous production of spiritual literature. Her ideas, viewed as canonical messages, simply needed rituals in order to be transformed into reality. For that reason, and for that reason alone, theosophical teachings became endowed with rituals. It was definitely not the concept of secularisation that accounted for Leadbeater's strong engagement in ritual theurgy. Instead, Leadbeater (and others) had no choice if they wanted to retain Theosophy with its many canonical messages.

The first *description* of the initiation into the Great White Brotherhood seems to rest on a prototype, a seminary event, with masters present, as Lord Maitreya, as from the night of May 27<sup>th</sup> to the morning of May 29<sup>th</sup> in 1915. Different masters are assembled in a semicircle around master Maitreya who sits in a marble seat in front of his house. The candidate stands on the next level of the terrace and he or she must now answer some questions. The following excerpt of a dialogue between an ‘initiator’ and a ‘seconder’, who speak on behalf of the candidate, is essential:

“The Initiator asks:

‘You have evidence that if additional powers are conferred upon him, *they will be used for the furtherance of the Great Work?*’

And the Master Kuthumi replies:

‘This candidate’s life this time has been short, but even already he has many good deeds to his credit, and he is beginning to do our work in the world. Also in his life in Greece he did much to spread my philosophy, and to improve the country in which he lived’.”<sup>49</sup>

Perhaps the most essential ‘canonical message’ in the initiation is that of being a ‘vehicle’ or a transmitter for the Great White Brotherhood. The candidate will simply be *used* for the furtherance of the great work. Repeatedly, in Leadbeater’s writings clairvoyance is closely connected to chakra and reincarnation - used as measurements of spiritual development. Master Kuthmuni acknowledges the young candidate, and with his clairvoyance he can ‘see’ that the person involved lived in Greece and was carrying out the work of the brotherhood. A more detailed analysis of this initiation, witnessed by Leadbeater, will be provided in appendix 1.

#### *Alice Bailey and the coming of a New Age*

Alice Bailey (1880 - 1949 AD) entered The Theosophical Society in 1915, but later she left the organisation. The coming of a new time, ‘New Age’ she called it, was also dependent on the preparation done by her adherents, the World Servers. Such a name reflects the eschatological and social aspects of

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<sup>49</sup> Leadbeater 1927b: section: ‘Account on a first initiation’ (my italics).



her esoteric organisation, the Arcana School, established in 1923. As Steiner, she was much influenced by Christianity, and the coming of the 'Age of Aquarius' became synonymous with the return of Christ. The moment of this return depends on the endeavours of the World Servers, particularly on an ability to send out a stream of thought-energy (invocation). Such an invocation results in an 'answer' (evocation) from higher spiritual beings:

"The truth lying behind all invocation is based upon the power of thought, particularly in its telepathic nature, rapport and aspect. The unified, invocative thought of the masses and the focused, directed thought of the New Group of World Servers constitute *an outgoing stream of energy*. This will reach telepathically those spiritual Beings Who are sensitive and responsive to such impacts. Their evoked response, *sent out as spiritual energy*, will in turn reach humanity after having been stepped down into thought energy and in that form will make its due impact upon the minds of men, convincing them and carrying inspiration and revelation."<sup>50</sup>

There are different working methods which result in this outpouring of mental energy from the World Servers. A series of group initiations and group meditations calling forth evocations of the Hierarchy is essential.<sup>51</sup> The techniques mainly consist of visualising 'triangles' around the Earth while repeating what Bailey calls the Great Invocation. A 'triangle' consists of three persons who link mentally (or telepathically) each day for a few minutes, imagining that light and good will circulate between them – in the end to be transmitted into spiritual triangles surrounding the Earth, which affect both the Hierarchy and affairs on Earth.<sup>52</sup> Clairvoyance, or rather clairsaudience, is completely endorsed by Bailey, because of the importance to her of telepathy. Her organisation is totally dependent on telepathic abilities:

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<sup>50</sup> Bailey 1948: 154.

<sup>51</sup> There are actually seven hierarchies, one initiating intelligence, another art, a third will, etc.

<sup>52</sup> In 1937 'The Triangles Organisation' was established, but as early as in 1932 a similar theurgical organisation appeared named 'Men of Goodwill', now 'World Goodwill'; Santucci 2005: 158.

“One of the characteristics distinguishing the group of world servers and knowers, is that the outer organisation which keeps them integrated is practically non-existent. They are *held together by an inner structure of thought* and by a telepathic medium of interrelation. The Great Ones, Whom we all seek to serve, are thus linked, and can - at the slightest need and with the least expenditure of force - get in rapport with each other. They are all tuned to a particular vibration.”<sup>53</sup>

In this study the telepathy and clairsaudience, needed in order to ‘receive’ messages sent, belong in the clairvoyant ritual field.

*Steiner’s dialectics: communication with the deceased, Buddha on Mars and the weaving of Christ’s etheric body*

Like Leadbeater and Bailey, Rudolf Steiner (1861 - 1925 AD) stressed the dialectical process, but in a different way. Like Leadbeater he used clairvoyance to uncover previous incarnations, and a speciality of his was to investigate those of famous persons. Gautama Buddha, Steiner tells, gained Buddhahood in his twenty-ninth year, and as a master he did not have to reincarnate again in a physical body.<sup>54</sup> Buddha stayed, however, close to Earth to work on it from the spiritual world until the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century where he left for Mars to become its saviour. Until that time Mars was a dangerous region of aggression, and by cleaning it, sojourns of the soul to Mars in the intermediate state after death will affect the next incarnation on Earth. People on Earth with no aptitude for aggression can look ahead to meet Buddha on Mars on their journey through the spheres after death. Later, returning to Earth, when they have finished their stay at the other planets as well, such souls bring with them peace. Once returned to

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<sup>53</sup> Bailey 1950: chap. I, section 1. Web-edition.

<sup>54</sup> Steiner, *The Christ Impulse and the Development of the Ego-Consciousness*, Lecture I: 25<sup>th</sup> October, Berlin, 1909 (1909, GA 116). Rudolf Steiner Archive. Found at: [rsarchive.org](http://rsarchive.org) where one can download e-books and read different lectures online. IMPORTANT NOTE: Here, and below, I have given the full title, the year, the day of lecture, the number of the lecture (when dealing with a series of lectures with the same title) and archive-number, for example GA 116, to ensure a clear reference.

Earth they may even become Buddhists with a favourable influence on society.<sup>55</sup>

An explicit testimonial of matrix number two is to be found in Steiner's many lectures and comments on life after death. Between the living and the dead there exists a dialectical process. The dead are dependent upon human activity. Their spiritual development is accelerated through tender attention from relatives or friends. Especially, Steiner recommends the reading of spiritual texts while thinking of the good moments one had together. The deceased, for their part, may implant important and progressive ideas to the living. Steiner advised those left behind to ask the deceased questions while they were falling asleep. Questions could also be put forward during the awakening phase next morning. If done correctly, then answers would come to one's mind. Further, during the daytime the deceased could directly intervene and make things happen, or prevent accidents from happening. The deceased could also assist in creating a constructive and spiritual atmosphere for preceding relatives and friends.<sup>56</sup>

In addition, there is a third way of dialectical interaction between 'high' and 'low'. The concept of help is important to Steiner, for example medical help, as something different from 'good' karma. There are forms of healing (or help) that do not affect the balance of good karma (it does not reduce good karma) as in Hinduism or Buddhism. In a series of lectures from 1910, *Die Offenbarungen Des Karma*, such notions of karma were addressed by Steiner. His overall conclusion was that free will, help from others (especially of a medical kind) and karma are three different issues. In a later lecture Steiner also distinguished between karma and providence. Steiner asked openly why a person can be cured from an illness caused by bad karma by the use of medicaments combined with a caring attitude from those who want to help.<sup>57</sup> For Steiner, karma must be interwoven by luciferic or

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<sup>55</sup> Steiner, *Life Between Death and Rebirth*, Lecture VIII: 12<sup>th</sup> March, Munich, 1913; (GA 140).

<sup>56</sup> Wilkinson 1998: chapter five. Web-edition.

<sup>57</sup> „So kann sich die Frage aufwerfen: Was geschieht, wenn in karmischen Zusammenhänge eines Menschen durch das, was er früher erlebt und getan hat, ein Krankheitsprozeß zur Hinwegschaffung dieser karmischen Tatsache notwendig ist, und wenn diesen Menschen durch Heilmittel oder durch einen anderen Eingriff oder Hilfe in der Weise geholfen wird, daß er in solchem Falle durch menschliche Hilfe wirklich geheilt wird?“. Steiner, *Die*

ahrimanic influences (see below) in the intermediate state between life and death in order to become manifest. It is a complex concept. However, these two components are removed from the soul by medicaments (or otherwise) and hence negative karma disappears. Now, a healing occurs without diminishing the balance of the good karma.<sup>58</sup> Thus, the removal of shortcomings or illness will trigger progress on the ladder of evolution.

However, the most important method of invoking the divine down to Earth in order to speed up and guarantee evolution is to love Christ. Using this love Christ can build up an etheric body enabling Him in a physical sense to be close to, or surround, the Earth.

“The true meaning of words from the Gospel can only now be discerned: ‘Whatsoever you have done to one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it into Me.’ (Matthew 25.40). The forces streaming from man to man are the units integrating the ether body of Christ: love or compassion weaves the ether body of Christ. Thus, then the goal of Earth evolution is attained, He will be enveloped in the threefold vesture woven from the powers that have lived in men – and which, when the limitations of the ‘I’ have been transcended, become the sheaths of Christ.”<sup>59</sup>

*Comment:* Steiner’s *Mysterium von Golgatha* is a highly complex matter. Here, as elsewhere, Steiner’s concepts and their developments during his lifetime are indeed very complex. As far back as 1902 he wrote *Christianity as a Mystical Fact*. In 1910 he started a new series of lectures and writings on Christ, and he understood the return of Christ as an appearance in the etheric world, not in the physical. This was a kind of gift from the solar-

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*Offenbarungen des Karma*, X. Hamburg, am 27. Mai, 1910. This edition is a copy in the Royal Library in Denmark, but there is no information on the date and place of print.

<sup>58</sup> According to Buddhism a disease can also be due to ‘bad karma’, but when receiving medical care which cures the disease, ‘good karma’ must also interact. In such causes the patient uses of his stock of good karma. This is one of several differences between the concept of karma in modern esoterism and that of eastern religions.

<sup>59</sup> Seddon 2004: 99.

logos,<sup>60</sup> a kind of offering which would affect all humans. By his redemptive act Christ accelerated the development of spiritual faculties or clarified what was already incipient due to evolution.<sup>61</sup> Christ's 'sacrifice', the experiencing of physical death for three days in Jesus' body acting as a 'vehicle' for Christ, would help humanity to develop new spiritual organs. With the help of these spiritual organs many humans would gain an insight of the nature of Christ in the spiritual world. This would happen from 1933 and would accelerate their spiritual evolution onward.<sup>62</sup> Also, in a series of esoteric karma teachings Steiner admitted individual credit after death for understanding the *Mysterium von Golgatha*.<sup>63</sup> This will be discussed in some detail below. Basically, the redemptive acts of Christ must be seen as a dialectical activity. It is the interaction of man which strengthens the mission of Christ and hence the evolutionary goal of Earth.

**Dualism and monism are interdependent, including the mind and/or the world as a stairway to heaven**

In theosophy not only the human soul, but also human history, spheres, atoms and solar-systems are placed on the 'ladder of evolution'. Both Steiner and Bailey acknowledge the existence of dualism probably due to their affinity for Christianity. However, the 'dualistic forces' are relative and play their role in the cosmic evolution at certain stages in the overall macrohistory as outlined by Blavatsky in principle. In the 'U-shaped' journey of the soul (atman), descent into matter is partly a progression, and only a fall in relative terms. In matter and in physical bodies, the soul not only awakens again but it also develops a greater potential and insight. Development of *consciousness in matter* is so significant that the soul can attain heights even greater than before descending. The positive

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<sup>60</sup> Christ as Logos or Word is "the instrument of a potentially universal transformation, one that aims to reunite the spiritual and physical." McDermott 1992: 302.

<sup>61</sup> Trumpf 1998: 290.

<sup>62</sup> Leijenhorst 2005b: 1090.

<sup>63</sup> The *Mysterium* can be understood as a strengthening of love in man emanating from divine love released by the event of Golgotha. "Das Ereignis von Golgatha ist die freie kosmische Tat der Liebe innerhalb der Erdengeschichte; sie ist auch nur erfassbar für die Liebe, die der Mensch zu diesem Erfassen aufbringt". Steiner, *Anthroposophische Leitsätze*, Goetheanum, um Weihnachten 1924. (Lit.: GA 26). Web-edition.

eschatological message in Theosophy is that the turning point in the ‘U-shaped’ journey has been passed and that humanity stands on a threshold to a ‘new age’. Still, man is in a delicate position and he must be careful of temptations, especially egoism, intellectualism and materialism, which can sabotage potential progress. On the other hand, however, these negative inclinations were necessary on the journey *into matter*. In the present time, they may generally be viewed as ghosts echoing inclinations from an earlier stage in evolution – though theosophists as Blavatsky, Steiner, Bailey etc. differed in their opinions on this subject. Each of them told his or her version of the macrohistory and diverging eschatological visions appeared. Lucifer, Steiner tells, achieved his ultimate influence in an earlier epoch while Ahriman is predominant in our current era. Stated in oversimplified terms, Lucifer, being light and breathing,<sup>64</sup> gives through his challenging influence the opportunity for freedom and independence from physical incarnation.<sup>65</sup> This is, however, at the present stage of evolution, negative as man needs to incarnate in order to learn and develop. Ahriman is materialism or the ether-body that has been parched by materialism.<sup>66</sup> He can also manifest himself as Mephistopheles, i.e. as occult powers, ambitions and political corruption. Without the hardening influence of Ahriman, souls become old too quickly and pure intellectualism is the result.<sup>67</sup> Irrespective of these characteristics, some anthroposophists conceive Lucifer and Ahriman as pure devils.<sup>68</sup> A balance between the influences of Ahriman and Lucifer is needed. Lucifer controls the left side and Ahriman the right side of the body. “Had he not two ears, two eyes, and two nostrils, man would not attain to the perception of his own I or Ego.”<sup>69</sup> And the reason for this symmetry is that man is in the

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<sup>64</sup> Steiner, *The Balance in the World and Man, Lucifer and Ahriman*. Lecture I: 20<sup>th</sup> November, Dornach 1914 (GA0158). Web-edition.

<sup>65</sup> Steiner, *The Balance in the World and Man, Lucifer and Ahriman*. Lecture III: 22<sup>nd</sup> November Dornach 1914 (GA0158). Web-edition.

<sup>66</sup> Steiner, *The Balance in the World and Man, Lucifer and Ahriman*. Lecture I: 20<sup>th</sup> November, Dornach 1914 (GA0158). Web-edition.

<sup>67</sup> Steiner, *The Balance in the World and Man, Lucifer and Ahriman*. Lecture III: 22<sup>nd</sup> November, Dornach 1914 (GA0158). Web-edition.

<sup>68</sup> Weekendavisen 5.5.1995. Danish newspaper. Here T. Amitzbøll writes, that Steiner’s whole life was dedicated to fighting Lucifer’s evil forces.

<sup>69</sup> Steiner, *The Balance in the World and Man, Lucifer and Ahriman*. Lecture II: 21<sup>th</sup> November, Dornach 1914 (GA0158). Web-edition.

middle of a battle between these two forces. If understood correctly, neither Ahriman nor Lucifer are devils *per se*, but necessary components in developing will, thinking and a symmetric body. Their 'negative' influence is limited to certain epochs in the macrohistory. Lucifer is already loosening his grip, and in epochs to come the influence of Ahriman will vanish. Thus, dualism will gradually be transformed into monism in eons to come and ultimately it means returning to unity. In a general sense, Theosophy is both a belief in evolution and a return to unity. This 'unity' is what Blavatsky called Parabrahman.<sup>70</sup> The evolutionary ascension of the soul can be described as a slow progress to the 'ultimate source'.<sup>71</sup> Then, in the end, the spiritual return is to the 'One absolute', also called Devachan, which corresponds to Nirvana.<sup>72</sup> Whatever the name, this process entails the different ontological levels to be enfolded, in a reverse order as to that of emanation, back to the ultimate source. With the help of theurgy, however, this goal could be reached much sooner.

### **Holism**

The idea of cosmos as a coherent animated organism is probably, from a philosophical point of view, as old as Greek philosophy and the idea is described by Plato in *Timaios*. Posidonius (ca. 135 - ca. 50 BC) expressed his monistic and holistic worldview in terms as *sympatheia* and *logos*.<sup>73</sup> Logos is a higher form of *sympatheia* and thus the universe is not only to be governed by rationality but also by a coherent and interconnecting force. Posidonius' theory is also a theory of 'vitalism' where logos, viewed as a spiritual force, has the ability to bring lesser complex forms of wholeness into matter (or down to the 'lower' world).<sup>74</sup> Different degrees of wholeness are found at different ontological levels. At higher levels *logos* organise more complex forms of wholeness compared to those found in matter or in nature. 'Wholeness' is thus hierarchically organised. In this thesis such a kind of holism is called hierarchical holism. Something very similar is found

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<sup>70</sup> Blavatsky 1888: Vol. I, 256.

<sup>71</sup> Trompf 1998: 280.

<sup>72</sup> Blavatsky 1888: Vol. I, p. 173.

<sup>73</sup> See for example Johansen 1991: 610 - 611.

<sup>74</sup> Johansen 1991: 611.

in Theosophy. Blavatsky believed in an etheric force penetrating everything. As many others were, she was convinced that empty space did not exist, but was filled with a substance (ether). Quoting an occultist, Mr. J. W. Keely, Blavatsky determines at what frequency ether vibrates.<sup>75</sup> In Blavatsky's view there are different levels of 'etheric forces',<sup>76</sup> which interact as intermediaries between matter and spirit. Conclusively, her teachings express a hierarchical form of holism as found in Hermetism. 'Ether' is here, as in modern New Age, substituted with 'energy', which becomes an all-pervasive vitalising *fluidum* acting as *sympatheia* and *logos*. Energy becomes links able to interconnect all parts in the universe. Generally, in Theosophy and Anthroposophy, it is the concept of a 'macrohistory' connecting every aspect of cosmos with human history that testifies the belief in an all-pervasive holism.

### **Between life and rebirth: a part of the astrological ritual field**

After death the deceased loses his etheric body, according to Steiner, but gradually expands his astral body to become identical with the whole solar system. First expansion, or first stop, is the Moon, then Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. This order of the planets is exactly the same as the one found in *Poimandres*. The absence of both Uranus and Neptune, two well-known planets further out in space than Saturn, discovered before Steiner was born, is conspicuous. Scrutinising the whole subject it becomes clear that Steiner is totally dependent on old astrological rules. The following is primarily based on Steiner's *Esoterische Betrachtungen karmischer Zusammenhänge*,<sup>77</sup> a series of lectures given in 1924 one year before his death.

After death the etheric body with its memories of our past life is shed off gradually in three days when the deceased experiences his life on Earth in

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<sup>75</sup> 'Aetheric vibration' occurs at 8,100,000,000 cycles per second whereas molecules only vibrate at 100,000,000 cycles per second; Blavatsky 1888: Vol. I, 562.

<sup>76</sup> There are for example an inter-aetheric levels higher than the 'aetheric vibration'; Blavatsky 1888: Vol. I, 562. Further, Blavatsky 'astral-light' is synonymous with aether (spelled aether or ether); Vol. I, 74. Another aspect of ether, 'nervous ether', is synonymous with the vital-force; Vol I, 531.

<sup>77</sup> Steiner 1996: especially 79 - 120.



reverse order.<sup>78</sup> Next, the soul enters 'karmaloka', i.e. the place or area of karma. Memories of life as essence containing the karmic effects are handed over each night during sleep to the astral body, and at the Moon the deceased starts to experience what he or she has done to others. The duration of this process is one third of the life-span on Earth.<sup>79</sup> The karmic lessons are aided by Moon-beings, who are 'Uhrlehrer' for humanity and the deceased realises his wrongdoings. Now, the deceased wants to take on the burden of his wrongdoings - and leaves behind a part of himself before entering the sphere of Mercury.<sup>80</sup> The remaining part of the soul is that which has done good deeds. Negative karma creating sickness on Earth is removed on Mercury by Mercury-beings. Mercury, or Hermes Asclepius, has for more than two thousand years been the symbol for doctors. In astrology, Mercury is a doctor and one of his signs, Virgo, is connected to diseases. According to Steiner, the beings on Mercury were the earlier masters behind *Merkurmysterien*, who in Antiquity offered humanity insight into medicine and diseases.<sup>81</sup> Leaving Mercury behind the deceased's next stop occurs at Venus, the 'region of love'. Here, the ascending soul will discover real love as opposed to the 'translucent' love experienced on Earth - especially the translucent love experienced between the age of fourteen and twenty-one years. In his lecture Steiner now begins to relate seven-year periods in life to each of the planets, except for the Sun.<sup>82</sup> Principally, Steiner uses traditional astrological principles when subdividing a lifetime into periods governed by each of the planets.<sup>83</sup> After looking into the period of fourteen to twenty-one

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<sup>78</sup> Leijenhorst 2005a: 87.

<sup>79</sup> „Es dauert ungefähr ein Drittel der Lebenszeit.“ Steiner 1996: 86.

<sup>80</sup> „Die Ergebnisse seiner bösen Handlungen, die muß der Mensch in der Mondenregion zurücklassen. Und damit läßt er einen Teil von sich selber zurück.“; Steiner 1996: 91. Note the similarity with *Poimandres*, where ascending is a process of casting off impurities, i.e. something is left behind.

<sup>81</sup> „Da wußte man auch, daß man über das Wesen der Krankheiten erst erfahren kann, was der Wahrheit entspricht, wenn die Wahrheit von den Merkurwesen kommt; daher war alles Heilwesen, alles medizinische Wissen, das Geheimnis von gewissen Mysterien, den Merkurmysterien.“ Steiner 1996: 94.

<sup>82</sup> Steiner 1996: 96.

<sup>83</sup> According to Steiner, the Moon governs 0-7 years old; Mercury 7 - 14; Venus 14 - 21; Sun 21 - 42; Mars 42 - 49; Jupiter 49-56 and Saturn 56 - 63 years old. I have not been able to trace exact the origin for these ages, but a German astrologer, Thomas Ring (1892 - 1983 AD), held a similar system, except for the Sun where Ring allotted 14 years, i.e. the period 21-35 (and

years in one's 'earthly' life while experiencing the true nature of love, the soul enters into the sphere of the Sun in a spiritual condition still better. In the 'being' of the Sun (Sonnendasein),<sup>84</sup> the deceased will experience even the slightest intention to do good that he had had while on Earth. Furthermore, the Sun-region acts as an integral unity accumulating the influences from the other six heavenly bodies.<sup>85</sup> In astrology, the Sun is the planet representing above all a synthesis of the horoscope.<sup>86</sup> Due to the Mystery of Golgotha, i.e. Jesus being the 'vehicle' for Christ, the experience of the Sun in the intermediate state between death and rebirth has changed. Before the era of Christ man could look into the condition of souls on the Sun when entering the sphere of the Sun. After the era of Christ man is prepared while on Earth to see the soul of all humans (or of humanity) while sojourning on the Sun.<sup>87</sup> Again, this is in accordance with the astrological perception of the Sun as a symbol for wholeness or synthesis in the horoscope. When entering the sphere of Mars, one enters a region of sharp communication and stringent judgment. According to Steiner, Voltaire was a person who received strong impulses from Mars while on Earth, especially between his forty-second and forty-ninth year.<sup>88</sup> Mars is normally associated with war, combat, strife or keen discussion, and the sharp and stringent side

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then seven years hereafter to respectively Mars, Jupiter and Saturn - as Steiner). For these periods, see Steiner 1996: 97 - 98 and Ring 1997: I, 63 - 74. The sequence of the planets is the same as found in Ptolemy's account of the 'ages of man'. Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, IV.10.

<sup>84</sup> Steiner 1996: 105. The whole 'existence' between death and rebirth is, according to Steiner, 'Dasein'. It is difficult to translate 'dasein' into English. It can mean 'being, entity, existence and subsistence'. However, 'Dasein' is a deeper form of 'existence' than 'being'.

<sup>85</sup> Steiner 1996: 105.

<sup>86</sup> In this way one's Sun-sign symbolises a synthesis which must (or can) be extended by interpretation of the other planets as well. For Thomas Ring the Sun is 'Lebensmittel' (as standing in the middle of the sequence of the seven heavenly bodies; Ring: 1997: I, 63). Sun as the centre and as the dominant planet in astrology can explain why Steiner's 'Lebensmittel' ranges from 21 - 42 years. In this period one therefore experiences a synthesis in life, i.e. not only love (Venus) and learning (Mercury), but other factors as well.

<sup>87</sup> Steiner writes (with my italics): „Und hat der Christus den Menschen im Leben zwischen dem Tode und einer neuen Geburt *vor* dem Mysterium von Golgatha die Kraft gegeben, den Menschen zu schauen im Sonnendasein, so bereitet er *nach* dem Mysterium von Golgatha während des Erdenlebens den Menschen vor, damit er im Sonnendasein das ganze, volle Menschenwesen schauen kann.“ Steiner, 1996: 109.

<sup>88</sup> Steiner 1996: 114. Actually, this is a traditional astrological interpretation or stated with other words: Voltaire had a strong Mars in his horoscope, i.e. he was influenced by Mars.

of Mars is emphasised by Steiner in this context. In another lecture Mars is described as an aggressive mind, a wording apparently taken from a textbook of astrology.<sup>89</sup> Jupiter is first and foremost described as “Weisheit” encountered on Jupiter when the last veil to wisdom is removed.<sup>90</sup> Again, this is in accordance with traditional astrology. In astrology Jupiter is ruler of the so-called ‘ninth house’, which among other things rules education, insight, higher learning and wisdom. In the last sphere, that of Saturn, one could expect something revealing, positive and significant to happen, but in accordance with traditional astrology souls on Saturn are unable to live here and now. In astrology Saturn often symbolises ‘the past’, for example past karma in more modern astrology. Souls sojourning Saturn have no ‘presence’ and are solemnly connected to their past, in line with astrology. Even Steiner is shocked when he looks into that sphere.<sup>91</sup> Yet, looking at the past (synonym for Saturn) through the glasses of clairvoyant insight, a new possibility arises in the coming earth-life. Due to the sojourn on Saturn, one can in the life to come be as Victor Hugo, who managed to bridge ideas, impulses and feelings.<sup>92</sup> Again, such a positive turn is in accordance with astrology provided Saturn is well-placed in the birth chart.

### Summary

The five matrices are also found in early theosophical literature including that of Steiner’s, but some findings must be stressed. In Theosophy karma is relative because other factors such as providence, personal will, and help from others determine the fate of an individual. Further, karma is reviewed as by a teacher in a classroom and not by a judge in a courtroom. Those who have behaved reasonably well pass the grade and are promoted to a new and higher level. Bad karma results in punishment, but compared with the effect of good actions, its range is limited. *Karma has itself been transformed into*

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<sup>89</sup> „In der Marssphäre wird angeregt für das spätere Erdenleben der aggressive Sinn, [...]“. Steiner 1996: 166.

<sup>90</sup> Steiner 1996: 167.

<sup>91</sup> „Das ist das ungeheuer Erschütternde, wenn man die Saturnsphäre hellseht, in dem Sinne, wie ich das auseinandergesetzt habe, daß in der Saturnsphäre Wesenheiten leben, die eigentlich keine Gegenwart haben, sondern nur auf ihre Vergangenheit zurückblicken“. Steiner 1996: 117.

<sup>92</sup> Steiner 1996: 118.

*providence acting as a corrective principle for future development.* There is a great trust in a dialectical relationship between man and the ‘higher’ which can accelerate the speed of evolution both for the individual follower and for humanity as well. According to Leadbeater, initiation into The Great White Brotherhood speeds up the spiritual evolution on Earth. Alice Bailey viewed her organisation, the World Servers, as an instrument for determining the time of Christ’s return. She also created a prayer, The Great Invocation, and an imaginary technique of sending energy through ‘triangles’ in order to speed up evolution. To Steiner the greatest dialectical effect was first and foremost to be found when human interaction, love and compassion,<sup>93</sup> strengthened the etheric body of Christ - and hence his ability to secure evolution on Earth. Blavatsky was more moderate, but confirmed the dialectical process between ‘high’ and ‘low’ by her own version of *Tabula Smaragdina*. Spiritual advancement is in her version created more by moral and spiritual perfection, than by utilizing a dialectical relationship between ‘high’ and ‘low’ Not only ordinary rituals in the form of initiations, but also a significant ritual field, that of clairvoyance, emerged in the wake of Blavatsky’s literary production. Steiner’s after-death teachings were much modelled by astrological rules. It is an example of how a ritual practice can create ‘belief’ in accordance with Olsson’s theory.

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<sup>93</sup> Redfield’s energy exchange (see chapter 7), where one must learn not to steal the energy of others, but to give energy through love and aesthetic appreciation, is the basis of his interpersonal ethic. Thus, it seems to me, that there exist prototypes of ethics in modern esoterism rooted in – and justified by – the dialectical relationship between ‘low’ and ‘high’.

## CHAPTER 7

### Dialectical esotericism: *Tabula Smaragdina*, James Redfield and Eckhart Tolle

The second matrix, a key factor in determining dialectical esoterism, is found in *Tabula Smaragdina*, a short alchemical manifesto. Likewise, matrix number two can be identified in Hegel's philosophy of history, especially in abstract terms. Relying partly on Hegel, James Redfield has managed to write a bestseller, *The Celestine Prophecy*, which to a high degree exemplifies dialectical esotericism. Taking into consideration Hegel's position as a philosopher and Redfield's popularity, along with that of the equally popular author Eckhart Tolle, we have proof that dialectical esotericism enjoys a significant role in society. Of course this obviously leads to a discussion of Hanegraaff's methodological approach to New Age as a product of secularisation. The five matrices and their related ritual fields may properly be labelled *dialectical esotericism*. The alchemical charter *Tabula Smaragdina* contains a dialectical relationship between 'high' and 'low'. Though this is not a generic study, it should be mentioned that Gilles Quispel's historical account demonstrates that the dialectical components of this alchemical manifesto have its roots in a Christian-Hermetic environment. The dialectical relationship which is found in *Tabula Smaragdina* is now a leading principle in modern bestselling authors such as Redfield and Tolle.

The *Tabula Smaragdina*, also called the *Emerald Tablet*, is a short alchemical treatise kept in a somewhat lyrical and condensed style composed to communicate comprehensible canonical messages. As a charter of alchemy its impact on alchemists in particular is unchallenged. *Tabula Smaragdina* also serves as a source of inspiration for many currents in western spirituality.<sup>1</sup> In *Tabula Smaragdina* there is a strong focus on the

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<sup>1</sup> It may very well have inspired, for example, Jacob Boehme. In one of his clavises (174) he writes: "The whole visible world is a mere spermatical working ground; every thing hath an inclination and longing towards another, the uppermost towards the undermost, and the

dialectical relationship between 'low' and 'high', and a focus on a force from Oneness moving forward towards the goal of monistic perfection. Everything arises from and returns to unity. The charter exists in many forms in Latin and Arabic versions, and the one cited below appears in *De Alchemia* by Johannes Patricius (1541) and is translated by Quispel. I have inserted blank lines to separate the text into six sections with its own, but often repeated, canonical messages.

(1): It's true without lies, certain and most true:  
That which is below is as that which is above,  
and that which is above is as that which is below,  
to accomplish the miracle of the one thing.

(2): As all things came from One,  
through the contemplation of the One,  
so all things arise from this one thing by adaptation.

(3): Its father is the sun, its mother the moon;  
The wind carries it in its belly, its nurse is the earth.  
It is the father of all perfection throughout the whole world.  
Its power is perfect if it is turned into earth.

(4): Thou shalt separate the Earth from the Fire,  
the subtle from the gross, gently and with great sagacity.

(5): It ascends from Earth to Heaven, then again descends to Earth,  
and receives the powers of things above with things below.  
Thus thou shalt possess the glory of the whole world,  
and all obscurity shall flee from thee.  
This is the power of all power,  
for it overcomes every subtle thing and penetrates every solid  
substance.

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undermost towards the uppermost, for they are separated one from other; and in this hunger they embrace one another in the desire". Boehme 1647: 43.

(6): Thus was the world created.  
Hence proceed wonderful adaptations,  
of which the means are here established.  
Therefore I am called Hermes Trismegistus,  
having the three parts of the philosophy of the whole world.  
That which I had to say regarding the operation of the sun is  
completed.<sup>2</sup>

The main focus is in linking some of the alchemical charter's canonical messages to the five matrices. First, it must be noted that 'below' and 'above' attain the same position and are mirrored in each other (section 1). Secondly, this message is repeated in part 5 where wholeness (the One; referred to as 'it' or 'its') as a force ascends from Earth to heaven, and then descends with the power from 'above' in order to possess the glory of the whole world. It (Oneness) is then perfected and permeates every solid substance on the Earth (section 5; cf. also section 3: 'its power is perfect if it is turned into earth'). Further, one must notice that the interplay and integration of 'below' and 'above' in section 1 accomplish the miracle of the one thing (Oneness), i.e. a development towards unity (or monism) also stressed in section 3 and 5. Matrix number two, matrix number three and matrix number five are thus mirrored in *Tabula Smaragdina*. The first matrix in this thesis, 'pronoia rather than karma or sin', is not directly mentioned. However, the initiation of a motion towards oneness (section 1) gained either by a natural process in nature (section 1 and 3), or by an alchemical process of separating the subtle from the gross (section 4), is significant. One way of interpreting this direction toward monism is as a plan embedded in cosmos, i.e. as a kind of *pronoia*. Stated in the words of Paracelsus this can be understood as a process of *entelechia* accelerated in alchemy.

Earlier versions of *Tabula Smaragdina* written in Latin and Arabic date back to the 12<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> century AD respectively. Though differing slightly from Patricius' version, the canonical message concerning a dialectical process between 'high' and 'low' (matrix number two) is exactly the same. For example does the charter of Jabir ibn Hayyan from the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD

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<sup>2</sup> Quispel 2000b: 304.

refer to a Balinus who said: “That which is above is from that which is below, and that which is below is from that which is above, working the miracles of one.”<sup>3</sup>

*A Greek source?*

It is commonly agreed that Balinus was the prominent Apollonius of Tyana, a holy man and *magus* from the first century AD. On one of his many travels, it is told, he once entered a chamber in a graveyard and to his surprise he found an old grey-haired man sitting on a golden throne, i.e. Hermes Trismegistos, with the *Tabula Smaragdina* (hereafter referred to as *TS*) in his hands. According to Gilles Quispel the *TS* is a hermetic text, like the treatises of the *Corpus Hermeticum*.<sup>4</sup> In a relatively long and sophisticated article Quispel emphatically argues that the ‘lower’ and ‘higher’ reflect each other, an idea based on what Quispel labels ‘the occult idea of God’. Surprisingly, this idea is expressed for the first time by the astrologer Manilius from the first century of the Christian era:

“Decendit deus atque habitat seque ipse requirit  
(God comes down and inhabits man and *seeks himself*)  
*Astronomica* 2, 107 – 08”<sup>5</sup>

Now, in a progression of arguments using different sources from Antiquity, Quispel outlines his idea of the hidden (occult) God “separating itself in above and below begetting itself, increasing itself *seeking itself, finding itself* [...]”.<sup>6</sup> It should be mentioned that Quispel’s arguments are much more sophisticated than outlined here. He concludes that the *TS* was originally written in Greek language, possibly in Alexandria, in the fourth century AD. Its basic tenet is, that “All comes from One and returns to the One”,<sup>7</sup> i.e. an idea found in *Asclepius*. As emphasised by Quispel, the *TS* show no traces of

<sup>3</sup> Found on “The Alchemy Website”: [levity.com/alchemy/emerald.html](http://levity.com/alchemy/emerald.html).

<sup>4</sup> Quispel 2000b: 305.

<sup>5</sup> Quispel 2000b: 308.

<sup>6</sup> Quispel 2000b: 308. The quotation is an extract from Quispel’s translation of Hippolytus’ *Refutatio* VI, 17, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Quispel 2000b: 326.



a ‘world-hate’ that is characteristic of Christian Gnosticism.<sup>8</sup> The monism in *TS* is thus similar to that found in *Asclepius* admiring cosmos and its harmony.<sup>9</sup> Quispel’s traces the dialectical relationship between ‘low and high’ to the *Acts of Philip* and the *Gospel of Thomas*, here to quote from the latter:

“Now I fulfil what I was ordered to do, namely;  
If you do not transform the below into the above,  
and the above into the below,  
and the right into the left,  
and the left into the right,  
you cannot enter the Kingdom of God.”<sup>10</sup>

As Quispel remarks, “The antithesis ‘below-above’ and ‘above-below’ is identical with the initial two-liner of the *Tabula Smaragdina*.”<sup>11</sup> Quispel’s research into the existence of an occult God, dividing himself in a lower and higher part searching each other, will prove significant in future research. It is a contribution important for identifying the roots of *dialectical esotericism* in Western culture. It should be emphasised that dialectical esotericism is not here today and gone tomorrow. Additionally, it is a totally overlooked feature in Western esotericism. Below it will be demonstrated that dialectical esoterism is manifest in *The Celestine Prophecy* and *A New Earth* by best-selling authors James Redfield and Eckhart Tolle. Quispel’s research confirms Hanegraaff’s statement that the borderlines between Christianity, Gnosticism and Hermetism are somewhat constructed.

### ‘Hegelianism’

Recently, Kocku van Stuckrad has criticised Western esotericism as outlined by Hanegraaff in *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism* for lacking a clear definition and demarcation.<sup>12</sup> Stuckrad also seeks a discursive model

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<sup>8</sup> Quispel 2000b: 326.

<sup>9</sup> Quispel 2000b: 326.

<sup>10</sup> Quispel 2000b: 314.

<sup>11</sup> Quispel 2000b: 315.

<sup>12</sup> van Stuckrad 2005a: 78 - 97. For a more detailed discussion on Stuckrad’s proposal and criticism see the next and last chapter.

able to offer new insights into the dynamics of western culture as well, and especially he looks for *a framework of analysis*. Dialectical esotericism offers such an explanation. Obviously, in a discursive sense, (i.e. as a broader discourse), one must ask where else to find a dialectical interaction between something 'higher' and 'lower' outside the field of esotericism. Such a question obviously leads to segments of Hegel's philosophy, especially to *consciousness* as a growing entity in the course of history. One could point to several fields of knowledge using a dialectical model, for example to the interplay found in sociology between individuality (the single man) and society. Marxism understood as an ideology and a philosophy can be another example of using a dialectical approach. In a sense the ruling class (capitalists, feudalists) is the 'higher' and the working class is the 'lower'. Society will in the end, during a series of transformations, be a society where ownership is equally distributed among all members of that society. When this occurs a kind of economic 'monism' is introduced. In a 'broader discourse' one could argue that the charter of *Tabula Smaragdina* belongs to the same set of ideas as Marxism: in the end 'dualism' with its unequal and unjust distribution will disappear. Only 'monism' (a classless society) can prevail in the course of history. Though it is not the intention to deal with the five matrices as a discursive model, which makes it possible to explain different dynamics in Western culture, a few remarks must be added. Holism, for example, can be found in other contexts than esotericism. Holism can also be rephrased as 'totalising principles' and globalisation, economy, rationality and secularisation are such principles. They perform their structuring functions on both the individual and society - and often on nature too. Ecology, for example, contains a holistic 'philosophy' or movement.

Hegel believed that his own mental voyage into the discovery of ideas was a reflection of the course of history. Or, as a commentator has expressed it: "The absolute spirit working in history takes a path which was followed by Hegel's own consciousness."<sup>13</sup> In one sense, the 'spirit of the world' (Der Geist der gegenwärtigen Welt) holds an objective existence - thought dependent on the work of human beings in society. Furthermore, both man,

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<sup>13</sup> Hamlyn 1987: 246.

the world (seen as culture *in* history) and *Geist* are subject to evolution. The ‘work’ of the world spirit requires a ‘plan’, and as such Hegel’s philosophy of history is based on a teleological form of causality. Through a dialectical process (thesis – antithesis – synthesis) both spirit and history develop towards still higher stages. Change is created by conflicts between opposites (thesis – antithesis culminating in a synthesis) and even war between nations is a great dynamo for setting the right course for history. On a personal level, the objective of history does not necessarily promise happiness, but rather freedom of spirit, self-realisation and development of self. One could ask if the spirit of the world holds an independent and objective existence *a priori* in Hegel’s thinking. The answer is ‘no’ because the spirit of the world is not completely real without human activity. Hegel writes:

“The *first* remark we have to make, and which - though already presented more than once - cannot be too often repeated when the occasion seems to call for it, - is that what we call *principle, aim, destiny*, or the nature and idea of Spirit, is something merely general and abstract. Principle - Plan of Existence - Law - is a hidden, undeveloped essence, which *as such* - however true in itself - is not completely real. Aims, principles, etc., have a place in our thoughts, in our subjective design only; but not yet in the sphere of reality. That which exists for itself only, is a possibility, a potentiality; but has not yet emerged into Existence. A *second* element must be introduced in order to produce actuality - viz. actuation, realisation; and whose motive power is the Will - the activity of man in the widest sense.”<sup>14</sup>

Hegel’s argumentation is coloured by an Aristotelian distinction between ‘potentiality’ and actual existence (realisation). Aim, principles and the nature of *Geist* only carry an ontological status as ‘not completely real’. A full realisation into real existence needs the assistance of human activity, and in this sense a dialectical relationship between man and the spirit of the world exists. Hence, interaction between the ‘lower’ (man, the world or nature) and the ‘higher’ (*Geist* as a transcendent reality) is established with a

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<sup>14</sup> Hegel 2001: 36. Pdf-download, Web-edition.

development towards a higher goal. Is Hegel then a representative of Western esotericism? Actually he is not, but from a basic point of view only matrix number five (holism) is missing. This matrix is not mentioned specifically even though nature is embodied and permeated by a reason rooted in both nature and the spirit of the world. A detailed comparison shows that a main difference between for example Hermetism and Hegel lies in his perception of *Geist* as a *spirit of time*. A dimension of the world spirit *is* time (where the dimension of nature is space). It makes no sense speaking of *Nous* in Hermetism as a spirit contained only *in* time or as an entity made real (or actualised) by man's mind in the course of history. In Hermetism, as far as the 'higher' is God or *Nous*, the 'higher' either seems to be 'eternity' or a level beyond space and time. In the following, however, it can be useful to apply the term 'Hegelianism' to denote an unsophisticated understanding of Hegel.

*Modern esoterism and 'Hegelianism'*

In 1996 James Redfield's *The Celestine Prophecy*, which can be classified as New Age literature, was an international bestseller. Additionally, it topped the *New York Times Best Seller List* and remained on the list for three years. Its popularity has resulted in a movie by the same name released in July 2006. It is only natural that the book catches the attention of scholars of Western esotericism. Hanegraaff has urged students of esotericism to read and analyse this book "which should be on the reading list of anyone who wishes to understand what is happening to religion in contemporary western societies."<sup>15</sup> At the same time Hanegraaff also finds the book totally lacking in profundity and originality. Hanegraaff does not really understand why this poorly-written example of *Trivialliteratur* has been successful, but he makes a significant conclusion by stating that 'New Age spirituality' is no longer limited to a marginal position. It has developed into a broad folk religion appealing to all levels of society.<sup>16</sup> Stated otherwise, it has moved into the centre of society or taking up a significant position, a conclusion indirectly

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<sup>15</sup> Hanegraaff 2000: 289.

<sup>16</sup> Hanegraaff 2000: 289.

confirmed by Olav Hammer as well.<sup>17</sup> However, the point of the matter is not whether Redfield is a poor writer or whether those inspired by his book are devoid of any critical judgement.<sup>18</sup> The point of the matter is, as will be demonstrated below, that Redfield in an effective way launches canonical messages identical to the five matrices (though, of course, partly rewritten). Redfield is a modern exponent of *dialectical esoterism* adding some canonical messages of his own, for example a dialectical relationship between individual and collective history. He does, as will be demonstrated, first and foremost make use of, and belong to, the clairvoyant ritual field.

Hegel is not an inventor of the discipline ‘philosophy of history’, and rather one can argue that the stoics were among the first to develop an idea of history, i.e. the course of the world, as something moving towards a goal of divine redemption. Nevertheless, Hegel has probably succeeded in making the unfolding of history a matter of real philosophical discourse, i.e. as opposed to the stoics who ascribed such an insight to God alone. It is noteworthy that *The Celestine Prophecy* does not mention ‘the Age of Aquarius’ though it believes in a new awakening at the beginning of this millennium. The reason behind this awakening is not stellar influence but a development of mind, which in the end opens up for a better ‘aura’ for the whole Earth. History itself is synonymous with a cognitive development to be found in the minds of bright humans (note the similarity with Hegel). History, over a span of time, becomes an objective unit containing a series of viewpoints (mental ideas), which are handed over to a person born at a given time as ‘experiences’ and/or ‘teachings’. The last millennium is of special importance to James Redfield as it enables a person born in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to attain a cognitive development equivalent to the one found in western history for the last thousand years. Still, however, the majority of humans behave as if they lived in the Middle Ages. They are not guided by a rational or scientific understanding of the world, but only by dogmatic ideas. In the next period, the Renaissance, man learned to be his own centre of judgement. From here man becomes an explorer of the world

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<sup>17</sup> “Prominent New Age authors such as Deepak Chopra (b. 1947) and James Redfield (b. 1950) sell millions of copies of their books and become celebrities far beyond the confines of an underground cult milieu.” Hammer 2005a: 859.

<sup>18</sup> Hanegraaff 2000: 290.

(apparently synonymous with a researcher) able to collect all kinds of data from the world, but not capable of extracting any kind of spiritual knowledge. Consequently, humans today often experience spiritual and existential despair despite a formal education. Fortunately, the new millennium can remove all forms of human despair by adding the missing spiritual dimension. More precisely, nine spiritual insights are at hand for those ready to receive them, insights not conflicting with rationality and the development of science. However, the opportunity requires spiritual forerunners talented enough to operate the spiritual pushbuttons. The *second* insight of the nine consists in understanding history and its relation to human cognition as outlined above. Is Redfield influenced by Hegel? Probably, James Redfield writes in *The Celestine Journal*:<sup>19</sup>

“What we must grok, I believe, is that the progress of the world operates through a dialectical process, just as the philosopher Hegel envisioned in the Eighteenth Century. First, you have a way of life or belief, a thesis, and then someone disagrees, and proposes a counter-idea, an antithesis. And then from outside these poles a compromise emerges, a greater truth or way of life that represents a better integration of the polar positions, one that works better. You have a higher synthesis. The pendulum swings in another direction.”

Blavatsky also refers to Hegel’s *Philosophy of History*. She believed, to quote Trompf, that her ‘ladder of life’ “was for Blavatsky the true progress, the proper antidote to Darwinian materialism. It is a philosophic solution she believed was already in Hegel’s vision of the WORLD SPIRIT [...].”<sup>20</sup> So, the framework she used for her cosmic and historical evolution was, according to herself and Trompf, also Hegelian. Hegel is generally viewed as somewhat incomprehensible, and this can explain why he is seldom quoted or referred to by esoteric writers. It is, however, conceivable that Blavatsky and Redfield referred to Hegel because his *Philosophy of History* expressed

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<sup>19</sup> Redfield 2003, July. Web-edition.

<sup>20</sup> Trompf 1998: 280. See also Blavatsky 1888: Vol. I, 641 for Blavatsky’s own account of Hegel and her understanding of his ‘realisation of the idea of spirit’.

a dialectic way of thinking that was similar to, but not identical with, that found in matrix number two.

**The five matrices in *The Celestine Prophecy***

In this section it will be demonstrated that all five matrices are included in *The Celestine Prophecy*. Later, some remarks on upcoming best-seller author Eckhart Tolle will be included. In this way the objective of this thesis will be obtained, i.e. a demonstration of the existence of the five matrices from classical Hermetism via Agrippa to contemporary 'esoteric' literature.

*Pronoia rather than karma or sin*

James Redfield addresses many modern problems, e.g. a craving for mystery, ideological disorientation, existential problems and uncertainty as to what is God. In particular Redfield addresses a desire for goodness and purpose in life. The *nine insights*, which must be read in a specific order, deal with solutions to the problems encountered by modern man.

In the novel, an unnamed social worker (the 'I' in the novel) experiences a professional career crisis, hears about an ancient manuscript found in Peru offering some insights most important to humanity. Both the Peruvian government and the Roman Catholic Church are looking for the manuscript in order to destroy it. In the *Celestine Prophecy* 'karma' is not mentioned at all, and providence is the guideline from beginning to end of this novel (matrix number one). Already the *first* insight deals with providence: when becoming a seeker of truth, 'mystical occurrences' will appear in one's life able to direct the search for understanding and meaning in a desirable and progressive direction. In the end, such 'mystical occurrences' will also reveal the absolute meaning of individual life. Redfield shows consistently in a somewhat plain but effective fashion how providence is at play. When flying to Peru in search of the manuscript, the narrator, the 'I' in the novel, wants to go to the lavatory and 'accidentally' he hears a person uttering the word 'manuscript'. A little later he addresses, out of curiosity, that man.

“‘Excuse me’, I said. ‘I heard you mention a manuscript. Were you speaking of the one found in Peru?’

He looked surprised, then cautious. ‘Yes, I was’, he said tentatively.”<sup>21</sup>

The man is, as it turns out, an assistant professor of history at New York University who has some knowledge of the insights. Still onboard the aircraft Dobson, the historian, now explains the ‘Hegelian’ second insight discussed above and in this way the narrator comes a step further in the right direction. Maybe Dobson in Redfield’s novel should be called a *pronoia ex machina* instead of *deus ex machina*. Anyway, for Redfield there is a genuine belief in providence continuously guiding those ready to walk the spiritual line. Another example of the intervention of providence follows. Entering into a companionship with Dobson, the narrator (now called John Woodson)<sup>22</sup> wants to visit him at his hotel. Just before arriving Woodson is brought to a stop, as he hears gunshots, and suddenly he sees a panicked Dobson running towards him, yelling him to flee. A little later a man (as a new *pronoia ex machina*) suddenly appears behind Woodson, pausing to rest after having escaped in a direction different from Dobson’s.

“‘Wait a minute’, someone said in a loud whisper from behind my left shoulder. I started to run but he reached out and grabbed my arm. ‘Please wait a minute’, he said again. ‘I saw what happened. I’m trying to help you’

‘Who are you?’, I asked, trembling.

‘I’m Wilson James’, he said. ‘I’ll explain later. Right now we have to get off these streets.’”<sup>23</sup>

Predictably, James also knows something about the hidden manuscript and repeatedly it is providence that bit by bit leads Woodson to discover all the insights in the manuscript. Everybody Woodson meets has information to offer. Providence as a guidance is, not surprisingly, mentioned directly in

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<sup>21</sup> Redfield 1996: 30.

<sup>22</sup> This is the name of the narrator in the movie.

<sup>23</sup> Redfield 1996: 45.



insight number seven, as it becomes clear that life also offers a personal mission.<sup>24</sup>

Life does not only offer meaning, but for those attentive it also provides a personal mission. In Redfield's interpretation providence permeates every aspect of life and reaches its heights when a person finds his 'individual mission'. So, when pursuing a personal mission, i.e. helping humanity towards a new level of reality, providence manifests itself as meaningful and clearly recognisable coincidences. Actually, the concept of coincidences (guided by providence) is described throughout the novel, for example in connection with insight number *three*. Here it is stressed that if a person attunes to an existing 'energy' in the world, meaningful coincidences will from now on occur continuously and automatically.<sup>25</sup> To Redfield the existence of universal 'energy' that can be felt, inhaled and 'tapped' is an important canonical message. *Pronoia* thus exists in itself, but at the same time it seems to be reinforced by factors as seeking, attuning to a cosmic energy, by developing intuition and by asking important questions. Important existential questions about one's life also induce a series of events, which contain answers to the questions.<sup>26</sup> Redfield also believes that every meeting with other people always contains a message, i.e. no meeting is incidental.<sup>27</sup>

Redfield believes every person is subjected to a 'control drama', a result of the person's upbringing. A 'control drama' is a way of manipulating others to get attention in a compulsive manner, and in Redfield's interpretation it amounts to stealing other people's energy. To relate positively to other people means to ensure a proper exchange of energy.

*The dialectical relationship between Man and God (or the divine), including healing of other people, society and/or the Earth*

This USP in Western esotericism is explicitly found in the first insight, which reads:

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<sup>24</sup> "Knowing our personal mission further enhances the flow of mysterious coincidences as we are guided toward our destinies." For this wording, see the seventh insight at: [www.celestinevision.com/insights.html](http://www.celestinevision.com/insights.html).

<sup>25</sup> Redfield 1996: 49.

<sup>26</sup> Redfield 1996: 205.

<sup>27</sup> Redfield 1996: 229.

“A new spiritual awakening is occurring in human culture, an awakening brought about by a critical mass of individuals who experience their lives as a spiritual unfolding, a journey in which we are led forward by mysterious coincidences.”<sup>28</sup>

In Redfield’s interpretation, a new evolution or collective spiritual awakening occurs when a certain number of individuals are (rightly) spiritual-orientated. This collective awaking is also brought forward by providence acting as mysterious coincidences, i.e. meaningful occurrences. Providence also relates to the dialectical process between ‘low’ and ‘high’:

“The more readily we have energy flowing into us, *the more mysteriously the universe responds* by bringing people into our lives to answer our questions.”<sup>29</sup>

This concept is seemingly based on energy. The more energy flowing in, the more the universe responds by securing a pronia, which brings people in to our lives able to answer (apparently) existential and spiritual questions. As stated earlier, there is also a dialectical relationship between individual cognitive patterns and those of history, i.e. the ‘Hegelian’ approach.

*Dualism and monism are interdependent, including the mind and/or the world as a stairway to heaven*

Dualism in *The Celestine Prophecy* is scarce, just like dualism in New Age is scarce. According to Hanegraaff New Age movements are best defined indirectly, i.e. “not in terms of what its adherents *believe* (for, again, these beliefs are very diverse), but in terms of what they *reject*”,<sup>30</sup> e.g. dualism and reductionism. According to Redford, there is no anthropological dualism between mind and body (whatever the level of ‘vibration’). There is, however, a discrepancy between bodies operating on a low level of frequency compared to bodies (persons) operating on a high level. At a low level of development there are power struggles between individuals trying to

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<sup>28</sup> For this wording, see the first insight at: [www.celestinevision.com/insights.html](http://www.celestinevision.com/insights.html).

<sup>29</sup> Redfield 1996: 262 (my italics).

<sup>30</sup> Hanegraaff 1998d: 371.

steal each others 'energies' and at a high level of development humans give energy to others. So, it is by obtaining an increasing level of energy and oscillation (vibration, frequency) that true monism is reached.

“‘We’ll continue to achieve higher and higher levels of energy and vibration,’ Dobson said, finishing his sentence.”<sup>31</sup>

Such occurrence of true monism is found when the physical world merges with the spiritual, which includes an ability to walk straight into heaven - with a body transformed into light and energy.<sup>32</sup> To Redfield the *body is the stairway* - or that which climbs the stairway. Also of much concern to Redfield is human ethics and how it relates to the interchange of personal energy. A whole chapter is devoted to question of ethics labelled ‘interpersonal ethic’. Its prime concern deals with how to offer other people love and acknowledgment, and to perceive them as beautiful (this increases their level of energy). By this manoeuvre social interaction and society are also put on a ladder.

*Scientific laws are synonymous with spiritual principles - and holism*

In *The Celestine Prophecy* energy and vibration are scientific realities. At the beginning of the novel, a professor in micronutrition experimenting together with a team of researchers in Peru explains that healthy plants simply grow better when they receive human attention.<sup>33</sup> The micronutrition science in Redfield’s version commonly observes a field of energy around the plants. In a mystical regression, later in the novel, Woodson experiences and remembers not only his own birth, but also the birth of the universe (Big Bang). At creation there is only energy in the form of ‘vibration’ - later manifesting itself as hydrogen. What is attained by such a theory? Well, probably, that *oneness* exists behind diversity. If anything is *archê* according to Redfield, it is ‘vibration’, and the periodic system apparently evolves into a matter of ever increasing vibrations.<sup>34</sup> Everything existing can thus be

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<sup>31</sup> Redfield 1996: 262.

<sup>32</sup> Redfield 1996: 276.

<sup>33</sup> Redfield 1996: 63 - 65.

<sup>34</sup> Redfield 1996: 118.

derived from one thing: vibration at a certain frequency. And here, at the centre of energy, one finds Redfield's most explicit holism, *i.e. matrix number five*. Everything is connected due to energy and vibration. One can say that energy and vibration constitute a *sympatheia* between all things whether physically perceivable or not. Holism is important to Redfield, and viewed from that perspective one may understand why Redfield on the last page of the book offers his readers to have their personal horoscopes cast for \$50. In return, Redfield will provide a tapped explanation of the control-pattern (drama) and his or her spiritual mission in life.<sup>35</sup>

### **Eckhart Tolle and Western esotericism**

Eckhart Tolle is a new best-selling author and some of his books are available in many translations. In the following, a brief analysis of his *The Power of Now* (1999), a number one book on the *New York Times Best Seller List*, and *A New Earth* (2005) also a bestseller on the same list, is as follows. Tolle's central message is the existence of an eternal 'Now' behind the phenomenal world, which can be realised and experienced as identical with the 'deepest self'. Pure 'beingness' is the root of the self and continuously contrasted with the 'ego', the limited perceiver burdened by pain and unhappiness caused by the deficiency of being trapped in the present. In order to get rid of such a miserable condition, the ego or mind has to *surrender* to the 'Now',<sup>36</sup> also called the 'Unmanifested', being a condition of peace and silence beyond time and space from which every thing arises. All-in-all, it is somewhat difficult to classify or categorise Tolle's teachings, but what springs to mind is perhaps a kind of Vedanta adapted to, as we shall see, dialectical esotericism. However, it is also very typical of New Age to distinguish between an immortal higher self and a limited and mortal ego.<sup>37</sup>

In *The Power of Now* (1997), traits of Western esotericism, for example in the form of Faivre's concordance, are only rudimentarily confirmed with no convincing testimony for the five matrices. However, the five matrices are otherwise explicitly met in *A New Earth* (2005) where the Vedanta-like

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<sup>35</sup> In *The Celestine Journal* Redfield often writes about astrology. His major viewpoint is that messages appear synchronous, *i.e.* on different levels at the same time.

<sup>36</sup> Tolle 2005a: 69 & 171 - 191.

<sup>37</sup> Hanegraaff 1998a: 472.

teachings are expanded, for example by introducing the concept of *maya*,<sup>38</sup> but placed into an esoteric and theosophical framework. Tolle's new USP in *A New Earth* says that personal illumination and awakening entails an ability to build a new Earth, i.e. matrix number two. Personal illumination simply affects the whole Earth. At the same time the universe itself becomes conscious through an evolutionary process.<sup>39</sup> Thus, the universe apparently develops automatically, but this process is accelerated through an individual's enlightenment.

In the first chapter in *A New Earth*, Tolle outlines typical theosophical USP, for example that "Any life-form in any realm - mineral - vegetable, animal or human - may be said to undergo 'enlightenment'."<sup>40</sup> Here, as elsewhere in dialectical esotericism, there is an all-pervading animism where even atoms are 'life-forms' participating in an overall controlled evolution. The idea of a providence governing a person's life plays the same important role to Tolle as it does to Redfield. *A New Earth* carries the subtitle "Awakening to Your Life's Purpose" probably in order to pin-point Tolle's new discovery, i.e. that every human's life has an absolute meaning. This canonical message is mentioned on only two pages in *The Power of Now* but becomes a leading principle in *A New Earth*.<sup>41</sup> Probably, the explanation is that if Tolle wants to be a part of Western esoterism he simply has to adapt to dialectical esoterism. However, when this is said, this is not to disparage Tolle's independent and perhaps original way of thinking and it is obvious that he represents a genuine element of *mysticism* in Western esotericism. There is no reason to doubt that he has experienced the 'Unmanifested' through a lot of personal suffering and experienced his first glimpse of awareness when he was a first-year student at the University of London.<sup>42</sup>

Analytically, however, it is also clear that Tolle's authorship exemplifies many esoteric and New Age characteristics, for example the idea of concordance (Faivre). In *A New Earth*, many sayings of Jesus are mixed with statements of different Zen-Masters. Additionally, Tolle assures that

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<sup>38</sup> Tolle 2005b: 9.

<sup>39</sup> Tolle 2005b: 291.

<sup>40</sup> Tolle 2005b: 3.

<sup>41</sup> Tolle 2005a: 73 - 74.

<sup>42</sup> Tolle 2005b: 30.

Gnosticism, medieval Christianity, Sufism, Hasidism, Kabbala, Advaita Vedanta, Zen and Dzogchen in Buddhism are all schools “that represented not only a rediscovery, but in some cases an intensification of the light of the original teaching.”<sup>43</sup> Also significant are pronounced elements of ‘psychologization of religion’ as advanced by Hanegraaff (see more below) and recognisable elements from Jung’s analytical psychology. Jungian concepts of the collective unconsciousness are first and foremost found in Tolle’s review of ‘the collective ego’, ‘the collective female pain-body’ and ‘national and racial pain bodies’.<sup>44</sup>

#### *Matrix number one*

Matrix number one, i.e. providence determinates fate to a higher degree than karma/sin, is met in the importance of a providence guiding personal life and the fact that the concept of ‘karma’ is not dealt with. The world ‘karma’ is hardly mentioned at all. Neither is there any teaching of ‘sin’ as an retaliation, i.e. as something moulding one’s destiny. Sin appears as a dysfunction in the human mind and a means to live unskilfully and blindly, hereby causing suffering (*dukkha*) in personal life.<sup>45</sup> Providence is linked to the concept of evolution and Tolle can assure that “Life will give you whatever experience is most helpful for the evolution of your consciousness.”<sup>46</sup> Like Redfield, Tolle can also exemplify the play of providence in a very plain fashion, for example: “I run out of money just when I was getting close to finishing writing. I bought a lottery ticket and won \$1,000, which kept me going for another month.”<sup>47</sup>

#### *Matrix number two*

Matrix number two, i.e. the dialectical relationship between ‘high’ and ‘low’, is an USP mentioned already on the first page in *The Power of Now* as a saying by Tolle: “You are here to enable the divine purpose of the universe to unfold. That is how important you are!” However, oddly enough, during

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<sup>43</sup> Tolle 2005b: 16.

<sup>44</sup> Tolle 2005b: 125 - 127; 154 - 160.

<sup>45</sup> Tolle 2005b: 9.

<sup>46</sup> Tolle 2005b: 41.

<sup>47</sup> Tolle 2005b: 275.

the book this matrix is only occasionally mentioned. Here, as in Redfield's *The Celestine Prophecy*, a leading keyword is 'energy'. Voiced as 'energy' matrix number two (and part of matrix number three) is adduced in relation to the surrender of the ego:

“When you do (i.e. surrender), the energy that you emanate and which then runs your life is of a much higher energy vibrational frequency than the mind energy that still runs our world [...]. Through surrender, spiritual energy comes into this world. It creates no suffering for yourself, for other humans, or any other life form on the planet. Unlike mind energy, it does not pollute the Earth, and it is not subject to the law of polarities, which dictates that nothing can exist without its opposite, that there can be no good without bad. [...]. It belongs to a different order of reality and will create a different world when a sufficient number of humans enter the surrendered state and so become totally free of negativity.”<sup>48</sup>

So, when a small or sufficient number of humans surrender the ego to the Now, a different world is created, a world of no suffering and with plentiful spiritual energy. Similar to Redfield, Tolle also sees the physical and spiritual world as a matter of energy and assigned frequencies. Matrix number two surfaces more intensively in Tolle's *A New Earth*, here to quote from the important first chapter of the book:

“Not everyone is ready yet, but many are, and with each person who awakens, the momentum in the collective consciousness grows, and it becomes easier for others.”<sup>49</sup>

Here, Tolle's explanation on how the 'lesser' can effect wholeness is not based on 'correspondences', but on the collective consciousness as a medium for transmitting information. This explanation is modern, of a psychological kind, and perhaps more acceptable to many modern

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<sup>48</sup> Tolle 2005a: 176 - 177 (my parenthesis).

<sup>49</sup> Tolle 2005b: 7.

esotericist. Another example of matrix number two is the belief that negative thoughts pollute not only the personal body, but the whole Earth as well.<sup>50</sup>

*Matrix number three*

Matrix number three, i.e. the mind and/or the universe is put on a stairway of development and that monism prevails over dualism as time goes by - are also met. Everything develops towards enlightenment before transformed into a higher level, and flowers are for example the crowning development of plants. Spiritual and physical evolution is that not easy to grasp, neither for Tolle:

“Consciousness itself is timeless and therefore does not evolve. It was never born and does not die. When consciousness becomes the manifested universe, it appears to be subject to time and undergo an evolutionary process. No human mind is capable of comprehending fully the reason for this process. But we can glimpse it within ourselves and become a conscious participant in it.”<sup>51</sup>

In one sense then, the mind is both a part of the phenomenal world and at the same time mind is the foundation from which the external world arises. The mind is both ‘in’ and ‘outside’ time and space, i.e. the physical world. As stated earlier, Tolle’s worldview is maybe a kind of Vedanta adapted to, or transformed into, Western esotericism, also confirmed by a differentiation into a relative and absolute level of truth. In any case, to Tolle a personal spiritual evolution is a reality underpinned among other factors by a belief in reincarnation.<sup>52</sup> Thus, both the manifested personal mind and Earth, but apparently not the universal mind, are put on a stairway.

There is always a certain dualism to be found in dialectic esoterism until a monism wins through due to development or evolution. Until today, the human ego mirrors the final stage of universal sleep, i.e. the planet Earth and the whole universe have been in a state of sleep. “It was a necessary stage in

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<sup>50</sup> Tolle 2005b: 271.

<sup>51</sup> Tolle 2005b: 291.

<sup>52</sup> Tolle 2005b: 292.



the evolution of consciousness”, as Tolle puts it.<sup>53</sup> The times are, however, changing for the better and humans now witnesses a change of consciousness probably found in many galaxies too:

“We are midst of a momentous event in the evolution of human consciousness, but they won’t be talking about it in the news tonight. On our planet, and perhaps simultaneously in many parts of our galaxy and beyond, consciousness is awaking from the dream of form.”<sup>54</sup>

Here, Tolle displays a belief in a coming cosmological and anthropological monism viewed as a healed condition, where cosmological sleep (unconsciousness) and the dysfunctional ego pollution the body and Earth will be replaces by clear consciousness and personal enlightenment. The polarity of sleep/consciousness, ego/enlightened mind (or the collective pain-body/enlightened minds), i.e. dualism, will be replaces by monism (pure consciousness and enlightenment). A new Earth is now breaking through at the expense of an old Earth encapsulation delusion and suffering. Stated otherwise using an explanation from *The Power of Now*, one can say that the world is no longer subject to the law of polarities. Simply stated, the world has progressed from being dualistic to be clearly monistic.

*Matrix number four*

Matrix number four, i.e. spiritual and scientific principles are two sides of the same coin, are exemplified in different ways. Generally, Tolle accepts Darwinism and parallelises biological and spiritual evolution. Tolle also holds the idea that every life form in any realm produces a crowning result, which represents enlightenment. Flowers are enlightened plants while crystals and diamonds seem to be enlightened minerals.<sup>55</sup> Another example is the belief that the collective pain-body is encoded with every human’s DNA, though not yet discovered by science.<sup>56</sup> As in *Hermetica* and much

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<sup>53</sup> Tolle 2005b: 292.

<sup>54</sup> Tolle 2005b: 293.

<sup>55</sup> Tolle 2005b: 3.

<sup>56</sup> Tolle 2005b: 143.

New Age literature, warnings against the misuse of science have also been issued. For example, that the uncritical use of antibiotics has developed into a time bomb where antibiotic-resistant so-called ‘superbugs’ threaten the re-emergence of great epidemics.<sup>57</sup> Alternative approaches which does not look at disease as an enemy, for example homeopathy and Chinese medicine (which doesn’t create new diseases) are needed.<sup>58</sup> It is my experience that Western esotericism including much New Age has a dual approach to disease. From one perspective one has to get rid of illness, but everyone also has to learn something from illness, which possesses the virtue of being a learning-principle sent from God (cf. Paracelsus, for example) or from providence. Illness does not strike without spiritual reason, and it cannot be perceived exclusively as an enemy. Hence, illness has to be understood and treated by holistic methods involving the body, mind and spirit of man. However, summarised with the restrictions mentioned, Tolle often parallelises scientific and spiritual principles.

*Matrix number five*

Matrix number five, i.e. the strong holism, is as the other matrices most directly expressed in *A New Earth*. Tolle does not explain holism in terms of sympathy or correspondences, but uses modern words and explanations. One place he uses the word ‘collective unconsciousness’ (see above) to which even animals are connected. This is the reason why virtually no animals were killed in the tsunami disaster of 2004, i.e. “they could sense the tsunami’s approach long before it could be seen or heard and so had time to withdraw to higher terrain.”<sup>59</sup> Tolle can also point at Jung’s idea of synchronicity as an ‘acausal connecting principle’.<sup>60</sup> The most modern and neutral way of explaining holism is probably found in the expression ‘interconnectedness’:

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<sup>57</sup> Tolle 2005b: 75.

<sup>58</sup> Tolle 2005b: 76.

<sup>59</sup> Tolle 2005b: 277.

<sup>60</sup> Tolle 2005b: 277.

“But all things in existence, from microbes to human beings to galaxies, are not really separate things or entities, but form part of a web of interconnected multidimensional processes.”<sup>61</sup>

Tolle exemplifies terms as ‘sympatheia’ and ‘correspondences’ within a modern language by rewriting such words to ‘collective unconsciousness’, ‘synchronicity’, ‘web’ and ‘interconnectedness’. “At that deeper level, all things are one”,<sup>62</sup> says Tolle, and this statement together with his modern and somewhat abstract interpretation of ‘correspondences’ underlines a horizontal type of holism.

### **The conglomerate nature of Tolle’s USP**

As a brief summary of Tolle’s two books, it is important to stress the conglomerate nature of Tolle’s stated USP. It is obvious that assignment of his somewhat Vedanta-like teachings into an esoteric framework has had to involve very conflicting statements. Some of these contradictions are rather severe, for example by declaring in *The Power of Now*: “Your primary task is not to seek salvation through *creating* a better world, but to awaken out of identification with form. You are then no longer bound to this world, this level of reality.”<sup>63</sup> This eastern-like USP is quite different from the central USP launched in *A New Earth* where one must live *in* this world of evolution to awake to ‘your life’s purpose’ in order to create a better world.<sup>64</sup> Another example of a contradiction is two statements concerning consciousness, where Tolle can write that consciousness itself is timeless and therefore it does not evolve.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, Tolle can also write the exact contrary on the next page, i.e. that consciousness is a part of evolution.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps Tolle means that consciousness does not evolve on an absolute level, but only on a relative level. No doubt, that Tolle gets away with different contradictions simply because the nature of religion *is* conglomeratic (Olsson). There is an obviously *additive* use of religion and one message is to be *engaged* in life,

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<sup>61</sup> Tolle 2005b: 276.

<sup>62</sup> Tolle 2005b: 276.

<sup>63</sup> Tolle 2005a: 166 (my italics).

<sup>64</sup> The subtitle to *A New Earth* is a repetition: *Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose*.

<sup>65</sup> Tolle 2005b: 291.

<sup>66</sup> Tolle 2005b: 292.

another message is to be *detached* from life. These viewpoints are from a theological point of view found in *adding* some USP from Vedanta to central USP in Western esoterism. However, the result is - with an emphasising of providence instead of karma, on a dialectical relationship on 'low' and 'high', on a transformation of dualism into monism, on holism and on evolution - typical dialectical esoterism. As stated several times in this thesis, the five matrices are not the only matrices encountered in a current; there are always additional USP.

*Tolle's meditative techniques*

Tolle recommends different meditative techniques in order to subdue the ego (form identity) and realise the Unmanifested (essence identity). These techniques also appear rather conglomeratic, and from a logical point of view it is difficult to extract any precise essence (see more below). However, religion is not a world of logical operations and prefers an 'and' where normal logic uses an 'or', for example man has a free will *and* is subjected to fate.

A central USP to Tolle is that the ego (or mind) must be annihilated or dissolved into the universal mind (i.e. enlightenment). One meditative method recommended for this transformation is 'noticing the gaps' between every "chancing succession of things you see or hear."<sup>67</sup> Thus, there are 'gaps' in the habitual stream of thinking, in sounds, feelings and in the first moment of perception. Consciousness constantly reincarnates into a new thought, feeling, sense perception or experience. This is the cycle of rebirth that Buddhists hope to avoid, says Tolle, "and it is only at this moment – through the power of Now – that you can get out of it."<sup>68</sup>

The relation between ritual practice (meditation) and USP can be set up in the following easy-to-read way:

**Ritual practice:**

Observing thoughts, feelings, perception,  
sounds.

**USP:**

Trapped; attached to ego and form.

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<sup>67</sup> Tolle 2005b: 253.

<sup>68</sup> Tolle 2005b: 252.

Observing ‘gaps’ between thoughts,  
feelings etc.

Realising the Unmanifested, the Now.

The above table, though very simply, shows that ‘doing’ and ‘believing’ reflect each other, i.e. a ritual element is a contracted expression of a belief (or a complex of ideas) and beliefs are mental modes or attitudes resulting from participation in ritual. It is, however, not the task here to demonstrate fully whether or not Tolle’s different meditative techniques constitute a meditative ritual field. The interesting and significant aspect is the presence of the clairvoyant ritual field. It is not surprising to find a clairvoyant ritual field, or at least strong traits of such a field, because of Tolle’s dependency on Western esoterism. Tolle’s first book, *The Power of Now*, reveals a strong dependency on such concepts as ‘energy’, ‘vibration’ and the clairvoyant perception, in order to measure the degree of evolution. Tolle proposes different techniques (see more below), for example the development of ‘the inner body’, i.e. a body of energy and vibration. Such a body is very similar to other ‘bodies’ found in parts of esoterism, for example the astral-body, the ether-body etc. The ‘inner body’ is already there, but is strengthened through *attention*, and a portal to the Unmanifested.<sup>69</sup> In its deepest aspect, says Tolle, the inner body *is* the Unmanifested.<sup>70</sup> Concerning how to connect to the ‘inner body’, it is worth to quote from *The Power of Now*:

“Direct your attention into the body. *Feel* it from within. Is it alive? Is there life in your hands, arms, legs, and feet – in your abdomen, your chest? Can you *feel the subtle energy field* that pervades the entire body and gives vibrant life to every organ and every cell? Can you *feel* it simultaneously in all parts of the body as a *single field of energy*?”<sup>71</sup>

Exact as in the clairvoyant ritual field it is a question of ‘sensing’ a subtle energy, measuring development or evolution whether by clairvoyance,

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<sup>69</sup> Tolle 2005a: 101.

<sup>70</sup> Tolle 2005a: 101. However, Tolle can also state that the inner body lies in the threshold between ‘form identity’ and ‘essence identity’. Tolle 2005a: 94.

<sup>71</sup> Tolle 2005a: 93 (my italics).

clairaudience or clairfeeling. Enlightenment happens through exploring the body, not by ignoring it. Transformation is *through* the body, not away from it.<sup>72</sup> Similar to Redfield's anthropology, the body is very important and is not perceived as being inimical to soul or spirit.<sup>73</sup> In modern esoterism development (or evolution) has become a question of sensing energies of different frequencies and to quote again (see above): "When you do (i.e. surrender), the energy that you emanate and which then runs your life is of a much higher energy vibrational frequency than the mind energy that still runs our world [...]."<sup>74</sup> It is now obvious that the meditative ritual of developing the 'inner body' is directly related to his USP that development is a matter of 'higher energy vibrational frequency'. The more one tunes in to the 'inner body' the more one tunes in to 'higher frequencies' - and the more developed becomes one's consciousness. Again, it is easy to see the relationship between 'ritual practice' and 'belief'.

Ritual practice	USP
Connecting to the 'inner body-energy'.	High frequencies equate to gnosis and spirituality.

Tolle exposes a new USP in *A New Earth*, that of 'inner space', which is "the life that animates the physical form."<sup>75</sup> By drawing parallels with modern physics, Tolle can assure us that the solidity of matter is only an illusion created by our senses, as 99.99% of matter is empty space.<sup>76</sup> Here, Tolle finds a new way of explaining how micro- and macrocosm reflect each other: they are made up of the same 'substance', i.e. empty space.<sup>77</sup> With a clever move Tolle now announces a new USP:

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<sup>72</sup> Tolle 2005a: 95.

<sup>73</sup> In New Age, mind and matter, or mind and body, are not inimical to one another. Hanegraaff 1998a: 174 - 175.

<sup>74</sup> Tolle 2005a: 176 (my parenthesis).

<sup>75</sup> Tolle 2005b: 250.

<sup>76</sup> Tolle 2005b: 250.

<sup>77</sup> "The physical body is no more than a misperception of who you are. In many ways, it is a microcosmic version of outer space." Tolle 2005b: 250.

“Although inner space has no form, it is intensely alive. That ‘empty space’ is life in its fullness, the unmanifested Source out of which all manifestation flows. The traditional word for that Source is God.”<sup>78</sup>

Perhaps, ‘inner space’ is identical with the ‘inner body’, but it is not explicitly stated by Tolle and instead he issues a warning against believing that one can *feel* the inner body. “So when you say, ‘I can feel my inner body’ that is a misperception created by thought.”<sup>79</sup> From a logical point of view it is somewhat hard to understand that the importance of feeling the ‘inner body’ (in *The Power of Now*; see above) is just a misperception. Perhaps Tolle means (in *A New Earth*) that feeling the body is a relative truth and only a step to realising the absolute truth of formless ‘inner space’ identical with life in its fullness.

#### *Partial pictures of reality in the meditative rituals*

In Tolle’s somewhat mixed and complex authorship it is possible to isolate two types of USP (or ideas). The first type is a Vedanta-like USP with a belief in relative and absolute truth and in emptiness (the formless Unmanifested).<sup>80</sup> The other USP is a belief in the five matrices and the evolution of spirit and matter. Rituals are, amongst other things, important to Olsson because of their ability to communicate different partial pictures of reality as the different ritual ‘elements’ are open for interpretation. Tolle’s meditative practices considered as a rituals communicate a number of different ‘realities’ corresponding to different beliefs (USP) as seen in the simple table below:

<b>Ritual element</b>	<b>Partial pictures of reality</b>	<b>Corresponding USP</b>
Being in thoughts, feelings.	Mind fluctuates.	Attached to <i>form</i> (suffering).

<sup>78</sup> Tolle 2005b: 251.

<sup>79</sup> Tolle 2005b: 251.

<sup>80</sup> The existence of a universal mind is, however, typical for New Age (Hanegraaff 1998a: 204 - 206). Additionally, Vedanta inspired Blavatsky to some degree, but by giving it a new meaning (Hanegraaff 1998a: 454 - 455). Therefore, Tolle is, as stated in this thesis, a New Age writer.

Observing ‘gaps’	Experiencing emptiness	The Unmanifested, Now <sup>81</sup>
Connecting to ‘inner body’	Feeling subtle life-energy	Contacting higher frequency <sup>82</sup>
Feeling (?) of ‘inner space’	Space is alive	‘I’ is the one Source, God

The above table shows the ritual elements to be found in the relative few ritual practices (meditations) put forward by Tolle. The ritual elements (left in the table) are the building-blocks Tolle uses when constructing his meditations.

First, it must be noticed how dependent Tolle is upon the clairvoyant ritual field successfully launched by Theosophy, in order to measure its most important canonical message: that of evolution. The first two ritual elements, being in mind and observing ‘gaps’, are Vedanta-like (or Buddhist-like) elements communicating two partial pictures of reality: that mind fluctuates and that it is possible to experience ‘emptiness’, i.e. no attachment to any kind of *form*. These two partial pictures of reality are a *result* of interpretation, according to Olsson. This interpretation of the ritual elements is in Tolle’s version caused by two important USP: 1) attachment to form, i.e. feeling, thoughts and immediate perception, causes suffering, and 2) experiencing ‘emptiness’ equals the experience of the Now or the Unmanifested. The two last ritual elements deal with the clairvoyant ritual field and in a deeper sense the related USP are also typical of Western esotericism. It must be stressed that the above table demonstrates how *ritual elements* disclose the ‘partial pictures of reality’ involved and how these again relate to ‘beliefs’ (USP). Such an understanding makes use of both emic and etic viewpoints. Besides Olsson’s theory, one of the most important contributions to this question may be found in Rappaport’s analysis of religion as ‘Self-referential messages’,<sup>83</sup> an analysis to be dealt with in the next chapter.

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<sup>81</sup> Equals the divine presence of Christ. Tolle believes that the second coming of Christ is a transformation from thinking (ego) to pure consciousness. Tolle: 2005a: 86 - 87.

<sup>82</sup> Equal to become closer to the one Source, the Unmanifested.

<sup>83</sup> Rappaport 1999: 69 - 106.



Second, even when Tolle makes use of his most Vedanta-like partial pictures of reality, he identifies the related USP with God and the presence of Christ, and this is what Faivre calls the concordance of traditions. Most important is to notice that the Vedanta-like USP are understood within an esoteric framework, for example, that personal enlightenment accelerates the liberation of other people,<sup>84</sup> i.e. matrix number two. The USP of enlightenment is used to *promote* the collective effect in matrix number two which means that meditation is also perceived as a kind of magical tool. It has an effect far beyond that of the personal sphere.

*The textual relationship between canonical messages and ritual practices*

The above table offers a clue on how to relate USP or canonical messages to ritual practices found in Tolle's two best-selling books, and this method of textual analysis has already been applied in the reading of *Hermetica* and Agrippa's *De occulta philosophia*. To reiterate, 'religious texts, as far as they deal with both beliefs and rituals/practices, simply mention rituals or ritual practices because they vitalise important USP and are 'contracted' forms of beliefs. The method is highly recommended when analysing Tolle. His books are maybe a bit confusing without knowing that the meditative practices mentioned are 'contracted' beliefs. Two examples can illustrate this.

The first example is given above and deals with the meditative technique to *connect to* and feel *the subtle energy field* in the 'inner body' (described in chapter six, "The Inner Body"). The 'inner body' is a portal to the USP mentioned in the preceding chapter five, "The state of Presence". The USP mentioned in chapter five are the reality of the Now, of 'Being', of pure consciousness and of the 'divine presence of Christ'.<sup>85</sup> Thus, the meditative technique (to connect to and feel the subtle energy field) described in the end of chapter six vitalises the canonical messages found in chapter five and six.

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<sup>84</sup> On the first page of his follow-up, *Practising the Power of Now* (2001), Tolle writes: "Since it was first published in 1997, *The Power of Now* has already had an impact on the collective consciousness of the planet far beyond anything I could have imagined." Tolle 2001: 9.

<sup>85</sup> Tolle 2005a: 77 - 88.

Stated otherwise, the meditative technique viewed as a ritual is a ‘contracted’ form of belief.

The second example is another technique mentioned at the end of chapter six, “The Inner Body”, dealing with the ‘creative use of mind’. This technique or ritual practice is to be used when in need of creative ideas:

“If you need to use your mind for at specific purpose, use it in conjunction with your inner body. [...]. Whenever an answer, a solution, or a creative idea is needed, stop thinking for a moment by focusing attention on your inner energy field. Become aware of the stillness. When you resume thinking, your mind will be fresh and creative.”<sup>86</sup>

This technique is actually a bit lengthier than the excerpt given above. However, it is sufficient in order to understand the partial pictures of reality involved. Some could perhaps claim that it is just a technique, but there is more to it as two ‘partial pictures of reality’ are communicated. The first is that by being conjoined with the ‘inner body’ one experiences the vitalising formless life-energy. The second partial picture of reality arises from the awareness of stillness, i.e. the awareness of the ‘gaps’ between thought, feelings and perception, and this is to *experience emptiness* (USP: being in the Now or in the Unmanifested, which is the source of life). It is this interplay between these partial pictures of reality and Tolle’s USP, which makes the technique rational. If one accepts his USP it becomes understandable that the technique ‘works’. By contacting the ‘inner body’ one contacts a life-force (or energy) and by contacting emptiness one contacts the source of life. No wonder then, that a person doing so will be ‘fresh and creative’. From an emic point of view, it ought to be obvious that if a devotee of Tolle feels that the technique works, it will then *vitalise* the belief in Tolle’s USP. This technique also entails ‘contracted’ forms of belief.

Like Redfield, Tolle has also written a more practical follow-up to *The Power of Now* (1997) with the title *Practising the Power of Now* (2001) -

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<sup>86</sup> Tolle 2005a: 105.

probably with the intention of clarifying what type of meditations and exercises are needed in order to support the different USP.<sup>87</sup> The book reveals a few new USP, for example that compassion emanates from the state of 'Being', which creates a healing effect on other people, animals and even trees and flowers.<sup>88</sup> The essence of this book is, however, that the relationship between USP and ritual (in the form of meditation) is closer and more obvious, i.e. USP and rituals properly follow one another almost side-by-side. This arrangement confirms the simple rule that rituals need USP and USP need rituals.

### **Secularisation and dialectical esotericism**

James Redfield and Eckhart Tolle are New Age authors and belong to what Hanegraaff calls 'New Age in a restricted sense' (*sensu stricto*). Hanegraaff has offered much reflection on the relationship between Western esotericism and New Age. He acknowledges that New Age, in a restricted sense, has its roots in the Theosophical tradition including its more Christian offshoots founded by Rudolf Steiner and Alice Bailey. "These forms of occultism provided the basic ideas of the 'New Age in a restricted sense'."<sup>89</sup> New Age in a general sense (*sensu lato*) with its strong 'American flavour' is inspired by transcendentalism and romanticism understood as a reinterpretation in contrast to a mere continuity.<sup>90</sup> New Age and traditional Western esotericism are worlds apart, as New Age is deeply affected by *psychology*, *evolutionism* and *instrumental causality*.<sup>91</sup> Yet, "there is no good reason to exclude New Age religion from the study of esotericism. This does not imply, however, that New Age is therefore simply an aspect of esotericism".<sup>92</sup> To Hanegraaff it is of uttermost importance to recognise a distinction between New Age and Western esotericism based on psychologization, evolutionism and instrumental causality. Earlier, Hanegraaff also included 'the study of religion' as one of the four 'mirrors of secular thought'.<sup>93</sup> In the future, says

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<sup>87</sup> The subtitle is: 'Essential Teachings, Meditations, and Exercises from *The Power of Now*'.

<sup>88</sup> Tolle 2001: 111 - 114.

<sup>89</sup> Hanegraaff 1998a: 375.

<sup>90</sup> Hanegraaff 1998c: 375 - 376.

<sup>91</sup> Hanegraaff 1998c: 379.

<sup>92</sup> Hanegraaff 1998c: 379.

<sup>93</sup> Hanegraaff 1998a: 442 - 462.

Hanegraaff, it is only by recognising the subtle influence of secularisation that one can determine whether or not New Age is a part of esotericism.<sup>94</sup>

This study is based on an approach to the study of religion (and esotericism) different from Hanegraaff's, a subject matter outlined in detail in the following chapter. According to this thesis, part of New Age belongs to *dialectical esoterism* for the simple reason that the five matrices are found together with some of their related major ritual fields in the best-sellers of Redfield and Tolle. This thesis recognises to some degree the impact of secularisation on modern esotericism. The question is the degree of relevance.

#### *Psychology and psychologization*

It will be demonstrated in the last chapter that secularisation influences cosmologies but not USP in Western esotericism. According to Hanegraaff, New Age is characterised by a 'psychologization of religion' and a 'sacralisation of psychology'. Psychologization of religion means that religion is 'all in the mind' without, however, reducing religion to atheism. Sacralisation of psychology takes place when the mind is assumed to have a sacred dimension. Therefore, the conceptions of the mind can exist objectively and gods, for example, are both perceived as concepts of the mind and external realities.<sup>95</sup> Further, in a broader sense, 'psychologising religion' also means to understand religion in psychological terms, for example as a reflection of the dynamics of the unconscious. This implies that the Jungian understanding of alchemy may be correct, but alchemists themselves (i.e. before secularisation) never interpreted their beliefs in psychological, only in religious, terms.<sup>96</sup>

Nevertheless, this view may be challenged. Garth Fowden has devoted a chapter to a concept similar to 'psychologization of religion', called *Religio mentis*, in his important book on Hermetism.<sup>97</sup> The crux of the matter is that Hermetism defines itself as a *religio mentis*.<sup>98</sup> Hermetism is to a high degree a religion that manifests itself in the mind as reflection, gnosis and

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<sup>94</sup> Hanegraaff 1998c: 379.

<sup>95</sup> Hanegraaff 1998c: 378.

<sup>96</sup> Hanegraaff 1998c: 379.

<sup>97</sup> Fowden 1986: 95 - 97.

<sup>98</sup> *Asclepius*.25: "But – believe me – whoever dedicates himself to reverence of mind [lat: *religio mentis*] will facing a capital penalty." Copenhaver 2000: 82 (my brackets).

meditation. Obviously, there is also a ‘sacralisation of psychology’ in Hermetism insofar as the mind itself gains immortality. Furthermore, we may ask in a broader sense: did the Hermetists include a psychological component in their worldview and on their road to the highest gnosis? Astrology made use of psychological elements in the second century AD and Hermetists imported some of these psychological elements. In *Poimandres*, Hermetists had to get rid of ‘fluctuation of mind’, ‘cunning’, ‘boldness’, ‘erotic desire’ etc. in order to reach the Ogdoad and God. It is hard to argue that psychology is non-existent in Greek astrology (and hence in Hermetism). It is not an experimental psychology, but mainly one developed from cosmological doctrines. Still, it is a type of psychology trying to address the temperament, motives, actions and social interactions of human beings. It may be of significance that Ptolemy clearly defined astrology as belonging to the domain of the mind (psyche).<sup>99</sup> It is also hard to deny that there is no psychology found in the writings of Agrippa, for example, when he states that a strong belief in the physician and the medicine add much to health, sometimes more than the medicine itself (i.e. the placebo effect). Another example is Paracelsus’ warning that strong fear may attract serious diseases. Admittedly, of course, there is a significant gap between these rudimentary types of psychology and modern academic institutional psychology.

#### *Instrumental causality*

Hanegraaff provides his own definition on how to understand ‘instrumental causality’.<sup>100</sup> It is neither a theory, worldview, a type of symbolic system,

<sup>99</sup> *Tetrabiblos* III.13: *Peri poiôtêtos psychês*, i.e. ‘Of the quality of the mind’. Here one can for example read that what concerns reason (or speech) and the ability to grasp (*peri to logikon kai noeron*) is seen from the position of Hermes (Mercury) in the horoscope. What concerns the sensory (or perceptive) and irrational part (*peri to aisthêtikon kai alogon*) is seen from the position of the Moon. When reading the whole chapter, it would be difficult to suggest that Ptolemy had no psychological insight.

<sup>100</sup> Hanegraaff writes: “Instrumental causality [...] is: neither a theory (although theories can be developed to account for it, for example a Cartesian one) nor a worldview (although a worldview can be explained in terms of such theories, for example some forms of 19-century positivism) nor a certain type of symbolic system (although it can give raise to symbolic systems, for example the one which dominates contemporary society; nor even a mentality (for, again, as a human attribute it makes its appearance in any mentality). Like participation, it is a spontaneous tendency of the human mind: the tendency to suspect things that happen in

nor a mentality, but a spontaneous tendency of the human mind. Instrumental causality explains events in terms of ‘material causation’. Principally, instrumental causality is the opposite of spontaneous ‘participation’. A fictitious illustration follows. A six-year old child receives on Christmas Day a gift from Santa Claus. Then, the child can imagine that the gift is from the genuine Santa Claus, but at the same time he or she also knows that this is grandfather or another real person. Modern magicians have, according to Hanegraaff, a similar attitude and are unable to deal with ‘correspondences’ as real. Hence they see magic as a method to increase consciousness and not as a real explanation of the correspondences they operate with. They can only ‘pretend’ (like the child seeing Santa Claus) that correspondences are real, because they, at one level, *have to* reject them due to modern knowledge and rationality. Now, this thesis has not defined matrix number five, holism, in terms of ‘correspondences’, but rather in terms of a *communication* between wholeness and its parts. Neo-Darwinism, and especially cybernetics, assumes that different ‘parts’ and ‘levels’ communicate and adjust to each other. In this respect they are holistic theories, but they do not explicitly state how this communication is established. If a modern, though plausible, theory on how ‘parts’ communicate with ‘wholeness’ is established, modern magicians would adopt this theory immediately. This is one of the weaknesses of Hanegraaff’s argument. He does not take into account that modern esotericists try to find new cosmological explanations, e.g., that Tolle explains holism with the aid of the collective consciousness as the carrier that transports communication between parts and between parts and wholeness.

### *Evolution*

The idea of evolution certainly belongs to the era of secularisation, and there is no sense arguing against it. This powerful idea of evolution has clearly been assimilated into theosophy and New Age. In the case of Redfield, evolution applies first and foremost to the body, whereas evolution in Blavatsky’s case primarily is a question of the soul’s development from life to life. Evolution is used to create a macro-history of the world and the soul

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the world to be the result of material causation, and to explain events in this manner.”  
Hanegraaff 2003: 375.

in early theosophy, but in Redfield's esoterism the world seems 'lesser' and much more clear. In this thesis 'development' is formulated as the mind and/or the world put on a stairway. Now, basically this means a return to oneness, unity, the absolute or God. As far as the world is considered to be at a lower ontological level than the divine, *the return to unity constitutes a progress*. The difference between development based on evolution and a 'back-to-unity-process' is therefore - from an existential point of view - less than generally assumed. Theoretically, in evolution man and cosmos may develop *ad infinitum*, but this is not necessary the case. To Redfield evolution *leads on, or forward, to heaven*. In Hermetica development *leads back to heaven*. The concept of evolution, which Hanegraaff apparently also ascribe to Romanticism,<sup>101</sup> implies three significant consequences. First, the final state is higher than the beginning. Second, progress will more or less inevitably happen. Third, progress is universal, i.e. it also applies to adherents of other religions. Evolution seems to be the strongest of Hanegraaff's three main criteria in secularisation. There is no reason to question this view, however, in existential terms a return to unity, i.e. as things were once, also constitutes development.

#### *The impact of the study of religion*

The study of religion is the last of Hanegraaff's 'mirrors of secular thought' to be dealt with here.<sup>102</sup> This topic is rather complex and only a single dimension of this 'mirror' will be dealt with here, namely, some *consequences* of 'the theosophical synthesis'. This synthesis consists of three elements: spiritualism, sexual and solar theories, and the appearance of occultism as a revival of traditional occult sciences (for example as plagiarised material from Agrippa). "It was Helena Petrowna Blavatsky (1831-1891) who brought the various elements mentioned above together into an occultist synthesis which became the foundation of modern theosophy."<sup>103</sup> According to Hanegraaff, the theosophical synthesis includes

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<sup>101</sup> Hanegraaff 1998c: 237 - 262.

<sup>102</sup> Earlier, Hanegraaff described four secular mirrors: i) Esotericism between Enlightenment and Counter-Enlightenment, ii) The impact of the study of religion, iii) Evolution as religion and iv) The psychologization of religion (or esotericism); Hanegraaff 1998a: 411 - 513.

<sup>103</sup> Hanegraaff 1998a: 448.

‘elements of Oriental religions’ and perspective (interpretation) of ‘comparative religion’ in a western occultist framework.<sup>104</sup>

Simply stated, Hanegraaff may be very correct about many of the details concerning ‘the study of religion’. It is very clear that Tolle, for example, includes elements of oriental religions, even partial pictures of reality from the ritual elements - together with Christian elements - into a western esoteric framework. Perhaps Tolle also believes that he is contributing to ‘comparative religion’ when making his ‘concordance of traditions’ (see above). However, my reluctance to accept Hanegraaff’s theory of secularisation (and New Age including modern Western esotericism as a secularised traditional esoterism) rests on two facts. First of all, as stated earlier, the five matrices are unaffected by secularisation (i.e. here by foreign religions). Secondly, it is difficult to accept that early esoteric writers, for example Agrippa, were unaware of ‘oriental’ religions.<sup>105</sup> The crucial fact is that Agrippa knew about metempsychosis and some technical matters found in Arabian philosophy and responded to these items. Thus Agrippa was in the same situation as Tolle and had to consider the relevance of ‘foreign’ USP. As in the case of Tolle, he accepted foreign USP when they supported his own westernised canonical messages.

#### *Two positions*

The five matrices are found in New Age literature as demonstrated above. So, in that sense at least, parts of New Age are a *natural* part of Western esotericism. At one level Hanegraaff’s theory of secularisation works well and is highly intelligible. Religion is, of course, also a product of society. However, Hanegraaff’s and Rappaport’s approaches to religion naturally conflict. Hanegraaff views religion as a product of contemporary society, and when a religion has a tradition, a continuous reinterpretation of central ideas must occur in order to maintain the tradition. Hanegraaff also sees a religion with its ideas, cosmology, codes of behaviour and society as totally interwoven and inseparable. However, Rappaport additionally tries to

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<sup>104</sup> Hanegraaff 1998a: 449.

<sup>105</sup> Theoretically, such a viewpoint requires that the reception between Europe and (near) Oriental cultures and religions occurred and began to crystallise before the Age of Enlightenment. For such a viewpoint, see for example: Offermann 2005: 16 - 45.



separate *different liturgical levels* in religion which interact with *different quantities of sensitivity to society* (and history). The crucial fact is that secularisation does not at all affect the five matrices. Perhaps, psychologization and instrumental causality affect some codes of conduct and the *understanding* of specific cosmologies.<sup>106</sup> In this way secularisation can *transform* certain explanations, but the point of the matter is, as we shall see in the next chapter, that adherents of esoterism do not care that much whether their explanations are logical in an absolute sense or not.

### Summary

The branch of esotericism defined by the five matrices and some of their related ritual fields can be labelled *dialectical esoterism* or *dialectical esotericism* due to the presence of matrix number two. Dialectical esoterism is very old and probably has its roots in Hermetism and/or gnostic Christianity. It is an important and essential matter that the five matrices are found in recent esoteric literature by best-selling authors like Redfield and Tolle. As evaluated by Hanegraaff and Hammer, this implies that New Age or Western esoterism is ‘far beyond the confines of an underground cult milieu’ (Hammer). Stated positively, this means that Western esoterism is moving into the centre of society. From another point of view, especially the Durkheimian point of view, it is not surprising that a dialectical relationship between ‘low’ and ‘high’ finds its way into Religion in a culture in which progress – and a great acknowledgment of the few creating advancement for the many – is highly respected and admired.

Blavatskian Theosophy effectively founded the clairvoyant ritual field, and the authorships of Redfield and Tolle additionally prove its existence. The clairvoyant ritual field is a ritual practice: the perception of chakras, auras or energy fields coursing through the body in order to quantify spiritual *evolution*. It is the presence of the five matrices, and the clairvoyant ritual field, that classify Tolle as a westernised and dialectical esotericist despite the presence of his Vedanta-like USP. Redfield is also a dialectical

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<sup>106</sup> If secularisation is synonymous with the development of science, one can say that science has significantly affected some *features* of the cosmologies involved, for example that matter is energy. Modern esoterism gladly accepts the Big bang-theory (Redfield), a heliocentric system (Tolle) as opposed to a geocentric system (Paracelsus, Agrippa and others).

esotericist despite his special affection for Christian teachings of a sort, for example the coming of a Paradise on Earth, although realised on a level 'of higher energy vibrational frequencies'.

## CHAPTER 8

### Some notes on historiography and methodologies in Western esotericism

Until comparatively recently, there was not much scholarship on Western esotericism, perceived as a coherent field in itself. There were, however, various studies on parts of esotericism, for example on alchemy, magic, psychology, art or Renaissance thinking, to be found in articles and books. Two significant professorships have appeared in Europe, one in Paris and one in Amsterdam.<sup>1</sup> Antoine Faivre was a professor at Sorbonne and held a chair in 'Histoire des courants ésotériques et mystiques dans l'Europe moderne et contemporaine' from 1979 to 2002.<sup>2</sup> With his book *Access to Western Esotericism* from 1994 (or his *Accès de l'ésotérisme occidental* printed in two volumes in 1996) he made a breakthrough, thus marking a milestone in the studies of Western esotericism.<sup>3</sup> Faivre managed to transform the various studies into a structured subject matter, mainly by setting up six characteristics common to all the currents of Western esotericism. His definition consists of a *form of thought* sharing four primary criteria,<sup>4</sup> which must be present simultaneously, and two secondary criteria which are often encountered. When Faivre refers to 'L'Europe moderne' it is the period from around 1475 AD up to recent times. Historically, Faivre includes Theosophy, but not New Age, as a part of esotericism. However, in Faivre's recent works he includes classical Hermetism as a part of

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<sup>1</sup> Other 'chairs' seems to have been established recently, for example at the University of Exeter.

<sup>2</sup> This chair was originally established in 1965 under the name 'History of Christian Esotericism'. Faivre's successor since 2002 has been Jean Pierre Brash.

<sup>3</sup> There are different versions of "Accès de l'ésotérisme occidental", the first published in 1986 covering approximately half of the content compared with the French edition in 1996. An English version (1994) was printed in one volume including Faivre's small introduction *L'ésotérisme* from 1992 with the title *Access to Western Esotericism*. It is in the *L'ésotérisme* that Faivre's criteria for esotericism appeared for the first time. The second volume of the French edition from 1996 was published in English (2000) with the title: *Theosophy, Imagination, Tradition: Studies in Western Esotericism*.

<sup>4</sup> In French, *forme de pensée*, which can also be translated as a 'way of thinking'.

esotericism – just like Hanegraaff.<sup>5</sup> Wouter J. Hanegraaff holds the Dutch professorship at the University of Amsterdam with a chair called ‘History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Current’. This department, which was established in 1999, covers the area from classical Hermetism up to the present, and offers the world’s first and only complete programme for teaching and research in Western esotericism.

The historiography of esotericism is problematic, in particular the question of when esotericism, i.e. the academic study of esoterism, *became aware of itself*. Looking back, there were authors long before Faivre who claimed that esoterism in the West was something of its own. The Dane, Alfred Lehmann (1858 -1921 AD) established psychology as an experimental science at University of Copenhagen. In 1893 he published two volumes, *Superstition and Magic I-II*,<sup>6</sup> with the purpose ‘to lessen the appetite for superstition among the cultured part of the public’. Without too much irony, detachment or disparaging comments, the books in general gave a clear and very systematic introduction to topics such as astrology, occultism, alchemy, spiritism, mesmerism, dreams and magic. According to Lehmann these topics developed by becoming increasingly sophisticated up to and during the Renaissance, collapsed, and then later re-emerged again in new forms.<sup>7</sup> Lehmann moved from the astrology and magic of the Chaldeans (the last people to rule Mesopotamia) through Alexandria to the Middle Ages, Renaissance and all the way to his own time. Thus he must have had a culturally-consecutive understanding of his topics. He classified many of these topics as ‘learned magic’. Lehman actually defined a large part of esoterism, and to Lehman ‘learned magic’ differed from medieval or popular magic only by the amount of applied human intelligence. In Lehman’s universe the learned Magus were people like Geber,<sup>8</sup> Arnau de Vilanova, Johan Trithemius, Cornelius Agrippa and Paracelsus. They all managed to fabricate the various magical components in such a way that they formed ‘architectonic marvels’ where popular magic was only able to build ‘a

<sup>5</sup> There is a longer article on Hermetism in ‘Hermetic literature in Antiquity’ in *DGWE*.

<sup>6</sup> This is a translation of the Danish title: *Overtro og Trolddom*. A popular book published in its fourth edition as late as 1999.

<sup>7</sup> Lehmann 1968: Vol. II, 9 - 39.

<sup>8</sup> His real name was Abu Musa Jabir ibn Hayyan, primarily known as an alchemist. It is probably that he was born 721-2 AD and died in 815 AD.

simple wall of stones'.<sup>9</sup> Alfred Lehmann undoubtedly belongs to an international group of academic writers who tried to educate the public on the esoteric topics in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Not surprisingly, current research concludes that the 19<sup>th</sup> century's "academic historiography has not yet been systematically investigated."<sup>10</sup> In his earlier writings Hanegraaff suggested three types of contribution from different scholars, grouping them according to the most common biases toward esotericism, as pro-esotericists, anti-esotericists and historicists.<sup>11</sup> However, in the case of Alfred Lehmann, his time and his profession, a mild and formal kind of distance from the subject was to be expected. Thus, he was not really an anti-esotericist.

At this stage in time, it is impossible to give a clear review of earlier efforts to systematise Western esotericism into a culturally-consecutive topic. Adherents themselves have for a long time proclaimed a connection back in time, but this is a typical religious attitude and thus, non-academic religious authors as authorities on the topic are excluded in this study. However, among those I would like to mention Manly P. Hall (1901 - 1990 AD), well-known to most Americans as having just a small degree of interest in esotericism. His *The Secret Teachings of all Ages* from 1925, reprinted many times, is available in different versions. The first two editions were so completely pre-subscribed that until 1928 it was not available in any shop.<sup>12</sup> Hall is a real perennialist (see below) and a pro-esotericist, yet one must admire his sensitive and emic understanding. In 1934 he founded 'The Philosophical Research Society' in Los Angeles, later called 'The University of Philosophical Research' which in 2002 received full state approval.<sup>13</sup> The reality is simply that not many earlier writers cover this subject without falling into the category of being either a pro-esotericist or an anti-

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<sup>9</sup> A recent study nearly confirms this relationship, though its topic concerns the debt owed to medieval magic in Renaissance magic. The shift in the use of medieval ritual and image magic (for example as applied by Ficino and Agrippa in Renaissance) lies in the "rationalist environment [...] connected with the belief that the structure of the cosmos is accessible to rational enquiry." Klassen 2003: 190.

<sup>10</sup> Hanegraaff 2005b: 338. Even earlier writers, such as Jacob Brucker (1696 – 1770), a German historian of philosophy, had some idea of 'Western esotericism' by proclaiming a "straight line from ancient gnosticism via Jacob Boehme to German Idealism"; 2005b: 338.

<sup>11</sup> Hanegraaff 1998b: 18 - 59.

<sup>12</sup> Hall 2000: iii.

<sup>13</sup> See Internet, *prs.org*.

esotericist, as Hanegraaff has pointed out. By including people like Lehmann and Hall, the history of research on esotericism will end up somewhat differently. If one for a moment includes the writings of Lehmann and Hall (actually found in *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism*),<sup>14</sup> Western esotericism has also been defined by its contents. Here are some parts of the topics:

Lehmann: Magic, occult philosophy, astrology, numerology, kabala, alchemy, spiritualism, dreams, the unconsciousness, theosophy, hypnosis.

Hall: Atlantis, occult philosophy, initiates (Plato for example),<sup>15</sup> astrology, numerology, alchemy, mysticism, freemasonry and American Indian symbolism.

In fact, Faivre, co-editor of *DGWE*, and Hanegraaff as chief editor also try to identify Western esotericism through topics such as astrology, alchemy etc. Numerous publications, for example the English series *Mysteries of the Unknown*<sup>16</sup> translated into several languages, have also given the public a similar understanding. An adherent of occultism (or esotericism) most often believes in these topics - not to mention healing, UFOs, Big Foot, ghosts, witchcraft and the like.<sup>17</sup>

#### **Antoine Faivre's characteristics and methodology**

The six characteristics of Antoine Faivre are of uppermost interest. Firstly, all these criteria give a powerful signal to researchers in the world that a new area of research is established, a field which is able to define itself. Secondly, the exact contents of the criteria determine what is 'proper esotericism', and thirdly the criteria imply methods of research more relevant to the field than others. For Faivre, the six criteria are not just

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<sup>14</sup> Godwin 2005: 455 - 456.

<sup>15</sup> Not surprisingly, Hall was also a theosophist.

<sup>16</sup> Time-Life Books Inc, 1988.

<sup>17</sup> Actually, witchcraft and UFOs are topics mentioned in *DGWE*, i.e. apparently subjects perceived as topics in the field of esotericism; Valente 2005: 1174 - 1177; Mayer 2005: 1139 - 1194.

proposals in an attempt to identify the field of esotericism; they actually offer a precise definition:

“But one must also ask what makes it a particular region distinct from its neighbors. That is why I have proposed calling ‘esotericism’ in the modern West a form of thought identifiable by the presence of six basic characteristics distributed in varying proportions. Four are ‘intrinsic’, in that their simultaneous presence is a necessary and sufficient condition for a discourse to be identified as esoteric. With them are joined two others, which I call ‘secondary’, that is, not intrinsic but whose presence is frequent next to the four others. This being said, it is clear that none of the six belongs to esotericism alone.”<sup>18</sup>

The six characteristics, the four intrinsic and the two secondary are:<sup>19</sup>

(1) The Idea of Correspondence

This notion is somewhat similar to the fifth matrix though this matrix does not promote ‘correspondence’ as the only interrelationship between ‘parts and wholeness’. Faivre also reckons ‘correspondences’ between nature and history, even texts, e.g. the Bible and nature are supposed to illuminate each other. Everything in nature is a sign and even the least object holds a secret, and the universe is a mosaic of hieroglyphs ready to be decoded.

(2) Living nature

Nature is alive and pervaded by a hidden fire or light circulating through it. The living nature also enables stones, metals or plants to maintain or re-establish physical or psychic health. Further, and very importantly, Faivre connects gnosis or knowledge to living nature. Gnosis is to understand nature in its intimate context and to contemplate the active forces including its first elements. Faivre’s ‘living nature’ is another side of nature mentioned in the first criterion. I think that the question of a light or hidden fire circulating in nature is somewhat dubious, if one wants to include Hermetica

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<sup>18</sup> Faivre 2000: xxi.

<sup>19</sup> The following is based on Faivre 1994: 10 - 23.

in esotericism. There is no mentioning of a fire or light circulating in nature, and in *Poimandres* fire, light and logos explicitly withdrew from nature (made up of water and earth) after a brief contact.<sup>20</sup> Faivre admits that since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century a monistic spiritualism has emerged neglecting nature, due especially to the influence of Hindu doctrines.

### (3) Imagination and mediations

These two notions are complementary. Imagination is important when decoding the signs in nature (found in the first criterion). Signs or signatures are mediators between perceptible data and invisible or hidden things. Further, rituals, images, mandalas, intermediate spirits, the “hieroglyphs of Nature” and symbols “charged with polysemia” are mediators too.<sup>21</sup> Faivre considers mystics more or less free from mediations in contrast with the esotericist, who seems much more interested in intermediaries. This distinction between mysticism and esotericism excludes the former as a topic in Western esotericism.<sup>22</sup> However, gnosis is not discarded and is related, as stated above, to correspondence and the living force in nature. Imagination is a faculty, a “sort of organ of the soul”, through which the esotericist receives gnosis by discovering, seeing or knowing mediating entities. Imagination is “the eye of fire that makes visible the invisible.” In a sense Faivre says that the esotericist is so attached to ‘mediations’, i.e. sympathies, rituals, images (of Tarot etc.), that he or she “prefers to sojourn, to travel, on Jacob’s ladder, where the angels (and doubtless other entities as well) climb up and down, rather than to climb to the top and beyond.”<sup>23</sup> It is important to note that Faivre sees imagination as a tool which puts the theory of correspondences

<sup>20</sup> *Poimandres*, 4: “The fire was nimble and piercing and active as well, and because the air was light it followed after the spirit and rose up to the fire *away* from earth and water so that it seemed suspended from the fire” (my italics). *Poimandres*, 10: “The weighty elements of nature were left behind, bereft of reason (logos) so as to be mere matter” (my parenthesis). Copenhagen 2000: 1 - 2.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Polysemia’ is probably derived from the Greek word, *polusēmia*, ‘multiple meaning’ or ‘many signs’.

<sup>22</sup> Arthur Versluis, the founder of the journal *Esoterica*, has criticised this attitude. For Versluis it is okay to omit the word ‘mysticism’, but then one has to clarify that gnosis can be a “direct perception of hidden or esoteric aspects of the cosmos (Cosmological gnosis)” as well as a “direct insight into complete transcendence (metaphysical gnosis)”. Arthur Versluis in *Esoterica*, Vol. IV (2002). Web-edition.

<sup>23</sup> Faivre 1994: 12.



into active practice.<sup>24</sup> Actually, imagination is the foundation of esotericism as a visionary philosophy. However, Faivre's somewhat limited perception of *ritual as a mediator* will briefly be discussed below.

(4) The experience of transmutation

Transmutation, a concept from alchemy, is here understood as a path offering a "second birth", and the path itself consists of "*nigredo* (death), *albedo* (whitening) and *rubedo* (reddening, philosopher's stone)", which Faivre compares with "the three phases of the traditional mystical path: purgation, illumination, unification." This fourth criterion "comes to complete the first three". It is somewhat peculiar that Faivre excludes the 'mystic' from esotericism, but nevertheless uses a definition from the 'traditional mystical path' in order to explain spiritual transmutation as a key-concept.

(5) The practice of concordance

The first of the secondary characteristics is the attempt to establish common denominators between two or several different traditions (or religions), and when most successful, to bring out a common basis, to obtain a gnosis of highest quality. This comparative approach, which Faivre calls it, started in the 19<sup>th</sup> century when comparative religion became a new academic discipline.

(6) Transmission

According to Faivre, "one is not initiated by oneself alone" and a second birth of initiation is required in order "to undergo this discipline". Some insist on regularised and authenticated channelling, and this channelling has taken place since the middle of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Yet, another characteristic may exist in addition to the first four intrinsic criteria. As pointed out by Arthur McCalla<sup>25</sup> and Erik Davis,<sup>26</sup> it seems that

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<sup>24</sup> Faivre 1994: 13.

<sup>25</sup> McCalla 2001: 442 - 443.

<sup>26</sup> Erik Davis, "Hermes on the Seine. The Esoteric Scholarship of Antoine Faivre". Web-edition. An abbreviated version of this review appeared in *Parabola*, 1996. Erik Davis, a

Faivre includes a fifth criterion: the need for myth, fall, redemption, genuine imagination and absence of pantheism.<sup>27</sup> Faivre dislikes pantheism because it has no “reference to the original Fall, and with the negation of any form of anthropocentrism.”<sup>28</sup> In anthropocentrism, man is central to the whole macrocosm - as found for example in the writings of Paracelsus and Jacob Boehme. Spinoza’s pantheism is “never anything but the ‘degradation’ of androgynous eternity”. ‘Fortunately’, Faivre manages to correct Spinoza on the subject of eternity by declaring: “divine eternity is unceasing production, a free game of *descensus-ascensus*”.<sup>29</sup>

### *Methodology*

The six or seven characteristics mentioned above are considered by Faivre as his method<sup>30</sup> and as such the method has been labelled *heuristic* by Hanegraaff.<sup>31</sup> For Faivre, his method is not to demonstrate an ‘overarching esoterism per se’ but rather ‘the genesis of the various transformations of these modern Western esoteric currents’.<sup>32</sup> It is also of importance to recognise wrong methodology and one can summarise six instances of these: the ‘religionist’, ‘reductionist’, ‘essentialist’, ‘universalist’, ‘thematic’ and ‘doctrinal’ approach.<sup>33</sup> Faivre’s method is above all *analytical*, and in a clear-cut way one may analyse whether a current belongs to Western esotericism or not.

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writer and culture critic, has properly given the most severe and penetrating criticism of Faivre’s scholarship based on English translations without denying Faivre’s profound erudition and the significance of his effort to establish esotericism as an academic area.

<sup>27</sup> For Faivre, imagination is an eye of piercing quality, a tool for penetrating ‘the bark of appearances’ and to make ‘the invisible visible’. Faivre often warns his readers of pitfalls in esotericism today, which is a time of ‘poorly researched studies’. Also, mass media “produces fantastic images and ‘wild’ imaginings instead of appealing to genuine imagination able to ‘grasp the multileveled meaning of reality’”. Faivre 1995a: 64; note p. 65.

<sup>28</sup> Faivre 1994: 294.

<sup>29</sup> Faivre 1994: 231. It seems to be a somewhat pro-esoteric Faivre speaking here.

<sup>30</sup> Faivre & Voss: 1995: 48.

<sup>31</sup> Hanegraaff 2005b: 340.

<sup>32</sup> Faivre & Voss: 1995: 63 - 64. Faivre was probably influenced in 1993 by Hanegraaff’s more critical approach to religion. This information was provided to McCally by Hanegraaff in a private conversation March 2000. McCally 2001: 447.

<sup>33</sup> McCally 2001: 440 - 441. See also Faivre 2000: especially xxi - xxviii. Faivre’s introduction is here more detailed concerning ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ methodology compared with those given in the introduction in his *Access to Western Esotericism* from 1994.

The religionist method, according to Faivre, is a strong subjective approach, i.e. an emic unilateral construct. The reductionist method is the well-known approach where religion (esotericism) is ‘reduced’ to something else, for example psychology, epistemology, sociology, economy, philosophy etc. In launching the essentialist method as something to be avoided, Faivre uses Pierre A. Riffard’s notion of esotericism as a universal, existential, and anthropological structure, as an example. Pierre Riffard’s scheme from 1990 consists of eight etic ‘invariants’: (i) the impersonality of the author, (ii) the opposition of esoteric and exoteric, (iii) the existence of the ‘subtle’, (iv) mediation between spirit and matter, (v) the importance of numbers, (vi) occult sciences, (vii) occult arts and (viii) initiation. Riffard claimed esotericism to be found all over the world from pre-history to present day as a mode of living.<sup>34</sup> The essentialist believes that each religion has a recognisable form or identity; it encompasses a ‘real essence’.<sup>35</sup> The ‘universalist’s method’ is not exclusive and is unable to identify Western esotericism. The inadequate thematic method is definition by themes such as androgyny, sophiology, the soul, world soul etc. The doctrinal method only reproduces what is already known - or risks generating as many doctrines as there are currents. It should be obvious that Faivre did not conceive his own method as a doctrinal approach to the topic of esotericism. Instead of these approaches, Faivre recommends *methodological agnosticism* in the study of esoterism, as proposed by Hanegraaff.<sup>36</sup>

#### *Currents and practices*

In 1998 Faivre made rather important distinctions between *currents*, *spiritual attitudes* and *practices*. These have already been outlined in chapter 2 and some ‘practices’ are in this thesis transferred into dynamic ritual fields. However, Faivre’s categories are repeated below.

<sup>34</sup> Here in Hanegraaff’s summary (Hanegraaff 1998b: 24). Riffard is thus both an ‘universalist’ and an ‘essentialist’. For more information, see section below on Pierre Riffard.

<sup>35</sup> A variant of ‘essentialism’ with “a higher degree of inner consistency” (Hanegraaff 1998b: 26) is ‘perennialism’, i.e. the concept of an eternal ‘truth’ in a given religion. Faivre dismisses perennialism as a scientific methodology and conceives it *per se* as the way Renaissance esoterism perceived itself.

<sup>36</sup> Faivre and Voss 1995: 66. This method based on a suspension of a normative judgement is proposed by Hanegraaff (1998a: 4).

Pure Currents: Hermetism, Christian Kabbalah, Paracelsism, Rosicrucianism and Theosophy.

Currents, which are also *practices*: Alchemy, Astrology, Magic, and Occultism.

Pure spiritual attitudes: Hermeticism (i.e. not classical Hermetism) and Gnosis.

This thesis does not agree with all Faivre's categories, where for example Paracelsism is listed as a current, but not as a practice. In this thesis Paracelsus' alchemy is first and foremost a *ritual field*. Neither does this thesis agree that Alexandrian Hermetism is a current belonging to Western esotericism, but rather a 'root', or a kind of 'foundation', to esotericism.

### **Hanegraaff's methodology and perception of esotericism as religion**

Hanegraaff has paid much attention to the different methods applied in esoterism. Regardless of the fact that Hanegraaff in a very empirical and non-biased way has dealt with both New Age and esoterism,<sup>37</sup> he has recently veered off course. As a chief editor of *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism* (2005) he is responsible for all the subjects, themes, currents and writers included under the heading 'Gnosis and Esotericism'. In these two impressive volumes, classical Hermetism, Gnosticism, Grail tradition, Avicenna, Scientology and much more, are now included under Western gnosis *and* Esotericism (as the title reads). One might ask: what is the reason for such a daring undertaking, which "brings together a great range of historical currents and personalities that have flourished in Western culture and society over a period of roughly two millennia, from Late Antiquity to the present."?<sup>38</sup> Hanegraaff gives three main reasons for bringing all these currents and topics together, a historical, a typological and a heuristic reason. According to Hanegraaff, compared with the typological

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<sup>37</sup> Hanegraaff very much stresses an empirical approach done with an open, but neutral mind.

<sup>38</sup> Hanegraaff 2005a: vii.

and heuristic definitions, a historical definition is the best approach. A brief summary follows:

Historical definition: Currents and personalities in Western esotericism are bound together by *certain* (but unspecified) links between them. Firstly, these currents “display *certain* similarities and are historically related.”<sup>39</sup> Secondly, it is unwise to be too specific at this recent stage in establishing esotericism as a science, since “scholars in this domain often strongly disagree about abstract theoretical definitions although they in fact share a broad consensus about the historical phenomena covered by the term.”<sup>40</sup> Hanegraaff’s historical definition seems to be *tactical* insofar as it is able to bring together a great number of different specialists with specific knowledge of spectacular currents and personalities since late Antiquity. Actually, Hanegraaff’s definition is *operative*, because he defines esotericism as ‘what we are doing’.

Typological definition: Esotericism is not an isolated field of knowledge. It must also be seen as an integrated part of the study of religion, whether anthropological or historical in its approach. In the domain of religion *per se* a typological definition as ‘esoteric’ (an inner mysterious dimension), as opposed to ‘exoteric’, may be appropriate - though it would be based on the ‘religionist’ agendas.<sup>41</sup> A typological definition is universal and ascribes certain *qualities* to a current or religion which are not to be found elsewhere.

Heuristic definition: According to Hanegraaff, Faivre’s definition is heuristic in value. As such the method is replicable and can be used to determine what esotericism is. ‘Heuristic’ is also a problem-solving method and as such one can ‘solve’ to what degree a certain current belongs to esotericism. According to Hanegraaff, Faivre’s heuristic definition is somewhat limited in scope as it ‘works best’ for the occult philosophy in Renaissance and in the late 18<sup>th</sup>/early 19th century Illuminist and Romantic context.<sup>42</sup> Basically,

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<sup>39</sup> Hanegraaff 2005a: xi. (My italics).

<sup>40</sup> Hanegraaff 2005a: xi.

<sup>41</sup> Hanegraaff 2005a: xi.

<sup>42</sup> Hanegraaff 2005b: 340.

it is the reality of secularisation which altered esoteric movements to such a degree that Faivre's methodology has only a very limited value.<sup>43</sup>

However, Hanegraaff presented a new reason for his historical project shortly after the publication of *DGWE*: the polemical damage done to the esoteric subjects through history (labelled the "Grand Polemical Narrative").<sup>44</sup> Different discourses have not only ridiculed esoteric movements and topics and labelled them dangerous, irrational and immoral. The 'Grand Polemical Narrative' has also distorted esoteric items to a degree that scholars today - even those in the field of esotericism - are misled by the earlier destructive discourses. As a consequence, paganism has become a construct of the polemic between monotheism and idolatry. Gnosticism was a construct of an old attack by Christianity, and magic had become a construct within a Christian discourse which had tried to eliminate its own magical components. As a consequence, Hermeticism was excluded as a counterculture of superstition and unreason by Protestant and Enlightenment authors. In the aftermath of these damaging discourses even Protestants themselves suffered as they simplified their own religion to be a matter of pure 'faith' and not a matter of mythology, magic, ritual participation, 'good works', or any other kind of practice.<sup>45</sup> Hanegraaff's contemplations are subtle and philosophical and some of them will be dealt with a little later.

#### *Religion in general and esotericism*

Recently Hanegraaff has also addressed the field of esotericism as an integrated part of the study of religion, probably in the context of the 'Grand Polemical Narrative'.<sup>46</sup> Hanegraaff views the discourse on esotericism as a delayed reflection of earlier discourses on the study of religion. The growing pains of the field of esotericism are similar to those found in the general study of religion. Hanegraaff outlines five different theoretical and methodological debates according to their originator: (1) perennialists or

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<sup>43</sup> Hanegraaff 2005b: 340. Secularisation is a very important topic for Hanegraaff; see more below.

<sup>44</sup> Hanegraaff 2005c: 230.

<sup>45</sup> Hanegraaff 2005c: 240.

<sup>46</sup> Hanegraaff 2004: 480 - 519.

traditionalist (parallel to dogmatic theologians), (2) religionists,<sup>47</sup> (3) historians of science and philosophy, (4) specialists on specific currents and (5) generalists in the study of Western esotericism - a category to which he includes himself and for example Antoine Faivre. It is (maybe) obvious that the two first categories have contributed, as Hanegraaff remarks, with religious rather than scholarly inspiration.<sup>48</sup> This explains why many specialists on specific currents and personalities, i.e. category (4), dissociate themselves from esotericism as they do not like “to be suspected of being krypto-esotericists rather than academic scholars.”<sup>49</sup> Historians of science and philosophy, i.e. category (3), would have normally contributed to esotericism had it not been for a prevalent tendency to prejudices or glittering statements, examples being George Sarton and Frances A. Yates. Sarton simply ignored ‘superstition’ and ‘magic’ as a study of those topics was a ‘hopeless undertaking’. Yates, on the other hand, made too “far-reaching claims about the Hermetic Tradition as a casual factor in the emergence of the scientific revolution.”<sup>50</sup> However Hanegraaff admits that the importance of a hermetic dimension to 17<sup>th</sup> century science as a discourse, is generally recognised these days. To some degree this thesis shares Hanegraaff’s view of historians of science and philosophy. On the other hand, however, it is essential to recognise that historians of science and philosophy can contribute with major empirical research, for example the research in alchemy done by William R. Newman and Anthony Grafton.<sup>51</sup>

In order to eliminate the earlier failures of research approaches to religion in general and esotericism in particular, Hanegraaff recommends *a hermeneutics of suspicion* to fill up all the gaps left by the earlier generations, i.e. done in the earlier periods of ‘Great Narratives’.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Religionists in the general study of religion are for example the Eranos group with prominent figures as Mircea Eliade and Joseph Campbell. Where perennialists, according to Hanegraaff, openly admit their dogmatic beliefs in specific metaphysical doctrines, the religionist approach tacitly holds such doctrines. Hanegraaff, 2004: 501.

<sup>48</sup> Hanegraaff 2004: 503.

<sup>49</sup> Hanegraaff 2004: 503.

<sup>50</sup> Hanegraaff 2004: 502.

<sup>51</sup> See chap 5, above. Actually, many contributors to *DGWE* are historians of science and/or philosophy. Contributors are only listed by names, not professions. Examined briefly, it seems that the majority of contributors are *not* to be found in institutes of religion or anthropology.

<sup>52</sup> Hanegraaff 2004: 509.

According to Hanegraaff a subtle but clear change in history-based studies in the humanities followed the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the emergence of a *neue Unübersichtlichkeit* as a new paradigm (*Zeitgeist*) promoted by Jürgen Habermas in 1985.<sup>53</sup> Hanegraaff's 'hermeneutics of suspicion' becomes appropriate, I think, if it is used to correct the damage done by the 'Grand Polemical Narrative' mentioned above. His two articles published 2004 and 2005, though written independently, must be read together. So, in order to establish the field of esotericism a re-thinking has to take place. The problem is, however, that Hanegraaff may carry his views too far by taking up the new 'paradigm of opacity', especially when it is also combined with Wittgenstein's concept of *family resemblance*. This will be discussed with further details in a separate heading below. Despite the impact from the 'Grand Polemical Narrative' and secularisation, Western esoteric currents still exist. This demonstrates, according to Hanegraaff, that "Western esoteric currents have a remarkable ability to survive by means of adaptation and assimilation."<sup>54</sup>

It must also be emphasised that Hanegraaff sees a great potential in the study of Western esotericism because of its ability "to contribute to the development of new theoretical approaches in the study of religion generally."<sup>55</sup> Summarised, it can innovate the study, of religion generally and of Christianity specifically, in the following manner:

1. Clarify the importance of secularisation.
2. Help overcome a Eurocentric heritage in the study of religion.
3. Clarify a variety of dimensions in Christianity (rituals, magic etc.) neglected by theologians.

Ad 1) Secularisation is an important subject to Hanegraaff, one he has dealt with continuously since at least 1996 (see more below).

Ad 2) The study of Western esotericism can contribute to overcoming a 'Eurocentric heritage' by adopting a very sceptical attitude, i.e. by applying

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<sup>53</sup> Hanegraaff 2004: 509.

<sup>54</sup> Hanegraaff 2004: 510. Hanegraaff does not go into further details on this subject.

<sup>55</sup> Hanegraaff 2004: 512.



‘hermeneutics of suspicion’; by rejecting the old, but still very used Tylorean/Frazerian triad ‘magic-religion-science’.<sup>56</sup> According to Hanegraaff, many scholars fear “that a thorough globalization of the study of religion may lead to a reappearance of the religionist and krypto-theological perspectives which the discipline has fought so hard to overcome.”<sup>57</sup> As a consequence scholars, says Hanegraaff, simply want to stand on Western intellectual foundations, for better or for worse. Hanegraaff’s viewpoint seems to be that the intellectual globalisation of the study of religion is not to be feared if the West can fulfil the ‘Enlightenment project’ by applying a critical approach to its own historical and intellectual foundations.<sup>58</sup>

Ad 3) Theology has hampered itself by reducing Christianity to a matter of ‘faith’ and not to a matter of “ritual, magic, various experimental dimensions and phenomena, folklore, art, and so on – which are increasingly attracting the interests of historians but still tend to be neglected by theologians”.<sup>59</sup> Dealing with esotericism and Christianity, Hanegraaff also believes that esotericism has been detached from a Christian context since the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>60</sup>

#### *Hanegraaff’s definition of ritual*

Earlier in 2000 Hanegraaff also provided definitions of ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’ which include a definition of ritual.<sup>61</sup>

*Religion* = any symbolic system which influences human action by providing possibilities for ritually maintaining contact between the everyday world and a more general meta-empirical framework of meaning.

Religion may take the form of ‘a religion’, as Hanegraaff writes, but it can also take the form of spirituality:<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Hanegraaff 2004: 512.

<sup>57</sup> Hanegraaff 2004: 512.

<sup>58</sup> Hanegraaff 2004: 512.

<sup>59</sup> Hanegraaff 2004: 512, n. 15.

<sup>60</sup> Hanegraaff 2004: 480.

<sup>61</sup> Hanegraaff 2000: 295.

*A spirituality* = any human practice which maintains contact between the everyday world and a more general meta-empirical framework of meaning by way of the individual manipulation of symbolic systems.

The mention by Hanegraaff of rituals in connection with religion or Western esotericism is extremely rare, and the first statement above is the only one I have been able to find in all of his writings. This also applies to the *DGWE* where there is no entry in the index concerning 'ritual', 'ceremony' or the like, nor are any of the many articles analysed from the perspective of a ritual theory. Actually, only a handful out of more than 270 contributors include a few remarks on ritual, ceremony or prayer. By looking at the definition above a ritual seems to be an *intermediary* between the everyday world and a more meta-empirical level of meaning. Faivre seems to share this view on a ritual as an 'intermediary' (found in his third criterion; see above). In any case, however, as stated earlier when dealing with Rappaport and Olsson, religion is neither just a symbolic system nor is a ritual an 'intermediary'. Additionally, it is possible to distinguish between spirituality and religion, and looking at the definition given above one can see that 'a spirituality' does not make use of rituals, but exclusively of symbolic manipulation. Again, this reveals a very philosophical attitude and could be another way to avoid ritual in the study of Western esotericism.

#### *Hanegraaff and secularisation*

To Hanegraaff the significance of secularisation is paramount. Even his first major publication, *New Age Religion and Western Culture* (1996), carried the subtitle: 'esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought'. The possible impact of secularisation on religion in general will not be dealt with in this thesis, but rather the consequences of secularisation on esotericism as outlined by Hanegraaff. Here, five distinctive effects may be isolated. First, during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries traditional Western esotericism transformed itself into 'occultism'. During this period, esoteric currents lost an enchanted worldview primarily based on non-causal correspondences and

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<sup>62</sup> Hanegraaff 2000: 296.

adopted a modern scientific worldview. Secondly, in the age of secularisation oriental religious ideas were adopted by esotericism. For example, the concept of karma was welcomed as an alternative to Christian concepts of divine providence.<sup>63</sup> Thirdly, by secularisation the idea of evolution entered into Western esotericism less based on Darwinism than on German Idealism and Romanticism. Evolution involved not only human souls, but also ‘the universe in its entirety’.<sup>64</sup> Here, Hanegraaff actually confirms part of matrix number three, i.e. the mind and/or the world are put on a stairway to heaven. Fourthly, modern psychology has had a great impact on esotericism to a degree where one can speak of a ‘psychologization of religion’. God, gods or divine entities now become projections of the human psyche, and at the same time they may also be considered to be real, i.e. they are both inner and outer realities. Finally, New Age represents an essential individualism with no room for a cult or even a sect, and a New-Ager is a first-class spiritual consumer creating and re-creating his or her own private symbolic meanings and values.<sup>65</sup> In the preceding chapter this thesis dealt with the first four ‘mirrors’ of secularisation (mentioned above) and the conclusions shall not be repeated here.

#### **Some important explanatory notes on the five matrices**

In the following a comparison between Faivre, Hanegraaff and this thesis will be made primarily in order to clarify similarities and differences between the methodological approaches. Later, some theoretical considerations of Pierre Riffard, Kocku von Stuckrad, and Arthur Versluis will also be included. It must be stressed that this thesis does not represent a *heuristic* study as there is no intention to define Western esotericism. This thesis only argues that the five matrices may be found in very early esoteric Renaissance literature, in theosophical literature and up to modern esoteric bestsellers by James Redfield and Eckhart Tolle. The existence of the five matrices in some parts of Hermetica is also attested. It is also significant that *Asclepius*, one of the hermetical treasures, *indicates* the presence of four

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<sup>63</sup> Hanegraaff 2004: 498.

<sup>64</sup> Hanegraaff 2004: 498.

<sup>65</sup> Hanegraaff 2004: 499.

matrices. *Asclepius* was known in Europe before Ficino's translation of parts of *Corpus Hermeticum* into Latin in 1471 AD.

There are normally other important USP present in any given current as outlined by this study. However, if one asks, 'what is Western esotericism about', one can at least reply that part of it, and probably the greater part, deals with five important canonical messages. Thus the five matrices sanctify and identify an important branch in Western esotericism, labelled *dialectical* esoterism or esotericism. The question is not whether one knows what religion is or not, but that scholars, journalists, officials, ordinary people etc., speaks about (and often define) a religion by pointing to its canonical messages and its most important rituals.

This study, compared with those of Faivre and Hanegraaff, differs basically in its approach to its subject, viewing it as a part of religion rather than as a 'philosophy of life'. To many adherents, religion means philosophy, and from an emic point of view one can argue that it does become a philosophy of life (when one includes ritual activity). However, seen from an etic point of view the picture changes drastically, because the ritual activity shapes the beliefs involved to a much greater degree than is normally recognised. Ritual activity influences beliefs involved in different and unexpected ways, e.g., a canonical message of a certain importance can survive for centuries as long as it is 'agreed upon' in ritual activity. This is one of the most significant findings of Rappaport. This implies that Ultimate Sacred Postulates have an unexpectedly high degree of immunity to historical change, whether they are labelled 'secularisation' or not. Another significant finding of Rappaport is that cosmologies are arbitrarily connected to USP. One might reason that when science or philosophy makes new advances, central religious belief would also change. What is more probable is that cosmologies, and the codes of behaviour mainly deduced from them, change.<sup>66</sup> It is worth quoting Rappaport again:

"It follows that cosmological structures can change – expand, contract, or even be radically altered structurally – in response to

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<sup>66</sup> Cosmologies have a more concrete impact on 'conduct' than USP; Rappaport 1999: 266.

changes in environmental or historical conditions without changes in, or even challenge to, Ultimate Sacred Postulates.”<sup>67</sup>

Neither Faivre nor Hanegraaff differentiates in substance between Ultimate Sacred Postulates and cosmologies. Both Faivre and Hanegraaff think that historical change and secularisation influence esoteric currents in their entirety. Earlier, Hanegraaff declared esotericism to be very much connected to Neoplatonism.<sup>68</sup> I disagree. There are no continuous philosophical ‘-isms’ found in Western esotericism insofar as esoteric texts are as full of ‘conglomerates’ (Olsson) as any other religious texts.<sup>69</sup> Simply stated, this thesis is also *applied ritual theory*, and as such it is significantly different from other approaches (Hanegraaff, Faivre, Kocku von Stuckrad, Arthur Versluis and others). In the following section, major differences from and similarities to this thesis will be outlined. Faivre and Hanegraaff will be quoted primarily, as they must be considered the most important scholars in the establishment of esoterism as a recognised area of academic research.

### **Faivre – and this thesis**

The five matrices follow Faivre’s ‘methodology’, i.e. his criteria given above, primarily because of Faivre’s research has identified the most important canonical messages (USP) in Western esotericism. It may surprise the reader that the five matrices and Faivre’s criteria are similar, as they are both embedded in a perception of a holistic universe made up of communicating parts. At a more detailed level, however, the impression formed by this study is one of disagreement in the wording of the first four criteria - they are too specific, as if extracted from the writings of Paracelsus. The differences between Faivre’s first four intrinsic criteria and the five matrices are thus:

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<sup>67</sup> Rappaport 1999: 265.

<sup>68</sup> “The influence of neoplatonism upon esoteric traditions is so pervasive that it is often not even mentioned.” Hanegraaff 1998a: 388.

<sup>69</sup> This will be further exemplified in the last chapter, ‘Conclusion and future prospects’.

- 1) The five matrices are formulated more abstractly, and they are therefore not rooted in or connected with a specific cosmology. They are USP.
- 2) The five matrices contain a dialectical relationship between ‘high’ and ‘low’ and refer to a concept of destiny based more on *pronoia* than *karma/sin*.
- 3) The five matrices do not contain direct references to imagination, *gnosis* (or any other capabilities of the mind). In that sense, they do not represent a ‘thematic’ study (see above).

This thesis does not deny the existence of imagination or *gnosis* in Western esotericism. Concerning the imagination, imaginative practices of varied intensity were found in much esoteric literature. According to Agrippa, for example, imagination, as we have seen, had to be reinforced by correct astrological timing in order to create a greater impact.<sup>70</sup> Conversely, imagination played a paramount role for Paracelsus when it ousted the birth-horoscope.<sup>71</sup> In New Age literature a belief in the imagination (or the power of the mind) prevails with such force that it can cure or repel serious disease.<sup>72</sup> Often then, imagination is a very important USP in Western esotericism. Concerning *gnosis*, Faivre is maybe right on the button with his somewhat provocative remark that the esotericist “prefers to sojourn, to travel, on Jacob’s ladder, where the angels (and doubtless other entities as well) climb up and down, rather than to climb to the top and beyond.” This thesis *is not a study of gnosis*. Rather, I have included a short and highly experimental appendix on how *gnosis* and *paideia*, i.e. religion as a field of learning, *could* be related to Western esotericism.

*Methodological agnosticism versus a reflexive method*

According to Faivre, certain methods have to be avoided, i.e. the ‘religionist’, ‘reductionist’, ‘essentialist’, ‘universalist’, ‘thematic’ and ‘doctrinal’ approach. These methods must be substituted by *methodological agnosticism*. However, there is an alternative: the *reflexive method*. Here, the

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<sup>70</sup> See, chapter 3, above.

<sup>71</sup> See, chapter 5, above.

<sup>72</sup> Such viewpoints can for example be found in the writings of Louise L. Hay, who directly declares: “What we think about ourselves becomes the truth for us.” Hanegraaff 1998a: 234.

researcher ‘observes’ his material, then engages in the practice, for example, of being initiated, but ends up ‘observing’ his material as well as his own experience. In the end the researcher is his own source, ‘which’ he or she must examine as an objective source. This method is for the *mature researcher* who is not overwhelmed by the sympathies (or antipathies) derived from the participation. When done by a mature researcher there are two obvious advantages: the first, that a greater understanding emerges from being a participant, the second, that the perpetual discussion about the correctness of an emic *or* etic approach is avoided. By using a reflexive method the approach becomes etic-emic. As stated previously, Rappaport is the master in uniting these two methods.<sup>73</sup> The method used by Olsson is also reflexive, and a ritual field as a specific ‘referential system’ (i.e. there are at the same time other ‘referential systems’) is an example of an etic-emic methodology. Thus, each ritual field is basically self-referential and its ‘beliefs’ always involves ways of action and, if possible, also ritual behaviour.<sup>74</sup> Ritual fields are thus relative systems of ‘truth’ in the same way as a referential system viewed from within is ‘absolute’, but only relative when seen from the outside. According to Rappaport canonical messages are ‘self-referential messages’ as rituals have ‘self-referential aspects’. Rappaport’s point of view is that a participant can transmit information to others through ‘symbolic messages’ in *most* rituals, but participation in a ritual is *always* self-informative (and hence *always* self-referential).<sup>75</sup>

*Comment:* The similarity between Rappaport and Olsson on the etic-emic subject should be obvious. When religious rituals are viewed in isolation, i.e. removed from the ‘beliefs’ or ‘messages’ involved, they may have, in theory and to some extent, an objective meaning based on symbolic messages or expressive communication. On the other hand, when rituals are properly connected with messages and beliefs, rituals and ritual fields are transformed into meaningful and self-informative, but self-referential systems. Rituals analysed without ‘beliefs’ have only a limited meaning, but always

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<sup>73</sup> See chapter 2, pp. 22 - 23, above.

<sup>74</sup> See chapter 2, pp. 26 - 27, above.

<sup>75</sup> Rappaport 1999: 69 - 106, especially p. 104.

communicate (in a 'condensed' way) a high degree of meaning when analysed with the related beliefs (or canonical messages) involved.

*Faivre's 'practices' converted to ritual fields*

Faivre's idea of 'practices' in Western esotericism is extremely important for different reasons. By this idea Faivre now focuses on 'doing' in esotericism, i.e. it is no longer just a question of a 'form of thought'. Faivre is right in declaring alchemy to be a practice, i.e. 'doing' something as opposed to merely thinking. He is also right when categorising astrology and magic as 'fields of doing'. Faivre's 'practices' simply imply the existence of ritual fields *able to 'embody' the important USP in Western esotericism including the five matrices*. Stated differently, one of the reasons for the amount of astrology in Western esotericism (and also in Hermetica) is its ability to 'communicate' important USP, especially the reality of 'holism' (matrix number five).<sup>76</sup> In a significant article by Jean-Pierre Brach and Hanegraaff 'correspondences' (i.e. a holistic worldview) are considered to be basic to various divinatory arts, magic, astrology and tarot.<sup>77</sup> I believe that Faivre's 'notes as practices', the observation that 'practices' in Western esotericism do exist, will be understood to be huge ritual fields in the future. The benefits are obvious. First and foremost it turns esotericism into a study belonging to *history of religion* and *anthropology* - and not to 'philosophy' or the history of ideas - by emphasising a 'mode of doing', which is essential to Rappaport and Olsson, among others. Secondly, acknowledging the existence of such huge and maybe somewhat open ritual fields, it is now easier to understand and examine the role of more traditional and concrete rituals found in Western esotericism. Thirdly, the additive elements in Olsson's theory may explain why adherents can be both Christians and practitioners of esoterism at the same time. Fourthly, a more detailed study can reveal exactly which USP are confirmed in the different practices. In any case, as this thesis has demonstrated, the idea of chakras as something concrete and instrumental developed in theosophical circles where the idea

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<sup>76</sup> Two other important reasons are, that astrology by adherents is conceived to be scientific, i.e. it 'works' (matrix number 4) and that astrology is a generator of systems of classification, especially a division into 4, 7 or 12 (parts of something).

<sup>77</sup> Brach & Hanegraaff 2005: 275.



of spiritual evolution played a dominant role. By clairvoyance one sees the chakras, which according to colour, radiation etc. ‘measure’ the degree of spiritual evolution obtained. Stated more simply: by describing Faivre’s ‘practices’ as ritual fields one can obtain a new and much more informed understanding of how ‘doing’ and ‘thinking’ interplay in Western esotericism.

### **Hanegraaff - and this thesis**

As stated in the preceding chapter, this thesis views with some scepticism Hanegraaff’s interpretation of how secularisation has affected Western esotericism. This is not to deny secularisation *per se*, but esotericism is not that affected by *instrumental causality* - at least related to astrology. Earlier we have dealt with instrumental causality in some details.<sup>78</sup> To briefly reiterate, instrumental causality is the explanation of apparently religious (or spiritual) phenomena as natural occurrences. If, for example, a child sees Santa Claus at Christmas, the child doesn’t really think this is Santa Claus, but rather Dad or Granddad. Hanegraaff’s point is that modern adherents of esoterism are no longer able to deal naturally with correspondences because of the impact of instrumental causality. Furthermore, the esotericists “seldom bother to try and work out their theoretical implications or convince critics.”<sup>79</sup> To the best of my knowledge, astrologers today primarily make use of three types of explanation as stated below:

USP: Astrology works (i.e. correspondences work)  
Cosmology: Casual  
                  Analogical  
                  Synchronised (as outlined by Jung)

Hanegraaff is incorrect when he states that correspondences before the age of secularisation were based on ‘analogy’, i.e. a non-causal model. Actually, as demonstrated by Neugebauer, Greek astrology was comparable with

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<sup>78</sup> See chapter 7, p. 213 - 214, above.

<sup>79</sup> Brach & Hanegraaff 2005: 278.

modern kinetic models,<sup>80</sup> i.e. of a casual nature (as *heimarmenê* in *Hermetica*). It was Plotinus who introduced the concept of analogy into Western astrology as opposed to an Aristotelian concept of 'causality'.<sup>81</sup> Due to the work of Ficino in the early Renaissance the concept of analogy was reintroduced, mainly from the writings of Plotinus and other Neoplatonists philosophers,<sup>82</sup> but it did not eliminate a casual understanding.<sup>83</sup> For example, Paracelsus' idea of correspondences may be seen as a kind of compromise between casual and non-casual interpretations.<sup>84</sup> As stated for example by Olav Hammer, a certain trend in astrology today is to re-learn astrology from Renaissance and Mediaeval methods.<sup>85</sup> One may suppose here that Greek astrology with its casual explanations is also enjoying a 'renaissance' to a certain degree.<sup>86</sup> Some modern astrological books try to explain the art by referring to casual models. For example, by pointing to the fact that "all of the phenomena which take place in solar space and astrophysical space act at a distance [...] by means of radiation of an electromagnetic or corpuscular nature or by means of variation in the general field, electrical, magnetic, electro-magnetic or gravitational."<sup>87</sup> One can even find modern astrologers making an attempt to explain the subject matter as 'metaphysical causality'.<sup>88</sup> However, the most popular modern explanation is without doubt based on an *analogical cosmology*, where one level of reality 'reflects' through 'signs' what happens on another level of reality. Thus, Gustav-Adolf Schoener is right in stating that in modern astrology, analogous relations are preferred "and not – as is often assumed – the direct influences of the stars."<sup>89</sup> The third model, 'synchronicity', is based on Jung's idea that similar occurrences between the human mind and nature are

<sup>80</sup> See chapter 4, note 66, above.

<sup>81</sup> See chapter 5, p. 147, above.

<sup>82</sup> Copenhaver 1986: 351 - 369; 1988: 79 - 110.

<sup>83</sup> Pierre Gassendi (1592-1655), a professor in astronomy in Paris, was maybe also the last astrologer to interpret astrology into an Aristotelian context - thereby using a casual explanation to defend the validity of astrology; Tester 1987: 230-2.

<sup>84</sup> See chapter 5, p. 147, above.

<sup>85</sup> Hammer 2005b: 137.

<sup>86</sup> The biggest 'Greek' project is Project Hindsight. Information can be found at: [projecthindsight.com](http://projecthindsight.com).

<sup>87</sup> West & Toonder 1970: 14.

<sup>88</sup> Found at web: [astrologyforthesoul.com/moses/synkronicity.html](http://astrologyforthesoul.com/moses/synkronicity.html).

<sup>89</sup> Schoener 2002: 38. Web-edition.

synchronised, i.e. they take place at the same moment.<sup>90</sup> Hanegraaff is not right in stating that correspondences *up to* the time of secularisation were based on analogy and thereafter on causality.

This thesis disagrees with Hanegraaff's assumption that esotericists 'unintentionally' end up interpreting correspondences in "modern (rationalist, nominalist, quasi-materialist) terms",<sup>91</sup> when finding an alternative to 'correspondences'. Well, some do, insofar as a minority copes with a casual interpretation of the universe. When you look at it, the USP 'astrology works' is totally independent of what design the universe has, i.e. a 'USP' is only arbitrarily connected to any cosmology. For this reason, adherents of esoterism simply don't care very much whether the universe operates according to casual, analogical, or synchronised 'laws'. It is not a 'philosophical' weakness in religion to prioritise USP before a cosmology. Hanegraaff thinks otherwise: his *philosophical attitude* compels him to believe that esoteric currents *must* be dependent on modern science and philosophy, which in their turn must give religious adherents 'logical' problems.

This thesis also disagrees somewhat with Hanegraaff's 'psychologization of religion' as described earlier.<sup>92</sup> This disagreement has been increased by his notes on ritual magic and psychologization. Here, Hanegraaff proposes that magic ritual since the 18<sup>th</sup> century has been in reaction to a disenchanted worldview created by mainstream science. Additionally, since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, magic ritual has increasingly functioned as a tool for spiritual self-development.<sup>93</sup> According to Hanegraaff, the first category, the development of magical ritual as a reaction to a disenchanted worldview is especially exemplified by Neopaganism (including Wicca). The second category, i.e. ritual as a spiritual technique for self-development, is especially exemplified

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<sup>90</sup> This model of explanation is also mentioned by Jean-Pierre Brach & Wouter J. Hanegraaff in their article on 'correspondences'. See note, below.

<sup>91</sup> Brach & Hanegraaff 2005: 278.

<sup>92</sup> See chapter 7, pp. 211 - 213, above.

<sup>93</sup> Hanegraaff 2005d: 742. See also, Hanegraaff 2003: 357 - 380. Here also, disenchantment is a reality because of secularisation. The reason magic survived is psychological: there is a deep-rooted feeling and intuition that language of myth and poetry must be transferred to the 'real nature of the world'. The more such intuitions are rejected by society "the stronger the emotional need to overcome the dissonance." Hanegraaff 2003: 377.

by The Golden Dawn. This thesis agrees with Hanegraaff's standpoint that magic is a part of religion, i.e. found *within* religion and not *outside* religion, based on his rejection of the old Tylolean/Frazerian triad 'magic-religion-science'. It is here worth noticing that Rappaport also disagrees with this triad. Magic is ritual *in* religion with a high degree of *efficacy*.<sup>94</sup> Rappaport does not associate the word 'magic' very much with ritual, but evidently prefers the word 'occult'. When using the expression 'magic' Rappaport does not disassociate 'magical' words from 'normal' words - as all ritual words brought into being are as real as "brute facts".<sup>95</sup> If there is any difference, it is to be found in the 'reality quotient' where magic rituals are extended into the physical realm and not only into the domain of the 'meaningful'. Yet, as Rappaport emphasises, one has to be "very careful about stipulating the limits of the effects that ritual can accomplish."<sup>96</sup> Also, Rappaport does not look at science as something excluded from religion. This is demonstrated in cosmologies which *can* be 'facts' due to time and cultural placement. Rappaport also believes that it may be possible to unite religion and science to a much higher degree if the 'Cartesian program' is abandoned in favour of Heisenberg's theories.<sup>97</sup> My objection to Hanegraaff's viewpoint is rather specific. Before one evaluates magic ritual as an instrument for self-development, or a compensation for a disenchanted worldview, one must simply treat them as ordinary rituals. One could simply ask: which USP are 'called in', attached to, and promoted by, 'magic ritual'?

#### *Hanegraaff's historical approach*

Hanegraaff's historical approach is definitively one way to travel, though it also contains various shortcomings. Hopefully it will fill up the 'missing links' in the future in order to justify some real historical connections. Another weakness is its lack of penetrating canonical messages, without which esotericism cannot communicate itself to an audience in the usual way scholars normally speak, for example, when they talk of Islam, Christianity and Buddhism. The best one can hope for is to memorise all the items and

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<sup>94</sup> Rappaport 1999: 50.

<sup>95</sup> Rappaport 1999: 117.

<sup>96</sup> Rappaport 1999: 117.

<sup>97</sup> Rappaport 1999: 456.

personalities described in *DGWE* and after an eight-hour speech one can declare that all these subjects in one way or another make up Western esotericism. A historical approach ends up by being a pure philosophical approach if it is unable to include and maintain important canonical messages surviving at least some generations. If one clears away USP or canonical messages from Rappaport's theory it collapses and becomes more or less useless. Similarly, the ritual fields of Olsson are meaningless if one excludes the beliefs generated by ritual activity.

The *DGWE* includes many personalities and currents which do not include all five matrices. For example, the five matrices are simply not found in Scientology (nor are Faivre's criteria). There is no teaching of a divine providence, neither of karma nor sin. There is no concept of a 'lower' part of the universe communicating with and affecting a 'higher' part in a dialectical way. There is maybe a bodhisattva-like attitude though of a costly kind, and hence scientologists must go on missions to convince and liberate others. There is no concept of a holistic universe where parts communicate with other parts. The universe is not living or organic in its structure. Only matrix number three is partly fulfilled<sup>98</sup> together with matrix number four.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> To repeat, matrix number three is: 'Dualism and monism are interdependent, including the mind and/or the world as a stairway to heaven'. In the beginning on the road to freedom a 'reactive bank' prevails over the rational and spiritual part (theta), but when becoming 'clear' one is freed from aberrations stored in the reactive bank and the thetan gains control. This happens gradually through a series of initiations each presenting new levels of insight (gnosis). The mind, but not the universe, is put on a ladder. Scientology has developed its own vocabulary and the physical universe is MEST, i.e. matter, energy, space and time and is neither monistic nor dualistic. It is just MEST. The relation between theta, i.e. the mind or spirit as infinite, and MEST is outlined in *The Factors*, thirty axiomatic arranged notions. If understood correctly, there are ultimately three universes, the one created by pure being, another which can be 'mocked up' by theta and the last one, MEST, which is agreed upon by all thetas. It seems to be an agreement, which cannot be changed, i.e. there is no improvement in MEST when some thetas are freed. Anyway, there are in 'the factors' no mentioning of improvement. MEST have 'cravings', 'which does not make MEST alive'; Hubbard 1967: 92. MEST is not 'alive' and is not subject to evolution or involution. MEST can be a trap for the theta that has forgotten its abilities, but is a game (i.e. a playing field) for a theta recovering its freedom and abilities (p. 93). MEST can maybe be compared with samsara in Buddhism: Samsara is still samsara (i.e. a trap) no matter how many minds are freed (as opposed to Western spirituality). There is simply a *sympatheia* in Western esotericism between mind and 'universe', i.e. they are continuously interrelated, an idea not found in Scientology. Concerning the mind, theta loses control in life when the 'engram bank' takes over. Engram

Regarding personalities to be included, Abraham Maslow apparently also belongs to esotericism as one of the founders of Human Potential Movement, though this is questionable, to quote: “Maslow described peak experiences in overtly religious terms, understanding mystical experiences to be the highest form.”<sup>100</sup> Yes, Maslow acknowledged religious experiences as part of a self-realisation. Interviewing highly successful Americans he discovered that many had peak experiences during their careers. Hence, Maslow acknowledged transcendent experiences to be placed at the vertex of his ‘pyramid of needs’. Self-realisation is itself a need at that vertex, and in a need-orientated psychology it is no surprise that some religious urges and motivations may be included. The peak experiments were described in psychological terms, i.e. as an experience of integration, fulfilment and sense of purpose given to one’s life. Later, however, Maslow found that many unhealthy and non-self-actualised individuals also had transcendental experiences.<sup>101</sup> Maslow was one of the founders of the transpersonal psychology, which from the beginning strove to combine insight from modern psychology with contemplative traditions found in major religions. In any case, Maslow was a perennialist and an essentialist because of his belief in a core-religious or identical essence in all religions:

“Also this kind of study leads us to another very plausible hypothesis: to the extent that all mystical or peak-experiences are the same in their essence and have always been the same, all religions are the same in their essence and always have been the same.”<sup>102</sup>

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bank “is that portion of a person’s mind which works on a stimulus response basic.” Hubbard 1975: 142.

<sup>99</sup> Scientology integrates to a high degree a modern scientific worldview especially in its description of MEST; Hubbard 1975: 248. Further, its spiritual ‘axioms’ are both subject to insight and behavioural experiences and hence viewed as something scientific. The name ‘Scientology’, i.e. ‘knowing about knowing’ or ‘science about knowing’ (see 1975: 368) itself implies such a stance.

<sup>100</sup> Hammer 2005c: 573.

<sup>101</sup> Maslow, 1964: chapter. III. This chapter is found on the web: [druglibrary.org/schaffer/lsd/maslow3.htm](http://druglibrary.org/schaffer/lsd/maslow3.htm).

<sup>102</sup> Maslow, 1964: chapter. III. This chapter is found on web: [druglibrary.org/schaffer/lsd/maslow3.htm](http://druglibrary.org/schaffer/lsd/maslow3.htm).

As a true perennialist, essentialist (and ‘universalist’), it is difficult to distinguish Maslow as an esotericist. Those interested can of course try to apply Maslow’s theory to chosen personalities within Western esotericism, for example Paracelsus, Jacob Boehme or modern adherents, but that’s quite another story.<sup>103</sup>

*The paradigm of opacity and family resemblance*

In connection with Hanegraaff’s historical definition, it is not accidental that he focuses on Habermas’ paradigm of opacity and Wittgenstein’s concept of family resemblance. More precisely Hanegraaff writes:

“Along the lines of a Wittgensteinian concept of family-resemblance, contemporary New Agers may have little or nothing in common with fifteenth-century Renaissance hermetists (not to mention the hermetists in late antiquity), and yet be historically connected to them by means of many intermediary links.”<sup>104</sup>

Normally, people assume language to be trustworthy due to an unambiguous relation between substantives and things referred to. The elder Wittgenstein argued otherwise. According to him, there is no identity, only resemblance, which he called ‘family resemblance’. Taking games as a starting point Wittgenstein asks: “Consider for example the proceedings that we call ‘games’. I mean board-games, card-games, ball-games, Olympic games, and so on. What is common to them all?”<sup>105</sup> Wittgenstein finds that games have nothing in common, only similarities, relationships and kindred relations. If we stop thinking, but only ‘look and see’, complex patterns of resemblance appear. Wittgenstein’s notion is in opposition to Plato’s view of an underlying essence that makes things as they are. In the ‘world of ideas’ there is a form (*eidos*), for example of a horse which is the essence of all

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<sup>103</sup> It is highly questionable that leading founders of the Human Potential Movement (HPM) as Rollo May, Carl Roger and Abraham Maslow were esotericists. Unfortunately, this is the impression left behind when reading Hammer’s article in *DGWE*. Thus for this, if for no other reason, HPM is described in great detail in a dictionary dedicated to Western esotericism.

<sup>104</sup> Hanegraaff 2004: 510.

<sup>105</sup> Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Aphorism 66. Found with commentaries by Lois Shawver. Web-edition.

horses. In contrast, according to the concept of family resemblance, 'religion' can not refer to anything specific and neither can there be something called 'esoterism' as no coherent esoterism exists. Hence, Hermeticism is only an abstract umbrella for the study of a great number of currents.<sup>106</sup> The idea of family resemblance is in accordance with the paradigm of opacity, a post-modern notion turned against the 'Grand Narrative' in modernism with its postulated coherent cultural systems, including religion. A historical deconstruction is needed, which is also done by scholars within esotericism, although a majority still sticks to an essentialist definition of esotericism.<sup>107</sup> Here, Hanegraaff initiates a new approach to the study of esoteric currents, which has *nothing to do with secularisation*.

Hanegraaff's integration of secularisation into family resemblance remains problematic. It is, I think, on the edge of self-contradiction to relate religion to secularisation and to 'family resemblance', as the latter methodology makes it impossible to distinguish between religion and culture. The idea of secularisation, on the other hand, and not least in the detailed way handled by Hanegraaff, simply presupposes that one has an understanding of the nature of culture and religion - viewed separately. So, secularisation implies an ability to see parts of culture, or spheres in culture, disengaged from religion. Hanegraaff has a clear grasp of what the secularised society represents, for example in the form of 'instrumental causality'. Timothy Fitzgerald has, I think, in a convincing way, demonstrated that scholars applying the Wittgenstein 'family resemblance' to religion make use of a hidden essentialist agenda.<sup>108</sup> They cannot otherwise separate religion from ideologies, such as for example Marxism, Freudianism, Maoism, Fascism, Apartheid and Democratic Egalitarianism. While investigating several books on the 'World's Religions', Fitzgerald never encountered these topics: their absence was irrelevant to the author's concept of religion. Fitzgerald neither mentioned nor spoke of secularisation or Hanegraaff, but it should be rather obvious that the ideas of secularisation and 'family resemblance' do not fit very well together. In other words, in order to employ secularisation to

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<sup>106</sup> Hanegraaff 2005c: 243.

<sup>107</sup> Hanegraaff 2004: 508.

<sup>108</sup> Fitzgerald 1996: 216 - 236.



determine how religion loses its hold over culture and/or society in detail, one simply has to use a 'hidden agenda' to distinguish religion from culture.

*A compromise between a historical definition and this thesis*

Despite my reservations with some of *DGWE*'s and Hanegraaff's conclusions, his historical move is strategically important, for he has substantiated, and also made public, the existence of Western esotericism and gnosis. The construction of a compromise between a historical generic methodology and a historical-anthropological approach, as used in this thesis, has served to clarify *the existence of different 'branches' in Western esotericism – as there are different branches in Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism etc.* The five matrices do in any case describe an important branch in esotericism as these matrices can be found from classical Hermetism up to most recent esoteric literature.<sup>109</sup>

*The importance of a reflexive methodology*

Though Hanegraaff in his early writings recommended methodological agnosticism, it seems to me that Hanegraaff a little later more accurately described his own approach:

“A continuing and (self-)critical dialectics of *emic* material and *etic* interpretation, in contrast, is the indispensable foundation to an empirical study of esotericism which wishes to go beyond mere description. Implicit in this perspective is that the process of understanding is understood to be a continuous and open-ended one, in which no interpretation may claim to have the final word.”<sup>110</sup>

The above approach can be labelled reflexive, and on the whole I believe it reflects Hanegraaff's concept of the fundamental methodology to be used in the study of esotericism. It must not be forgotten that Hanegraaff throughout his *New Age Religion and Western Culture* made use of many emic viewpoints. Principally, it should be obvious that the use of reflexive

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<sup>109</sup> It must be remembered, however, that this thesis considers classical Hermetism to be more a foundation for, or 'root of', esotericism rather than a natural part of it.

<sup>110</sup> Hanegraaff 1998b: 13.

anthropology with its etic-emic methodology in this thesis is in accordance with Hanegraaff's own suggestion.

### **Pierre A. Riffard**

Pierre A. Riffard outlines two methods in order to gain knowledge of esoterism, the *external* and the *internal* method. The external method is an etic approach having several approaches at its disposal, for example, critical-historical, comparative, phenomenological, structuralist, anthropological etc.<sup>111</sup> The internal method, or procedure, is an emic approach whereby the scientist gets various 'invariants' at his disposal. More recently, Riffard has proposed nine and not eight 'invariants' (see above) as earlier (in his *L'ésotérisme* from 1990).<sup>112</sup> These are: (i) mythical origins, (ii) cosmic cycles, i.e. esoterism believes in cycles, for example of 540, 1080 and 2160 years, guiding history as destiny or providence, (iii) the chains of initiation, (iv) the secret books, (v) the mystical names, (vi) the occult etymologies, i.e. they prefer occult meanings of words over scientific ones, for example when declaring that the word *guru* means to push away (*ru*) from darkness (*gu*), and not just 'heavy', (vii) anagogic translation,<sup>113</sup> (viii) spiritual interpretations, i.e. even the most profane text can be endowed with a spiritual meaning and (ix) magical uses, where a book or a work of art is seen as a talisman, a divinatory machine, or an incantation<sup>114</sup>

Riffard is not that optimistic in uniting the external and the internal methods. He does not deny that it is possible, but for the time being it is still necessary to distinguish between the two methods that claim to give knowledge of what esotericism is all about.<sup>115</sup> The most conflicting differences between the internal and external approaches are: understanding versus knowledge, confluence versus influence,<sup>116</sup> tradition versus progress, analogy versus logic.

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<sup>111</sup> Riffard 1998: 63 - 64.

<sup>112</sup> Hanegraaff 1998b: 24.

<sup>113</sup> Literary, to 'lift up', i.e. idealising, spiritualising etc. In contrast, the external method uses literal translations.

<sup>114</sup> Riffard 1998: 65 - 71.

<sup>115</sup> Riffard 1998: 73.

<sup>116</sup> The historian believes in generic influences, the esotericist in perennialism.

Riffard's summarised approach to esotericism is both complex and delicate. Unfortunately, this thesis can not offer a deeper analysis in order to justify Riffard's theory. However, a few comments follow. According to this thesis, Western esotericism is not 'esoteric', i.e. 'inner' or 'hidden'. There may of course be a few secret organisations, for example, Freemasonry, which have secret rituals of initiation. On the whole, however, esoterism is very open and its major texts are published like any other texts. Today, some of them are even bestsellers. Rather, there is great competition and much promotion of the superb magical, astrological, initiatory, 'esoteric' etc. literature. According to this thesis, esoterism is religion in the same sense that Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism etc. are religions.

Thus two scenarios may be envisaged: (a) That Western esotericism is part of an worldwide esotericism and (b) That it is not. My personal viewpoint is that Western esotericism, despite its name, is not part of a universal esotericism, because for example, the level of secrecy is too low. In any case, it has to be dealt with as a 'normal' variant of religion. Nor are there any chains of initiation in Western esotericism unless one accepts, as proposed by Arthur Versluis, that one may be initiated by pure reading (see below). According to Hanegraaff, Riffard's suggestion for the 'invariants' is, as in the experimental method, to take one case for, and one case against. This only proves, as Hanegraaff insists, that there are only "some cases to which the criteria may be applied."<sup>117</sup> This is *not* the method applied in this thesis fundamentally because classical Hermetism is not considered a natural part of Western dialectical esoterism. There are, except for 'holism' (matrix number five), pro and contra arguments for the other matrices, as we have seen. However, this thesis agrees with Riffard that different methods, or approaches, are applicable in the study of esoterism, not least an anthropological approach.

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<sup>117</sup> Hanegraaff 1998b: 24, n. 43.

### **Kochu von Stuckrad**

Kochu von Stuckrad, a lecturer in ‘History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents’ at the University of Amsterdam, is looking for a new ‘definition’ of esoterism:

“[...] one needs a concept of esotericism, which illustrates not only continuities, but also the dynamics and processes of forming identities. Such a concept must involve the *discursive transfer* between the individual areas of European culture, especially religion, natural science, philosophy, literature and art.”<sup>118</sup>

Such a requirement is rather strict, but basically I support Stuckrad’s proposal. The involved ‘definition’ is to be used as an interpretative tool able to spot *similar discourses* in areas other than esotericism. The five matrices conceived as a specific branch in esotericism illustrate continuity and also ‘dynamics’. It has been demonstrated that certain currents are influenced by discourses in their environment typical of their time. An example is the influence of the 19<sup>th</sup> century theories of evolution on Blavatsky’s Theosophy. Further, I am convinced that the five matrices are not only USP but exact matrices, as they may be found, principally outside esotericism, as concepts deep-rooted in Western culture. For a few examples see the preceding chapter.

It is also worth noticing that Stuckrad looks for a study of religion as “a system of communication and action and not as a system of (unverifiable) belief.”<sup>119</sup> Stuckrad advocates an analysis of *doing* (action) in religion. Lastly, Stuckrad has published a historical book on astrology demonstrating that astrology is one of the major subjects in Western culture.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> von Stuckrad 2005b: 9. Stuckrad also criticises Hanegraaff for his loose historical approach, where ‘certain’ links between the many personalities and currents in Western esotericism are considered sufficient to make up a sustainable definition (2005a: 79).

<sup>119</sup> von Stuckrad 2003a: 255.

<sup>120</sup> von Stuckrad 2003b.

### **Arthur Versluis**

The last significant contributor to Western esoterism to be mentioned is Arthur Versluis, Professor of Literature at Michigan State University. Versluis is the editor of *Esoterica*, an online journal devoted to the trans-disciplinary study of Western esoterism, including for example gnosis, magic, mysticism, art, literature and politics. He is also the author of several books and articles on esoterism. In a recent publication Versluis argues that texts in Western esotericism have a special character enabling the reader to be initiated by pure reading:

“Where does an isolated alchemist learn to become a master alchemist? The answer, in brief, is through encoded or symbolic literature and art. In essence, that is what this book is about; it is an in-depth examination of how initiation can take place through the written word or image.”<sup>121</sup>

Such a viewpoint, of course, is not in line with the major ideas outlined here. It resembles Richard Reizenstien’s old idea of *Corpus Hermeticum* conceived as a ‘reading-mysterium’ bestowing upon the reader a transcendental experience. This may be possible insofar as mystical experiences are not subject to patent. However, the question is, in what kind of mental state did hermetists read their scriptures? Was it in a ‘meditative’ state and more importantly, did they do it alone? Today it is commonly agreed that many dialogues in *Hermetica* were real conversations between a teacher and a student, often called a ‘child’ or ‘son’. This communication might even have been ritualised, and many students might have been involved simultaneously, as demonstrated by Mahé.<sup>122</sup> As related earlier in this thesis, single members were initiated, for example, when the teacher and student after prayer kissed or embraced each other. I have also argued that this could happen in autumn when Mercury (Hermes, synonymous with gnosis) reached its elevated position in Virgo.<sup>123</sup> In the chapter on Paracelsus an engraving was mentioned showing an alchemist kneeling in front of a

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<sup>121</sup> Versluis 2004: 10.

<sup>122</sup> Mahé 1998b: 79 - 85.

<sup>123</sup> See chapter 2, p. 42 - 43, above.

tabernacle praying that God attend his alchemical endeavours.<sup>124</sup> The alchemical practice was so ritualised that it had become a specific ritual field. It is hard to say if a reader *is* initiated by reading. That may be, but one mustn't forget, for example, that people like Leadbeater actually constructed rites of initiation.<sup>125</sup> USP and rituals are always in need of each other, and if one reads about different USP, rituals will always find their way to the important USP involved. This is the point that one misses by accepting Versluis' proposal. However, in conclusion, Versluis' contributions are very important to the understanding of gnosis in Western esotericism (for additional information, see appendix 2).

### Summary

In this chapter where especially Faivre and Hanegraaff's methodologies - and their theoretical discussions - have been outlined, much attention has been given to compare their methodologies with the methodology used in this study. It is natural that a study like this, which makes extensive use of Rappaport's and Olsson's anthropological studies and theories will collide, at least theoretically, with methods hitherto found in, or recommended for, the study of Western esotericism. However, despite some discrepancies, compliances can also be found in many details, and to sum up:

### *Discrepancies*

Originally esotericism was defined as a 'mode of thinking' and such an approach was philosophical or had its place in the history of ideas. This thesis looks at esotericism as a piece of religion, which includes ritual, USP, cosmologies, and ritual fields. It has also been demonstrated that a philosophical approach oversimplifies by neglecting what 'adapts' and what 'assimilates' during the course of history.<sup>126</sup> Consequently this study, neither theoretically nor empirically, agrees fully with the process of secularisation found *in esotericism* as outlined by Hanegraaff. Furthermore, this thesis

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<sup>124</sup> See chapter 5, p. 139, above.

<sup>125</sup> In appendix 1, Leadbeater's long ritual of initiation into the Great White Brotherhood is analysed to demonstrate the USP involved, and the different partial pictures of reality communicated by the ritual.

<sup>126</sup> To repeat, 'Adaptation' to Rappaport, designates "the processes by which living systems maintain themselves [...]". Rappaport 1999: 408.

disagrees that a methodology based on Wittgenstein's *family resemblance* is comparable with the concept of secularisation, which presupposes an ability to distinguish between religion and culture. Methodologically, i.e. looking for 'family resemblance' and USP, Hanegraaff and Rappaport are in opposition to each other. Maybe as an extension of family resemblance as an accepted methodology, *DGWE* lists currents and personalities from now on to be awarded the seal of approval for genuine esotericism and esotericists. Once 'approved', it is doubtful that all these currents and personalities will ever be excluded in coming editions. Also, one may expect pressure from many others not yet approved.

### *Compliances*

Faivre's criteria are not that far from the five matrices, as one could think, and the main difference rests on the level of abstraction. Faivre's criteria are too connected to a specific cosmology. USP are abstract in nature whereas cosmologies and other lower liturgical statements are very concrete. More important, however, is Faivre's acknowledgment of the existence of 'practices' (doing) in esoterism. Though this thesis does not agree in details with Faivre's notions, he has nevertheless put his finger on an important issue. When analysed, most of Faivre's 'practices' are seen to be open ritual fields able to maintain and communicate important USP in Western esoterism.

Though not outlined in detail, Hanegraaff's polemics against the 'Grand Polemical Narrative' are in accordance with many of the viewpoints in this study, especially the notion that the Protestant Reformation has endorsed, that research in religion relies too heavily on religion as a question of 'faith'. As a research paradigm this viewpoint is of the utmost importance to the study of Western esotericism. Hanegraaff's rejection of the Tylorean/Frazerian triad 'magic-religion-science' is also important. In matrix number 2, i.e. 'the dialectical relationship between man and God (or the divine), including the healing of other people, society and/or the Earth', there is a clear magical component. Hanegraaff's recommendation of an etic-emic methodology in future research is also in accordance with more reflexive anthropological methodologies used in this thesis. This implies that being a pro-esotericist is acceptable where one looks at oneself as a source,

unless the research is not followed by objectivity in the form of a critical self-examination. Finally, a generic historical framework (Hanegraaff and contributors) does not exclude a historical research like this, because it does not claim to be an overall *heuristic* study. Rather, it is a study of an *important branch* found within a historical framework which has continuously included the five matrices as USP. Religion always deals with 'messages', regardless of whether these must be understood as an expression of nominalism or of essentialism.<sup>127</sup> In any case, this study is a generalist's study.

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<sup>127</sup> It is irrelevant for this study to discuss whether it is done by a 'conditioned' or 'relative essentialist'. It is simply a question of viewpoint. Strategically, it is probably most wise to declare it 'a study of a nominalist'. Both nominalism and realism (a form of essentialism) postulate a harmony between 'words' and 'things'. Thus, religion (and esoterism) is very real, and something literal to deal with.



## CHAPTER 9

### Summary and some future prospects

The five matrices cover a span of approximately 2000 years, as we have seen. This empirical documentation of the five matrices is the first of its kind. Faivre's criteria were introduced after his initial works, and he made no attempt ever to demonstrate the value of the criteria in any systematic fashion. It is documented in detail that the five matrices are present in the selected texts.

It is important to note that this thesis is not a *heuristic* study in the sense Hanegraaff uses this terminology, i.e. the matrices do not define esotericism. Rather, this thesis creates a profile of a *branch* within esotericism defined by a broad historical framework - as outlined by Hanegraaff and others. My purpose has not been to dispute Hanegraaff's (and other researchers) historical and operative definition of Western esotericism. Critical remarks advanced are a natural consequence of an anthropological approach to religion with its related empirical research and results. Often, the anthropological approach selected is contrary to prevalent approaches used by Hanegraaff, Kochu von Stuckrad, Versluis and others. This thesis is also *applied ritual theory* with an embedded anti-philosophical approach to religion, or at least it maintains a very critical attitude to very cognitive approaches. The big question concerns the nature of religion but it isn't actually posed by this thesis. Roy A. Rappaport's, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*, could alternatively have been titled 'What is Religion?' Religions survive through continuous adaptation and assimilation primarily expressed through what Rappaport calls the 'second dimension of liturgical order'. This dimension contains three levels, USP, cosmology and rules of conduct, differing in *logical typing, authority, concreteness and reversibility*. The USP level is the most illogical, authoritative, abstract, and irreversible. USP are central to the religious organism and most prone to survival – as long as they are agreed upon, or accepted, primarily through ritual activity. They can neither be verified nor falsified and are hereby immune to any kind of scientific or philosophical rationality. *If USP were rational, they would naturally react to logical arguments*, but they are not. In

contrast with USP, cosmologies are much more concrete, they can be verified or falsified, are reversible and have much less authority. Cosmologies are *arbitrarily* connected to USP and their authority relates to rules of conduct - often deduced from the cosmology. In the case of USP, rituals implement their contents and the fragile, and often logically bizarre, USP become *realities* during ritual activity. Rappaport's theory is a significant contribution to the understanding of the nature of religion. One of the conclusions in this thesis concerns Faivre's criteria, which are equally in agreement with the five matrices.<sup>1</sup> I believe that Faivre would have stressed the abstract elements in his criteria if he had known Rappaport's ideas thereby giving them a much greater scope. This thesis fully recognises Faivre's imagination as a very important USP in Western esotericism.

Another significant contributor to the understanding of religion is Tord Olsson and his theory of ritual fields. The essence of religion deals with *doing* and *recognising* as two complementary modes of interacting, and religion is never neither cognitive nor behavioural in nature. Rituals are also 'dynamios' able to *generate* belief and like mirrors in a hall of mirrors able to reflect different partial pictures of reality. Based on some minor research of mine it is the conclusion of this thesis that rituals have an ability to create, alter, maintain and attract beliefs. Ritual may absorb belief; the prerequisite is, however, that the ritual can communicate the belief involved in a proper 'contracted' way.<sup>2</sup> One could object that the ritual fields created in this thesis, the astrological, alchemical, magical and clairvoyant fields, are of a somewhat abstract nature. This is quite correct, but by virtue of being ritual fields they can provide a comprehensive view of *how doing and thinking interact* in Western esotericism. Ritual fields can be a starting point for further research and help clarify how minor and more common rituals must be conceived.<sup>3</sup> Below, two major (A) and three secondary (or derivate) conclusions (B) will be discussed in detail:

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<sup>1</sup> See chapter 8, p. 237, above.

<sup>2</sup> A certain number of rituals may substitute each other, but as whole rituals are not interchangeable.

<sup>3</sup> In appendix 1 I have analysed Leadbeater's initiation into the Great White Brotherhood and demonstrated how much easier it is to understand when one knows that the ritual belongs to the clairvoyant ritual field.

- A1: The five matrices are USP, i.e. they belong to the second dimension of the liturgical order as outlined by Roy A. Rappaport.<sup>4</sup>
- A2: The five matrices as USP, together with its major ritual fields, constitute an important religious *branch* within Western esotericism.
- B1: *Hermetica* is *one* of the roots to Western esotericism rather than part of it.
- B2: Western esotericism created by the five matrices is not part of any known philosophy.
- B3: Western esotericism moves from philosophy to experience – and is often anchored in reality by participation in ritual activities.

**A1: The five matrices are USP, i.e. they belong to the second dimension of the liturgical order as outlined by Roy A. Rappaport**

To Rappaport USP and cosmologies are distinguishable and cosmologies are only arbitrarily connected to USP. In order to distinguish between USP and cosmology, a summary follows of the major cosmologies encountered in this thesis. In addition, a cosmology from an older Danish astrologer, Lorenz Benedicht, is included, as his cosmology is of a Christian sort. Later, Benedicht's Christian cosmology helps to illustrate the relationship between Christianity and Western esotericism.

As a starting point, matrix number five with the precise wording, 'the holistic cosmos, including the form of 'sympathy' between its parts', is set up against the major cosmologies encountered in this thesis. This demonstrates how *a holistic recognition of the world* (USP) is able to coexist together with different cosmologies. In *Hermetica* the belief in holism is related to different cosmologies promoting casual relationships between 'high' and 'low'. Generally, the stars exercised their dominance over the universe, Earth and humans. In the dualistic *Poimandres*, the seven heavenly bodies belonged to the domain of the demiurge, entrapping human minds into a kind of slavery caused by heimarmenê.<sup>5</sup> In tract XIII, *On Rebirth*, another dualistic tract, the human mind is kept in confusion by a zodiac

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<sup>4</sup> The first dimension entails the simultaneous and synchronous aspects. The third dimension of liturgical order entails the sequential aspects of rituals.

<sup>5</sup> See chapter 4, p. 86, above.

“with many forms in order to confuse human beings”.<sup>6</sup> Humans are put into a misconception about oneness and let astray by the zodiac and its classifications.<sup>7</sup> By contrast, in *The Anthology* of Stobaeus, the planets, zodiac and decans, i.e. ten-degree parts of the zodiac, are mainly connected to a monistic cosmology. Another version is the cosmology in *Korê Kosmou* (also from Stobaeus) which is neither dualistic nor monistic, but dualism and monism interact with each other. When the seven planets with their sympathetic power promised God they would improve themselves the whole universe gained from their vow. Later, however, the Earth returned to a state of misery because of the pollution of the four elements caused by humanity’s evil deeds.<sup>8</sup> In *Korê Kosmou* it is noteworthy that the seven planets co-operate with God, and not with a demiurge of any kind. The mentioned scriptures from *Hermetica* all depict a holistic belief - but they do not share the same cosmologies.

Though not the subject matter of this thesis, the cosmologies found in *Hermetica* are very different. In *S.H.* XV, for example, the area between Earth and Moon is first divided into a section (*moira*) going from the surface of the earth to the top of the mountains. Between Earth and the Moon there are a total of four sections of different sizes functioning as residential units for souls ready to incarnate. The area from the Moon to the ‘top of heaven’ is the dwelling place for gods (which are also synonymous with planets), stars and providence. Such a cosmology is very different from the cosmologies encountered in *Poimandres* and in *On Rebirth*, but holism as an important USP still prevails.

Agrippa’s cosmology is also predominantly causal due to the direct influence of the stars. However, as God supervises the ‘intellectual sphere’ superseding the stars, another kind of cosmological information appears. To summarise, the planets became ‘lower ontological regulators’. Agrippa’s cosmology is somewhat complex, as its exact layout depends on the topic discussed. His cosmology is an ‘ad hoc cosmology’, as the exact outfit and structure of cosmos fits to the USP in question (or the topic discussed).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> CH XIII.12 (see chapter 4, p. 84, above).

<sup>7</sup> See note, above.

<sup>8</sup> See chapter 4, p. 98, above.

<sup>9</sup> Ad hoc, i.e. ‘for this purpose’.

When describing the numbers belonging to the intellectual sphere, it is no problem for Agrippa to expand the number of ontological levels in the cosmos in order to match it with the number in question. For example, six different ontological levels are presented when analysing 'The Scale of Number four': the archetypical, the intelligible, the celestial, the elemental, the lesser and the infernal world.<sup>10</sup> In his first book Agrippa only made use of three ontological levels, the elemental, the celestial and the intellectual sphere. As stated earlier Agrippa's cosmology is predominantly monistic - as there is not much room for the devil and his 'hell' associated with the 'infernal world'.<sup>11</sup>

Paracelsus' cosmology is that of the visible and the invisible (volatile) intertwined by *astra* being everywhere, even in the inner organs of man. His cosmology is as a starting point predominantly monistic, even though a bifurcation prevails. There is macrocosm and microcosm, and everything, including man, has a double body. There is a mortal (visible) body and an immortal (invisible or astral) body to be found in everything.<sup>12</sup> Paracelsus' cosmology, at least in his alchemical writings, contains strong elements of 'horizontal' holism, i.e. as opposed to vertical or hierarchical forms of holism. When explaining *sympatheia* (or correspondences) Paracelsus uses,<sup>13</sup> as we have seen, both a casual and an analogical interpretation.<sup>14</sup> Concerning the kinds of attraction inherent in the different cosmologies, Paracelsus' monistic cosmology (including nature) has those of animism, medicine, and wisdom.

Blavatsky's cosmology is that of macrohistory, as pointed out by G. W. Trompf. The concept of *evolution* expanded into theosophy every aspect of its cosmology. By combining linear time from Christianity with a cyclic perception of time from Hinduism, or older esoterism, Blavatsky's concept

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<sup>10</sup> See chapter 3, p. 60, above.

<sup>11</sup> Hell, or the infernal world, is first mentioned in the description of 'the scale of number four'. It does not play any major role at all in Agrippa's cosmology.

<sup>12</sup> For Paracelsus' cosmology, see Benzenhöfer & Gantenbein 2005: 925 - 926. See also, chapter 5, p. 146, above.

<sup>13</sup> Maybe one should differentiate between 'sympatheia' and 'correspondences' in the following manner. In Stoicism, *sympatheia* was a physical category, i.e. a force in nature and in the universe. 'Correspondences' is more a cognitive notion as it relates to correlative thinking.

<sup>14</sup> See chapter 5, p. 147, above.

of time may be classified as helical. Thus, the attractions of Blavatsky's cosmology are those of macrohistory and helical evolution. In her spiritualised macrohistory, Blavatsky needed many spiritual hierarchies to govern evolution, giving her cosmology a clear vertical (hierarchical) dimension. Her cosmology is predominantly monistic and expresses a dominant perennialism, i.e. there is one universal cosmology governed by leading 'masters' from the major religions. By contrast, Rudolf Steiner's cosmology is at its present stage in evolution more dualistic, due to the influence of Ahriman, Lucifer and Mephistopheles.<sup>15</sup>

James Redfield's cosmology is also one of 'macrohistory' though on a much smaller scale compared with theosophical cosmology. Redfield's holism is primarily represented in his second insight. Here, one must realise that the 'personal time-line' is a reflection of the collective time line, where individuals repeat and experience the phases in Western history.<sup>16</sup> Noteworthy is Redfield's idea that the end product of evolution is a physical paradise, though of a higher 'vibration' than earthly matter. As Redfield and Adrienne puts it: "Reaching heaven on earth (raising our vibration) is the purpose of human existence and history".<sup>17</sup> Redfield's cosmology is non-casual and predominantly monistic. The appeal in Redfield's cosmology lies in its non-casual, horizontal (non-hierarchical) holism together with an accentuation of the correlation between the personal and the collective time-line.

Eckhart Tolle's cosmology is influenced by Blavatskian Theosophy. Everything develops towards enlightenment before it is transformed into a higher level, and flowers are for example the crowning development of plants. However, until today the universe has been in a state of sleep. The 'absolute mind' is timeless and does not evolve, but when consciousness becomes the manifested universe, it becomes subject to an evolutionary process. A kind of Vedanta transforms into, or adapts to, Western esoterism with its strong belief in evolution. Tolle's cosmology is predominantly

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<sup>15</sup> In brief, each represents different streams that prevent spiritual evolution. Christ, on the other hand, is a central impetus behind spiritual and physical evolution.

<sup>16</sup> Redfield & Adrienne 1995: 28. See also Redfield's second insight, chapter 7, pp. 188 -189, above.

<sup>17</sup> Redfield & Adrienne 1995: 249.

vertical because holism (or correspondences), as a modern explanation, among other things is described as a ‘web of interconnected multidimensional processes’.

*Comment:* It is a well-known fact that in the wake of Luther’s Reformation several astrological books appeared in northern parts of Europe and also in Denmark.<sup>18</sup> An esteemed letterpress printer in Copenhagen, Lorenz Benedicht (ca. 1530 - 1604 AD), wrote and published a comprehensive book on astrology in 1594 AD.<sup>19</sup> In the beginning of his work he assures the readers that God, the creator of everything, “has appointed and ordained two officials”,<sup>20</sup> i.e. nature and the heavenly bodies. Without these two officials “nothing will come into being or be perfected on Earth, none of our fruits, no man or women comes into existence”.<sup>21</sup> For those interested in the history of astrology, Benedicht’s ‘descriptive astronomy’ is important because he adapts old astrological rules, many from Ptolemy, to all aspects of Danish culture, involving weather conditions, health, lifestyles and not least foods, including wine and drinking habits in the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>22</sup> During winter, for example, when Saturn rules, i.e. when the Sun is in Capricorn and Aquarius, one must avoid being ‘cold and dry’. The remedy for this is red wine to which is added carnations and the warm meat of an ox. In springtime, however, when there is not too much fire left in the stomach due to the cold Danish winter, instead of meat, fresh fish is recommended. On closer examination, Benedicht’s ‘Christian astrology’ only fulfils the criteria of two matrices, numbers 1 and 5. His cosmology is monistic as there is no linkage to evil spirits, the devil or the like. The stars rule everything in a manner similar to the way God governs everything on Earth.

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<sup>18</sup> Lorenz Benedicht, see note below, printed several books by Danish authors dealing with astrology in Danish and Latin.

<sup>19</sup> Benedicht 1594. Thanks to Tove Kruse, associate professor at Roskilde University (RUC), for providing a copy of Benedicht’s book. See also Kruse 2003: 47 - 79. Tove Kruse compares James Redfield’s and Lorenz Benedicht’s beliefs in an all-encompassing holism.

<sup>20</sup> ”haffuer hand tilskicket oc forordineret tuende Embizmend.”

<sup>21</sup> ”ingen ting bliffue eller fuldkommis paa Jorden, ingen Fruct vore, ingen Mand eller Quinde bliffue til.”

<sup>22</sup> Larsen 2004c.

In summary, please see the cosmology table shown below. In this table ‘monistic’ actually means ‘predominantly monistic’. The cosmology of Steiner is only partly dualistic at the present stage of evolution. The table illustrates cosmologies connected to ‘holism’, i.e. matrix number five, but the other matrices could have been selected as well.

***USP: Holism – and some of its connected (sanctified) cosmologies and their ‘appeals’***

Scripture/author	Cosmology	Appeals to an understanding of:
Poimandres	Dualistic, casual, (planetary)	Rational slavery
On Rebirth	Dualistic, casual, (zodiacal)	Misconception of oneness
Stobaeus, generally	Monistic, casual, (astrological)	A logically controlled world
Korê Kosmou	Dualistic-monistic, (planetary)	Degeneration and regeneration
Agrippa	‘Monistic’, casual, hierarchical	An intellectual world
Paracelsus	‘Monistic’, casual-analogical	An animated and wise world
Blavatsky, (Steiner), Leadbeater	‘Monistic’, (‘dualistic’), hierarchical.	Spiritual and material evolution
Redfield	‘Monistic’, synchronic, horizontal	Paradise on Earth via evolution
Tolle	Monistic, analogical, ‘empty’	Developmental enlightenment

An obvious question to ask is whether Hermetists and modern esotericists perceive the matrices in the same way. The answer to this, of course, can only be hypothetical. Rappaport is very aware that information is received



differently by individuals *per se* and groups depending on factors as ‘size, literacy, technology, institutions for receiving, storing, interpreting and disseminating information’.<sup>23</sup> Thus, one could argue for differences in perception of the same USP and cosmology. The right column of the table illustrates my interpretation of the way the cosmologies were, or at least could have been, received by an audience. Unfortunately, it is common *not* to differentiate between USP and the appeal of a cosmology. Such differentiation is necessary to recognise any ‘duration’ or ‘sameness’ in the history of Western esoterism.

One could perhaps refute this by stating that the five matrices are only cosmological features in different versions, i.e. they do not exist as USP. A cosmology gives answers to questions such as the shape of the universe, i.e. flat, round, cubic etc. A cosmology also represents, or is the basis for, certain types of classification. This could for example be a partition separating male-female, or matter-spirit etc. In any case, the matrices do not describe the shape, size, extent of, etc. the Earth or cosmos. Neither do the matrices specify any kind of classification, for example a tripartition or a classification into four (for example four elements). The five matrices are not cosmologies, or aspects of a cosmology. They are simply USP and each of them co-exists with different cosmologies as demonstrated above.

One could perhaps also argue that the five matrices are an abstract philosophical construction and that no part of esoterism has contained such abstract USP. It is easy to dismiss such objection by pointing to the selected texts that actually contain some of the matrices more delicately expressed than in this thesis. The following is matrix number five found in *Asclepius*: *omnia unius esse aut anum esse omnia*.<sup>24</sup> Similar, matrix number 2, i.e. ‘the dialectical relationship between man and God (or the divine), including the healing of other people, society and/or the Earth’, can nearly be expressed as: That which is below is as that which is above, and that which is above is

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<sup>23</sup> Rappaport 1999: 111. Further, though not of importance here, participation *in* liturgy means acceptance, but that does not guarantee the rules or norms encoded will be abided afterwards (p. 123).

<sup>24</sup> Festugière: “tout est dépendant d’un seul et cet Un est Tout” (NF, *Asclepius* 1.12). Quispel translates: “The All is from the One and All is One”. See chapter 4, p. 115, above.

as that which is below.<sup>25</sup> These two examples show that the matrices *per se* are no philosophical construction taking precedence over the esoteric texts.

**A2: The five matrices as USP together with its major ritual fields constitute an important religious branch within Western esotericism**

The five matrices constitute an important branch highlighted by some major ritual fields. In line with some of Faivre's practices, the astrological, alchemical, magical and clairvoyant fields have been emphasised in this thesis. From a theological point of view, one could argue that the five matrices are sufficient to establish a branch in esotericism. However, in actuality the branch is established in esotericism by the five matrices *combined with* among others the related ritual fields and rituals.

Rituals are able to function as a common field of view for *different partial pictures of reality*. Benedicht's astrology as a ritual practice communicated different partial pictures of reality, for example the reality of God, his supervision of the world, holism and a purpose in all cosmological settings. The alchemical ritual also communicated different pictures of reality: the presence of God,<sup>26</sup> God as an alchemist, an alchemical cosmogony, Iliaster, the light of nature, the reality of transmutation and holism.<sup>27</sup> An atheist viewing Paracelsus' alchemical experiment would have seen a different reality, for example, a specifically-formed furnace, a fire under the furnace, and some colour phenomena in the furnace during heating. The different 'actions' or elements in a ritual are fixed, but each of these elements are open for interpretation (Olsson).<sup>28</sup> Because of a ritual's ability to communicate different partial pictures of reality, ritual fields can never *define* Western esotericism or any of its branches. Astrological, magical, alchemical, and clairvoyant ritual fields may also be found outside Western esotericism. However, as stated earlier, ritual fields become *self-referential* and can be compared with a specific referential system.<sup>29</sup> When attached to specific USP, ritual fields obtain *special forms* in Western esotericism able

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<sup>25</sup> Excerpt from *Tabula Smaragdina*. See chapter 7, p. 181, above.

<sup>26</sup> The burning fire was also the shining Sun and equal to the presence of God.

<sup>27</sup> See chapter 5, p. 143, above.

<sup>28</sup> Olsson 2000: 57.

<sup>29</sup> See chapter 8, pp. 239 - 239, above.

to communicate with the related USP in a 'condensed' way. Now, this thesis does not assert that participants perceive all 'contracted' matrices simultaneously during ritual activity. On the other hand, it is not difficult to imagine that, for example, Paracelsus could have recounted his experience of all five matrices as partial pictures of reality if confronted with the question. Although this is fiction, the following conversation might have taken place.

- Paracelsus, you explained that a successful alchemical experiment confirmed the light of nature. Did you see, or experience, that everything was connected on that occasion?
- They were the same. The light of nature reveals from signatures the curative power in many herbs and links them to the correct planetary spirits. However, it is often a patient's ability to recover that determines for me the correct mixture, dosage and solution. However, yes, when I see the correct colour phenomena in my vessel, I know that the curative powers have been fertilised by the planetary spirits.
- Do you see, or experience, a relationship between 'low' and 'high'?
- The effect of the lower world on the upper firmament is for many the distinguishing mark of our art, and it tells me that the process of *entelecheia* has been accelerated. I feel and experience that there is a goal out there coming closer when performing my art. The process for all of us is not without struggle, but I have just completed an astrological prediction. There you can read how times soon to come will affect our human soul.
- When doing your art, do you experience religious and scientific principles to be the same, as two sides of the same coin?
- I am not sure that I understand your question. What you call religion is for me to know and science to practise. Therefore, I practise what I know.
- Does the world become more and more monistic according to your alchemical experience?
- I have just answered that question, if you know what *entelecheia* implies. It is also important to remove the poison found in everything in nature. It serves no good and distorts the speed of *entelecheia*. Alchemy is the art of putrefaction and re-creation.
- A last question, Paracelsus. When performing your alchemy, do you see, or experience, that providence counts more than retaliation and sin?

- Maybe I understand this question. If you mean in my personal life, I do not feel purified or newborn when performing alchemy. Maybe some do. I am a Christian. I believe that an ethical life will guide me to paradise. God is forgiveness and even the slightest repentance he will reward at least a thousand times. God can even send us diseases in order to recognise our wrongdoings. When doing my alchemy I often remember God and his will, but that is something else. If I did not have my belief in God, alchemy could not help me. However, if your question concerns nature and history we discussed that topic a few minutes ago.

The creative aspect of the ritual fields involved, or the ritual's ability to create beliefs, also affects Western esoterism. For example, the ascension as described in *Poimandres* made use of astrological cosmology and experiences gained from practising astrology, i.e. astrology viewed as a ritual. As the planets were the domain of *psychê*, Hermetists transcended psychological characteristics such as cunning, audacity and erotic feelings in order to enter an area of pure spirit (*nous*). A parallel example is Steiner's teachings on a life after death that in nearly every detail was structured by a belief in astrology.<sup>30</sup> A huge ritual field in modern esoterism is that of clairvoyance, mostly promoted in theosophical circles by Leadbeater and Anni Besant (1848 - 1933 AD).<sup>31</sup> Clairvoyance viewed as a ritual field transformed and modelled the eastern belief in chakras. Chakras and auras became bodily extensions and appendages. All this took place primarily in order to create a method able to *measure* evolution, or matrix number three, in modern esoterism. The clairvoyant ritual field also exists in Redfield's and Tolle's authorship. Here it is a question of perceiving and measuring the 'energy-aura' in plants, humans and things including the Earth. Ultimately, it is the ability to tune into a given 'frequency' and then viewing the whole Earth or universe on that frequency.

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<sup>30</sup> See chapter 6, pp. 175 - 178, above.

<sup>31</sup> Together with Leadbeater she wrote several books, for example *Thought Forms* (1901) and *Occult Chemistry* (1908). In both these books clairvoyance is the tool, which can investigate thought forms as well as atoms, their spin and vibration. Web-editions.

**B1: Hermetica is one of the roots to Western esotericism rather than a part of it**

According to this thesis, the many scriptures in Hermetica cannot be synthesised into an upward order of gnosis and initiations, sometimes called the ‘way of Hermes’ or the ‘road of immortality’. Matrix number 1, ‘pronoia rather than karma or sin’, is found in some of the writings while contradicted in others.<sup>32</sup> Sometimes the concept of ‘karma’ or sin had a greater impact on destiny than providence, which can be seen for example in *Korê Kosmou* and *CH X*. The dialectical relationship between ‘low’ and ‘high’ is testified to by *Korê Kosmou*, but it is only cursorily confirmed elsewhere.<sup>33</sup> Even when applying the criteria of Faivre, it is hard to find a light or hidden fire in nature, especially in more dualistic tracts as for example *Poimandres*. Hermetists were interested in astronomy, but as a whole they ignored *nature*, which is an important issue in Faivre’s criteria. In Hermetica, there is no intention to control nature, as opposed to esoterism in Renaissance, where man became a centre of the universe, able to influence and control the whole cosmos by magical skills. Faivre’s notion that esotericists prefer to sojourn on Jacob’s ladder, rather than to climb to the top and beyond, is not valid when applied to Hermetists. Their engagement in a radical gnosis transcending every aspect of the sensuous cosmos (*ho aisthêtos kosmos*) is often obvious.<sup>34</sup> Analytically, classical Hermetism is one of the roots of Western esotericism rather than part of it. It must be emphasised, however, that the important astrological ritual field emerges for the first time in Western esoterism together with the teachings of Hermes Trismegistos.

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<sup>32</sup> One could argue that Hermetists initially learned how karma and sin affected their lives. Later on the road to immortality, when freed from bodily impulses, they learned how to surrender to a divine *pronoia* guiding them to higher stages of liberation and gnosis. According to this thesis such a viewpoint is plausible.

<sup>33</sup> If Copenhaver’s translation is correct, the dialectical relationship is found in *Asclepius*. However, his translation may be disputed as the Latin text, concerning the function of the famous statues mentioned in *Asclepius*, is somewhat corrupt.

<sup>34</sup> See chapter 4, for example pp. 88 - 89, above.

**B2: Western esotericism created by the five matrices is not any known philosophy**

It is a widespread misconception that religion is philosophy and that Western esoterism is totally permeated by Neoplatonism, as stated for example by Hanegraaff. However, this is not to deny that religion *with* ritual activity from a pure emic point of view can be a vision of life or a 'philosophy of life'. The concept 'philosophy of life' is somewhat diffuse, but is often a practical philosophy where behaviour is integrated with major concepts. In reality, however, 'philosophy of life' is often a lifestyle based on a mixture of ideas and specific values. In such cases religion is not a lifestyle except when initially rooted in ritual activity. A philosophy *can* contain important messages, a cosmology and advices on how to live life. Such big and outdated systems apparently resemble Rappaport's second dimension in the liturgical order, but with a radical difference: they were never cybernetic in nature. The different levels were too integrated logically and hence inseparable. Religion is cybernetic in nature and its different levels cannot be mixed, neither are there any logical connections between USP and cosmology. In religion USP become realities through *commitment*, whereas philosophical statements, even of a very abstract nature, become realities through *thinking*.<sup>35</sup>

Analysing the empirical material used in this thesis it quickly becomes obvious that esotericism generally has nothing to do with Neoplatonism. For example, Agrippa's cosmology, or rather cosmologies, is an *ad hoc* cosmology matching the topics Agrippa selects. In his first book, he describes a tripartition of the world made up by an intellectual, a celestial and an elementary sphere. Here, God is *included* in the intellectual world and is simply a part of the four elements: *Quomodo elementa sunt in coelis, in stellis, in daemonibus, in angelis, in ipso denique Deo*. Later, in his second book, Agrippa abandons his tripartition in favour of a division into six ontological levels when describing his 'scale of numbers', as we have seen. In addition, when he comes to 'the orphic scale of number twelve', he simply has to omit the infernal word.<sup>36</sup> In his last and third book concerning

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<sup>35</sup> This is not to deny that 'intuition' may be recommended by certain philosophers, for example by Bergson.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Agrippa, Book II, (part 2). Web-edition.

the supremacy of ceremonial magic, Agrippa considers spirits so mean that he classifies them as belonging to a level below the infernal, called 'subterranean'.<sup>37</sup> All this has nothing to do with Neoplatonism. Some major differences between Neoplatonism and Agrippa's occult philosophy are:

\* Agrippa's God is intellectual and has different attributes.<sup>38</sup> Plotinus' God, the One, is not capable of thinking.<sup>39</sup> It has no intention of creating, but cannot do otherwise. The One "seeks nothing, has nothing and needs nothing, overflows [...]".<sup>40</sup>

\*Plotinus operates with three levels of existence each called a hypostasis (foundation), the One, Nous and the Soul (psychê) of the world. Matter, or *materia*, is not a foundation, and it hardly exists. To the degree it exists, it is totally deprived of any intelligence and 'beingness'.<sup>41</sup> By contrast, matter is very real to Agrippa, and the elemental world has its own intelligence and magic. Generally, due to a Christian influence, Western esotericists consider the world as much more real than Neoplatonists. If one incorporates matter into Plotinus' schema, the ontological levels are: the One, Intellect, Soul, matter. Agrippa only deals with three ontological levels in his first book, i.e. the intellectual, celestial and elemental spheres.

\* Theoretically, it is totally unthinkable that anything can affect the One, or highest divinity, and *a dialectical relationship between 'low' and 'high' is non-existent*. *Nous* is the first emanation of the One, but there are no processes the other way round. The One, beyond thinking or self-awareness, does not integrate any experience from levels below. *Nous*

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<sup>37</sup> Agrippa, Book III, chapter xvi.

<sup>38</sup> Agrippa applies the word 'attributes', for example wisdom, understanding, form and love (Book IV, chap. x).

<sup>39</sup> Plotinus 5.6. This chapter is entitled: "On the fact that that which is beyond being does not think, and on what is the primary and what the secondary thinking principle."

<sup>40</sup> Plotinus 5.2.1. The text reads *hypereryê*, i.e. aorist of *hyperereô* (overflows). In Greek an aorist can be translated as the present. In this sense, the One still overflows in an unending process.

<sup>41</sup> In contrast, Gnosticism views *materia* or *physis* as an independent power.

becomes an emanation when it ‘looks at’ or ‘gazes at’ the One. Also Soul is filled and becomes the second emanation when it ‘looks to its source’.<sup>42</sup> “So it goes on”, says Plotinus, and the soul of the world finally comes to exist in a plant – though it is the least intelligent part of it. Each hypostasis remains as it is, in its own place, while generating.<sup>43</sup> The criterion of matrix number two with its dialectical relationship between high and low is not met in Plotinus’ philosophy.

Agrippa’s cosmology is an ad hoc cosmology and ‘logically’ inconsistent. Rather his texts are typically religious, full of conglomerates as outlined by Olsson. Agrippa can, for example, prove to the reader that the Aristotelian elements are found in everything. They are found in heaven, the stars, angels, demons and even God himself. The canonical message is simply that everything is combined into wholeness (by the four elements). Undaunted, Agrippa uses bits and pieces of Aristotelian philosophy to set forth his own canonical message. In his first book the philosophical scenario changes unexpectedly, and Agrippa turns to Platonism to ‘document’ holism as an outstanding USP. In his second book, primarily dealing with numbers, Agrippa leaves his Aristotelian and Platonic cosmologies and introduces twelve numerological tables, each able to transfer the same USP (‘holism’). Equally undaunted, Agrippa uses the stoic concept of *sympatheia* symbolically expressed as the strings in a lyre, stretched out through the cosmos, interlacing everything. From a philosophical point of view, Agrippa has a disorganised eclectic style where single philosophical components are fragmented, over-simplified, or used outside their original context. The question is not whether Agrippa is a competent philosopher, but whether he is able to present his canonical messages in a persuasive way. *Agrippa transforms philosophy into religion* and this manoeuvre is frequently encountered in Western esotericism.

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<sup>42</sup> Plotinus 5.2.1.

<sup>43</sup> Plotinus 5.2.1 & 5.2.2. Even when accepting magic Plotinus assures that the all, i.e. the universe (or the soul of the world) can not be affected: “We must not therefore assume that the All can be affected”; Plotinus 4.4.42.



### *Paracelsus*

Paracelsus' cosmology is one of bipartition consisting of the visible (matter) and the invisible (spirit) - though matter can be viewed as affected by three principles, sulphur, salt and mercury.<sup>44</sup> In Plotinus' analysis matter is no hypostasis, but rather the ultimate range of the emanation of the One. By contrast, according to Paracelsus, *prima materia* is a primordial state similar to 'chaos' (called *Iliaster*). One of God's first acts in creation is simply to differentiate *prima materia* as opposed to Plotinus' philosophy where matter is eternal and the world is without beginning or end. Plotinus explicitly states that the universe (cosmos) has always existed and always will exist.<sup>45</sup> Esoteric writers like Agrippa and Paracelsus were Christians and they believed in both a creation and an end to the existing world, contrary to the teachings of Plotinus where the world is eternal. Esoterism influenced by Christianity will naturally emphasise the reality of the world, of earthly time and history, to a greater extent than Plotinus' Neoplatonism. Metals are in alchemy 'living entities', growing in the womb of the Earth, representing an animism which exceeds that of Plotinus'. The radical animism often found in Western esoterism is closer to the hylozoism found in pre-Socratic philosophy where matter is alive, i.e. soul and matter are inseparable (see more below).

### *Blavatsky*

Blavatsky's esoterism is one of emanation, and she uses this term repeatedly. Now, there are many variations of emanation, the chief concept being that an ultimate source generates lower ontological levels unintentionally. In contrast, emanation is generated intentionally in Blavatsky's universe, and there are some significant differences between her interpretation and that of Plotinus. As pointed out by Trompf her macrohistory involves a return to the single source - from which a new emanation may happen. In Plotinus' philosophy, there is no worldly (periodical) returning to the One and as such

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<sup>44</sup> The three principles are called 'workmen'. Combustible sulphur gives form to things, incombustible salt gives solidity and volatile and mediating mercury was a nutritional component. Benzenhöfer & Gantenbein 2005: 926. These three principles also affect the four elements.

<sup>45</sup> Plotinus 2.1.1.

the world is static. Blavatsky's superior USP, the belief in evolution, makes the whole cosmos extremely dynamic. In her seven stanzas, found in the book of Dzyan,<sup>46</sup> Blavatsky outlines in detail the creation of the world using ideas found in Hinduism, Buddhism and not least in Western philosophy. Though Blavatsky's stanzas are very complex to understand, she states that Parabrahman sleeps before creating, that it "desires to exist" and is total "Self-Consciousness".<sup>47</sup> She also joins matter and spirit as two aspects of "the One Unity in which they are synthesised".<sup>48</sup> All these ideas are unknown in Plotinus' philosophy. Blavatsky also assures that "Nature is fire, the intelligence that moves the Universe is fire, and fire is intelligence."<sup>49</sup> Here, Faivre's second criterion is met, but there is no hidden fire of intelligence circulating in nature in Plotinus' philosophy.

If one defines 'animism' as including the animation of dead matter as stones, metals, stones and the like, Plotinus philosophy is not animistic. Matter has no intelligence and is not able to 'look back' (see above) on the soul of the world. Matter is no hypostasis as opposed to Blavatsky's opinion where even atoms are living beings with a consciousness.<sup>50</sup> Plotinus is not always that clear to understand, and if one questions where Intelligence (Nous) resides, one may argue that it (i) is found in the upper spheres, (ii) nowhere, (iii) is found everywhere - as recently outlined by J. Wilberding.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, even in the case of (iii), the consequence is not that matter is animated, but rather that Nous 'touches' the lower cosmological regions. Here is one of Wilberding's conclusions:

"Since celestial matter is better than sublunar matter, the intelligible is more present in the heavens [...]. But all matter is by its very nature *deficient*, and so the intelligible region (being) can only be fully present where there is no matter (non-being) whatsoever – and

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<sup>46</sup> This is a very old book, probably only one copy exists. Cf. also Riffard's definition of esoterism as always having a 'secret book'; chapter 9, p. 249, above.

<sup>47</sup> See Blavatsky's outlining of stanza I from the book of Dzyan; Blavatsky 1888: Vol. I, 44.

<sup>48</sup> Blavatsky 1888: Vol. I, 16.

<sup>49</sup> Blavatsky 1888: Vol. I, 77.

<sup>50</sup> See chap. 6, p. 163, above.

<sup>51</sup> Wilberding 2005: 315 - 334.

this is precisely at and perhaps beyond the periphery of the universe.”<sup>52</sup>

Plotinus recognised magic, without being a magician himself, by analysing it philosophically. He recognises a ‘power of nature’, which stems from the configurations (*schêmata*) of the planets, i.e. the aspects between the planets. As part of nature, stones and herbs may contain ‘active forces’, but it is important to exercise caution when interpreting. In Gregory Shaw’s otherwise sober introduction to Neoplatonism in Antiquity, he exaggerates a little by describing these hidden powers in stones and plants as divine.<sup>53</sup> The Greek text does not mention anything about divinity, but that stones and herbs in nature hides active powers created by the astrological aspects. A little later, Plotinus stresses that “we do not say that anything is alive which does not move itself perceptibly”, only that “things of this sort has a hidden life”.<sup>54</sup> Planetary aspects shape the different dispositions of things and had it not been for the heavenly bodies moving in the sky there would not have been any forces or powers in nature. Plotinus writes: “And all the heavenly bodies when they have been unified in this or that particular configuration produce now one and now another disposition of things: so that the figures (*schêmata*) have power [...]”.<sup>55</sup> What actually have power are thus the astrological aspects, or angles between the planets. Only to the degree stones and herbs in nature are in sympathy with the planetary aspects, powers or forces (*dynameis*) are transferred.<sup>56</sup> Plotinus’ positive attitude to astrology saves, I think, his metaphysics where matter is no hypostasis. Matter has forces imprinted – but is forever deprived of consciousness, intelligence and soul. Dealing with magic, Plotinus recognises that a magician can pray to the

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<sup>52</sup> Wilberding 2005: 332 (my italics).

<sup>53</sup> Shaw 2005: 835.

<sup>54</sup> Plotinus 4.4.36. Plotinus 1989: 253.

<sup>55</sup> Plotinus 1989: 249. When Plotinus speaks of the planets and their influence, he uses the word *schêmata*, which is the correct technical astrological name for the different aspects formed between the planets. Armstrong sometimes translates *schêmata* as both figures and configurations. This is a bit confusing as he is aware that ‘configurations’ are the astrological aspects (n.1, p. 244).

<sup>56</sup> Plotinus 1989: 251. In this fourth treasure Plotinus uses the stoic metaphor of strings in a lyre to explain how sympathetic connections work in the universe. Through such invisible strings the planets transfer their vibration to lower things; Plotinus 4.4.41.

planets or otherwise use the astrological aspects in heaven. However, Plotinus also makes it very clear that the magician cannot affect the planets. The body and soul of a planet remain ‘unharméd’.<sup>57</sup> Plotinus totally rejects a dialectical relationship between ‘high’ and ‘low’, as we have seen above. In other words, Plotinus granted the magician a power equalling the power an average astrologer possessed using *katarchê*-astrology. This type of astrology finds the correct timing, for example the right moment for a wedding. The magician can make use of prayers, incantation and music addressed to the planets in amplifying the ‘moments’ to come, but in a general sense they are unable to affect the planets.<sup>58</sup> What we can conclude is that simple matter, stones and the like, is not comprised of living entities in Plotinus’ philosophy.

In a broader sense, it is impossible to recognise a coherent influence on esoteric traditions from Neoplatonism “so pervasive that it is often not even mentioned” (Hanegraaff). It is simply impossible to classify Western esotericism as any (known) philosophy. A learning experience in looking for an ‘unknown’ philosophy may be found in studies on John Dee where “no coherent intellectual attitude informing and unifying all of Dee’s work” has hitherto been found.<sup>59</sup> Different attempts have resulted in proposals ranging from classifying his writings as scientific oriented Neoplatonism to perceiving Dee as a magus inspired by Hermeticism of the Renaissance (Yates). Nicholas Clulee distinguishes periods in Dee’s life of varying intellectual views and cautions against associating Dee with Neoplatonism or Hermeticism - at least prior to 1570 AD. “Vague similarities”, says Clulee, “should not lead to facile assumptions of intellectual kinship.”<sup>60</sup> Clulee concludes that a study of John Dee must remain free from any “static elaboration of a single philosophy.”<sup>61</sup> Western esotericism may possess a philosophical attitude because of the *terminology* and the level of *abstraction* often encountered. However, this does not alter the fact that fragments of philosophies are used indiscriminately to support the USP in

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<sup>57</sup> Plotinus 4.4.28; Plotinus 1989: 268.

<sup>58</sup> Plotinus 4.4.40 - 43.

<sup>59</sup> Clulee 1977: 632.

<sup>60</sup> Clulee 1977: 635.

<sup>61</sup> Clulee 1977: 680.

question. Blavatsky, for example, used many fragments of philosophy from Buddhism, Hinduism and the West to support her idea of a macrohistory based on holism and evolution. Redfield uses what he considers a part of Hegel's philosophy together with some Christian essentials where Tolle uses some Vedanta-like viewpoints in order to promote the idea of evolution. However, in esotericism, one must not focus too much on these fragments, but on how they *support* different USP. It is much more a question of religious argument than of technical philosophy.

*Comment:* Though this thesis is no generic study, the influence of Neoplatonism on esotericism is found in the area of magic. Especially noteworthy is the research of Brian P. Copenhaver who documents a high degree of Neoplatonic influence on natural magic. Ficino extended this concept. His natural magic, where the correspondences between 'high' and 'low' could be reinforced or awakened, did not rely on Hermetic authority. As Copenhaver puts it, "The philosophical content (of Hermetica) is banal, eclectic and incoherent".<sup>62</sup> Among others, Ficino found philosophical support for his theory of magic in the writings of Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Synesius and Proclus. In reality, Ficino drew on a number of sources, for example Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, Galen, Dioscorides,<sup>63</sup> Christian physicians and other sources.<sup>64</sup> It is not surprising that pro-magical fundamentals and arguments in Neoplatonism inspired Renaissance esoterism to a greater degree than the 'technical' Neoplatonic philosophy. According to this thesis, there is a clear magical element in esotericism due to matrix number two.

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<sup>62</sup> Copenhaver 1984: 524 (my parenthesis).

<sup>63</sup> Pedanius Dioscorides (c. 40-c. 90 AD), a Greek physician, botanist and pharmacologist, wrote *De Materia Medica* in five volumes: one of the most influential herbal books in history. Some information can be found at:

[healthsystem.virginia.edu/internet/library/historical/rare\\_books/herbalism/vienna.cfm](http://healthsystem.virginia.edu/internet/library/historical/rare_books/herbalism/vienna.cfm).

<sup>64</sup> Copenhaver 1984: 524 - 535.

**B3: From philosophy to experience – often anchored in reality by participation in ritual activities**

Though lacking in a coherent philosophy, Western esotericism has many experiences to offer.<sup>65</sup> This is a complex topic, especially in early esotericism. Here, one encounters outstanding intellectuals more or less involved in esotericism such as Albertus Magnus, Roger Bacon, Ficino, Agrippa, John Dee, Paracelsus, Bruno and Tycho Brahe.<sup>66</sup> More research is required to clarify what ‘experience’ signifies in Western esotericism. However, by following Olsson my viewpoint is that religious experiences are grounded in religious practices and *reinforced* by ritual activity. Religious texts are thus embedded experiences of a somewhat vague character often organised in clusters as *prototypes* or as *family resemblance*.<sup>67</sup> The acknowledgement, that religious text inter alia deals with experience, gives rise to a major challenge in future research to integrate scientific dimensions, for example those found in Paracelsus’ and perhaps Newton’s writings. *An unexpected conclusion may be drawn, namely, that parts of their scientific experiments were transferred to a ritual situation in order to gain more experience, a stronger confirmation and ultimately, perhaps, a numinous experience.* Consequently, it may be impossible to differentiate a ritual from a scientific experiment. Actually, this is the case in Paracelsus’ alchemy which had become ritualised and established a ritual field.

A closer textual analysis of the texts used in this thesis reveals major embedded experiences - found in or near important canonical message and related ritual fields (or rituals). The more attached to practices and rituals, the more acute and manifest are the experiences. Thus, the major areas of experience accumulated in Western esotericism concern:

1. Experience with holism (not exclusively, but very much based on astrological, magical, alchemical and clairvoyant insight and/or practices. This also applies to 2, 3 and 4 below).

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<sup>65</sup> Experiences develop from learning, i.e. experience is (as beliefs) a social phenomenon. Experience is grounded in a *paideia*; see appendix 2.

<sup>66</sup> All names here, except Tycho Brahe, are mentioned in *DGWE*. Similarly, all names listed, except Dee, are found in Larsen et al. 1995 (& 2000).

<sup>67</sup> Olsson 2000: 55 - 56.

2. Experience with the components found in fate, i.e. pronoiā, sin/karma, free will,<sup>68</sup> prudence, imagination,<sup>69</sup> spiritual insight,<sup>70</sup> healthy physical and mental condition,<sup>71</sup> evolution and gnosis.<sup>72</sup>
3. Experience in interpreting physical laws as synonymous with spiritual principles and visa versa.
4. Experience with spiritual and environmental developments.

*A few comments on the experiences*

These experiences are interrelated overall as the five matrices are related to each other. This has a number of implications, for example *that spiritual and environmental (including historical) developments are interconnected* and affected by pronoiā, spiritual insight, free will, fate, imaginations, mental conditions, gnosis and magical exercises (primarily based on the dialectical relationship between ‘high’ and ‘low’).<sup>73</sup> Simplified, one can argue that Western esotericism distinguishes itself by being this-worldly and very concerned with developments *of* and *in* the world.

In addition, it is important to recognise that *experiences* from one ritual field can be *transferred* to another ritual field. Experience gained in the astrological ritual field can then be transferred to a magical, alchemical or clairvoyant field. Now, ascension as described in *Poimandres*, probably happened in meditation or in a meditative ritual field.<sup>74</sup> One should keep in

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<sup>68</sup> All esoteric writers being discussed in this thesis, i.e. Agrippa, Paracelsus, Blavatsky, Steiner etc., also recognise free will, or as Blavatsky puts it, ‘Theosophy is not a question of fatalism’.

<sup>69</sup> This is Faivre’s criterion playing a dominant role for Paracelsus (& others) and in much modern esoteric literature.

<sup>70</sup> This is a common factor, but exemplified in the writings of Redfield with his different ‘insights’.

<sup>71</sup> Mental conditions played a big role for Paracelsus, for example his belief that fear could attract plague. Today, the bestsellers of Eckhart Tolle exemplify how the mind’s ability to grasp the ‘Now’ eliminates a ‘pain body’ functioning as a stumbling block for spiritual progress. Such viewpoints are part of what Hanegraaff calls ‘psychologisation of religion’. However, I object to this being exclusively a modern phenomenon.

<sup>72</sup> In *Hermetica* gnosis can even eliminate fate. See chapter 4, p. 110, above.

<sup>73</sup> This rule is sometimes referred to as “the universal law of prosperity and abundance.” Dyer 2001: 209.

<sup>74</sup> In *Hermetica*, there are many hints to meditation primarily based on keeping the body in total equanimity, for example, in the state of sleep (or the mental state just before sleeping). In *Poimandres*, for example, it is not accidental that the tract simply begins by stating: “Once,

mind that the additive element in Olsson's theory means self-education. Ritual fields are more or less complementary within a narrow geographic or cultural area. The individual when entering a new ritual field can naturally transfer experiences from other ritual fields. This way, some Hermetists' astrological experiences became part of the experiences they used when ascending. Actually, this is exactly what this thesis has demonstrated, e.g. when Agrippa transfers experience gained from astrology into his magical ritual field by determining the correct timing. Agrippa also transferred numerical (or mathematical) experience with his 'magical squares' to the magic domain.<sup>75</sup> Paracelsus used his astrological experiences to determine the relationships between herbs, plants and the seven heavenly bodies. He also used his experience gained from astrological practice in the construction of a talisman protecting against plague or other serious diseases. Also, he probably used astrological experiences when dealing with mental illness, as outlined by Pagel.<sup>76</sup> Similarly, it is obvious that Steiner transferred clairvoyant experience into his astrological experience (or visa versa) when dealing with life after death.<sup>77</sup>

### Future prospects

This thesis has identified five Ultimate Sacred Postulates in Western esotericism and Faivre's 'imagination' and Hanegraaff's 'evolution' (in modern esoterism) as USP. The esoteric branch defined by the five matrices is labelled *dialectical esotericism*. Future studies must clarify the scope and broadness of *dialectical esotericism*.<sup>78</sup> For example, Mary Baker Eddy the founder of Christian Science did not accept a dialectical relationship

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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 [...]" (my italics). In the end of *Poimandres* one can read: "I was deeply happy because I was filled with what I wished, for the *sleep of my body* became sobriety of soul, the *closing of my eyes* became true vision, *my silence* became a progeny of goods." (my italics; *Poimandres*; Copenhagen's translation).

<sup>75</sup> Agrippa used his magical squares to construct sigils able to call forth the constructive or destructive spirits of the planets. See Chapter 3, pp. 56 - 57, above.

<sup>76</sup> See chapter 5, p. 125, above.

<sup>77</sup> See chapter 6, pp. 175 - 178, above.

<sup>78</sup> Scientology is, as we have seen, a religion where the criteria for matrices are not met.



between ‘low’ and ‘high’ - at least formally.<sup>79</sup> Christian Science sets ‘mind over matter’ implying that positive thinking can eliminate illness created by negative or limiting thought-patterns.<sup>80</sup> In the later New Thought Movement, a dialectical relationship has probably evolved as the mind increasingly gained control over “money, work, relationships, and spiritual attainment”.<sup>81</sup> It is obvious to examine the writings of Jacob Boehme, normally recognised as the founder of Christian Theosophy, where a dialectical relationship between ‘low’ and ‘high’ is explicit voiced:

“176. Also we see in this hunger the impregnation of the *Archæus*,<sup>82</sup> that is, of the separator, how the undermost *Archæus* of the earth attracteth the outermost subtle *Archæus* from the constellations above the earth; where this compacted ground from the uppermost *Archæus* longeth for its ground again, and putteth itself forth towards the uppermost; in which putting forth, the growing metals, plants and trees, hath its original.

177. For the *Archæus* of the earth becometh thereby exceeding joyful, because it tasteth and feeleth its first ground in itself again, and in this joy all things spring out of earth, and therein also the growing of animals consisteth, viz. in a continual conjunction of the heavenly and earthly, [...]”<sup>83</sup>

Generally, there are different dialectical principles in Boehme’s cosmology and metaphysics. There is a clear dialectical ‘hunger’ between constellations and the Earth *indicating* that “our world is a world of reparation”,<sup>84</sup> i.e. there is an ongoing process from ‘dualism’ to ‘monism’. Monism is the

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<sup>79</sup> Eddy stresses that God is “unchangeable” not moved by “the breath of praise” or by “lip-service”. On the other hand, prayers (and desires) bring man in harmony and “desires which goes forth hungering after righteousness is blessed of our Father, and it does not return unto us void.” Eddy (2002:2). *Science and Health With Key to the Scriptures*. E-book (originally 1875). Web-edition (downloaded as zip-file).

<sup>80</sup> Hanegraaff 2005e: 861.

<sup>81</sup> Hanegraaff 2005e: 861.

<sup>82</sup> The use of the word ‘archæus’ is probably similar to Paracelsus’ understanding, i.e. ‘an agent impressing individual attributes upon the material world’.

<sup>83</sup> Boehme 1647: 44.

<sup>84</sup> Nicolescu 1991: 24.

‘conjunction’ of heaven and Earth. Matrix number 2 and 3 are thus probably met.

A second prospect is in line with Hanegraaff’s idealistic expectation that the field of esotericism can be useful to the general study of religion. Personally, I expect that the many texts belonging to esoterism in the future will be studied by anthropologists as a ‘testing-field’ for new theories due to the ‘spontaneous’ and anti-dogmatic nature of these texts. A third prospect concerns where the rituals in modern esoterism are to be found and in appendix 1, when analysing Charles Leadbeater’s initiation into the Great White Brotherhood, I have including a new research which seems to confirm the existence of the clairvoyant ritual field in modern health practices.<sup>85</sup> This indicates that many healing practices must be viewed as rituals *for* esoterism in order to understand Western esotericism properly.

A fourth prospect in future research is to examine the syncretistic as well as the additive relationship between esoterism and Christianity. Principally, this thesis agrees with Hanegraaff’s view that esoterism originally developed in a Christian context. Regarding syncretism, one can for example argue that a belief in a ‘creation’ of and an ‘end’ to the world testify syncretistic elements in esoterism. On the other hand, one can argue for an additive transference of experiences from Christianity to Western esoterism, for example in regarding the importance of faith (Agrippa, Paracelsus) as equal to gnosis. Another question is to what degree writers of esoterism and their adherents consider themselves both Christians and esotericists. Finally, Benedicht’s belief in pronia and holism simply suggest that which esotericism and Christianity had in common during the era of Renaissance. Probably, Christianity was much more anchored in beliefs of holism and purposefulness than normally recognised.

*From experience to gnosis; mysticism in Western esotericism*

The last prospect to be mentioned here concerns gnosis or mysticism and in appendix 2 I have included a rough outline of an anthropological theory of gnosis. Maybe this outline will be unacceptable to the reader, but its main points are:

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<sup>85</sup> Ahlin 2007.

1. The experience involved suggests what kind of gnosis one can expect to find in Western esoterism, for example, as suggested by Versluis, cosmological or metaphysical gnosis. Faivre's notion, that esotericists prefer to travel on Jacob's ladder rather than to climb to the top and beyond, is an indication of the existence of cosmological gnosis. In addition, Versluis also advocates for the existence of metaphysical gnosis, where one goes to the top – and beyond.
2. The numinous power of a ritual makes it impossible *a priori* to exclude currents or religions as being devoid of gnosis.
3. Ritual activity reinforces knowledge and experiences to a degree where mental knowledge (expert knowledge) is inseparable from ritual insight. This stage, which is connected to the numinous power of a ritual, is called *ritual gnosis*. From ritual gnosis a mystical illumination can happen (called cognitive gnosis, equivalent to traditional mysticism).
4. Cognitive gnosis *can* happen in a number of ways or spontaneously. Cognitive gnosis is free and not bound to anything, neither religion nor rituals.

Further qualitative and quantitative research of modern esotericism is needed in order to clarify the extent to which practitioners have encountered mystical experiences.<sup>86</sup> It will also be relevant to clarify the extent to which a mystical experience (of sorts) has been the basis for an esoteric authorship just like the case of Jacob Boehme and the Danish Martinus Thomsen. It is commonly agreed “that Böhme's spiritual illumination came after a bout of depression, and later it resulted in his first book, *Morgenröte in Aufgang, oder Aurora*, written in 1612 AD.”<sup>87</sup> Martinus is a well-known esotericist in Denmark, and his comprehensive authorship - often called Martinus'

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<sup>86</sup> According to Hanegraaff, New Age authors believe that mystical experience is not illusory but 'real'. Hanegraaff 1998a: 175.

<sup>87</sup> Versluis 2006: 142.

cosmology - has its point of origin in a series of illuminations in Marts and April 1921.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Larsen 2004b: 69. Boehme's *The aurora* was written twelve years after his mystical experience and similarly Martinus' first book, *Livets Bog* (The Book of Life) appeared eleven years later in 1932.

## APPENDIX 1

### **The clairvoyant ritual field - and Leadbeater's description of the initiation into the Great White Brotherhood.**

Below is an analysis of the initiation into the Great White Brotherhood compared with a study of Henrik Bogdan, "Western Esotericism and Rituals of Initiation". Recent Danish research confirms a widespread belief in holism, clairvoyance, chakra and aura *used* by the alternative therapists. Different alternative therapies are thus most likely rituals of USP in esoterism.

#### **Henrik Bogdan's research**

Before continuing with a description of the initiation into the Great White Brotherhood, it would be useful to take a closer look at Bogdan's conclusions about the rituals of initiation that are found in Western esotericism. First, there are certain basic components constituting the 'skeleton' on which each ritual of initiation takes its individual form and content.<sup>1</sup> These components are, to quote Bogdan:<sup>2</sup>

"In other words, both a mason and a witch would recognise themselves if a ritual of initiation were to be described to them as consisting of (a) a formal opening of the ritual work during which the candidate is not present; (b) the admission of the initiate into the lodge (or circle in the case of witchcraft) at which the initiate answers a number of questions, often including why he or she wants to be admitted; (c) circumambulations around the lodge room during which the initiate is led by an initiator, at which point there often occurs some form of ordeal; (d) the swearing of an oath never to divulge the traditional secrets of the degree (such as a sign, grip, or word), and to follow certain ethical rules; (e) the

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<sup>1</sup> Bogdan prefers the word 'ritual' instead of 'rites' (of initiation)

<sup>2</sup> In Bogdan's words, 'there are always, of course, exceptions to a rule'. Bogdan 2007: 170.

formal admission into the degree, often proclaimed by the chief initiator in the name of the order; (f) instructions in the traditional secrets and in their particular teachings connected to the degree; (g) receiving of one or more visible tokens connected to the degree (such as gloves, an apron, or a sash), sometimes also a name or motto; (h) finally, a formal closing of the lodge during which the initiate is present.”<sup>3</sup>

Second, and very important to this study, is Bogdan’s conclusion that rituals of initiation *mirror* and *reflect* contemporary esotericism.<sup>4</sup>

“Western esoteric rituals of initiation may be regarded as mirrors of contemporary esotericism inasmuch as they reflect the esoteric currents and notions, which are in vogue at the time when the rituals were written. [...]. It is further significant to note that most of the esoteric teachings that were *transmitted* through the rituals, and consequently were considered to be secret, were not confined to the initiatory societies as such. On the contrary, most of the teachings were readily available to the public in printed books [...].”<sup>5</sup>

There are, however, symbolic elements entailing differing interpretations dependent upon the receiver. A Christian and an esotericist, for instance, can both interpret a grail.<sup>6</sup> The majority of symbols used in Freemasonry have different meanings depending on the receiver. Often, then, instructions are given to standardise the understanding of the symbols applied. In doing so, it becomes possible to integrate contemporary esotericism with existing masonic rituals of initiation. However, this equivocal symbolism applies only to a certain extent, as explicit references to contemporary esotericism are easy detectable in the rituals of initiation.<sup>7</sup> For example, the ritual of

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<sup>3</sup> Bogdan 2007: 170.

<sup>4</sup> Bogdan does not, however, describe a dialectical relationship between ritual and beliefs as in this thesis.

<sup>5</sup> Bogdan 2007: 171. My italics.

<sup>6</sup> Bogdan 2007: 170.

<sup>7</sup> Bogdan 2007: 171.

initiation of the Golden Dawn epitomises current esotericism at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>8</sup>

### **Initiation into the Great White Brotherhood**

Leadbeater's description of the initiation into the Great White Brotherhood has already been mentioned in chapter 7. Leadbeater plays a double role as he both witnesses and comments on the ritual. The description of the different rituals of initiation is rather lengthy, with Leadbeater's many interposed comments and general remarks on Theosophy, and a whole book is actually dedicated to this initiation, i.e. *The Master And The Path* (1925). In order to shorten the description many of Leadbeater's comments have been omitted. However, a few of his normative comments are retained as they have become guidelines for his many adherents.<sup>9</sup> Leadbeater passes on instructions to his followers on how to understand the different ritual components (or elements) in the same manner as those initiated in Masonry instruct their neophytes.

#### *Entering upon probation*

The first step is 'entering probation' where the young neophytes are invited home to Master Kuthumi who materialises their auras as images. He will now examine the pictures of the auras each day to see how the students are getting on. Probably, when their auras are satisfying to look at, the student is ready for initiation.

“The Master pointed out various colours and arrangements in the auras, and told them what they meant and which He wanted altered. He told them that He should look at these images each day to see how they were getting on, and He hoped that they would so arrange them that they would be pleasant to look upon. Then He gave them His final blessing.” (283)<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Bogdan 2007: 171.

<sup>9</sup> In this respect one could, perhaps, speak of 'canonised rites' (or liturgy) insofar as it is predetermined how the ritual elements must be conceived.

<sup>10</sup> The version used of *The Masters And The Path* is divided into small sections. The reference is to section 283. Web-edition.

As contrasted with the rituals of initiation described by Bogdan, Leadbeater's account does not contain secret elements. However, Kuthumi's evaluation of the neophytes' auras resembles point (a) in Bogdan's list above. Only Master Kuthumi, when being alone, evaluates when they are ready. When ready for initiation, the neophyte visits Kuthumi again, who states after a few critical words: "But you have done remarkably well, and I am very pleased with you." (356).

*The first initiation*

According to Leadbeater, there are nine (or perhaps ten)<sup>11</sup> initiations before being an accomplished member of the Great White Brotherhood. However, only the first six initiations can be taken 'on our globe' (978). There are a different number of 'degrees' in different Masons and some lodges have 33 degrees of initiation, others only eight or nine.<sup>12</sup> The difference is, however, that it can take several lifetimes to reach the higher levels of initiation in Leadbeater's system. Until reaching the fifth initiation "there is the possibility of falling back, or of spending many incarnations wandering about."<sup>13</sup> This statement is not astonishing given the enormous dimensions of time and evolution in Theosophy into consideration. Leadbeater only describes the first initiations in detail and perhaps this is the element of *secrecy* as found in Freemasonry. Accordingly, it is possible that Leadbeater keeps something secret.

The first initiation, as witnessed by Leadbeater on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1915, is described vividly, and Lord Maitreya himself performs this initiation in his garden:

"The glorious garden was at its best; the rhododendron bushes were a blaze of crimson blossom, and the air was fragrant with the scent of the early roses. The Lord Maitreya sat in His usual place on the marble seat which runs round the great tree in front of His house; and the Masters grouped Themselves in a semicircle on His right and

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<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the entering into Logos itself is an initiation.

<sup>12</sup> Bogdan 2007: 98 - 105. The 'esoteric' Freemasonry, however, as described by Bogdan, has nine degrees of initiation (p. 104 - 105).

<sup>13</sup> *The Masters And The Path* (722).



left, on seats which were placed for Them on the grass terrace from which the marble seat rises by a couple of steps. But the Lord Vaivasvata Manu and the Mahachohan sat also on the marble seat, one on each side of the arms of the specially raised carved throne which faces exactly south, which is called the Throne of Dakshinamurti.”<sup>14</sup>

The location is on a southern slope of the Himalayas (93; 690) approximately 400 miles west of the city of ‘Lhasa’ (1009), i.e. the French spelling for Lhasa. Lord Maitreya, the minister for education and religion (267), is a Celt with red-yellow hair and violet eyes (92). Generally, it is believed that some of the masters are living in a ravine in Tibet, which is reproduced in the form of a picture or drawing (52). The ‘exact’ location of Lord Maitreya’ house and garden is also depicted on a map of sorts (1003).

The neophyte is accompanied by a ‘proposer’, i.e. the one who has recommended the neophyte, and a ‘seconder’, i.e. a companion of sorts.<sup>15</sup> According to Leadbeater, he receives neophytes from Lord Maitreya who has guided them to Leadbeater with the power of his thoughts or intention. In a general sense, then, the Great White Brotherhood on behalf of Lord Maitreya is the ‘proposer’ and Leadbeater the ‘seconder’. Below follows a description of the first phase of the first initiation (570):

Initiator: “Who is this that you thus bring before Me?”

Proposer: “This is a candidate who seeks admission to the great Brotherhood.”

I: “Do you vouch for him as worthy of admission?”

P: “I do.”

I: “Will you undertake to guide his steps along the Path which he desires to enter?”

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<sup>14</sup> *The Masters And The Path*, 567.

<sup>15</sup> This also resembles Freemasonry where one is admitted by recommendation of one or two ‘brothers’.

P: "I will."

I: "Our rule requires that two of the higher Brethren shall vouch for every candidate; is any other Brother prepared to support this application?"

Seconder (here Lord Jesus): "I am prepared to do so."

I: "You have evidence that if additional powers are conferred upon him, they will be used for the furtherance of the Great Work?"

P: "This candidate's life this time has been short, but even already he has many good deeds to his credit, and he is beginning to do our work in the world. Also in his life in Greece he did much to spread my philosophy, and to improve the country in which he lived."

S: "Through two lives of vast influence he patiently did my work, righting wrong and introducing a noble ideal in his life as a ruler, and spreading abroad the teaching of love and purity and unworldliness in his incarnation as a monk. For these reasons I stand by his side now."

The Initiator now asks the neophyte for the first time (570-572):

I: "Do you desire to join the Brotherhood which exists from eternity unto eternity?"

Neophyte: "I do, Lord, if you think that I am fit to do so while my body is still so young."

Now, Leadbeater, the witness to the initiation, sums up:

"The initiator now asks:

“The usual questions as to astral knowledge and astral work are then put to the candidate. Many astral objects are shown to him and he has to tell the Initiator what they are. He has to distinguish between the astral bodies of a living man and a dead man, between a real person and a thought-image of a person, and between a Master and an exact imitation of Him. Then the Initiator shows him many astral cases and asks how he would help in each, and he replies as well as he can. At the end He smiles and says that the answers are very satisfactory.”

At the end of the initiation the Initiator says (578-580): “I find this candidate satisfactory; do all present agree to his reception into our Company ?” (And all answer): “We agree.”

I: “In the Name of the One Initiator, whose Star shines above us,<sup>16</sup> I receive you into the Brotherhood of Eternal Life. See to it that you are a worthy and useful member of it. You are now safe for ever; you have entered upon the Stream: may you soon reach the further shore!”

*Some notes on Bogdan's 'skeleton'*

Compared with the components of a ritual of initiation in Western esotericism as outlined by Bogdan above, the initiation into the Great White Brotherhood follows rather closely the same structure. As shown above, there is a formal opening where the candidate is not present (a). The candidate is admitted into the lodge (b) and has to answer certain questions. In Leadbeater's version, the 'proposer' and 'seconder' perhaps answer some questions as to the youth of the candidate. Undoubtedly (c), the candidate has seen, not the room as the initiation occurs outdoors, but the surroundings where the initiation takes place, i.e. in the garden of the initiator. Next (d), the oath is to join fellowship from 'eternity to 'eternity' and the 'seconder' also promises to follow and guard the spiritual development of the

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<sup>16</sup> At this moment Leadbeater clairvoyantly sees light from the star in question emanating to the heart of the pupil (579).

candidate. Additionally, the candidate must follow different ethical rules.<sup>17</sup> There is (e) a formal admission into the degree declared by the initiator in the name of the ‘One Initiator’ (see above). There are also instructions (f): the initiator gives ‘the key of knowledge’ to the new brother “and instructed him how he might infallibly recognise astrally any member of the Brotherhood who was not personally known to him.”<sup>18</sup> It is clear from the context that the exact content of that instruction is secret.<sup>19</sup> In the more advanced stages of initiation, the adept receives a sceptre labelled the ‘rod of power’ (g), and this sceptre is depicted at the end of *Masters And The Path* (1009). Finally (h), the initiation is concluded when the candidate receives his key of knowledge (see, f) and is blessed by the assembled brothers. In turn, the candidate passes on the blessings received to the whole world (583).

*Symbols, indexes and expressivity*

When put to scrutiny, the rituals of initiation into the Great White Brotherhood contain no symbolic elements, except perhaps the sceptre mentioned above. This accords with Olsson’s viewpoint that some rituals contain virtually no symbolism. One may argue that the marble seats and the masters ‘clad in white silk deeply edged with magnificent gold embroidery’ are symbolic elements, but if that is so, then they are indexes as well. Just as a Rolls Royce or a sable coat is an index of the wealth of its owner,<sup>20</sup> then so are a marble seat and gold embroidered silk. Stated in the words of Olsson, such component is also expressive and the expressivity (i.e. non-symbolic ritual elements) is accentuated by Leadbeater’s ‘clairvoyant’ interpretation of the first initiation (see more below).

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<sup>17</sup> *The Masters And The Path*, 302 - 307. The ethical rules are, for example to ‘forget oneself’ and instead remember the needs of others, or ‘never betray or comment upon a brother’s weakness.’ There are also requests to learn and adopt certain virtues, as for example patience and tolerance as an antidote to ‘irritability’ (313 - 316).

<sup>18</sup> *The Masters And The Path*, 583.

<sup>19</sup> However, in Theosophy it is generally believed that clairvoyance is attained as a natural result of spiritual progress and elsewhere Leadbeater has written intensively on the topic of clairvoyance and how to recognise higher developed beings.

<sup>20</sup> Rappaport 1999: 55.

### **The ritual clairvoyant field**

Leadbeater is important to Western esoterism for two reasons. Primarily, he was an influential exponent for 'clairvoyance' becoming an instrument for measuring nearly everything invisible or visible as related to spiritual evolution (and other conditions). Secondly, he was an influential exponent of matrices number two and three because he wanted to speed up its otherwise slow evolution.<sup>21</sup> The brief description of the first initiation into the Great White Brotherhood given above serves the purpose of accelerating spiritual evolution. This initiation becomes intelligible in the light of clairvoyance. For example, when the initiator declares that the One Initiator's Star shines above, a flash of lightning extends from the star to the heart of the candidate. It is Leadbeater, who sees this because he is clairvoyant. Additionally, 'Angelic music burst out in a royal march'.<sup>22</sup> A bridge is established between words uttered and parallel (invisible) actions. To a devoted reader Leadbeater's interpretation (i.e. the literal-clairvoyant interpretation of words said) becomes part of the 'partial pictures of reality' connected with the ritual elements (i.e. its single parts).<sup>23</sup> Leadbeater instructs his readers or disciples in the same way neophytes are instructed in the Masonic rites of initiation (see Bogdan's exposition above).

The clairvoyant ritual field effectively created and promoted by Leadbeater (and others) has since been an important ritual field in Western esoterism. Today it is maybe the most successful ritual field partly outmatching the astrological ritual field, and modern esoteric writers like Redfield and Tolle make extensive use of the clairvoyant ritual field (as demonstrated in chapter eight). In the subsequent section there follows an extract of recent research from the University of Århus in Denmark. This research affirms, more-or-less, that different alternative therapies are rituals (for Western esoterism).

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<sup>21</sup> See also chapter 6, p. 165, above.

<sup>22</sup> This can properly only be heard by 'clairaudience'.

<sup>23</sup> A consequence is, of course, that rituals in the clairvoyant ritual fields are perceived - from an emic point of view - as highly effective.

*Different therapists and their beliefs*

A sociological research published has recently conducted a survey amongst alternative therapists residing in the Århus district of Denmark.<sup>24</sup> The typical therapies employed were reflexology, healing, psychotherapy/conversation, massage, craniosacral therapy, acupuncture and acupressure, kinesiology and clairvoyance. Its most important conclusions were:

\* To a significant extent the consulted alternative therapists are more religious than the rest of the Danish population.<sup>25</sup>

\* The majority of the alternative therapists have a spiritual approach to their practices.<sup>26</sup>

\* Alternative therapists may function as a channel for the distribution of 'spirituality'.<sup>27</sup>

The table below shows the *percentage* spread of answers to the question outlined below. Only one in seven declares that spirituality or religion has *no* significance for their practice (or practices).<sup>28</sup>

What value has spirituality/religiousness for your practice? (n=164) <sup>29</sup>	
Very high value	20
Much value	20
Some value	26
Nearly no value	20
No value	15

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<sup>24</sup> Ahlin 2007.

<sup>25</sup> Ahlin 2007: 75.

<sup>26</sup> See the cover of the book, i.e. this is one of the conclusions intended to promote the sale of the book.

<sup>27</sup> See preceding note. The research papers define 'spirituality' as the opposite of 'religious' (involved in organised religious groups, for example the Danish Church). To be 'spiritual' is thus equal to have an individualistic approach to religious questions.

<sup>28</sup> Some of the alternative therapists or healers were involved in more than one practice.

<sup>29</sup> Tabel 18; Ahlin 2007: 89.

Below is a table showing ‘beliefs’ the alternative therapists consider valuable *to* their practices. Again, the numbers are shown in percentages.<sup>30</sup> The non-spiritual can be ‘religious’ and only four percent are non-spiritual *and* non-religious.<sup>31</sup>

	n = ca. 82	n = ca. 25	n = ca. 42	n = ca. 152
	<b>Spiritual</b>	<b>Uncertain</b>	<b>Non Spiritual</b>	<b>Total (average)</b>
Holism	85	67	46	71
Channelling	52	19	9	34
Chakra	77	40	22	55
Clairvoyance	58	0	7	33
Chi	48	37	19	38
Aura	69	19	11	44
Karma	43	4	9	27

One conclusion is that at least half of the spiritual-oriented think that their ‘beliefs’ have a relation in practice.<sup>32</sup> It is not specified what the notion ‘karma’ means but as stated earlier this notion is conceived as something positive in Western esoterism. The concepts of chakra, clairvoyance and aura have a relatively high score confirming that approximately 45 percent of the alternative therapist must be characterised as belonging in the clairvoyant ritual field.<sup>33</sup> Of those perceiving themselves as spiritual, approximately 70 percent must belong to the clairvoyant ritual field. The top score goes to the notion of ‘holism’ with an average of 71 percent. Another, perhaps important conclusion is that clairvoyance is the concept with the most definitive ‘spiritual’ tenor (as the ‘uncertain’ and non-spiritual have a score of zero and seven percent respectively).<sup>34</sup> However, the alternative therapists were also asked what notions (found in a long list) *they did not*

<sup>30</sup> Tabel 23; Ahlin 2007: 97.

<sup>31</sup> Tabel 10; Ahlin 2007: 66.

<sup>32</sup> Ahlin 2007: 97.

<sup>33</sup> The approximate 45 percent is an average of 55, 33 and 44.

<sup>34</sup> Ahlin 2007: 97.

*know of*. Only one percent declared that they knew nothing of chakra, clairvoyance and aura respectively, and no-one was ignorant of holism. This must be compared with other results, for example that 33 percent and 44 percent did not know anything of channelling and the Great White Brotherhood respectively.<sup>35</sup> In the survey *well-known* notions such as holism, chakra, clairvoyance and aura are the four concepts with the highest score among all three groups, i.e. the spiritual, the 'unsure' and the non-spiritual alternative therapists.<sup>36</sup>

#### *Therapists and clients*

The different 'beliefs' mentioned above are the alternative therapists' private beliefs, meaningful to them when working with their clients. They are not their clients' beliefs. However, the research also pinpoints the degree to which the practitioners *try* to imbue their clients with their specific beliefs. The conclusion is that no less than two thirds have, with varying frequency, tried to convey their beliefs to their clients.<sup>37</sup> When questioned whether their clients are conscious of the spiritual/religious elements *in* the therapy (or treatment), nearly all belonging to the 'spiritual group' believe this to be the case.<sup>38</sup> Contrarily, less than half of the non-spiritual practitioners believe that the client perceives spiritual/religious elements within the treatment.<sup>39</sup>

This does not prove that clients actually accept the beliefs of their therapists. However, the conclusion is that the types of 'spiritual' beliefs mentioned above *are most likely to* affect clients who turn voluntarily to alternative therapists.<sup>40</sup> Should this be the case, alternative therapists are, through their practices, an important factor in the spreading some USP in Western esoterism. This effect must be juxtaposed against the relative high proportion of the Danish population turning to alternative therapies. It was estimated that in 2005 44 percent of the population had made use of

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<sup>35</sup> Tabel 45; Ahlin 2007: 146.

<sup>36</sup> Tabel 46; Ahlin 2007: 147.

<sup>37</sup> Ahlin 2007: 112.

<sup>38</sup> Ahlin 2007: 113.

<sup>39</sup> Ahlin 2007: 113.

<sup>40</sup> Ahlin 2007: 153



alternative therapies. In the US the average that year was 42 percent and in Canada as high as 70 percent.<sup>41</sup>

#### *The additive situation*

Not surprisingly, the research confirms an additive approach to religion among the alternative therapists. Here, the investigation dealt more with 'believing' than with 'doing', but 75 percent of all therapists went to church.<sup>42</sup> It is unclear however what ritual fields besides their own they participated in. Concerning 'belief', i.e. evaluated from a more theological approach, 43 percent of all therapists believed in reincarnation and 42 percent believed in pantheism, i.e. that God is omnipresent in nature.<sup>43</sup> Only 10 percent denied the existence of a God. When we look at it, this comprehensive research portrays 'belief' as something highly 'conglomeratic' (Olsson).

#### *Alternative therapies as rituals*

The study concludes that parts of the therapies are rituals.<sup>44</sup> One of the tasks was to examine the situation 'before', 'during' and 'after' the therapy. Therapists from all three groups made to a certain degree use of meditations and prayers before and during the therapy.<sup>45</sup> The investigation was based on quantitative and qualitative methods and it was possible to obtain separate individual answers on blank sheets of paper. Many expressions were used by the alternative therapists when answering, for example that meditation or prayer were used to 'tune in' on the client, to focus the 'energies', to tune in on 'spiritual frequencies', to 'obtain clairvoyant insight', to 'send good vibrations' to the client and to coordinate their 'own energy with that of the client'.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Ahlin 2007: 40. The percentages are accumulative.

<sup>42</sup> Table A 13. Ahlin 2007: 165.

<sup>43</sup> Table 11 & 12. Ahlin 2007: 70 - 71.

<sup>44</sup> Ahlin 2007: 105.

<sup>45</sup> 35 percent (of all three groups in average) used meditation and 50 percent used prayers. Among the 'spiritual group' the ratios were 54 and 69 percent. Ahlin 2007: 107 - 108.

<sup>46</sup> Ahlin 2007: 107.

### **Summary**

In this appendix it has been shown that Leadbeater's initiation into the White Great Brotherhood is in accordance with other rituals of initiation found in Western esoterism as outlined by Bogdan. His conclusion, that throughout history rituals of initiation constantly *mirror* and *reflect* prevailing ideas in contemporary esoterism, is totally in agreement with this thesis, that ritual and 'belief' are expressions of each other. Thirdly, and very importantly, Ahlin's thorough research suggests *that many therapies are rituals* for various USP in Western esoterism. Future additional research may specify the USP in question (besides a belief in holism, chakra, aura and clairvoyant perception).

## APPENDIX 2

### A rough draft of an ‘anthropology of gnosis’

When writing this thesis it has repeatedly come to my mind that the history of religion as well as that of religious anthropology is in need of a new theoretical framework embracing gnosis in Western esotericism. On the one hand one finds Faivre’s somewhat provocative announcement that esotericists prefer to sojourn on Jacob’s ladder, where angels, symbols and other mediators are ascending and descending, rather than go to the top – and venture beyond. Faivre does not reject gnosis within Western esotericism, but connects it with the cosmological insight gained while travelling up and down Jacob’s ladder.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Arthur Versluis in principle advocates two different kinds of insight, a cosmological one (similar to Faivre) and also a metaphysical gnosis.<sup>2</sup> Cosmological gnosis refers to a subtle dualistic knowledge (or direct perception) of the hidden patterns of cosmos, whereas metaphysical gnosis is non-dual and offers direct insight into the complete transcendence.<sup>3</sup> According to Versluis, real mystics are for example Meister Eckhart, his disciple Johannes Tauler (c. 1300 - 1360 AD) and Jacob Boehme (1575 - 1624 AD). They were all deeply engaged in a gnostic or esoteric dimension without which “Christianity often becomes a matter of forms alone, just going to church on Sundays.”<sup>4</sup> Though Versluis applies a broader definition of esotericism than that which is found implicitly in Faivre’s criteria, Boehme was also an esotericist, and this raises doubts about Faivre’s rejection of mysticism. From a general point of view, the *DGWE* supports Faivre’s perspective:

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<sup>1</sup> Faivre does not completely reject mysticism. Faivre admits that mysticism is found in the writings of Boehme, but of the sort that employs images (intermediaries) as a goal in itself, whereas (genuine) mysticism “claims to abolish images”. Faivre 1994: 27. Faivre seems to regard *via positive* with its images and imagination as something inferior to *via negative*.

<sup>2</sup> Versluis also outlines a third kind of gnosis, eschatological gnosis (insight into that which transcends history and the cosmos). Versluis 2004: 27.

<sup>3</sup> Versluis 2004: 27; 2002: 2.

<sup>4</sup> Versluis 1994: 60 - 61.

“Esotericism and mysticism do have similarities: the primacy of experience and inner transformation, the quest for unity, and the claim that the very heart of religion will be revealed only by going beyond rational discursivity. However, the two notions do not come down to the same thing [...]: the body of the modern mystic is a body of pain, subject to a ‘road of excess’ that disfigures and annihilates rather than transfigures it. The esotericist, on the other hand, typically awaits the transmutation of world and his own carnal reality; he prefers to sojourn ‘on Jacobs latter [...]’”<sup>5</sup>

However, as also pointed out by Rousse-Lacordaire, some esotericists, often Christian, identify themselves with mysticism, for example Valentin Tomberg (1900 - 1973 AD) to whom mysticism was a cardinal element of Hermeticism. Tomberg distinguished three forms of union (mysticism), one with Nature, one with a transcendent human Self and one with a living God.<sup>6</sup>

In an attempt to create room for both Faivre’s and Versluis’ notions, I have developed a rough draft of an anthropological model covering both gnosis and mysticism. The model makes use of Olsson’s notion of ritual fields, some of the numinous aspects in Rapport’s theory and a few ideas and observations of my own. The key concept is *experience*, often of a this-worldly character, as a kind of accumulated learning and knowledge *reinforced* by ritual activity and ultimately transformed into cognitive gnosis (mysticism). Another concept is that of a ‘ritual gnosis’ different from ‘cognitive gnosis’ (see more below). Before proceeding it is important to note that mystic experiences are not restricted to the sphere of religion, but can occur spontaneously or be provoked by lack of sleep, drugs, alcohol, falling in love, reading (Versluis’ ‘initiation’) or in many other ways. Mystical experiences are not the exclusive right of any religion though, of course, religions addressing mysticism over time have developed considerable experience on this topic.

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<sup>5</sup> Rousse-Lacordaire 2005: 819.

<sup>6</sup> Rousse-Lacordaire 2005: 819.

First, one has to recognise that religious texts are not only ‘religious’ but generally contain insights and knowledge of sorts. Examples are law (Islam, Judaism), rules of marriage, cooking, astronomy (calendar-making), agriculture, history, medicine (very widespread), warfare, rules for logical deduction (for example Islam and Buddhism), poetry, chemistry (alchemical texts), words of wisdom and much more. Unfortunately, primarily The New Testament, which does not impart such kind of this-worldly knowledge,<sup>7</sup> is for many an exemplary collection of religious texts. In a general sense, religion becomes special cases of *paideia* and *didactics* - and religion always contains learning and practice.<sup>8</sup> Below is depicted a table of the processes in achieving both experience, ritual gnosis and cognitive gnosis.

Body → knowledge → ritual → experiences → ritual → ritual gnosis  
(potential mysticism) → cognitive gnosis<sup>9</sup>

Knowledge is not only theoretical, but also relates to the body as skills, for example hunting skills, farming skills, fishing skills, skills on how to cope with spirits, the human mind, diseases etc. The body is a foundation of knowledge, and both knowledge and experience are expressed through the body - even when dealing with more cognitive aspects. Relying partly on Merleau-Ponty, Olsson sees the body as an indispensable vehicle for being-in-the world.

The idea is that knowledge becomes *reinforced* by repeated ritual participation and transformed into experience. Knowledge, experience (and skills) are simply bound to a ritual or extremely dependent on it. Next, through further ritual practice experience becomes so intensified that it becomes ‘ritual gnosis’ - defined as ‘*expert knowledge*’ on how knowledge and ritual activity interrelates. Ritual gnosis is not only knowledge on a certain subject but always entails ritual understanding and insight. Basically, ‘ritual gnosis’ occurs when knowledge and experience are *perfected* through ritual activity. From an emic point of view this means that the ‘expert’

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<sup>7</sup> Except, perhaps, (medical) healing by exorcism.

<sup>8</sup> Olsson 2000: 19.

<sup>9</sup> Cognitive gnosis can be cosmological gnosis, metaphysical gnosis etc. The various categories are of secondary importance in this draft of an ‘anthropology of gnosis’.

knows exactly *how knowledge (on a subject) relates to ritual practice*. The religious expert is able to relate specific knowledge to specific rituals, and able to recommend the use of remedial rituals to handle specific problems encountered by participants, his students or otherwise. In Tibetan Buddhism, for example, an expert (lama, tulku, lineage-holder and otherwise) is always a ritual expert and a 'scholar' in his field. It is unthinkable that he would be unable to relate philosophy, psychology, worldly knowledge etc. to certain rituals. It is even expected that he can uncover the psyche of his students in order to recommend the most suitable 'practice' (with distinct rituals and teachings). Teachings and rituals are integral parts of Tibetan Buddhism, in concordance with Olsson's theory where ritual activity and beliefs are interdependent and mutual expressions. Ritual gnosis is attained when a practitioner becomes a ritual expert and a 'scholar' of his topic.

When applying Olsson's and Rappaport's theories, it becomes obvious that one can hardly distinguish between 'gnostic' and 'non-gnostic' religions. Rituals transform, as we have seen, USP (for example God exists) into reality through a *numinous* experience able to reintegrate the mind - by which even the universe may manifest itself as wholeness:

"Whereas psychiatrists might view the numinous state as *dissociated*, the experience is often reported to be what might better be characterized as *reassociated*, for parts of the psyche ordinary out of touch with each other may be united, or better, in the light of a ritual's recurrent nature *reunited*. Reunion, furthermore, may reach out from the reunited individual to embrace other members of the congregation, or even the cosmos as a whole."<sup>10</sup>

Many rituals are especially *designed* to create mystical experiences. However, this does not exclude the fact that ordinary ritual may be a platform for a numinous experience. This implies that no one can rightly claim, that a Christian participating in 'ordinary' Christian rituals has never sensed, perceived, or recognised God. Rappaport when dealing with 'ritual learning' not surprisingly writes: "That which is learned in ritual may thus

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<sup>10</sup> Rappaport 1999: 220.

override, displace or radically transform understandings, habits, and even elements of personality and character laid down in early childhood.”<sup>11</sup> Applying Rappaport’s and Olsson’s way of thinking, it is definitively not accidental that concepts like ‘gnosis’, ‘gnosticism’ and ‘mysticism’ are totally absent in their selected writings. Due to the numinous power of the ritual, it would be wrong to reserve ‘mystical experiences’ for certain religions. Analytically, from the perspective of ritual theory as outlined by Rappaport and Olsson, it is impossible to define (or construct) rituals offering only a numinous, but not a mystical, experience.

*Comment:* This thesis agrees with Hanegraaff on different issues, for example that Gnosticism is a construct due to the “Grand Polemical Narrative” and in this respect more imaginary than real. However, as Hanegraaff points out, ‘gnosticism’ relates to something real, and ‘gnosticism’ can not be isolated to specific currents as ‘gnosis’ manifested itself in pagan, Jewish or Christian contexts.<sup>12</sup> The *DGWE* classifies Gnosticism not as an opponent to Christianity but rather as an umbrella term covering many currents.<sup>13</sup> Many Gnostics in the second century saw themselves as Christians and mainstream Christianity grew out of this plurality of currents rather than vice versa. In continuation of this view, it is difficult to make a distinction between a religion of ‘gnosis’ and one of ‘faith’. The point of the matter is that one can argue for the presence of ‘gnosis’ in Christianity and ‘faith’ in Western esoterism. There is a lot of ‘faith’ in esoterism, for example Paracelsus’ view that faith equals insight (in the light of nature).<sup>14</sup> Agrippa relied on ‘three guides’ that bring us to the path of truth, namely love, hope and faith.<sup>15</sup> Different scholars have argued for the existence of gnosis in NT.<sup>16</sup> I think it is primarily the numinous

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<sup>11</sup> Rappaport 1999: 390. To Rappaport a ritual, or ritual participation, is by definition a repeated act. This topic is analysed in detail in chapter six, “Time and liturgical order”; see for example Rappaport 1999: 202 - 204.

<sup>12</sup> Hanegraaff 2005c: 236.

<sup>13</sup> van den Broek 2005: 403 - 405.

<sup>14</sup> See chapter 5, p. 133, above.

<sup>15</sup> See chapter 3, pp. 77 - 78, above.

<sup>16</sup> For example, Quispel 2000c: 270 - 302.

power of a ritual that makes a distinction between religion of ‘gnosis’ and ‘faith’ questionable.

It is possible to differentiate gnosis, as proposed by Versluis, as being cosmological or metaphysical in nature *depending* on the knowledge and *experience* involved (Olsson). It makes sense to classify different types of ‘cognitive gnosis’ in accordance with the kind of experience involved. For example, by travelling up and down Jacob’s ladder with its different cosmological symbols, (for example symbols found in tarot, astrology, mandalas and alchemy), esotericists gain experience in cosmological gnosis.

Metaphysical illumination occurs when going *beyond* the cosmological ontological levels as demonstrated by Versluis by referring to, among others, classical Hermetism. This thesis agrees that Hermetists were engaged in cosmological speculation where gnosis related both to the understanding of cosmos (its rotation, form, arrangement and relation to microcosm) as well as to the possibility of transcending cosmos. In dualistic tracts like *Poimandres* and *On Rebirth*, as we have seen, the highest gnosis occurs by transcending the planetary sphere or by crushing the zodiac (going out of the zodiac like leaving a tent).

Returning to the discrepancy between Versluis and Faivre, it should be obvious that by accepting the above proposition of an ‘anthropology of gnosis’, one cannot exclude the presence of mystical experience within esoterism in general. In the same way, one cannot exclude the existence of (natural) mysticism in the religion(s) of Aborigines and many other natural religions. It is common sense that certain religions and currents have more experience with mysticism than others – expressed by ‘masters’ guiding seekers or initiates toward a goal of *both* ritual and cognitive gnosis. Such master-student relations are nearly absent in Western esoterism and this absence adds a spirit of “catch-as-catch-can”, as remarked by Versluis.<sup>17</sup> It is on this basis that he argues for a “precarious relationship between an author and a reader through the medium of the book”.<sup>18</sup> My personal rejection of Versluis’ argument is *not* based on denying that cognitive gnosis can occur by reading (or otherwise), rather that spiritual masters to the best of my

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<sup>17</sup> Versluis 2004: 28.

<sup>18</sup> Versluis 2004: 28.



knowledge always educate their students (or initiates) in *ritual knowledge*. Esoteric books are, indeed, full of ritual instructions and this applies in particular to the various ritual fields found in Western esoterism. There are countless ‘handbooks’ on how to perform magic, clairvoyance, astrology and alchemy. They give instructions, but sometimes there is confusion as to the proper USP involved - which is quite understandable considering the almost incomplete dogmatism within Western esoterism. Without a clear understanding of the USP involved, it is nearly impossible to see the interrelation between ritual and beliefs. On the other hand, one also finds esoteric literature attempting to relate USP to ritual practice, for example in the writings of Leadbeater and Redfield. In the wake of Redfield’s first bestseller, he and his wife, Carol Adrienne, wrote an experimental guide in which they introduced different exercises related to the nine insights, for example, how to see energy in nature, in hands and around people and plants.<sup>19</sup> Many of these techniques are very mind-oriented and though Hanegraaff has a clear point with his ‘psychologization of religion’, I believe that many healing techniques act as rituals for many USP in esotericism (appendix 1).

### **Pain, Tolle and Boehme**

The notion of the body of the modern mystic as a ‘body of pain’ subjected to a ‘road of excess’ that disfigures and annihilates rather than transfigures it (see above), plays a significant role in Western esoterism. To state more exactly however, this ‘body of pain’ is transfigured rather than disfigured and annihilated - as exemplified by Jacob Boehme and Eckhart Tolle. A significant feature in Tolle’s teachings is the conscious effort to annihilate *the pain body* by experiencing the ‘power of the now’, rather than to await the transmutation of the world. The ‘power of the now’ is a portal to an eternal ‘now’ (reality) transcendent to normal daily activities giving Tolle’s message a clear mystical dimension. However, an urge to get rid of the pain body *coexists* with a belief in the evolution of the world, as we have seen. One finds a similar issue in the writings of Jacob Boehme where typical esoteric ideas coexist with a belief in metaphysical gnosis. Both Faivre and

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<sup>19</sup> Redfield & Adrienne 1995: 74 - 77.

Versluis find components from 14<sup>th</sup> century German mysticism and from plain esoterism in Boehme's Christian theosophy. Faivre views this as an amalgam of medieval mystical tradition and Paracelsus' Naturphilosophie. Versluis focuses on Christian Theosophy as 1) wisdom, 2) as direct spiritual experience, 3) as reading nature as a book, and 4) as a spiritual guidance through letters and oral advice. Stated shortly, Versluis finds both cosmological and metaphysical gnosis in Boehme's theosophy. This thesis agrees, and the following is a short extract from Boehme's *The Aurora*:

“But to me is shewn the ladder of *Jacob*, upon which I am climbed up, *even into heaven*,<sup>20</sup> and have received my ware [...].”<sup>21</sup>

In both Tolle and Boehme's theosophy there is a craving for a 'second birth' able to transform the 'body of pain' into one of (more) joy making it possible to *be in*, and live in, the world. As a major rule, Western esotericists do not *intend* to renounce the world, and it is in light of this fact that a new approach to mysticism in Western esotericism must be developed.

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<sup>20</sup> 'even into heaven' is my *italicisation*.

<sup>21</sup> *The Aurora*, 13.22. Translated by John Sparrow in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. Nicolescu 1991:150.

### **SAMMENFATNING PÅ DANSK (DANISH SUMMARY)**

Vestens esoterisme er temmelig homogen op gennem dens historie, fordi megen nutidig såvel som ældre esoterisme er skabt på et trosfundament, som kaldes de fem matrix. Det er kombinationen af de fem matrix som danner grundlaget for en vigtig gren af den vestlige esoterisme, som benævnes dialektisk esoterisme (jf. matrix nummer 2 i nedenstående). De fem matrix er:

1. Forsyn (pronoia) mere end karma/synd.
2. Det dialektiske forhold mellem mennesker og Gud (eller det guddommelige), hvilket indebærer en healing af mennesker, samfundet og/eller Jorden.
3. Dualisme og monisme er gensidigt afhængige, hvilket indebærer at den menneskelige sjæl og/eller verden kan ses som trappetage mod himlen.
4. Åndelige love er synonym med videnskabelige principper.
5. Et holistisk kosmos med forbindelse (sympati) mellem alle dens dele.

Afhandlingen er dog ikke teologisk men antropologisk, fordi den baserer sit teoretiske fundament på to antropologer, nemlig Roy A. Rappaport og Tord Olsson. I sin essens er afhandlingen *anvendt antropologi*, nærmere bestemt anvendt ritual-teori. På den måde vil afhandlingen også demonstrere anvendeligheden og rækkevidden af Rappaports og Olssons teorier. Hermed påvises det, at antropologiske teorier kan anvendes på et historisk materiale. Forudsætningen er naturligvis, at en række historiske tekster analyseres på empirisk facon. De anvendte tekster er de hermetiske skrifter, tekster af Agrippa, Paracelsus, en række teosoffer som f.eks. Blavatsky og Leadbeater, samt tekster af to moderne succesforfattere, Redfield og Tolle. Den dialektiske esoterisme har rod i et hermetisk-kristent miljø, men de fem matrix, undtaget nummer fem (holisme), er ikke gennemgående i de hermetiske skrifter. Hermed bliver den klassiske hermetik mere et grundlag for vestens dialektiske esoterisme end en ægte del af den. De fem matrix er

en slags laveste fællesnævner og de forskellige strømninger i vestens dialektiske esoterisme indeholder også andre USP.

Ifølge Rappaport består religion af tre hierarkiske niveauer, nemlig Ultimate Sacred Postulates (USP), kosmologi og regler for adfærd. En USP er f.eks. at Jesus er Guds søn. De tre hierarkiske niveauer kalder Rappaport den anden liturgiske orden og det er netop i ritualen, at de kommer samlet til udtryk. USP er det mest abstrakte niveau, således at USP ligger udenfor empiriens og logikkens rækkevidde. USP kan hverken verificeres eller falsificeres. Det næste niveau, det kosmologiske niveau, er langt mere konkret, således at (mange) kosmologier i princippet kan bevises eller modbevises. Det 'laveste' niveau, regler for adfærd, er det mest konkrete og ofte, men ikke altid, skabt af kosmologien. USP er *arbitrært* knyttet til kosmologier, dvs. de to niveauer er skarpt adskilte, hvorved der ikke er nogen forbindelse mellem dem. USP har til opgave at sanktionere, hvad der er under dem, og i princippet kan de sanktionere hvad som helst. Religion overlever på samme måde som biologiske mekanismer, dvs. ved at tilpasse *dele* af organismen til miljøet. En religion vil, siger Rappaport, primært søge at overleve gennem *bevarelse* af sine USP ved at *tilpasse* kosmologier og adfærdsmønstre til de kulturelle omstændigheder. Teoretisk kan man således forvente, at de fem matrix, som også er USP, overlever (så længe de bakkes op af tilhængere), mens kosmologier og evt. regler for adfærd transformeres og tilpasses til de skiftende historiske og kulturelle forhold. Afhandlingen påviser bl.a., at dette faktisk er tilfældet i vestens esoteriske historie. Kosmologier er kommet og gået, mens de fem matrix har været intakte - i det mindste siden renæssancen. Tendensen er, at markante figurer som f.eks. Agrippa, Paracelsus, Blavatsky, Redfield og Tolle alle har bidraget med forskellige kosmologier og undertiden regler for etik og adfærd. På den måde er der også dynamik, bevægelse og forandring i vestens esoteriske historie.

Tord Olsson anskuer religion som bestående af *rituelle felter*, som anvendes additivt. Dette betyder, at religionstilhængere verden over principielt er engageret i mere end en religion. Tendensen er, at man lægger en eller flere religioner oven i den religion, som man går ud fra med det formål at få flere erfaringer. I et etableret rituelt felt indtræder en tilpasning mellem ritual og tro, således at de afspejler hinanden. Et ritual er principielt

'sammenpresset' eller 'kondenseret' tro, mens troens kognitive dimensioner er attituder og indsigter udledt af den rituelle aktivitet. Endvidere indeholder og udsender et ritual flere forskellige virkelighedsbilleder, da det består af en række sekventielle handlingskomponenter. Ritualer bliver hermed et samlingspunkt for en religion med dens diverse konglomeratiske forestillinger. Et ritual videregiver sjældent en samlet livsanskuelse, netop fordi religion består af en række forskellige forestillinger, som sædvanligvis organiseres i nogle klynger (clusters). Det dialektiske forhold mellem tro og ritual betyder, at religion hverken er ren tro eller ren handling. Religion er tro, ofte i form af erfaring og indsigt, *tilknyttet* bestemte rituelle handlinger. Religion er således i høj grad også noget man *gør*. Tro kan indvirke på rituelle handlinger, men omvendt kan rituelle handlinger også skabe trosforestillinger. Ifølge Olsson er rituel aktivitet primus motor i skabelsen af religiøs tro.

Baseret på Faivres påvisning af, at astrologi, magi og alkymi er hjørnesten i vestens esoterisme, opfatter afhandlingen disse praktikker som værende åbne rituelle felter (sammen med et såkaldt clairvoyantisk felt). Disse fire rituelle felter har hver deres trosforestillinger, især hvad angår nuancer eller specifikke USP. For eksempel er det clairvoyante rituelle felt nærmest skabt til det formål at måle evolution, en meget vigtig USP i teosofi, new age, antroposofi - samt i moderne esoterisme. Afhandlingen påstår ikke nødvendigvis, at hvert rituelt felt indeholder eller videregiver alle fem matrix. Afhandlingen demonstrerer, at man møder de fem matrix gennem additiv adfærd, dvs. ved at anvende flere rituelle felter. Dog vil alle rituelle felter tydeligt kommunikere matrix nummer fem, dvs. ideen om at alt er forbundet (holisme). En anden af Olssons pointer, nemlig at rituel aktivitet skaber trosforestillinger, dokumenteres på forskellig måde. Dette sker bl.a. ved at påpege, at opstigningen gennem de himmelske sfærer i det hermetiske skrift *Poimandres* er formuleret på baggrund af datidens astrologiske praksis. En anden væsentlig konklusion er, at vestens esoterisme ikke er nyplatonisme eller en anden kendt form for filosofi. Vestens esoterisme er ganske enkelt fra et *etic* perspektiv sammensat af diverse konglomeratiske forestillinger som unddrager sig enhver entydig filosofisk syntese.

Baseret på et lille antropologisk feltarbejde med de rituelle felter konkluderer afhandlingen, at ritualer kan skabe, indfange, opretholde og

modificere tro. Dette sidste medfører, at esoterismen kan adoptere f.eks. østlige trosforestillinger, da disse modificeres eller transformeres i et rituelt felt, så de passer til vigtige USP. Begrebet 'karma' vil f.eks. transformeres til at blive et vejledende princip som arbejder med et formål (pronoia, matrix nummer et). Det ligger også implicit i Rappaports teori, at man smertefrit kan importere fremmede kosmologier, fordi USP er arbitrært forbundet med kosmologier.

Afhandlingen fremlægger også en ny litterær analysemetode, som kan anvendes på religiøse tekster, især tekster som omtaler mange praktikker. Disse praktikker er sammenpresset tro, hvorved de kan relateres til mere åbent formulerede trosforestillinger i teksten. Sagt simpelt behøver ritualer USP og USP behøver ritualer. Ved at analysere en religiøs tekst på denne måde vil man opdage nye (sammenhængende) strukturer i teksten.

Det har ikke været afhandlingens formål at kritisere andre forskere, men ved at anvende de nævnte antropologiske teorier bliver det ganske tydeligt, at vestens esoterisme på ingen måde er nyplatonisme (Hanegraaff). Det bliver også tydeligt, at kun dele af esoterismen konstant nytolkes for at tilpasse sig til de skiftende kulturelle omstændigheder. Hanegraaff og andre overser hermed, at der er forskel på især USP og kosmologi. I sin essens er vestens esoterisme sin egen og på ingen måde blot et synkretistisk produkt.

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