

HERMETICISM

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HERMETIC PHILOSOPHY

By Currently Unknown Author

For many years, magick was considered a strange and mystical force that could not be understood. Today, magick is considered by many to be an art and not a science. Perhaps the word "science" scares people and makes them think that the "mystery" of magick will be taken away if scientific principle is applied. And yet, everything in the physical plane operates in accordance with some "law" or method. For instance, if we throw a ball up in the air it will come down because of the force of gravity. Magick also follows a series of rules in how it operates. These rules are referred to by some as Hermetic Philosophy and are part of the Hermetic Teachings.

Hermetic Philosophy is discussed in detail in "The Kybalion: Hermetic Philosophy" by Three Initiates. This book was written in 1912 and published initially by the Yogi Publication Society, Masonic Temple, Chicago IL. The book is still available, but usually must be ordered. A word of warning: the book was written in the flowery style common at the turn of the century. It can sometimes be easy to get lost in the language, or to fall prey to the idea that "most of you are not worthy or ready for this information." Just keep your attention focused on the real message—the sharing of knowledge.

The roots of Hermetic Philosophy lie within ancient Egypt. The ideas were passed to mankind through the "Master of Masters," who dwelt in Egypt from the earliest days. His name was Hermes Trismegistus, the father of Occult Wisdom, the founder of Astrology, and the discoverer of Alchemy. The title "Trismegistus" means "thrice great." Some believe that the Egyptians deified Hermes and made him one of their gods, Thoth. Many years later, he was adopted by the Greeks and known as Hermes, Messenger (or Scribe) of the Gods.

The teachings of Hermes Trismegistus were reserved for a select few who had proven themselves worthy to seek the knowledge. Those who did learn the knowledge were sworn to secrecy. In those days, most people were believed to be incapable of learning. "Do not cast pearls before swine. Give milk to the babes, but give meat to the strong men." Throughout history, this belief has been held by many organizations. I personally believe that at the time of Hermes it was true. Humans as a species are still in an early stage of evolution. At any one time there are always a few humans who are more advanced than others, but for the most part the majority of the populace is just beginning the journey to find knowledge. However, in the past 8,000 years, mankind as a whole has grown, and there are more people who are beginning to become ready for this information.

The teachings of Hermetic Philosophy are really part of Hermetic Alchemy. Alchemy is the mastery of mental forces rather than material elements. It deals with the transmutation of mental vibrations into others, as opposed to the classic idea of changing lead into gold. The common belief is really allegory, shadowing the truth in symbols to hide the knowledge from those who are not yet ready, and to preserve it from those who would destroy it.

The Principles of Hermetic Philosophy

This system not only describes how the universe operates, but it also describes the fundamental principles that govern the operation of magick—it is the "physics" of magick. There are seven principles that form the core of the system:

- [The Principle of Mentalism](#)
- [The Principle of Correspondence](#)

- The Principle of Vibration
- The Principle of Polarity
- The Principle of Rhythm
- The Principle of Cause and Effect
- The Principle of Gender

The *Principle of Mentalism* begins with the belief that *everything* is mental. "We are but a thought in the mind of the ALL." The ALL is everything that was, is and will be, and at the same time it is nothing. At the highest level, there is the underlying creative force of the universe. This force cannot be described in human terms and cannot be truly understood by humans. The ALL is everything and everything is part of the ALL. *In magick, nothing can occur without first occurring as a thought; once the thought occurs, the rest follows.*

The *Principle of Correspondence* says that there is always a correspondence between the laws of the various planes of existence. The phrase, "As above so below; as below so above" is an application of this principle. Since everything is mental, and everything is part of the ALL, then everything is interconnected. Therefore, the higher planes of existence have correspondences to the lower planes of existence. We are microcosms of the universe, and the universe is a macrocosm within which we are contained. This idea is one of the most influential of all the principles. *This principle allows us to influence the higher planes and shows how the higher planes influence us.*

The *Principle of Vibration* states that "everything is in constant motion." Everything is constantly changing, growing, moving, in a state of flux. Let us examine our physical existence for a moment. All matter is composed of smaller particles, atoms. At one time we thought that the atom was the smallest unit of matter. Atoms are always in motion. As such, we are constantly in motion on some level, even when we appear to be at rest. In this century, we have discovered that the atom is comprised of smaller building blocks called protons, neutrons, and electrons. We have recently proven that there are even smaller particles such as quarks, leptons, muons, and many others. Until the turn of the century (1900s), the general thought was that

objects were solid and did not move. Note that the Principle of Vibration, which has been around for thousands of years, states otherwise. Science is just now catching up with what magick has known for a very long time. If we look at matter, we see that it is composed of energy. Energy is simply a force moving at a certain rate of vibration. Take, for instance, light: light that we can see—the visible spectrum—appears in the colors we know as red, orange, yellow, blue, green, indigo, and violet. All the colors are actually comprised of the same discrete units of energy (photons), but they vibrate at different rates. The different rates of vibration cause us to see the different colors. *The Principle of Vibration allows us to see how to transform or transmute energy states.*

The *Principle of Polarity* contains the idea that "everything is dualistic in nature." Another way to say this is that everything has its opposite. An easy illustration of this is heat and cold. Heat and cold are both descriptions of temperature (a measure of amount of energy contained by an object), but where does one draw the line between hot and cold? The human body cannot tell the difference between extremes of heat and cold. For example, if you have a wart removed with liquid nitrogen, the spot will first feel cool and then will feel as if someone is burning you with a match or flame. Heat and cold are merely degrees, differing only in the rate of vibration. We see polarity all around us and refer to it every day: light and dark, hard and soft, large and small, loud and quiet, black and white, positive and negative. These are all common manifestations of polarity. All these pairs are related and differ only by degree. This principle is very important to the concept of mental transmutation. *If we wish to change something from negative to positive, then we must recognize that negative and positive are the same thing, but vibrating at different rates.* Once this is realized, then all that must be done is to raise the vibrational rate of the negative. Mental transmutation will be discussed in more detail later in this lesson.

The *Principle of Rhythm* states that everything moves in cycles. "Everything flows out and in; everything has tides; all things rise and fall; the pendulum swing manifests in everything; the measure of the swing to the right is the measure of the swing to the left; rhythm compensates."—*The Kybalion*. We cannot cause a principle or law not to work, but it *can* be neutralized. *The Mental Law of Neutralization allows one to see the swing or rhythm, to locate a point in the swing at*

which they wish to be, and then to move themselves to it, thus nullifying the effect of the swing.

The *Principle of Cause and Effect* states that "there is a cause for every effect." If a ball rolls down a hill (effect), then there must have been some cause (something moved it) to precipitate the rolling down the hill. In science, this is known as the Newton's First Law of Motion: "an object at rest tends to stay at rest unless acted upon by an external force, and an object in motion tends to remain in motion unless acted upon by an external force." The law of cause and effect applies to both physical and non-physical manifestations. This principle, in part, incorporates the idea that YOU are responsible for your actions. YOU have the power to change the course of your life—it is YOUR ultimate decision to take any action. The power of this principle can be seen in everyday life, especially in interpersonal relationships. If someone yells at you, what is your honest and immediate reaction? For most people, it is to respond in kind. Now, it is up to you to decide if you wish to take that action (yelling back). If a person smiles at you what is your initial reaction? Usually it is to smile back. These are simple examples of this principle at work. *For everything that happens, something had to cause that event to occur.*

The *Principle of Gender* states that there is gender in everything. On the physical plane, gender manifests as sex. On the higher planes, gender refers to the duality, the polarity of active and passive forces, the Yin and the Yang, the Male and the Female. Every individual contains both aspects of male and female, Yin and Yang. Sexually, all humans start out as females; it is not until the third week of gestation that the fetus begins to take on either male or female aspects. This illustrates that both aspects of Being are present within everyone. *The principle of Gender works in the direction of generation, regeneration, and creation.* Without this principle there can be no creation.

Hopefully, by this point you are already beginning to see application of these principles on many levels. The highest application of these ideas is in Mental Transmutation. Transmutation is the process of changing one thing into another. Mental Transmutation is the art of changing and transforming mental states, forms, and conditions into others. *The key to mental transmutation is that **everything is mental.*** Since everything is mental, we can effect change by applying mental

force—if our force (Will and energy) is strong enough, we can effect the change we want to make. Mental transmutation takes place on the mental plane, thereby causing change to occur on the physical plane (remember the Principle of Correspondence). Only the most advanced masters can manifest large-scale change, in the grossest sense, on the physical plane. Even then, there are limits to what can be accomplished in physical incarnations.

Before going further, I wish to switch tracks for a moment and discuss a little of what is and is not possible. Many people like to spout the idea that "everything is possible." Well, everything *is* possible, depending on your level of ability and spiritual maturity. When we develop to the point where we rejoin the ALL or the TAO or the "universe," then all things *will* be possible. However, we are not yet there. We operate on the physical plane, the lower astral planes, and the lower mental planes. *Everything is energy*. To transform energy, we must be able to "grasp" and shape the energy. The physical body, much like a piece of copper wire, can handle only a limited amount of energy. If you have ever looked inside a light bulb while it is off, you will see two posts with a small piece of coiled wire inside. When electricity is applied, the small coil of metal begins to glow, because it is resisting the flow of energy. If too much energy is applied, then the coil will become too hot and explode or melt.

To some degree, the same process occurs within people, because the physical body is subject to physical laws. One of these is that there is a limit to what can be contained or channeled. Another way to see this is to look at the human body as the small end of the funnel. What happens when you attempt to pour a gallon of water into a funnel? Well, if you pour too much, it overflows—the small end cannot handle the physical volume of water.

The use of energy is also governed by mental and spiritual maturity. Remember the first two hermetic principles: Mentalism and Correspondence. How many of us can truly control our thoughts? If the body could manipulate unlimited power, then we could manifest anything that our minds could create. For those of you who watch science fiction, cast your mind back to the movie "Forbidden Planet," or remember the "Alice in Wonderland" episode of original "Star Trek," or the episode of "Star Trek: The Next Generation" where The Traveler appeared. In each of these shows, mankind was given the

ability to create anything that he/she could imagine. At our stage of development, mankind could easily destroy the fabric of creation if we were able to wield limitless energy. Still don't believe me? As an experiment, picture an apple in as much detail as you can. See the round shape, the stem, a few leaves on the stem; see the shading on the apple, its texture, the shading on the stem, and the textures of the stem; see the veins in the leaves. Now, see the entire apple in all its detail. Hold the image in your mind. Think of nothing but the apple. Hold the image in your mind for five seconds. Try it for 10 seconds. Hold it for a minute. Ten minutes. Hold the image for an hour, five hours, a whole day. Continue to hold the image until you can no longer hold it. Be honest: could you see the apple? How long did you manage to hold the image before it changed or before other thoughts intruded on what you were seeing? If you cannot maintain perfect control of your mind for even a limited time period, then what would happen if you could create anything in your mind? Imagine your worst nightmare being made manifest. Now, image the worst nightmares of an entire planet being made manifest on the physical.

Just because we do not have access or control over limitless energy does not mean that we cannot effect change on a smaller, more personal scale. Our ability to effect change is limited to the amount of energy we can manipulate and the strength of our wills. There is an upper limit to what the human body can handle, but very few people operate anywhere near that level. The ability to manipulate energy is tied to the energy channels and system of the body (the *chakras* are part of this system and will be discussed in a later lesson). These channels are like muscles and must be "exercised" in order to increase the amount of energy they can handle. The more an individual works with energy, the more energy he/she will be able to manipulate it, and the longer he/she will be able to manipulate it without tiring. With enough dedication and exercise, you can reach your physical limitation, but it does not happen overnight, just as lifting weights for a week will not allow you to lift a car over your head. Magick takes practice and work. In short, you have to train for it.

The Planes of Existence (Matter and Energy)

So far, we have spoken only with regard to the physical planes. To some extent, the limitations are lessened on the astral and mental planes, but there are still limitations. This is due partly to the spiritual maturity level and partly to the chakra systems. (The chakras exist on

more than one plane.) In short, if you are reading this, then you are not at the level needed to manifest excessive change on a global scale. (And, no, neither am I. However, one "day" I will be able to this; eventually *everyone* will be able to do it.)

Let us look at how Hermetic Philosophy perceives the "planes of existence." This term is a bit misleading, since all planes simultaneously exist and overlap. To some extent, it is like a building with three major sections. Each section occupies multiple floors. Again, this is a separation that exists only in the human mind for the sake of clarity. The planes are really groupings of degree (or vibration) within the manifestation of "like." Each of the major planes is divided into seven minor planes. Each of the minor planes is divided into seven sub-planes.

The major planes of existence are:

The Physical Plane	The Physical Plane is comprised of matter and is the realm of physical existence.
The Mental Plane	The Mental Plane is the realm of thought and consciousness.
The Spiritual Plane	The Spiritual Plane is the realm of deity and The ALL.

The physical plane is divided into seven minor planes:

The Plane of Matter (A)	The Plane of Matter (A) is comprised of the grossest forms of matter such as solids, liquids and gasses.
The Plane of Matter (B)	The Plane of Matter (B) is composed of the more subtle forms of matter such as the radiant matter (radium, etc).
The Plane of Matter (C)	The Plane of Matter (C) is composed of the finest forms of physical matter.
The Plane of Ethereal Substance	The Plane of Ethereal Substance is composed of the "ether," the unifying element of the universe. <i>The ether connects the grosser forms of matter and energy.</i>
The Plane of Energy (A)	The Plane of Energy (A) is composed of the gross forms of energy such as light, sound, heat, electricity, gravitation, cohesive force, etc.
The Plane of Energy (B)	The Plane of Energy (B) is comprised of the more complex energy forms such as plasmas.
The Plane of Energy (C)	The Plane of Energy (C) is comprised of the energy of the "gods." This form of energy is accessible only to those operating exclusively on the spiritual planes. <i>It is the stuff of creation.</i> And it, too, is comprised of seven sub-planes.

The Mental Plane comprises the forms of living things, or life as we understand it, and is divided into seven minor planes:

The Plane of the Mineral Mind	The Plane of The Mineral Mind comprises the states of units or entities that animate the forms of minerals.
The Plane of the Elemental Mind (A)	The Plane of The Elemental Mind (A) is the realm of the lower level elemental forces of nature.
The Plane of the Plant Mind	The Plane of The Plant Mind is the realm of the plant kingdom and plant consciousness.
The Plane of the Elemental Mind (B)	The Plane of The Elemental Mind (B) is comprised of the higher elemental forces or entities such as gnomes, sylphs, salamanders, and undines—those who control the lower level elementals.
The Plane of the Animal Mind	The Plane of The Animal Mind is comprised of the animal level consciousness.
The Plane of the Elemental Mind (C)	The Plane of The Elemental Mind (C) is the realm of the more evolved elemental entities.
The Plane of the Human mind	The Plane of The Human Mind is comprised of the manifestations of life and existence.

The Spiritual Plane is composed of those entities that exist in spiritual form (non-corporeal). This is the plane of the ascended beings and of deity. This is the realm of angels and guides, archangels, demigods, and other such entities. This plane is so far removed from ours that it is difficult to say much about the seven sub-planes. Until we reach a further stage of development, it is useless even to attempt to speculate about a plane populated by beings who are at a level of existence as far advanced over ours as we are over that of the common amoeba.

The last paragraph is paraphrased from *The Kybalion*. We must remember that this information was imparted a very long time ago and has been handed down for centuries. The book itself was put together at the beginning of the 20th century. Since that time, I believe that there have been great strides made in understanding a little more of "that which is not knowable." I would, therefore, suggest the following division of the Plane of Spirit:

Plane of Spirit Guides (A)	The Spiritual Plane is a plane of development, just as are the Physical and Mental Planes. The eventual goal is a return to the ALL, a return to TAO, to become "one" with everything. <i>Before we can achieve that state, we must first experience "everything."</i> Part of the experience must include helping and guiding others along the spiritual path. This is something done at all levels of existence, but at some point in our spiritual evolution we transcend the need for physical form and exist as
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	pure spirit or essence. Accordingly, I would propose that the first spiritual plane is that of the spirit guide. The spirit guides are those entities that have just begun their existence in the spiritual form. They are able to help and protect physical beings and impart some of their knowledge. This existence allows them to understand better how the spiritual level interacts with the physical.
Plane of Guardian Spirits and Angels: Cherubim (A)	The second level of the spiritual plane would be inhabited by the guardian spirits and/or the lesser angels, the Cherubim. These entities are more advanced than the spirit guide and are allowed more interaction with the physical.
Plane of Spirit Guides (B)	The third plane of spiritual existence would be reserved for the second level spirit guides. This level of guide has become used to the spiritual level, has integrated more information, and normally interacts with those on the physical plane who are closer to transcending physical existence.
Plane of Guardian Spirits and Angels: Seraphim (B)	The fourth plane would be the home of the second level guardian spirit and/or Seraphim. These enlightened souls are able to interact on the physical plane to a higher degree than the others and usually are more concerned with those just crossing over or those who have just crossed over to spiritual existence (even spiritual entities will need help from time to time).
Plane of Archangels	The fifth level of spiritual existence would be the level of archangels, those entities who are just about to rejoin with the ALL or TAO.
Plane of Demigods	The sixth level of spiritual existence is that of the demigod, those who are on the verge of transcending spiritual individuality and rejoining with the ALL or the TAO.
TAO, ALL	The last level of spiritual existence is the TAO or the ALL.

Let me stress that *these are best guesses on my part*. Further, I am using several terms familiar to humans to provide some point of reference. Since many people do have some background in Christianity or Catholicism, I chose to use the terms Cherubim and Seraphim as a level reference only. Whether there are actually entities classified as this is better left to other discussions. Further, I am not positive about the fifth and sixth levels, for they very well could be reversed. However, I do believe that, in time, as we are more ready to understand, these levels will be revealed in more detail.

At this point, we move into a discussion of the area of Mental Transmutation. The idea of transmutation is to change one form of

energy into another (after all, "everything is energy"). The theory of mental transmutation is simple: use a higher principle to overcome the effects of a lower principle. While the idea is simple, it could not (and cannot) be fully explored until the seven principles are understood.

"To change your mood or mental state, change your vibration."—*The Kybalion*

Everything is mental. Everything is energy. Everything vibrates. YOU are the master of your own mood and mental state. Another person may do something that angers you, but they do NOT force you to lose your temper—YOU lose control of your temper because of YOUR reaction to something they said or did. The baser negative emotions (hate, envy, jealousy) are all states of low-vibrating energy. To change your mood, raise your mental vibrational level.

"To destroy an undesirable rate of mental vibration, put into operation the Principle of Polarity and concentrate upon the opposite pole to that which you desire to suppress. Kill out the undesirable by changing its polarity."—*The Kybalion*

Polarity is in everything; everything has its opposite. Love and hate are the same thing vibrating at different ends of the spectrum. Happiness and sorrow are the same, but vibrating at different rates. To counter something, use its opposite. From chemistry, we know that if we mix bases and acids in equal strengths, they will cancel each other out to form a neutral substance. To see this in everyday life, try being very positive and cheerful around someone who is in a bad mood. The bad mood cannot survive for long when confronted by a positive mood. It is also possible use a bad mood to cancel a positive mood. Watch the people around you. Someone will come into the office in a bad mood and snap at someone; later on, that person will be short with another, etc. The chain goes on and on. *Polarity and vibration are key elements to mental transmutation.*

"Rhythm may be neutralized by the application of the Art of Polarization."—*The Kybalion*

Everything is in constant motion, and there is a rhythm to the motion. The swing of the pendulum to the left is equal to the swing of the pendulum to the right. To avoid being caught in an undesirable swing, we use polarity or vibration to move ourselves above or below the

oncoming swing, thereby moving ourselves outside of the effect. The higher Hermetic Master will polarize or move him/herself to the very positive side of the "I AM" pole and vibrate to a rate at which the backwards swing of the pendulum will not affect him/her. This is done to some extent by all who understand this principle. They simply refuse to be swayed by the reverse swing.

"Nothing escapes the Principle of Cause and Effect, but there are many planes of Causation and one may use the laws of a higher to overcome the laws of a lower."—*The Kybalion*

For every cause there is an effect, and for every effect there is a cause. For every event there must be some initial action, and there is some reaction for every event. For an idea to manifest on the physical plane, it must first exist as thought; then it must take form on the mental plane and eventually be made manifest back on the physical plane. There are many planes on which we operate. The principle of causation exists on all planes. Just as one plane may influence another, causation on one plane may influence other planes.

"True Hermetic Transmutation is a Mental Art."—*The Kybalion*

Everything is mental; we are but a thought in the mind of the ALL. Influencing the physical and mental planes are brought about by control of your mental power and abilities in conformity of the laws of existence.

"The ALL is MIND. The Universe is Mental."—*The Kybalion*

Magickal Ethics

Before delving further into the principles and ideas of magick, it is critical to begin our exploration of the subject of magickal ethics. The foundation of this discussion will be that YOU are responsible for YOUR actions. *Everything that you do has influence or effect on something else.*

Magickal ethics follow the same principles as physical and mental ethics. Ethics can be broken into three broad categories:

- **Ethical Objectivism holds that there are moral and ethical absolutes that can be known.**

- Ethical Relativism holds that the ethics of a situation depend on the situation, the time, and the culture in which the event occurs.
- There is a third system that combines the two beliefs, saying that there are some fundamental ethical truths, but that they must be applied in consideration to the situation in which the event occurs.

Magickal Ethics is based on standard ethics. Magick is an ability that everyone possesses; everyone has the *potential* to use it, but few rarely *learn* to use it. You must consider magick to be another skill, like martial arts or cooking, that can be developed by any individual.

Many ethical situations will resolve themselves to the question of, "Would I want someone to take this action without my permission?" and "What actions would I consider appropriate for someone to take on my behalf?" *We must be cautious of attempting to rationalize our actions by claiming that we would really want someone to do something for us if we were in a situation.*

Let's look at a few examples of magickal ethics and "regular" ethics.

Magickal:

Can I cast a spell to make John Smith want to sleep with me?

Can I cast a spell to make John Smith fall in love with me?

These questions are often rationalized by the following types of ideas:

But I just "know" that we are soul-mates.

But I just "know" that if he realized his true feelings he would want this.

But I just "know" that I could make him the happiest person in the world if he would let me.

And the list goes on!

Physical:

Can I physically force John Smith to have sex with me?

Can I coerce John Smith to have sex with me?

Could I put something in John Smith's drink so that I could have sex with him?

These situations are clear-cut examples of an action that will cause harm to another individual.

Magickal:

Can I ask someone to attack me magickally?

This could be a useful learning tool if the people know what they are doing.

Physical:

Can I ask a friend to spar with me in some contact sport?

Notice that this situation involves *mutual consent between two individuals*. Mutual consent changes the ethical picture. While it is possible that bad things can happen as a result of the actions, *both participants understand the risk before the actions are begun*.

There appears to be a conflict with the basic Wiccan belief of, "An it harm none, do as you will." The actions could result in harm being doing to one or more people by the action; *the important thing to remember here is that it is a risk that is mutually agreed upon*. In this type of situation, I believe that the concept of mutual consent should be applied. I also believe that this idea should be applied in situations involving pain as part of the sexual act—if the action is mutually agreed upon by *both* parties, then the basic belief is not violated.

Many forms of magick work on influencing other people.

Magickal:

Can I put up a ward or shield around my property to deter thieves?

Physical:

Can I put up signs that say, "Thieves keep out!"

Depending on the construction of the ward or shield, a certain idea can be projected to those crossing the boundary. This idea *does*

influence another individual. This becomes a two-fold question: "Would you want someone to try to influence you?" and "Since the individual has made a conscious choice to interfere with my free will, then am I allowed to try to keep him from taking an action?"

Magickal:

Can I put up a ward or shield around my property to cause a thief's heart to stop when he crosses intending to steal my property?

Physical:

Can I shoot someone who is stealing my property?

Most people will agree that they should have the right to defend themselves and their property. However, the taking of a life in *any* situation will have Karmic repercussions that must be faced—even in the instance of self-preservation. Is a piece of property really worth the taking of a life? A similar issue is whether you could incorporate a "death action" into a ward to be triggered on the occurrence of an event such as someone's breaking into your house to kill you. How far will you go, and where will you draw the lines?

Magickal:

Can I work a spell to raise the awareness of a person or group of people regarding a specific subject?

Physical:

Can I force someone to accept an idea with which they do not agree, even if the idea is considered "wrong" by society?

Every individual must develop at his/her own rate. The spiritual development cannot be rushed or pushed forward. While the idea of raising someone's awareness may be appealing, would you want someone to *force* awareness on you? *Notice that the issue is really one of consent.*

Magickal:

Can I work a spell to raise the awareness of a person or group of people regarding a specific subject, provided that they are willing?

Physical:

Can I talk to someone on the street who agrees to the discussion, or to someone who asks me about a specific topic?

Notice that the situation has changed such that *the other individual now has the choice* to be made aware of a situation.

Many situations in magick involve consent and free will.

In most situations, magick should not be worked on or for a person without his/her express permission. *Also remember that permission for one action does not imply permission for another.* Permission usually must come from the individual. There are, however, exceptions. Before the age of consent, children usually may not give permission for magickal actions, since they may not understand the ramifications of what they desire. In the instance of working on or for children, permission from the parent or guardian is usually required. The same holds true for those who are mentally incompetent or those who cannot communicate for themselves.

In a perfect world, we would have the time to obtain permission before doing any work for others. However, this is not always the case. There are instances where time is of the essence, and there is not time to obtain formal permission.

Magickal:

Can I use my healing abilities to keep someone who has been struck by a car alive until emergency medical teams arrive?

Physical:

Can I use my knowledge of how to stop bleeding to keep someone who has been struck by a car alive until emergency medical teams arrive?

In these cases, it may be impossible to obtain permission. Some would advocate doing nothing, since, if you take no action, then there would not be any repercussions. Are there repercussions for *not* taking action to prevent something when you could? That is a good question, and one that is not easily answered. There is no physical law that says that you *must* help someone in need. Is there a spiritual imperative saying that you must help people in need? That is another good question. If you follow the belief that before you can transcend fully, you must

have compassion for all creatures in existence, then the answer is "yes."

Before we rush out and start trying to save people, there are other concerns to address.

What if the individual in question was *supposed* to die at that time?

What if death by that particular occurrence was *supposed* to occur to teach that soul a lesson?

Most people would like to believe that "untimely" death couldn't happen for a specific reason. This is incorrect. Before a soul incarnates, the major life tasks are decided upon and set in motion. This does not say that everything is predestined, but there *are* some events that can be prearranged. One of these is "untimely" death. Death itself is a critical experience in the soul's development.

The question remains, then, do you take action to save the individual? In these situations, we do not have the luxury of consulting the Akashic records to see if this event was supposed to happen. *If an event was predetermined, there is no way to change the event.* If the person was *meant* to die in the accident, then they *will* die. Just as "untimely" death is a possibility, living through a near-death experience is also a possibility.

Before taking any action, especially magickal, you should consider the ramifications of those actions. Also, you must be prepared to accept responsibility for your actions, or your lack of actions. Many situations where the ethics of an action is questioned come about because one or more of the individuals involved does not want to take responsibility for their actions.

The following ideas can help resolve ethical problems:

- Always take responsibility for your actions.
- Always consider the consequences of your actions.
- Always consider the options available to you (if there is time).
- Always remember that every individual has free will.
- Always remember that you should try not to harm others.

- Always remember that every cause has an effect and that every effect has a cause.

There is no quick and easy solution to the problem of magickal or physical ethics. We do not possess a little computer where we can type in a situation and an action to get a reading on whether the action is ethical. The individual must decide the question of whether an action is ethical. The extent to which an individual will go to observe ethics varies with each individual.

THE CORPUS HERMETICA

By **Secretum Secretorum** ©

The *Corpus Hermeticum* is a collection of texts from the second and third centuries of our era that survived from a more extensive literature.

Reflecting the generalized spiritual orientation of late Hellenistic gnosis rather than a tradition in any organized sense, these sometimes contradictory texts share only their claim to a common source of revelation, Hermes Trismegistus. In most of the texts his revelations are presented as a dialogue with one of three pupils: Tat, Asclepius, or Ammon. According to Augustine[115], Asclepius was the grandson of the great Greek god of the same name, and Tat was likewise the grandson of his divine namesake (the Roman deity Mercurius, the same as the Greek god Hermes).

The Hermetic texts are often cited as examples of the extent of late Hellenistic syncretism, for they exhibit traits of magic, astrology, alchemy, Platonism and Stoicism, and the Mysteries, as well as Judaism and gnostic thought. Such influences are not arbitrary borrowings but express the systemic assumptions of the late Hellenistic age generally: the Ptolemaic delineation of a hierarchical cosmos under the rule of *heimarmene*, the sympathetic parallel between macrocosm and microcosm, the attendant understanding of the consubstantial nature of all existent entities, the devoted or fallen feminine nature of reality, and the masculine redemptive possibility of cosmic and temporal reversal and thus of the effects of fall by means of a spiritual participation in the golden antiquity of origin. Hermeticism may be illustrated from the Poimandres, the first and most well known of the tractates. The Poimandres opens with the visionary account of an unnamed seeker:

One day, when I began to reflect on existence, and my thoughts had soared, and my bodily senses were held down like people heavy with sleep through surfeit of food or physical exhaustion, it seemed to me that a giant creature of immeasurable dimensions approached, called me by name, and said: "What do you wish to hear and to see and to learn and to know with understanding?" And I said: "Who are you then?" "I," he said, "am Poimandres, the Nous (Intellect) of the Absolute Sovereignty. I know what you wish, and I am with you everywhere." And I said: "I desire to learn the things that exist, to understand their nature and to know God. How much I do desire to hear!" Again he said to me: "Hold fast in your mind what you wish to learn and I will teach you."

The passage is characterized by a dualistic distinction between the corporeality of the "bodily senses" and Nous, the inner-thought or intellect of the seer, which soars aloft to receive spiritual revelation. The redemptive knowledge of "the things that exist," of their nature, and of (what was the same thing) the knowledge of God, is revealed in this noncorporeal vision by Poimandres.

Let us look at the *dramatis personae* before going further. The *Hermetica* are presented as revelations of divine truth, not as the product of human reason; and in the philosophical texts as in the technical texts those who do the revealing are the typical deities of Graeco-Egyptian syncretism.[116] Alongside Hermes Trismegistus himself and Isis, who had long been associated in the Egyptian as well as the Greek tradition,[117] we find Asclepius, identified with the Egyptian Imhotep/Imouthes;[118] Ammon, the Egyptian god Amun, euhemeristically regarded by some as one of the country's early kings;[119] Horus, the son of Isis;[120] and Agathos Daimon. Rather more unusually, the *Kore kosmou* alludes to Kamephis as an intermediary between Hermes and Isis, while *S.H.* XXVI.9 identifies the god of philosophy as Arnebeschenis, a Greek transcription for 'Horus of Letopolis. Both of these divinities are attested elsewhere in Greek literature of or on Egypt, but they were considerably less well known than the other figures mentioned, and their presence can be taken to indicate more than a superficial familiarity with the native milieu. There are also figures unique to the *Hermetica*: Poimandres, Tat and the priest Bitys. The origin and meaning of the name Poimandres is unclear, though it may be Egyptian.[121] As for Tat, he began humbly enough as a Greek misspelling of Thoth, but ended up taking on an identity of his own as Thoth-Hermes's son, both bodily and spiritual. The Hermetists apparently saw nothing

inconsistent in this—an indication that philosophical Hermetism is not just a haphazard accumulation of separate elements, but a self-validating structure with its own conventions.

Most modern experts on the *Hermetica* distinguish the "popular" occultist writings attributed to Hermes from the "learned" or "philosophical" treatises. Garth Fowden, in his *The Egyptian Hermes*, argues persuasively that all the *Hermetica*, whether practical or theoretical, magical or philosophical, can be understood as responses to the same milieu, the very complex Graeco-Egyptian culture of Ptolemaic, Roman and early Christian times.[122] With regard to origins and interrelations, the claim that both types of *Hermetica* come from a common environment rings true, yet two other facts also bear consideration: first, that the seventeen Greek treatises of the *Corpus Hermeticum* came to be treated as a distinct body of writing, though perhaps for no better reason than the accidents of textual transmission or the prejudices of Byzantine compilers; and second, that these seventeen Greek *logoi* are not much concerned with astrology, very little with magic and not at all with alchemy. They deal with theological, or, in some loose sense, philosophical issues: they reveal to man knowledge of the origins, nature and moral properties of divine, human and material being so that humanity can use this knowledge to save themselves. The same pious philosophy or philosophical piety—a blend of theology, cosmogony, anthropogony, ethics, soteriology and eschatology—also characterizes the Latin *Asclepius*, the forty Hermetic texts and fragments collected in the *Anthology* of Stobaeus, the three *Hermetica* found with the *Nag Hammadi Codices*, the Armenian *Definitions* and the Vienna fragments. Although traces of occult belief, astrology especially, is evident in many of these works, even dominant in some, their central philosophical and theological concerns do, in fact, distinguish the from what Festugiere called "popular Hermetism." [123]

Around 200 CE the Christian writer Clement of Alexandria knew of "forty-two books of Hermes" considered indispensable for the rituals of Egyptian priests; the list, four of whose items he calls "the astrological books of Hermes," somewhat resembles a description of sacred writings inscribed in the second century BCE on the wall of an Egyptian temple in Edfu.[124] Clement's report accords with our fragmentary knowledge of the Graeco-Egyptian astrology that began to develop as early as the third century BCE. Although it was a Greek work of the third or second century BCE,

composed perhaps in Alexandria and dealing with configurations of stars regarded as divinities, the title and other features of the *Salmeschiniaka* hint of Babylonian origins, though nothing proves such a connection. In the middle of the second century BCE, the unknown author of an astrology manual fathered his work on a pharaoh who ruled five centuries earlier, Nechepso, and on the high priest Petosiris, who reputedly took his revelation from Hermes and may correspond to an historical figure of the fourth century. The fragments of the handbook bearing the names of Nechepso and Petosiris survive mainly in the *Anthology* of Vettius Valens, a Roman astrologer who wrote in Greek in the second century CE. The most important of the astrological *Hermetica* known to us is the *Liber Hermetis*, a Latin text whose Greek original contained elements traceable to the third century BCE. This *Book of Hermes* describes the decans, a peculiarly Egyptian way of dividing the zodiacal circle into thirty-six compartments, each with its own complex of astrological attributes. Some Hermetic texts were tight in their focus, applying astrological theory to special circumstances: a *Brontologion* analyzed the significance of thunder as it was heard in various months, and a treatise *Peri seismon* related earthquakes to astrological signs. Of broader use were the *Iatromathematika* or tracts on astrological medicine, such as the *Book of Asclepius Called Myriogenesis* that discussed medical consequences of the theory of correspondence between human microcosm and universal macrocosm. Astrological botany and mineralogy were also favored topics. *The Holy Book of Hermes to Asclepius* based its botanical prescriptions on the relations between plants and decans, while *the Fifteen Stars, Stones, Plants and Images* singled out particular stars as determinants of pharmaceutical power.[125]

Another kind of occult wisdom attractive to Hermetic authors was alchemy, which made its first literary mark on Egypt after 200 BCE in the writings of Bolos Democritus of Mendes: the vestiges of his work show that Bolos described processes involving gold, silver, gems, dyes and other substances that became the main ingredients of the alchemical work. After Bolos but before the Christian era, a number of alchemical treatises began to appear under the names of Hermes, Agathodaimon, Isis and others. The latest date from the second or third century CE, and today we know them only as fragments - no more than thirty or so - from later alchemical treatises that mention either Hermes or another Hermetic figure. One of the larger remains of this literature, the *Anepigraphos*, cites the authority of

Hermes and Agathodaimon for an allegory on the making of silver, called "the moon," by cooking and melting various substances. In another, entitled *Isis the Prophetess to her Son Horus*, the angel Amnael reveals the alchemical mystery: that just as wheat engenders wheat or person begets person so gold breeds gold. These alchemical Hermetica were known to Zosimus, a native of Panopolis who lived in Alexandria around 300 CE. Zosimus is of great interest because he mingled Hermetic theosophy with the alchemist's pragmatic aims and left at least two works that shed light on the larger Hermetic project, especially on the kinship between the technical and philosophical texts.[126]

The collection of the first book of the collection called *Kuranides* says that "the god Hermes Trismegistus received this book from the angels as god's greatest gift and passed it on to all individuals fit to receive secrets." The book also claims to be a compilation from two others by Kuranos, which may be a version of the Persian name Cyrus, and by Harpocraton, an otherwise unknown author of late imperial times; the same work refers to an *Archaikos Biblos*, probably an early bestiary. This first of the six surviving *Kuranides* has twenty-four chapters, one each for the letter of the Greek alphabet that begins the names of the plant, bird fish and stone treated in the chapter. The second *Kuranis* has forty-seven alphabetized chapters on quadrupeds and their medical properties; the four others handle birds, fish plants and stones in the same way. Manuscripts of all but the last two books carry ascriptions to Hermes Trismegistus, but philology has traced them to the same Bolos Democritus who was a fountainhead of alchemical wisdom. If Bolos was their progenitor, the *Kuranides* represent the largest survival in Greek of a literature initiated by him that treated a wide range of natural phenomena and emphasized their medical and magical uses.[127]

If Fowden is right to claim that "the technical and philosophical books...are related aspects of...a practical spiritual 'way,'" then in the philosophical treatises one expects to find the theory behind the praxis of the technical *Hermetica*. When one looks, however, in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the *Asclepius*, the Stobaeus excerpts or the Nag Hammadi *Hermetica* for a theory of magic, something like what Proclus wrote *On the Hieratic Art according to the Greeks*, this seems not to be the case, although there are passages that assume such a theoretical framework for remarks on astrology, demonology or related topics. Instead of a theory of magic, the

theoretical *Hermetica* present a theory of salvation through knowledge or *gnosis*, yet this theory was the product of a culture that made no clear, rigid distinction between religion as the province of such lofty concerns as the fate of the soul and magic as a merely instrumental device of humbler intent.[128] In the Papyri many spells have as their goal *enpneumatosis* or "inspiration," literally, filling with *pneuma* or spirit. Was it a religious or a practical aim to seek such inspiration from Hermes? What we know of the role of *pneuma* in Gnostic and early Christian religion and of its place in Stoic physics and Galenic medicine should convince us that the question implies a false, unhistorical dichotomy.[129] Salvation in the largest sense - the resolution of man's fate wherever it finds him - was a common concern of theoretical and technical *Hermetica* alike, though the latter texts generally advertised a quotidian deliverance from banal misfortunes of disease, poverty and social strife, while the former offered a grander view of salvation through knowledge of God, the other and the self.

This distinction, as Fowden and others have shown, gives us only rough, provisional categories better suited to some texts than to others. Although the excerpts in the *Anthology* of Stobaeus have commonly been treated as "philosophical," a term that fits most of them as well as it suits the *Corpus Hermeticum* proper, some of the Stobaeian material clearly qualifies as technical. *Excerpt VI* deals with astrology, in particular with the decans and their "sons," the star demons. Festugiere highlighted the conclusion of this treatise, which promises that "one who has not ignored these things can understand god precisely and, if one dare say so, even see god with his own eyes and, having seen god, become blessed." In other words, the Hermetic authors found technical information on the decan stars a suitable prelude to *gnosis*. [130] The longest and most interesting of the Stobaeian excerpts, the *Kore Kosmou*, or "Daughter of the Cosmos," forthrightly declares that "no prophet about to raise his hands to the gods has ever ignored any of the things that are, so that philosophy and magic may nourish the soul and medicine heal the body"; this suggests that all knowledge - magical, medical and any other - bears on the quest for gnostic salvation. Magic comes closest to philosophy, perhaps, in the famous "god-making" passages of the *Asclepius* (23-4, 37-8) which shows that material objects can be manipulated to draw a god down into a statue and thus ensoul it.[131]

The writings of Zosimus, like the contrary advice of the *Kore kosmou*, show that categories roughly to modern usage of such terms as "magic," "philosophy" and "religion" were available to the very people who so frequently mixed them. Mixed aims and methods are evident in the sixth tractate of the sixth *Nag Hammadi Codex*, the "Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth." This work is a leading example of what Fowden calls an "initiatory" hermetic text concerned with the final phases of a "philosophical *paideia*," the last steps that the initiate takes to recognize his true nature and then, in knowing God, to attain godhood. *NHC VI.6* shares these sublime intentions with some parts of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, especially *C.H. I* and *XIII*, but most of the other seventeen Greek treatises are "preparatory" in Fowden's taxonomy. They describe various lower stages in the progress toward wisdom that the initiate must acquire before enjoying the rebirth offered in *C.H. XIII* or *NHC VI.6*. [132]

If the preliminary states of spiritual growth differed from one another, the changes among them may explain a striking feature of the *Corpus*, the apparently great divergences in doctrine between its component treatises and even within an individual *logos*. Scholars have taken pains to analyze and schematize parts of the *Corpus* as monist or dualist, optimist or pessimist, but Fowden proposes to see such variations as sequential rather than contradictory. Thus, a positive view of the cosmos as good and worth understanding would suit an earlier stage of the initiate's labors and, hence, a treatise focusing on a time when the body's needs were still great, while a negative treatment of the world as evil and unworthy of thought might befit a farther station in the spirit's journey and a different treatise on topics closer to the culmination of *gnosis*, which entailed liberation from the body. In any event, the texts themselves show that the Hermetic authors felt no obligation to respect the boundaries drawn around their writings by modern critics. *NHC VI.6*, for example, seeks nothing less than "the great divine vision," but it also contains two ritual passages that would not be out of place in the *Magical Papyri* (one of which includes the same prayer that concludes the *Asclepius*). In the second such passage, the initiate says, *I give thanks by singing a hymn to you. For I have received life from you, when you made me wise. I praise you. I call your name that is hidden within me: a ö ee ö ëë öö ii öööö oooo ööö uuuuu öööööööööööö. You are the one who exists with the spirit. I sing a hymn to you reverently.*

Hermes, the mystagogue, then directs his "son to write this book for the temple at Diospolis in hieroglyphic characters, entitling it 'The Eighth Reveals the Ninth.'" [133] This exchange between Trismegistus and his disciple confirms what Iamblichus said about Egyptian theology, that *they certainly do not just speculate about these things. They recommend rising up through priestly theurgy toward the higher and more universal levels above fate, to the god and craftsman, and without material attachment or any other help at all except observing the proper time. Hermes also gave instruction in this way, which Bitus the prophet translated for King Ammon after finding it carved in hieroglyphic letters in shrines of Sais in Egypt.*

Although Iamblichus seems to exclude any "material attachment" from Hermetic theurgy, the same cannot be said of the *Asclepius*, which in its "art of making gods" permitted "a comformable power arising from the nature of matter" and even mentioned "a mixture of plants, stones and spices, in describing the nature of the gods called down to animate their statues. *PGM IV.475-829*, formerly known as the "Mithras Liturgy," begins by calling for "the juices of herbs and spices," and it addresses the elementary powers of spirit, fire, water and earth with mystical noises like those that appear on almost every page of the Magical papyri: "EY EIA EE, water of water, the first of the water in me, OOO AAA EEE, earthy material, the first of the earthy material in me, YE YOE, my complete body." The same invocation seeks deliverance beyond the bodily elements "to immortal birth and...to my underlying nature, so that...I may gaze upon the immortal." Just as Iamblichus said, this famous document exhorts the initiate to rise up through theurgy to a divine rebirth; its devices are concrete and technical, but it sets those procedures in a matrix of theory explored more thoroughly in the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Asclepius*. [134]

Hermetic Collections

When A.D. Nock edited the *Corpus*, he used twenty-eight manuscripts dating from the fourteenth through the seventeenth centuries, but fifteen of them contain only the first fourteen treatises, or in some cases, even fewer. Two manuscripts that include all seventeen *logoi* also preserve a comment on *C.H. I.18* written by Michael Psellus, an important Byzantine scholar of the eleventh century. Finding the words of the biblical Genesis in this heathen cosmogony, Psellus remarked of its author that "this wizard seems to have had more than a passing acquaintance with holy writ. Making an eager go of it, he tries his hand at the creation of the world, not scrupling to

record the cherished Mosaic expressions themselves." It is noteworthy that a Byzantine Christian learned in Neoplatonism wished to defame the Bible-reading Hermes as a *goes* or "wizard," especially since the seventeen Greek treatises say so little about occult topics. Passages on astrology and magic in the theoretical *Hermetica* are even scarcer in *C.H.* I-XIV than in XVI-XVIII and the *Asclepius*. Could it be, then, that what we call the *Corpus Hermeticum* took shape just as a consequence of the abhorrence of magic expressed by Psellus? If so, it is worth noting the likelihood that he shared this pious loathing with other Byzantine scholars who transmitted the *Corpus* from his time to the fourteenth century, when the earliest extant manuscripts were written.[135]

Byzantine editors and copyists, then, may have immortalized their prejudices by selecting and redacting our *Corpus* from a larger body of *Hermetica* that certainly gave much attention to the occultism that is so inconspicuous in the theoretical treatises, especially the first fourteen. For Christian readers of the Latin West and Greek East alike, a *Corpus* purged of magic would better befit the authorship of the pagan sage described in the *Suda* around the year 1000: "Hermes Trismegistus....was an Egyptian wise man who flourished before Pharaoh's time. He was called Trismegistus on account of his praise of the trinity,[136] saying that there is one divine nature in the trinity." The *Hermetica* are full of random pieties, which is why Christians from patristic times onward so much admired them. Before the eleventh century - when Psellus seems to have known the *Corpus* in roughly its present form, around the same time when the first collections of technical *Hermetica* were assembled by Byzantine scholars - there is no sign of the *Corpus* as such, although individual treatises were evidently in use as early as the third century CE. John of Stobi, or Stobaeus, seems not to have known the *Corpus* as a whole, but he compiled an Anthology around the year 500 that contains forty excerpts of varying lengths from hermetic writings, including parts of *C.H.* II, IV, IX, and the *Asclepius*. Excerpts that do not give partial texts (texts that represent a separate and sounder tradition than other manuscripts of the *Corpus*, which just on that account would seem to have been assembled after Stobaeus) or the *Corpus* or the *Asclepius* fall into four groups: Hermes, Hermes to Tat, Hermes to Ammon, and Isis to Horus.[137] Earlier than Stobaeus is an interesting remark from Cyril of Alexandria, who knew *C.H.* XI and XIV as well as other treatises now lost; he died around the middle of the fifth

century. Much like Pselus, Cyril disapproved of Hermes as a magus and idolater, but he was fascinated by biblical and other resonances in his works, writing that

this Hermes of Egypt, although he was a theurgist (telestes), ever sitting in the temple precincts near the idols, had the good sense to acquire the writings of Moses, even if he did not use them at all blamelessly or correctly, having but a part of them....The one in Athens who collected the fifteen books called "Hermetic" (Hermaika) made himself a record of this in his own writings.[138]

Although Cyril apparently knew a Hermetic collection, his other references to Hermetic writings do not show that these "fifteen books" were a form of our *Corpus*. However, the earliest possible data, which comes from the texts themselves (sometimes referring to one another and to *Hermetica* outside the *Corpus*), indicate that Hermetic collections of some kind circulated as early as the second or third centuries. A scribe who copied the Nag Hammadi *Hermetica*, part of a mid-fourth "library," apologized for not adding more Hermetic materials to his codex because "the discourses of that one, which have come to me, are numerous," implying that he had access to more *Hermetica* than he had transcribed, conceivably to a collection. Authors of *NHC* VI, *C.H.* V,X,XII and XIV, *S.H.* III and VI and the *Asclepius* recognized groups of treatises by name, although the meanings of their labels to their original users remain unclear.[139]

THE AMBIGUOUS BODY OF THE CORPUS HERMETICUM

By Author Currently Unknown

Presented as the closing paper for the Bodies Conference

Welcome to this, the tail end of the conference.

Soon we shall return, each to the real world, or the various unreal worlds of academics where the body of our ideas are, hopefully, both tenable and tenurable. All of our ideas are inscribed within a body of practice which mandates (which is to say embodies) publication, conferences, dissertations, and other modes of discourse which allow the graduate student to secure a place within the body of scholarship and the body of scholars.

Yet I intend to tell a tale, and to present that story as a body of evidence. Twenty years before Columbus set off on his journey, a new world was discovered, and revealed to Europe. No mere land mass, this New World was the Body of Man, revealed as the World itself, the world in miniature, as Man himself was a small God. This revelation came through a peculiar body of Greek texts, themselves claiming to be translations from an Egyptian sage/man/god: Hermes the Thrice Greatest. This revelation came through the translation of this "Corpus Hermeticum" from Greek into Latin by Marsilio Ficino in the fifteenth century and his efforts at establishing an Academy in Florence which would renovate the World, both the little and the big.

A rather impressive text. What then was this Corpus Hermeticum? Here I am confounded by the same problem which it is my intention in this paper to claim confronted Ficino. The ambiguity of the Corpus Hermeticum lies not in some particular interpretation, but rather it is incumbent upon any interpretation of these strange texts, even to their description, and especially to an explanation of their origins. I hope to make this clearer further on. For now, perhaps, I should start as the Corpus Hermeticum begins itself, that is: "Once upon a time."

Once upon a time, in the ancient land of Egypt the God Thoth, or Tehuti was worshipped. Tehuti was a moon-god, the patron of science and literature, of wisdom and inventions, the spokesman of the gods and the keeper of their records. If the Egyptian pantheon were an English department, Tehuti would be the Fullbright scholar who returns with an endowed chair. He isn't the Head of the department, but he's always snapping up the best students. Egyptian theologians claimed that Thoth was the demiurge who created the universe with the sound of his voice. Thoth invented arithmetic, surveying, geometry, astronomy, soothsaying, magic, metallurgy, music, and writing. He was an inventive chap.

Once upon a little later time, say the fifth century b.c.e., the Greeks discovered the Egyptians and began mapping the Hellenic pantheon onto the Theban. Their homegrown Greek god of messages and messengers, Hermes, was equated with Thoth. One of the Egyptian titles of respect for Tehuti was aa-aa or twice-great. The Greeks seem to have done one better by talking about a mysterious Hermes Trismegistus, or Hermes the Thrice-great.

Now our once upon a time falls into history, so that nothing is very clear. Some Greek writers claimed that Hermes Trimesgistos was a human. Some held him to be a sage. Others a god. And others some combination of all three. Galen knew of the writings of "Hermes the Egyptian". Athenagoras in the second century A.D. knows of Hermes Trismegistus whose family is linked with the gods. And both Clement of Alexandria and Iamblicus gave thumbnail sketches of the books of Hermes Trismegistus. Magic, astronomy, alchemy, cosmology and theosophy seemed to have been his especial topics. Iamblicus informs us, or mis-informs us, that Hermes wrote his works in Egyptian, in hieroglyphics (after all he did invent them) then they were translated into Greek. Also, Iamblicus claims, many other books were being circulated under the name of Hermes which were not written by him. No such Greek works survived through to Christian Europe. By the fourteenth century Greek was operationally an unknown language, even to the educated monk or scholar. A single work, which claims to be a sort of seminar session between Hermes and the god of healing, Asclepius, did get translated into Latin some time in late antiquity and survived in an eleventh century codex.

There our tale would end. Except that its plot was thickened, as are so many human stories, by war. The Turks were threatening to conquer Constantinople, seat of the Eastern Roman Empire and center of Orthodox Greek Christianity. Negotiations were held in 1439 in Florence between representatives of the Metropolitan and the Pope, an attempt to smooth over theological differences between the two Catholic and Universal versions of the Christian faith, so that political aid might follow. Among the Greek priests and scholars sent to negotiate with the Italians was one Gemistus Pletho. Pletho knew his Aristotle as the Europeans did not, he knew the original Greek. Pletho also knew Plato's works, none of which save the Timaeus were in common use in Latin translation. Pletho was winning theological arguments using an erudition the Europeans lacked. Lacked but were soon to win for themselves. Just as the Soviet launch of Sputnik galvanized America's effort in aerospace, so this embarrassing show of Greeks with Greek scholarship hastened the study of Greek language, literature and philosophy in Europe.

One of the members in the audience in 1439 who heard Pletho and saw that Greek could be a strategic advantage for Florence was Cosimo Medici. It took Cosimo a couple of decades but he found the

perfect young scholar to learn this new Greek and translate the works of Plato and the neoPlatonists. That scholar was Marsilio Ficino. Cosimo set Ficino up in a villa in Careggi and supplied him with greek manuscripts. In the 1460's in the midst of translating Plato, Ficino was told by Medici himself to stop work and begin immediately translating a newly acquired manuscript, a collection of little booklets or tractates, attributed to some sage or man or god mentioned by Clement and Iamblicus. In short, Ficino set about translating the Corpus Hermeticum.

Ficino knew his ancient authors, so he "knew" that Hermes Trimegistus was more ancient than any of them. By the ancients' own testimony these lectures and revelations of Hermes were an original fountain of wisdom from which Moses and Plato were separate, though related, streams of thought.

And what Ficino found in these tractates was that the body, the cosmos, the human being, and God, were intimately related, were magically connected. The cosmos was a body, and the human was a little version of the cosmic. Ficino would later write in his Commentary on the Symposium "The parts of this world, members of one living being, all originating from the same maker, are joined together in the communion of one nature. Therefore, just as our brain, lungs, heart, liver and other organs act on one another, assist each other to some extent, and suffer together when any one of them suffers, in just this way the organs of this enormous living being, all the bodies of the world joined together in like manner, borrow and lend each other's natures." And through what agency is this borrowing accomplished?...through love. "Because" as Ficino says, "all the power of magic consists in love."

But this coherent, ordered, beautifully symmetrical system of interrelationships was not so much found in the reading as created by that reading. In a very real sense, the Renaissance version of this Hermetical philosophy which became one of the sources for the 17th and 18th century's political and scientific revolutions, this orderly philosophy of the cosmic body and cosmic eros was the result of Ficino's misreading across the corpus hermeticum.

Ficino's manuscript consisted of fourteen tractates. Who put these little booklets together into a single collection, and when this might

have been done are questions to which neither Ficino nor we now have answers. There were other manuscript traditions, however, than Ficino's, which contained four more tractates appended at the end. One of these additional tractates which Ficino did not have at his disposal, could have warned him of the dangers of reading and translations. This little book is written as a letter from Asclepius to King Ammon and says in part: "For my teacher Hermes used to say...that those who read my writings with the right mind will think them to be quite simply and clearly written, but those who hold the opposite principles to start with will say that the style is obscure, and conceals the meaning. And it will be thought still more obscure in time to come, when the Greeks think fit to translate these writings from our tongue into theirs. Translations will greatly distort the sense of the writings, and cause much obscurity. Expressed in our native tongue, the teaching conveys its meaning clearly, by the very quality of its sound, and when the Egyptian words are spoken, the force of the things signified works in them... [But] the speech of the Greeks, my King, is devoid of power to convince, and the Greek philosophy is nothing but a noise of talk. But our speech is not mere talk; it is an utterance replete with workings."

In this utterly unstructuralist theory of language the sign is the very working, the ergos, or organ of the signified. And the process of reading is a magical act which makes manifest, not the writing, but the principles held in the mind which reads. It is not, as with Harold Bloom, that every reading is necessarily a misreading, but rather that reading is a magical act of evocation in which the presence of the text as speech, its embodiment in sound, summons forth the spirit, the foreheld thought of the reader who is thus a magus transforming thought to action through the body of a text.

Then what did the fourteen tractates which Ficino possessed actually say about man, the body, the cosmos and God? The answer varies with each tractate. Let me read excerpts of a few and determine what sort of influence seems to be at work in that passage.

The first tractate is titled Poimandres. This book relates a vision where once upon a time while the speaker was pondering on first principles he fell into a strange sleep and was addressed by a Being of vast and boundless magnitude, Poimandres. Poimandres shows the speaker the creation of the world out of the four elements. Being merely

elemental, the stuff of the world is vastly inferior to God. But "Mind, the Father of All, he who is Life and Light, gave birth to Man, a Being like to Himself. And He took delight in Man, as being His own offspring; for Man was very goodly to look on, bearing the likeness of his Father. With good reason then did God take delight in Man; for it was God's own form that God took delight in. And God delivered over to Man all things that had been made." Here we certainly seem to be dealing with a writer who is familiar with the Genesis account of man's creation. But this account is made more problematic.

Poimandres continues "And Nature, seeing the beauty of the form of God, smiled with insatiate love of Man, showing the reflection of that most beautiful form in the water, a form like to his own, in earth and water, loved it, and willed to dwell there. And the deed followed close on the design; and he took up his abode in matter devoid of reason. And Nature, when she had got him with whom she was in love, wrapped him in her clasp, and they were mingled in one; for they were in love with one another. [14]"

Man's body is forced upon him by a feminine Nature who has a wild crush on the Masculine idea of man. This sort of relationship bears close resemblance to Gnostic myths current in the second century C.E.

Obviously, the cosmos as related by Poimandres is a nasty, grasping Lady who drags everything she touches, literally, into the mud. So the Cosmos is not such a great thing, eh? Yet the very next tractate contains this exchange between Hermes and Asclepius.

"Herm. And the Kosmos is a body, is it not?"

Ascl. Yes.

Herm. Now this Kosmos is great; there is no body greater than the Kosmos."

This cosmic body is not mere dross, for bound up with it is a spiritual principle: "That which is within the body, and which moves the soulless thing, is not a body; and that is what moves both the body of him who carries a thing and the body of the thing carried; for a soulless thing cannot of itself move anything. Thus it is that you see the soul distressed by the weight of its burden, when it bears two bodies at once."

So the body is not mere mass, but rather it is matter which is moved by soul. This soul is essential and of a piece with all created bodies. This concept will be found later by another reader of the Hermetica, Isaac Newton, and will be the seed of Newton's concept of mass/force as Betti Jo Dobbs has shown us.

So only looking at the first two tractates, a great deal of smoothing over is necessary if the Hermetica are to present a coherent philosophy, or even point of view. But there are twelve other books, each as varied. In one we read: "And God is the Good, and nothing but the Good. Call nothing else good then, nothing but God." And the influence here of Gospel of John seems palpable. Yet elsewhere in the same booklet we have: "And the other name of God is 'Father'. He is called the Father, because he is the maker of begetter of all things; for it is the part of a father to beget. And for this reason the begetting of children is held by those who think aright to be the most weighty concern in human life, and the most pious of deeds. That a man should depart from life and leave no child is a great misfortune, and a great sin; it is a thing accursed in the sight of the Sun. Such a one is punished by the daemons after death; and the punishment is this, that the soul of the man who has no child is condemned to enter a body that is neither that of a man nor that of a woman. Therefore, Asclepius, never be glad on behalf of any man that he is childless, but pity his misfortune, knowing what manner of punishment awaits him. This certainly neither Christian nor Gnostic, both tending towards the encratic and ascetic. An Egyptian hold over? or a late Hellenic theory of homosexuality?

Nor are the Hermetica democratic in their perceptions, the fourth tractate tells us "But man has this advantage over all other living beings, that he possesses speech and mind {ton logon kai ton noun} Now speech, my son, God imparted to all men; but mind he did not impart to all." Everyone yammers, this seems to say, even the Greeks. But only the few have the knowledge of true mind. So we would think these writers had little use for the common man or for the mere body, that material sludge of Nature who is after all only a sort of lusty Sadie Hawkins of souls. Yet the fifth tractate speaks of the body as movingly as the Book of Job. "Think, my son, how man is fashioned in the womb; investigate with care the skill shown in that work, and find out what craftsman it is that makes this fair and godlike image. Who is it that has traced the circle of the eyes, that has pierced the

orifices of the nostrils and the ears, and made the opening of the mouth? Who is it that has stretched the sinews out and tied them fast, and dug out the channels of the veins? Who is it that has made the bones hard, and covered the flesh with skin? Who is it that has separated the fingers, and shaped the broad surface of the soles of the feet? Who is it that has bored the ducts? Who is it that has shaped the heart into a cone, and joined the sinews to it, that has made the liver broad, and the spleen long, and hollowed out the cavities of the lungs, and made the belly capacious? Who is it that has so fashioned the most honorable parts that all may see them, and concealed the parts that are unseemly? See how many crafts have been employed on one material, and how many works of art are enclosed in one compass! All are beautiful, all true to measure, yet all are diverse one from the other." And it doesn't seem far fetched to imagine acquaintance with Job for this writer.

For the most part, though, the philosophy presented in the majority of the tractates is good old fashioned Middle Platonism. "The Good, Asclepius, must be a thing that is devoid of all movement and all becoming, and has a motionless activity that is centered in itself; a thing that lacks nothing, and is not assailed by passions...." these sorts of Platonic quotations could be given for hours.

What then attracted Ficino? Where did he find evidence for the wisdom he assumed lay in these texts? There are some passages worthy of a sage/god/man. This one in particular presents a idealized humanism not to be matched, not in Pico's own *De hominis dignitate*, nor in Hamlet's magnificent "What a piece of work is man.."

The following speech was written, not in the Renaissance, but in that misty antiquity which spawned Renaissance humanism:

"If then you do not make yourself equal to God, you cannot apprehend God; for like is known to like. Leap clear of all that is corporeal, and make yourself grow to a like expanse with that greatness which is beyond all measure; rise above all time, and become eternal; then you will apprehend God. Think that for you too nothing is impossible; deem that you too are immortal, and that you are able to grasp all things in your thought, to know every craft and every science; find your home in the haunts of every living creature; make yourself higher than all heights, and lower than all depths; bring together in

yourself all opposites of quality, heat and cold, dryness and fluidity; think that you are everywhere at once, on land, at sea, in heaven; think that you are not yet begotten, that you are in the womb, that you are young, that you are old, that you have died, that you are in the world beyond the grave; grasp in your thought all this art once, all times and places, all substances and qualities and magnitudes together; then you can apprehend God. ...[20b] For it is the height of evil not to know God; but to be capable of knowing God, and to wish and hope to know him, is the road which leads straight to the Good; and it is an easy road to travel. Everywhere God will come to meet you, everywhere he will appear to you, at places and times at which you look not for it, in your waking hours and in your sleep, when you are journeying by water and by land, in the night-time and in the day-time, when you are speaking and when you are silent; for there is nothing which is not God...Nothing is invisible, not even an incorporeal thing; mind is seen in its thinking, and God in his working." [22]

I apologize for so extensively quoting the text I'm supposed to be talking about. I offer only two defenses. First, as long drawn as the preceding quotations were, the Hermetica themselves are much longer and far more complex in their apparent borrowings and syncretism than even this florilegium could make evident. And secondly, when I get started talking about gnosticism and Hermeticism I tend to forget that the Corpus Hermeticum and the Nag Hammadi texts really aren't as widely read as Shakespeare, or even Tennyson.

So now that we at least we have a basic idea of what these texts contain, let's examine Ficino's concept of the magical body. Besides his Commentary to the Symposium, Ficino included much of his magical theory in the Three Book on Life, and it is especially in the third of these that we see him explaining the idea of a cosmic body where signals are sent, something like our own nervous impulses, through astral influence. Each of our bodies, just as the bodies of gems and plants and animals, replicates, mirror in some way that cosmic body, so the influence of the stars influences us. Also, since Christ is the image of man and the person of God, we are in our bodies reflections of godhood itself.

But that concept itself, the body, has not been exhausted even after this two day conference. Our own contemporary notion of what a

body is is still for the most part inscribed within a structuralist paradigm, a sort of structuralism which Foucaultian, Derridean or Irigaric theories might consider dated, if not in fact outdated (wherein "my body" is defined as the sum total of all that is not "my body", or my body ends where some other body begins). Or else we locate our bodies through a pure and privative capitalist critique (in this case "my body" is all that I own, my body is property and that property is mine). That these are not merely academic questions, of where bodies end or where proprietary rights begin, is obvious from the current deadly abortion question.

But for the Hermetic revolution to make sense to us here, now; for the notion of world as body, we must locate the boundaries between world and body in a wholly unmodern fashion. In the modern epoch, say since Descartes, between self and world there is a originary division inscribed, the primal slash is envisioned as being situated between my "self" and my "world". Yet other times had other bodies, and that slash was placed differently so that, in fact, the world was a body, and the body was a world.

It might help, at this point, to examine the origins of these words I am tossing about as "body" and "world". For it is the Greek "soma" which reflects the equally Greek "kosmos". And we find that the move towards translation, the move, first, from Greek to Latin so that "kosmos" becomes "mundus"; and then this present translation of "mundus" to world blurs essential origins. As the Corpus Hermeticum warned us, translation has brought confusion and apparent senselessness. Let us then examine these words in a proper, modern, scholarly way. Let us examine their etymologies.

The Greek soma meant at first, or as early as Homer, "mere" body, the physical stuff, as opposed to demas, the living body. Later "soma" designated both the living and the dead body, with the distinction that the living "soma" was imbued with "psyche" or the animating vital spirit. And this word "soma" can be traced back to an earlier Proto-Indo European root which developed related words in Greek meaning "swelling", "thumb", "tumor" and "tumulus". This is an unexpectedly troublesome etymology. How is the body like the thumb or the burial tumulus? The image this etymology suggests is of a thumby, tumorous, tumulous-bound swelling about the soul. The body is considered a swelling. We might examine this derivation of "body" as

swelling from a male point of view, as a metonymy for that urgent singular swollen member around which the body pivots and manifests as mere supplement to thrust. Or, on the other hand, from the feminine perspective the body can be seen as the swelling within the womb, the tumescence beneath the mystery of her pregnant belly, the body as a vital tumor in the hidden uterus.

The bodily metaphor makes assumptions of a certain anal retentive neediness for surroundings. The swelling which is the body finds its end in the swelling that is the grave. The grave is seen as a marker, a sign of the body buried beneath it. The tomb is literally in Greek a "seme", a sign; so that even semantics finds its origin in the somatic. And I would return to my first toilet joke and remind us that the Latin mundus in a phrase such as mundus mulieribus meant the toilet of the women, their decorations, their ornamentation, much as we could imagine some supermarket magazine called Ladies' World, replete with ads and articles about perfumes, shampoos and feminine hygiene products. Originally the Latin mundus had the primary meaning of cleansing methods or primping, so that Cicero tells us if he had guest coming over he would make sure his furniture was munda. This word for tidiness or a women's toilet became "world" only through a borrowing of the Greek word "kosmos", order, which could mean "putting oneself in order", "arranging one's face" powdering one's nose "making one's toilet" along with more general, ideal, and Greek notions of order in the "big picture" kosmos. Because the Latin word fit one of the meanings of the Greek word it took on all of the other meanings too, in a sort of etymological act of imperialism which we call a calque.

The idea of kosmos, then, as order or ornament is at least as old as the Pythagoreans. For them kosmos generated out of number hence possesses harmony and beauty, and is the opposite of chaos. Perhaps ultimately the word "kosmos" must be derived from the Proto-Indo European *kens "to proclaim", so that the idea of order is found etymologically to be not a given, but a product of discourse. So that voice or breath, the "anima" or "psyche" as the very stuff of discourse constitutes the "kosmos", while the body, the "soma", is the swelling stuff that surrounds the voice, and acts as both sign and tomb of that indwelling breath.

The argument from etymology which is transparent to us as modern scholars (so that in fact our scholarship can be defined as the set of practices which we use whose use is transparent to us) is a move towards the originary which is also of necessity imaginary. (all moves towards the originary must be imaginary: the Eden of Christian historiography locates a first spot by inventing it, the primal protoplast of evolutionary theory cannot be found but it is that datum supplied by the theory which founds the theory itself, the Big Bang of cosmology is not derived from data, the Oedipal complex of Freudian ego-formation).

The origin we find through our scholarship is a product of that scholarship. The transparency of this imaginary origin is surety of our scholarship; that is, we all understand the methods of scholarship, we can look through them transparently as through a window onto the world, and these methods are the givens, what is understood by the practicing community of scholars as the condition of their scholarship, so that we do not ask "meaningless questions" or "stupid questions" -- that is, those questions which reveal an ignorance of method, and also those which reveal a perception of the non-transparency of that method. The perceptive question of the New Historicist is the stupid question of the New Critic.

The etymological move towards PIE roots is one such gesture towards the originary and the imaginary. These roots, these origins, are "found" by looking through the words, "past" and "behind" them to an origin which our etymologies perceive by supplying.

Ficino's move with the Hermetical texts is identical, or at least congruent. He is also making a move toward the originary which is imaginary. Ficino sees through the Hermetical text to a originary point in some authoring, and authorizing, Hermes Trismegistos who precedes the texts, from which the text derives, rather than seeing Hermes himself derived from the texts, an author who arises after the fact of his work.

Ficino's renaissance scholarly attitude is distinct from our modern scholarly attitude in that he sees the Hermetica as originary rather than derived, as authored rather than anthologized, and as teaching and revealing a new order rather than repeating a received world of thought. Since the texts reveal relationships with or knowledge of

Babylonian astrology, Egyptian magic, Platonic cosmology, Christian theology, Pythagorean number theory, Gnosticism, and Cabalism this originary move fixes the diversity of opinion in a first source, a *prisca theologica* in which all of its diversity is resolved into a primary unity, that is, truth, a truth which can be recaptured for Fifteenth century Europe and late Medieval Christianity, making room for Plato, and Humanism (along with a rediscovered and re-rationalized occultism) in the Ark of Mother Church.

The Hermetica provided the possibility that Christianity might be freshened (as we say of cows) by pagan wisdom which does not contradict either Moses (hence the Church) or Pythagoras (hence Plato and the Western philosophical tradition), since both sprang from the originary fount of Hermes Trismegistos.

This mushy, messy mystical world/body view is the body of my speech. If it were a science fiction story this would be the tale of the irresistible force of ideas working upon all too movable bodies or "When Worlds Collude", of how mundus met kosmos after years of separation. How the world as decorative get up of its maker collided with world as grand, discursive ordering, and of how there was hell to pay for it, taken out in bodies, quite corporeally tied to stakes and burned.

Ficino's reading elides authorship, so that in fact the entire collection of disparate tractates was called by the name of the first libellus, Poimandres. It would be as though the whole New Testament were to be called the Book of Matthew, so that the Acts of the Apostles were called the fifth chapter of the book of Matthew. Just as he elides difference in the text, Ficino eludes diversity in his audience. Florence in the fifteenth century had become much more elite, more controlled by the Medici. Similarly, Ficino holds his symposia -- an essentially elitist movement of knowledge with those few scholars who have learned Greek, some who learned Hebrew, and members of the powerful political families of Florence.

These few men would act as the leaven to raise the loafing level of discourse in Europe. As Van Pelt has described for us, the image of the sacred Temple, itself, which before this time was conceived to have an entrance but no exit, now develops an exit, apparently thorough the influence of these Hermetical texts. The adept, after he

attains wisdom does not remain in the Temple, or ascend to the heavens, he returns to help mankind. The renaissance Hermeticists become involved in the Reformation.

The end is near, the time is apocalyptic, but as it keeps not coming the urge to perfect the world for Christ's return becomes a reform movement, as in Rosicrucianism, a renovatio through the 17th century on into the end of the 18th century. Those who are gaining power through the occult, those who are discovering their magical bodies are turning around to help the world.

The philosophical texts which were ascribed to the ancient Egyptian demigod/sage Hermes Trismegistus provided Europe with a new and invigorating philosophical tradition when these texts were first translated by Ficino in 1471. But the body of the Hermetical texts was problematized from that very first translation through Ficino's ascription of all 14 tractates to a single author, "Poimandres".

Throughout the Renaissance these writings were "marked" in the Derridean sense to form a spurious unity which elided the differences between the Neo-Platonic, Gnostic, Greek magico-philosophical, and Christian elements. Each of these strands of tradition has its unique view of the body, both as the human corpus and (through metalepsis) as the cosmic body. The Renaissance developed traditions of the "mesocosmos" mediating between these two bodies in the form of churches, villas and public buildings which were seen in the sixteenth century "Hermetic" architectural tradition as talismanic temples, replicating in brick and mortar the very form of the body of the cosmos.

And truth can be recaptured for early modern Europe, making room for Plato, and Humanism. And Christianity might be freshened (as we say of cows) by a pagan wisdom which does not contradict the Church. Yet within this very celebration of the humanist conception of cosmic unity and human potential there is inscribed the ineradicable mark of the anti-cosmic, the gnostic, which finds its provenance within the very body of these texts of liberation. The Church, of course, did not put up with this.

Ficino's translation is a tale of how mundus met kosmos after centuries of separation. It was a translation which would incite new insights in thousands, including Newton, Copernicus, and Gallileo. In

this translation the world as object of its creator collided with world as grand, discursive ordering, and there was hell to pay for it, taken out in bodies, quite corporeally tied to stakes and burned.

As early modern scientists and philosophers would find out, a corporate Church could still hold bodies, both human and heavenly, in thrall; they could crisp Giordano Bruno at the stake and force Gallileo to let the moons of Jupiter return, Aquinistic, back to their orthodox non-existence.

The humanistic tradition which did eventually win out against such canonical destruction of bodies, grounded itself, in part, on these Hermetical texts and was similarly "marked" with the contradictions implicit among the various tractates, which manifested in a spurious, invented, and essential unity of the "body". Within the very celebration of the humanist conception of cosmic unity and human potential there is inscribed, then, the ineradicable mark of the anti-cosmic, the gnostic, which finds its provenance within the very body of these texts of liberation.

HERMETICA - KEY TO UNIVERSAL KNOWLEDGE

By Joost R. Ritman ©

Translation of Joost R. Ritman's response to the [laudatio](#) delivered by prof. dr. Maria A. Schenkeveld-van der Dussen, chairwoman of the Arts Department of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, on being awarded the Academy's Silver Medal on 13 May 2002.

Honourable chairman, governors, and members of the Academy,
ladies and gentlemen,

'He who knows himself, knows the All' says the legendary Hermes Trismegistus. 'Nosce te ipsum - know thyself' is also the motto over one of the entrance gates of a Greek temple at Delphi.

As the founder of the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica, the international centre of research on the sources of the Hermetica, 'The Ritman Institute' and the publishing house 'In de Pelikaan', I can assure you that for me the motto 'He who knows himself, knows the All' has been the impulse of my life work, for which today I gratefully receive the Silver Medal which you have so kindly awarded me on behalf of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences.

We live in times of great social change and of deep social problems, times in which millions of people flee impending dangers of war, times in which shortages of food and water supplies are a major threat to our world and our natural resources are close to being exhausted. Standing on the brink of a threatening world conflict which draws a sharp divide between millions of people living in sickness and poverty and a relatively small group living in prosperity, the question is justified whether now is not the time to take renewed control and counter a pending global catastrophe.

According to Michele Ciliberto in his recently published study on Giordano Bruno, the rediscovery of the Hermetica beyond any doubt was one of the most important contributions to historical studies in Humanism and the Renaissance in the last fifty years.

The discovery in 1945 of the gnostic Library of Nag Hammadi, consisting of some 42 gnostic, Hermetic and early Christian texts, justifies a re-evaluation of the first four centuries CE. The find of the by now famous Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran in the same period has sharpened our insight into the pre-Christian Jewish communities from which we are told came Jesus the Nazarene. Add to these discoveries the earlier one in the Egyptian Fayum in 1930 of at least four Coptic texts attributed to Mani, the founder of the worldwide movement of Manichaeism, who called himself the apostle of Jesus, and we may conclude that the influence of gnosis - a third component next to religion and philosophy - on Western cultural history has been truly great. This conclusion, formulated by the Nestor of Gnosis, Professor Gilles Quispel, has determined the infrastructure and the path of my life.

It is not without reason when of the library of Alexandria was officially re-opened on 23 April, an initiative led by Mrs. S. Muhbarak, wife of Egyptian president Muhbarak, in collaboration with an international group of scholars and supported by the World Bank, the central theme was Thoth, the Egyptian deity who, it is said, as the precursor of Hermes Trismegistus expounded and put down in writing the initiation mysteries of Osiris, Isis and Horus.

When in 1985 the four main collecting areas of my library had been

defined and the library was opened to the public, the axiom 'Ad Fontes - Back to the Sources' led me - in imitation of the Greek philosopher Plato and inspired by the foundation of the Florentine Academy by Marsilio Ficino in 1462 - to found an academy that would focus entirely on conducting research into the hidden relation God - Cosmos - Man; or in the words of the ancient Rosicrucians 'Why mortal man is also called a microcosm'.

In 1985 Professor Quispel crossed my path and he introduced me to a circle of European scholars who have since given new impetus and direction to research in Hermetica, Gnosis and early Christendom.

The translations of the Hermetic *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Asclepius* were carried out with great enthusiasm by Gilles Quispel and Roel van den Broek and were foundation texts on the list of publications of the publishing house 'In de Pelikaan', which by now contains some thirty titles, including conferences proceedings and exhibition catalogues. A new addition to the series will be a translation by Professor Roel van den Broek, now in progress, of the fragments of Stobaeus and the Hermetic Definitions of Hermes Trismegistus. The translation of the world-famous Mani Codex by Professor Hans van Oort and Gilles Quispel is also nearing completion.

The placing of the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica on the list coming under the Cultural Heritage Act on 25 November 1994 by then State Secretary, Mr. Aad Nuis, meant that part of our cultural heritage was rescued from dispersal. This decision also guaranteed the flourishing of the Europe-orientated Ritman Institute under the guidance of two eminent scholars, Dr. Carlos Gilly, head of the Institute, and prof. dr. F.A. Janssen, professor of Book History at the University of Amsterdam. the Ritman Institute is associated with a group of prominent researchers.

The Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica and its staff aim, first, to collect important founding texts relating to Hermetica, mysticism, alchemy, Rosicrucians and comparative religion, secondly, to make available these texts through historical research and the organization of international conferences, exhibitions, symposiums and other activities, and, thirdly, to publish the results of this research through

its own publishing house 'In de Pelikaan'. These three initiatives have been developed in the last forty years independently of each other, and can be seen as models of three central points of departure:

Ideality - Vitality - Reality

The power of the imagination, the pursuit of an ideal, the quest after the origin of life, to transform the dynamics freed by these forces and activities into an accessible scientific structure, the fulfilling (or making real) of an ideal has resulted, forty years after the founding of the library in 1957, in frequent exchanges with some 400 representatives of research institutes, spiritual movements and last but not least university libraries. Their combined efforts have led to a return of the Hermetica to the centre of scholarship, guaranteeing its continued significance.

Today we witness a renewal within the sciences and humanities. New disciplines for young scholars are being formed, e.g. through the foundation of university chairs such as that of the History of Hermetic Philosophy and related Currents at the University of Amsterdam and the chair for Christendom and Gnosis at the University of Nijmegen. Articles and books appear explaining the origin and the true meaning of the main Hermetic and gnostic texts. Studies that one by one return true meaning to the early origins of European cultural history.

Church power, scholarly power, political power, as appears from the chronicles written in blood, were never without dishonourable motives. One need only take a brief look at the long register of those convicted because they fought for freedom of religion, freedom of expression, freedom of action. It is for this reason especially that I regard the award of the Silver Academy Medal by you as the governing body of the Royal Netherlands Society of Arts and Sciences as evidence of your defence of democratic liberties, for which the leaders of this country and its foremost representatives in this part of Europe have fought successfully for four hundred years.

In addition to this prize, the month of May presents to the Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica the great enterprise of the organization of an exhibition in the Marciana Library on the San Marco square which is to be opened in Venice and which is entitled *Magic, alchemy and*

science 15th - 18th centuries. *The influence of Hermes Trismegistus.*

Next to BPH librarian Carlos Gilly some eight, mostly Italian, scholars have contributed to the accompanying 600-page catalogue in two volumes.

Central in the exhibition is the figure of Cardinal Bessarion, a correspondent of Marsilio Ficino, admired by the Florentine Academy and, as you all know, a fervent champion of Plato and a major benefactor of the Marciana Library, who donated some 1,000 manuscripts, among them the texts of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Asclepius* with his own annotations.

Let me conclude this word of thanks with words of Hermes Trismegistus from the *Tabula Smaragdina*:

It is true!

It is certain!

It is the whole truth!

That which is below is equal to that which is above
and that which is above is equal to that which is below,
in order that the wonders of the One shall be accomplished.

As all things are accomplished out of the One,
through one mediatorship,
so they are all born out of the One by transmission.

This quotation refers to the continuity of every thinkable form of revelation, and can be summarized in the three-part:

Macrocosm - Cosmos - Microcosm

Creator - Creation - Man

and thus: Being human - the little world - Microcosm

Being in this world - inspired life - Cosmos

The fathoming of the Creator in the universe - Macrocosm

It goes without saying that the study of the arcane (hidden) sciences at

the classical schools of philosophy entailed a way of initiation followed by Plato, Pythagoras, Orpheus and many others and that these schools stipulated the condition of being fully human with respect to personality, soul and spirit. Thus we can also understand the Hermetic axiom that poses the development of a threefold intelligence, three steps of conscious observation joined to,

first, rational or sensory intelligence
secondly, emotional, inspired intelligence
through which, thirdly, spiritual intelligence will be developed

Hermetism, or Hermetic wisdom is universal knowledge based on rational, inspired and spiritual consciousness. Hermetism leads to direct observation and to a new ability where Rationality - Intuition - Spirituality enter into

- 1 the world of sensory perception, sensory intelligence
- 2 the world of the inner development of life on the basis of the soul, emotional intelligence
- 3 the world of spiritual intelligence placed in the covenant of the Creator - his Creation - and Man, spiritual intelligence

On this threefold basis Hermetica offers a new and at the same time age-old foundation for academic research in which modern man, imprisoned in the chaos that results from mainly sensory perception, is being offered a definition of life within which the organic arch-elements he lives in - fire, water, air, earth - can be investigated and understood in their pure meaning and form. It ought to be the recovery of human dignity that can give back to modern society new dimensions and new responsibilities with regard to life by:

- regarding and experiencing life in its original meaning in the power of Ideality
- freeing new energy with perseverance and driven by a holy fire, in the power of Vitality
- transforming the Word in living action, and serving man and his world, in the power of Reality.

Ladies and gentlemen, today's special award forever places me on the solid ground of reality. It has once more confirmed me in my view

that Hermetica can be applied as the key to universal knowledge, as the Source leading to the obtaining of Gnosis: knowledge of the One Self and the All-self, and in this way to get to know God the Creator from his works. It is my fervent wish that many researchers will soon strike out upon this path.

HERMETICISM AND THE GOLDEN FLEECE

By Joseph Caezza ©

Every century and upon every continent a handful of exceptional men are born who possess the innate ability to read the signatures of nature directly, to see immediately into the mystery of continuous creation and to know pristine reality revealed by the power of imaginal identification. Such vision differs radically from twentieth century pedestrian academic mentality. These sages have bequeathed us a legacy of artifacts fine as the thread of Ariadne in the form of the good texts of Hermetic Alchemy. These tomes speak from the vein of the forge and the crucible, a mother load in the vast mine of collective imagination about mankind's origin and ultimate destiny. They articulate with artful genius the same message of the hero's journey embodied in the great world myths. A generation ahead of mythic Cadmus, a generation behind Homer's Ulysses, Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece constitutes a fabulous example of the archetypal process of Nature referred to in the Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus as "the operation of the Sun".

The greatest alchemical adepts, Artephius, Nicholas Flamel, Salomon Trismosen, Michael Maier, Philalethes, Dom Pernety and Fulcanelli among many others have spoken at once with pornographic explicitness and again with exasperating obliqueness about the bench-top laboratory manipulations revealed in the circumstances of Jason's voyage. Joscelyn Godwin in his brilliant forward to Antoine Faivre's contemporary survey, *The Golden Fleece and Alchemy* remarks that C. G. Jung anchors Jason's argo along with the Hermetic great work solely to the psychic level of personality integration while ignoring how, why, what and with what, adepts actually do in their laboratories. Faivre too, pays gross negligence to this central aspect of the royal art which concerns itself with a combination of prayer, study and working hands-on directly with matter. "ORA, LEGE, LEGE, LEGE, RELEGE, LABORA ET INVENIES", declares the motto of the *Mutus Liber* of 1677, "Pray, Read, Read, Read, Read Again and You Shall Find".

Western alchemy represents a highly specialized version of the age old quest for mystical communion with the essential archetypal process of Nature. Adepts seek to recapitulate this process with symbolically affective laboratory gestures, chemical manipulations and of course, with the indispensable cooperation of providence. But what do they actually do in their laboratories?

Betty Dobbs in her monumental study, *The Foundations of Newton's Alchemy or The Hunting of the Green Lyon*, addresses this central issue of laboratory procedures in their 17th century European context better than any modern professional scholar. She explains that adepts worked their methodologies with simple manipulations and a few key materials. She provides an excellent translation of Sir Isaac Newton's *Clavis*, a recipe that entails the chief substances symbolized in the Jason myth.

According to the myth, Chrysomellos, the winged ram sent by beneficent Olympian deities rescues a child from the homicidal plot of his stepmother, carrying him safely to the eastern shores of the Black sea. Here the miraculous ram becomes a sacrifice, its fleece hung upon an oak tree in a grove sacred to Ares and guarded by a dragon. The scenario refers metaphorically to the descent of the Divine from above the highest sepheroth, Kether, down the Kabbalistic tree of life to the lowest sepheroth, Malkuth, Earth in the presence of the element Antimony, who's vital spirit, philosophic mercury, remains still in tact. Matter has become the prison of spirit. Insightful wisdom and artful alchemical manipulation may release it.

Renaissance alchemists represented antimony by the symbolic rams horns that also identify the zodiac constellation Ares. Antimony, a metalloid or semi-metal was perceived as below lead in an infant or childhood state in the natural process of metallic evolution fully mature in the element gold. It was also symbolized as a cross above a circle which additionally identified Earth, the divinely perfect circle of gold buried under the cross of nature upon which man is crucified.

Gold, more than a metaphor, blatantly and beautifully bears the solar signature. Its perfect state defies oxidation or attack by any single acid giving way only to aqua regia, a combination of nitric and hydrochloric acid. Luster and permanence testify to its Divinity within the confines of the metallic realm.

Ares, known to the Romans as Mars, also indicates the element Iron, rich in philosophical sulfur, the source principle of the luminous animating functional fire of Nature. It comprises the compliment of philosophic mercury. Iron finds use in purifying stibnite, the chief ore of antimony in the classic reduction process: $Sb_2S_3 + 2 Fe = 2Sb + Fe_2S_3$.

Newton spent years of study and labor working out the details of this reaction and its product at the root of animated philosophic mercury. Small iron nails are heated red hot in a crucible. Powdered antimony ore is added along with saltpeter and tartar to serve as fluxing agents. After several fulminating episodes sponsored by repeated additions of saltpeter the molten material is poured into a conical mold. Pure antimony sinks to the bottom topped off by a layer of scoria which easily separates after cooling. Signs of correct crystal purity include a star pattern on the surface of the antimony, hence the name star martial regulus.

In a major episode exactly reminiscent of Cadmus, Jason must sow serpents teeth into a field. From these seeds spring an army of ghost warriors who fight each other to death. The seed of gold, the serpent teeth are extracted from the layer of scoria above the purified antimony, the mercurial serpent, using sal ammoniac, ammonium chloride in the procedure of sublimation. This seed after purification is then sewn into meticulously prepared philosophical mercury. This metallic mixture then sealed hermetically in a flask undergoes a long gradually heated fermentation. Color changes clearly mark the major stages of this incubation along with the emergence and dissolution from the molten mass of many strange forms described metaphorically in the Jason myth as a battle of ghost warriors. Newton and other adept authors describe these forms as fast growing metallic trees. An anonymous contemporary operator recently perceived these forms as rapidly sprouting heads of cauliflower that soon dissolved back into the putrefying chaos contained in his hermetic flask.

The ultimate product of this labor mythically known as the golden fleece refers to the philosopher's stone. This red powder projected into molten base metal effects an apparently miraculous transmutation into gold. Recent discoveries by Stan Tenen and others, (*Gnosis* No. 3 and 28) of the geometric revelation hidden in the Torah's Hebrew letter code that model mathematically the fractal process of a seeds

germination into fruit containing self propagating seed within itself, illuminates this alchemical gesture of projection. During this gesture rearrangement of base metal subatomic particles catalyzed by the propagated potency of Divine Presence unfolding flower-like from the philosopher's stone, creates a well known wonder of alchemy.

This wonder of alchemy testifies with unquestionable proof to the level of personality integration achieved by the operator. Unlike the vague proofs of successful psychotherapy the adept has a tangible token artifact. Alchemy of the forge and crucible variety thus embodies the profound idea of sacred science. Our late twentieth century civilization moves ever closer to the rediscovery of this tradition. Yet the only way to exhaustively understand the symbolic implications of the Jason myth in its alchemical context is to become an alchemist and to execute the great work.

But does salvation require a laboratory? The archetypes projected into external substance may be manipulated at a strictly internal level. The symbols of western alchemy occur in familiar forms in Tantric Yoga. The European "Royal Art" of alchemy pursues the same goal as the Royal Raja Yoga of India. In the most remote past European and Hindu cultures sprang from a single root whose core experience of Gnosis presented itself in myths and related esoteric disciplines of spiritual reintegration.

J. Nigro Sansonese, a contemporary yogin as well as professor of math and physics delivers a brilliantly argued thesis in his recent *The Body of Myth*. Expanding the tradition of C.G. Jung and Joseph Campbell he explicates the anatomic, physiologic and neurologic basis of the great world myths. Such myths trek out the physical geography of man's body as the spiritual current moves up the spinal ladder of ascending attention to culminate in the ecstatic rapture of gnosis.

According to Sansonese myths reveal in esoteric language the stages of bodily transformation leading to contemplative trance. He includes an entire chapter on Jason and the Argonauts. Jason's ship, the argo refers to the cranium. The fifty argonauts represent the five senses withdrawn from fragmented external experience yet focused on the inward journey into trance. Two of these argonauts, the Dioscuri,

Castor and Pollux are esoteric descriptions of alternate nostril breathing.

The rowing contest between Jason and Hercules constitutes a further example of alternate nostril breathing just previous to the experience of trance symbolized as the heros collapse from exhaustion into unconsciousness. The author speaks from his own experience of meditative absorption when he describes minutely perceptible changes in the sutures and sinuses of the skull during breathing which correlate to elements of the stages in the argonauts' journey.

Finally Sansonese dissects the name "Jason" to reveal its two syllable nature as an onomatopoeic rendering for the physical gesture of respiration. Convincing evidence appears in the ancestral lineage of Jason. His great-grandfather was Aeolus, god of the wind. Also relevant are yogic breathing exercises that assign onomatopoeic syllables to inspiration and expiration such as HAM-SA, SO-HAM or SI-VA. These arguments might seem eccentric and vague. Perhaps only another yogin could appreciate their depth and profoundness.

Contemporary scholars have barely touched the phenomenological relationship between yoga and alchemy. Certainly they pursue identical goals. Mircea Eliade in his now classic encyclopedic survey, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom*, includes a brief chapter on yoga and alchemy. He notes that there are certain moments when the "osmosis" between these two disciplines is perfect.

The Hermetic scholar, Manly Palmer Hall speculates on the etymology of the symbolic rose of the Rosicrucians derived from Ras, wisdom or Ros, dew which recall Rasayana, the Ayurvedic science of longevity involving alchemically produced herbal and metallic medicines but more specifically "rasum", the nectar of immortality produced in the brain. Normally this secretion is destroyed by normal body function but yogic manipulations such as the headstand and kerchari mudra preserve and cultivate this substance.

During kerchari mudra, the tongue, artificially lengthened over years of ardent discipline inserts back and up into the nasal passage to block the normal flow of rasum. Such a practice is thought to function like the golden fleece to preserve health and even restore lost youth.

The greatest Hindu sages write about the spiritual accomplishment of Gnosis using the metaphor of the philosopher's stone. Jnaneshwar (1275-1296) certainly one of the foremost saints of the past millennium wrote an exquisite commentary on the Bhagavad Gita, Hinduism's central scripture. He composed this work at the age of fourteen, without formal education by direct knowledge resulting from Divine grace. He describes with unparalleled depth the symptoms of bodily transformation effected by the yogic process of spiritual awakening. His commentary contains no less than 17 references to the philosopher's stone that explicitly transmutes base metal into gold. Often these references describe the way divine grace transforms its recipient.

The seventh century South Indian sage, Thirumoolar in his classic, *Thirumandiram*, an esoteric masterpiece of 3000 verses, explains man's path to immortal divinity. In verse 2709 he declares that the name of God, Siva, is an alchemical vehicle that turns the body into immortal gold. His poetry resonates with the deathless nature of spiritual attainment.

Another great South Indian saint, Ramalinga Swamikal (1823-1874) dissolved his perfected body into blinding white light just as another earlier sage, Manickavasagar had done in the seventh century. As a child Ramalingar delivered brilliant scriptural discourses and commentaries without any formal education. He too claimed direct knowledge bestowed by divine grace. In his classic testimony, *The Divine Song of Grace*, Ramalinga describes the transmutation of his dense physical body into a body of light:

"Oh God! The Eternal Love, just to bestow upon me the golden body,
You,
Universal Love, have merged with my heart, allowing yourself to be
infused in me.
Oh Supreme Love, You with the Light of Grace have alchemised my
body".

Canto 6, Chapter 1, Verse 480

This verse resounds with the import of the gesture of alchemical projection where a minute quantity of the philosopher's stone transmutes molten base metal into gold. Ramalinga's body cast no shadow and attempts to photograph him revealed only his clothing.

The esoteric level of such accomplishment defies any attempt at vain academic analysis.

So too, a deeper understanding of the quest of Jason and the Argonauts defies the limit of ivory tower scholarship. The golden fleece beckons to every man as a road map of the soul's origin and ultimate destiny. Exhaustive study of the map will always be an optional first step. Genuine accomplishment emerges only when we take up the quest and join Jason on his hero's journey.

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THE HERMETIC PATH

by Author Unknown

When the call of spiritual evolution is strong enough, ordinary life among the masses becomes less than enough. One begins to see the activities and motives of himself and others as meaningless trappings, caught in the ebb and flow of nature. We wonder how we have gotten so caught up in pursuing things that we don't really want. It may begin to dawn that there is a way out of this twilight existence, and subsequently there is a quiet call to action. The way that one charts, if he is brave enough to heed the silent voice, will always be of his own choice. There are many systems that aid in spiritual self discovery, and some pitfalls as well. This paper concerns the Hermetic path, the general approach of the Western Esoteric Tradition.

The discipline of the path of Hermes is aided by activity that is very formal and heavily aided by structure. There are definite rules set down, presumably by those who have made it through the discipline, and they are followed meticulously. It therefore involves particularly intellectual study and formal ritual. Picture as an example here the magician, such as Faust, in his study, conducting scientific experiments. The idea is that the appearance and substance of this world are not to be ignored but can be so structured and utilized as to steer one toward inner experience of the Divine. The intellect is used scientifically to mold and reshape unenlightened and misguided perceptions.

Naturally this requires a teacher who has already made some success for himself on the path. Otherwise the aspirant would at first be flying blind, having only vague and misguided notions about what to do. He would likely just stumble blindly in the dark, following advice from both credible and bogus sources, not making much progress.

Unlike the Mystic, the Hermetic practitioner does not abstain from participating in the outside world of physical laws and other illusions. He instead uses them to steer a course toward inner realization. On the Hermetic path, a person's natural ability to organize the material world with symbols is used as a tool to bring about enlightenment.

That which is frequently regarded as evil and illusion by mystics, the world we create with our five senses, is consciously shaped and utilized with symbolic correspondences to create a vehicle of consciousness. Habits formed and modes of perception established are actually experienced as a structure that extends beyond the physical realm. This "chariot," so to speak, carries the aspiring ceremonial magician to his goal.

Symbolism

The ability to symbolize is the key factor for the path of Hermes. As the Golden Dawn's Neophyte ritual says, "By names and images are all powers awakened and re-awakened." Symbols properly utilized point beyond themselves into a realm where symbolism and thought are inapplicable. From this realm comes the magician's power, and likewise the power that perpetuates the physical realm. The magician uses symbolism to tap into this realm and then checks his symbols at the door. Once contact is made, his tools can be dispensed with if desired.

The big question is: What would we see if the ability to symbolize were not operative? If we didn't attach significance to occurrences in our environment via labels, meaning, conditioned responses, and associations, how would they appear to us? If we discard our opinions, notions, and associations regarding things seen, what then do we see? The same thing? A seamless whole? Nothing? This can be a very difficult question to answer, and yet it is essential that anyone on a spiritual

path be able to eventually do just that, to see and experience without symbolizing, conceptualizing, and compartmentalizing their world.

When this is possible, at least in some shaky fashion, then true knowledge of how the world is created begins to emerge. The magician discovers that perception is the foundation of his reality. All forms are mental forms, whether they be physical, imagined, or seemingly independent spiritual entities.

That which we experience when we turn off our automatic ability to symbolize is really not conceivable in verbal consciousness. That's why mystics end up rambling, why Quantum physicists end up spouting poetry, and why Hermeticists come up with bizarre occult systems which are of little use to anyone but themselves. But still, this being a Hermetic paper, we will here use the word "Chaos" for the time being in order to label what cannot be labeled (As the Hermeticist does, we will use verbal "training wheels" until we do not need them anymore).

When one is able to set aside the natural human ability to symbolize, one experiences reality face to face, and its appearance is chaos. It is devoid of categories, labels, and verbal boxes. It has no barrier and no structure--at least not in any way that we are able to comprehend--and therefore, for our purposes here, we call it Chaos.

Why would the Hermeticist, so well known for his use of labels, be fond of setting them aside? One answer is that when one actually does this, he gains the realization that his symbolizing ability is extremely powerful. It only is required that he use it consciously. For most people this ability is unrecognized and seemingly independent of the personality. It creates a threatening reality for them. Like the fundamentalist who sees sexual images in Disney cartoons, they may end up blaming others for things that they themselves are responsible for perceiving. Statements like, "You make me feel. . .," are typical of people who do not claim their own perception of others as an ability that is under their own control.

The Hermeticist works with this ability consciously and therefore discovers that his own happiness is largely under his influence. Using a reference with the knowledge that it isn't real, makes for great power, because he can move without fear of loss. Since nothing in the mind is real, then nothing that he perceives can be lost. Since there is nothing to lose, he can create anything he needs (since it doesn't exist anyway). One discovers that all around is a sea of chaos and pure potentiality, waiting for him to organize and shape it via symbolism and mental frameworks into a reality that expresses one's innate happiness.

This is a key point. The magician stops believing in the world he creates. He no longer takes so seriously the thoughts that ramble through his mind. The thoughts are the creators of his reality, but they are not the reality itself. One of the most effective ways to be miserable is for him to believe them. One of the most effective

ways to be miserable is to believe the words that come out of his own mouth or out of the mouths of others. So he simply stops.

Verbal consciousness, one of the mediums of symbolism, is very often mistaken for the reality to which it refers. It is only a mirror and therefore a tool. In other words, the map is not the territory. It can take much, much work on a spiritual path to finally turn this indicative axiom into a true realization. Once we realize through and through that the map of reality in our heads is not the reality to which it refers, we are more free to change that map and use it more effectively. We work from the inside out instead of from the outside in. Rather than waiting for our physical world to change our reality map for us, we change our reality map at will. Why wait for permission? Just do it.

This point is so obvious that it is almost ludicrous to mention it, but still, time and time again, we find ourselves miserable because we habitually mistake our personal versions of the universe for the universe itself. Imagine the frustration inherent in such a scheme. But then again we don't have to imagine it--we know what it is like.

So why do we do it? The best answer we can give here is that it is a natural ability to create imaginative frameworks in our minds that represent reality. It is an ability that is almost always up and running because the five senses, its chief assets, are constantly at work. Out of habit we continuously allow our senses to create miniturized versions of reality in our own minds. It is virtually unavoidable to stop this from happening, and there is no reason to loathe it or to utterly stop it.

This automatic symbolizing and perceiving is the chief instrument we use to cause suffering for ourselves, but that doesn't mean that it inherently causes suffering. In reality it is the unconscious misuse of the ability that causes suffering, nothing more. The task of the spiritual aspirant is to see through the phantasm of his own reality-map, to catch himself in the act of creating it, and to consciously take control of the ability to do so. With training, he changes from a man whose map is created by external conditions into a man whose reality map is changed by his own will. When that will is free of conditioning, when the map in his head no longer controlled by physical circumstance, but it is controlled by the inner Will. He is empowered to create his own beliefs, symbols, and maps--and correspondingly to create his own reality!

I have mentioned above that the ability to symbolize is almost always active. So if it is, then what are we doing with it now, right at this moment? Look at people around you. Look at the local government, the news, TV commercials, and coworkers. Look at yourself. Do you like what we are collectively creating? Do the people around you enjoy the world in which they are participating? Another question: If our own faculties are constantly at work in our lives creating an overall unhappy scheme, who is in control of those faculties? Who is running the show? It

is like a runaway phenomena, the reigns of which are dangling. It is a power unharnessed, undirected by the one who is gifted with it. We are left at the whim of undirected forces whirling in the ebb and flow of nature.

Science

With the advent of science, and the scientific method, the world was introduced full-force to the essence of Hermeticism. The scientific method involves formulating explanations of how things happen--mirrors of reality--testing them thoroughly, and then adjusting or discarding them based on the evidence. In other words, it acknowledges that we all have versions of reality up and running in our minds, but it mandates that we test and adjust them to be more accurate and to get them to yield desirable results. Imagine turning this amazing discipline toward the goal of happiness and spiritual attainment. That is the Hermetic path.

It is not surprising that our world today barely at all uses the scientific method for spiritual pursuits. It is usually instead geared toward just the physical life, toward creating utopia exclusively on Earth. This world is full of luxury and conveniences that modern technology have provided. We try to enjoy these fruits of science, but there is always something nagging us from within. The real issues are continuously unaddressed. The resulting uneasiness is the result of trying to escape from problems by avoiding them or suppressing them--by fixing the outsides of things rather than dealing with the behaviors, attitudes, beliefs, and complexes that create them. Just look at Western medicine. It speaks almost completely in terms of the suppression of symptoms, discomfort and suffering. Anti-depressants, anti-histamines, anti-inflammatory, anti-etc..

The downfall of science as it is currently practiced is that it almost never uses its discipline to delve deeply into how ailments emerge. It tends to ignore how we create our reality with our beliefs and corresponding behaviors. What good does it do you to combat physical suffering if, at the same time, you are still creating it? Worse yet, the very things that need science applied to them--beliefs, complexes, and behaviors--are the very things that are in charge of scientific pursuits. Not surprisingly, the world is filled with high tech weapons and drugs that numb us to reality. What we do with modern science pales in significance to what the original inventors of the scientific method intended for it. We put it in the service of desires and needs which do not produce a desirable reality. In other words, the world we are creating today with science is largely created by our own demons. When you do not take ownership of your ability to create your own version of reality, that ability fall into that hands of psychological complexes. Fear and desire are still the strongest motives for research and progress.

As individuals, it is up to each one of us to break this chain. Before we use our Hermetic abilities to create a "comfortable" life for ourselves here on the physical, we must first use it to weed out those things in our own personal programming that

are blindly causing us suffering. If we cannot do this, then the awesome power of science falls into the hands of our blind, infantile subconscious complexes.

The first step then is to find a system of symbols which encompasses and explains our demons and how they arise. That way, they can be dealt with. There are many such schemes of the cosmos. The Golden Dawn, for instance, uses the Kabbalah and the Tree of Life as a map of the interior make-up of man. The Glyph of the Tree charts the recesses of his body, mind, and spirit supposedly all the way to the source of existence. Placing symbols on this diagram he can personally identify how his mind works by how the symbols relate to each other. He discovers painfully how he creates suffering for himself. He applies symbols and various symbolic techniques, such as in ritual, to restructure his interior and exterior make-up. Gradually, with the assistance of a teacher, he undoes the automatic complexes that hold prisoner his creativity.

Hermes/Mercury

A way to better get a handle on our ability to perceptualize is to recognize this faculty with a new label. Let's call it Mercury. We will use both the planet and god, Mercury, to delineate what it is we are talking about. Mercury is a agile god who represents the power of the intellect. Under Mercury comes the mind, mediation, transmission, and translation--mental and nervous processes, speech and writing, dexterity, ambivalence, and the distribution of energies. Mercury is superficial. It is the moving ego mind that is capable of knowing about things externally. It shapes itself to whatever subject or stimulus is presented before it, creating therefrom all kinds of corresponding conclusions and belief systems in the blink of an eye. Likewise, the chameleon quality of Mercury, the planet, makes it take on whatever zodiac sign it is in and enhance it with intelligence. Moreover, if it is close to another planet in a chart it will adopt that planets function and add a sharpness to it. Mercury represents the mutable aspects of man's nature. It is the intelligence that is book-learned. It covers its subjects, but it does not really live them or become one with them. By its very nature of superficiality and ability to cover things, our Mercury-nature is the very thing which lies to us about reality. Because it so readily assumes the shape of our experiences, creating dysfunctional maps of reality based on them, it is the very thing that keeps us isolated and apart from creation. Our experiences prod our Mercurial intelligence and fashion from it beliefs, complexes, fears, and patterns of behavior that keep us locked up in the fantasy world of the ego. It is interesting to note that the Sephirah that corresponds to Mercury is Hod whose virtue is truth and whose vice is falsehood. Our maps of reality may be truthful and serve us well or they may be deceitful and lead us time and again into suffering. We have a choice.

The god Mercury is regarded as the psychopompus, the soul conductor of heaven, the messenger of the gods, the instructor and guide to the Hermetic mysteries.

Thought of as an initiator into occult schools, especially ritualistic ones involving full ceremonial. Our Mercurial quality when properly utilized becomes not an imprisoning pattern but a vehicle by which we experience deeper and more liberated states of consciousness.

Language

Hermes Trismegistus, a historical/mythical magus that is identified with both the gods Thoth and Mercury, is fancifully celebrated as the inventor of language and writing. Language is the biggest and foremost outgrowth of the hermetic mind. Some say that human beings have a natural instinct to form language.

What would humans be like without language? It is almost impossible to say, since we would imagine it most likely by using concepts and mental descriptions involving language. Language has the power to shape our mercurial mind in a way that allows us to create fixed areas or concepts. Concepts help us to organized knowledge, to pull facts together in meaningful ways which explain things. We all develop, knowingly or unknowingly, conceptual frameworks which help us understand the world.

Language is a Hermetic skill very much mis-used by the unenlightened mind. We tend to actually believe words as if they were the very object to which they refer. We tend to actually believe the things that we say. The Mercurial mind is so mutable that it jumps to conclusions based on very little experience. We start saying things like "Men are pigs!" or "He always. . ." and we end up believing it. We end up treating ourselves and others accordingly, running into misunderstandings and conflicts when our word-versions of reality do not match with experience. The next man you meet may have brute-like qualities mixed with a very gentle, artistic soul. But will you notice, if "Men are pigs."?

On the Hermetic path to enlightenment, the aspirant develops what S. I. Hayakawa calls *extensional orientation*. Extensional orientation is the state of mind that is prone to use words that refer to the environment without any interpretations or judgments about it. It maintains language reflecting the environment, rather than language imposing meanings on things and then wrestling with the meanings as if they were the things themselves. There are no such things as good and bad, nigger or Jew. There are no such things as human being and love. No such things as angels and demons. There is just what is and the labels we use to get by. Nothing more. And, of course, that which actually is cannot be conveyed by speech or image or label. It can only be referred to in that way by the Hermetic mind, and then that which is beyond mind will do the rest.

So, by employing language to refer to that which is beyond language, we are on the Hermetic path. The activity of the mind is turned against itself. It examines itself and modifies its ability to perceive. It undoes itself so that that which is beyond it can become the locus of control. The ego relinquishes its position and becomes an

aggregate of biological and psychological traits centered, as it were, around the influence of that which is beyond the known.

The mind finally then matures and becomes humble. The mature mind knows that words never say all about anything, and such a mind is therefore adjusted to uncertainty. Whatever challenges the world thrusts upon us, we are then at least free from those of our own making.

THOTH AND HERMETICISM IN CHRISTIANITY

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Studies in comparative religion, pioneered by such scholars as Gerald Massey, have yielded a wealth of data connecting Egyptian mythology and mysticism to Christianity, demonstrating that the former contributed a great deal to the latter. Naturally, most research has focused upon mythology involving Osiris, Isis, Horus, and Ra. This has been for good reason – these chief deities of ancient Egypt provide a firm, and in many cases detailed, underpinning of Christian mythology. However, rather than dwell upon these figures, about whom so much has been written in terms of comparative mythology, we shall turn to a lesser-discussed (although still a very prominent) Egyptian god, Thoth. In actuality, we will concentrate upon a late Hellenistic version of Thoth – Hermes Trismegistus – who represents Thoth amalgamated with the early Hellenistic figure of Hermes. While doing so, we shall explore many parallels between traditions involving Thoth (principally as Hermes Trismegistus) and Christian mythology. This will suggest that the Hermetic tradition contributed a number of elements to Christianity, as the latter emerged. Given the complexity of comparative studies in general, worsened considerably by the antiquity of the period and the massive loss of documentation, it will be virtually impossible to ‘prove’ that Christianity directly lifted elements from the Hermetic system. Rather, this article is merely an exploration, hopefully adding to the general intellectual milieu of thought and discussion, and providing some possible directions for further research.

Thoth and Hermes Trismegistus

In ancient Egypt, Thoth was the god of wisdom and writing; through being identified with Hermes by the Greeks, he evolved into Hermes Trismegistus. Thoth is described as a scribe and messenger of the gods, and in this capacity is usually shown as a man with the head of an ibis.¹ Owing to the sapiential and scribal nature of Thoth, a large

number of books were attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, thus adding to the corpus of “Hermetic literature.” In addition to the ibis image, the hawk’s head was also associated with Thoth. The idea of a winged spirit messenger is comparable to the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove, acting as a heavenly messenger at Jesus’ baptism, and also as the Paraclete offering testimony (John 16:7-8, 13-14).

According to Egyptian mythology, Thoth had another important role:

Thoth ... was frequently represented recording important proceedings, such as at the ‘Weighing of the Heart’ ceremony which was believed to take place after death.²

The “weighing of the heart,” or similar judgement, appeared within, and may have been partly subsumed by, the Isian-Sophian tradition. The transferral of motifs from Thoth/Hermes to Sophia would be quite natural, since both were “wisdom” deities. Alluding to the way in which such transferral can easily take place, Dr Stephan Hoeller explains:

Who, then, actually wrote the “books of Hermes,” which, since their rediscovery in the fifteenth century, have played such a significant role in our culture? The writings are all anonymous: their mythic author is considered to be Hermes himself. The reasoning behind this pseudonymous approach is simple. Hermes is Wisdom, and thus anything written through the inspiration of true wisdom is in actuality written by Hermes. The human scribe does not matter; certainly his name is of no significance.³

The “weighing of the heart” or similar near-death judgement issues, associated as they were with the Goddess (Isian-Sophian) tradition, naturally reappeared under the guise of Marian intercession (as in the Roman Catholic *Hail Mary*: “Pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death.”) Thoth’s role as an intercessor is noted by Dr. Hoeller:

Thoth ... was the principal pleader for the soul at the judgment of the dead.⁴

The notion of an intercessor in death is often mirrored by the idea of intervention in sickness, i.e. healing. Since Thoth was regarded as a wise deity of learning, naturally he became associated with the arts, and with sciences (including medicine). Spells and healing were also

identified with Isis (and later with Mary; to this day Christians attend Marian shrines, seeking healing), and it is possible that the Alexandrian Therapeutae (i.e. “Healers”) – who venerated Isis or at least the “Queen of Heaven” (cf. Jeremiah 44:17-19) – borrowed spells, chants, etc. from the Isian tradition, which could easily have encompassed a healing tradition stemming from Thoth. In the latter regard, the legendary healer Asclepius is closely associated with Hermetic literature. And certainly, if Eusebius’ claim that the Therapeutae were the earliest Christians is accurate, the existence of a closely-associated Hermetic medical tradition would help explain early Christianity’s intense interest in miraculous healing.

Like Hermetic healing in relation to the Isian-Marian tradition, the motif of the winged “Mercurial” messenger spirit, associated with Thoth/Hermes, was also apparently subsumed, in this case being identified with the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, the dove, and to a lesser extent, Mary. Alluding to Thoth’s link to the Paraclete, Dr. Hoeller notes that “Thoth was also the *teacher* and *helper* of the ancient Egyptian trinity of Isis, Osiris, and Horus.” (emphasis added)⁵ Likewise, providing a link from Mary to the Paraclete (and hence to Thoth), the Coptic Liturgy of St. Basil, used by the Coptic Orthodox church in Egypt, preserves a reference to Mary as “the fair dove.” The possibility that Mary attracted symbols and motifs previously associated with Thoth/Hermes is enhanced by Hermes’ mother being named *Maia*; ⁶ there may also be a link to the mother of Adonis, *Myrrha*, whose mythology is Syrian (n.b. that Ignatius, from this region, is one of the earliest Christian letter-writers to mention Mary). The goddess Isis, often seen as a ‘proto-Mary,’ may have facilitated the transferral of aspects of Thoth/Hermes to Mary, since Thoth helped Isis resurrect the slain Osiris.⁷

Thoth’s role as a scribe – and recorder of judgement proceedings – is echoed in Revelation 20:12-15 and 21:27, where the Lamb (representing Christ) apportions judgement based upon records in his “book of life.” In addition to the Christological elements, Thoth/Hermes (like Christ) was identified by Greeks with “God” himself, since the name *Theos* derives from Theuth/Thoth. Addressing both this derivation, and a variety of primitive Christological motifs, Dr. Everard states:

The titles appropriated to HERMES MERCURIUS TRISMEGISTUS were, in part, the titles of the DEITY. THEUTH, THOTH, TAUT, TAANTES, are the same title diversified, and they belong to the chief god of Egypt. Eusebius speaks of him as HERMES. From Theuth the Greeks formed QEOS, or Theos, which with that nation was the general name of the Deity. Plato, in his treatise named “Philebus,” mentions him by the name of Qeuq, or Theuth. He was looked upon as a great benefactor, and the first cultivator of the vine. ...

In one hand Hermes holds the *crux ansata*, the symbol of life—a master symbol which is the most persistent and determined in its appearance (and in its re-appearance) in all the sculptures of Egypt :— in the other hand the figure grasps a staff, associated with which are a serpent, a scorpion, a hawk’s head, and above all a circle surrounded by an asp, each with its special symbolical significance. ...

The T, Tau, was the instrument of death, but it was also what Ezekiel ordered the people in Jerusalem to be marked with, who were to be *saved from the destroyer*. It was also the emblem of the Taranis or the Thoth, or Teutates, or TAT, or Hermes, or Buddha among the druids. It was called the *Crux Hermis*. The old Hebrew, the Bastulan, and the Pelasgian, have the letter Tau thus,—X ; the Etruscan, + × ; the Coptic, + ; the Punic, ÉÏ ÉÏ. [emphasis original]⁸

In the above passage, Dr. Everard mentions a number of motifs that have Christological applications. Like Thoth/Hermes, Jesus is associated with the vine (John 15:1), and the allegedly life-saving cross – a clear inheritance from the *crux ansata* or *ankh* (the symbol of life), and the Tau – the latter of which, as Dr. Everard notes, was a symbol of death, and often took the form of a cross. Thus the *ankh*/Tau/cross, and the *Crux Hermis*, simultaneously encompassed motifs of life, death, and accordingly, rebirth. In Christian mythology, birth and death motifs are prominent: the nativity of Jesus continues to fascinate Christians, at least as much as his death/resurrection. The rebirth process is pictured by Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan (cf. John 3:3-5).

A more opaque aspect of the above passage deals with the relationship between Thoth, the scorpion, and Jesus. The scorpion motif – owing to the scorpion’s tail – was viewed as a ‘backbiter’ or betrayer, and is suggestive of an archetypal Judas-figure. Thus, alluding to the

scorpion's sting, Jesus describes Judas as one who has "lifted up his heel against me." (John 13:18) Since the name Judas means "twin," from an allegorical perspective Judas is Jesus' 'evil twin' or his darker/lower self, sometimes identified with Satan (cf. Luke 22:3; Matthew 16:23).

In the quotation above, Dr. Everard mentions some additional motifs. Like Thoth/Hermes, Jesus has a staff or sceptre (Psalm 2:9; Revelation 12:5); similarly, an early catacomb painting depicts Jesus with a wand, raising Lazarus.⁹(John 11) Also, with regard to the serpent/asp motif, although this motif has come to be frequently associated with the Devil, the Jesus figure has serpentine connotations. Referring to the copper healing serpent made by Moses (in Numbers 21:9), John 3:14 declares: "And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of man be lifted up." Moses – who is often viewed as a "type" of Jesus – links together the staff and serpent motifs: his first miracle is turning his staff into a snake (Exodus 4:2-4). The parallel between Moses and Jesus is often underlined by both functioning as high priests or mediators. Regarding such a mediatorial role (as well as the Christological "first-born" status), Dr. Everard presents the chief Scandinavian god, Thor, as being derived from Thoth, and notes that "THOR is represented as the first-born of the SUPREME GOD, and is styled in the Edda 'the eldest of Sons.' ... He was esteemed in Scandinavia as a middle divinity, a *mediator* between God and man."(emphasis original)¹⁰ This appears to derive from Hermes as a Mercurial 'go-between,' and hence also a 'mediator.' Dr. Hoeller elucidates upon this role:

While Hermes is regarded as one of the earliest and most primitive gods of the Greeks, he enjoys so much subsequent prominence that he must be recognized as an archetype devoted to mediating between, and unifying, the opposites. This foreshadows his later role as master magician and alchemist, as he was regarded both in Egypt and in Renaissance Europe. ... [Similarly,] Thoth acted as an emissary between the contending armies of Horus and Seth and eventually came to negotiate the peace treaty between these two gods. His role as a mediator between the opposites is thus made evident, perhaps prefiguring the role of the alchemical Mercury as the "medium of the conjunction."¹¹

Hermes Trismegistus and the *Divine Pymander*

The *Divine Pymander* of Hermes Trismegistus is a major source of Hermetic teachings, and incorporates sapiential traditions, mysticism, and philosophical views akin to Neoplatonism. Its style and contents bear a striking similarity to many of the texts discovered at Nag Hammadi, indicating that the Christian Gnostic tradition, in Egypt, evolved from, or coalesced with, an earlier Hermetic tradition. The extent to which the Hermetic writings preserve pre-Hellenic, Egyptian teachings specifically associated with Thoth is difficult to determine; nevertheless, “Hermes Trismegistus” offers some assurance of continuity in the *Divine Pymander* (IV:1):

this day it is fit to dedicate [this speech] to Tat [Thoth], because it is an Epitome of those general Speeches which were spoken to him.

Issues of continuity in the Hermetic tradition, and similar problems of analysis, are considerably worsened by the destruction of many Hermetic writings. Dr Hoeller observes:

The original number of Hermetic writings must have been considerable. A good many of these were lost during the systematic destruction of non-Christian literature that took place between the fourth and sixth centuries A.D. ... Church Father Clement of Alexandria says that the books of Hermes treat of Egyptian religion; and Tertullian, Iamblichus, and Porphyry all seem to be acquainted with Hermetic literature.¹²

Another problem in analysis is that Hermeticism was a *secret* tradition. As instructed in the *Divine Pymander*:

Avoid all conversation with the multitude or common people; for I would not have thee subject to Envy, much less to be ridiculous unto the many. ... it behoveth to avoid the multitude, and take heed of them as not understanding the virtue and power of the things that are said. [I:83-5]

Likewise, Jesus instructs his disciples concerning secret teachings, not to be revealed to the “common people” (whom Jesus refers to as “dogs” and “swine”):

Do not give what is holy to dogs, neither throw your pearls before swine, that they may never trample them underfoot, then turn around

and rip you open. ... Many are called, but few chosen. [Matthew 7:6; 22:14]

To you is has been granted to know [*gnōnai*] the mysteries [*mystēria*] of the kingdom of God, but for the rest it is in parables, in order that, though looking, they look in vain, and though hearing, they may not comprehend. [Luke 8:10]

Evidently, whatever these “mysteries” are, Jesus does not want them preached unto the “ends of the earth.” Here, Jesus is speaking as a Hermetic sage, teaching secrets to his inner circle of followers.

Thoth/Hermes as the Word, or Logos

As a divine messenger, Thoth/Hermes becomes associated with the idea of the divine Word (the Logos), the Mind of God, God’s image or manifestation, and the “Son of God.” In the *Divine Pymander*, the Mind of God speaks:

I am that Light, the Mind, thy God ... and that bright and lightful Word from the mind is the Son of God. ... That which in thee seeth and heareth, the Word of the Lord, and the Mind the Father, God, differ not one from the other; and the union of these is Life. [II:8-9]

Later, we read:

But the Father of all things, the Mind being Life and Light, brought forth Man like unto himself, whom he loved as his proper Birth; for he was all beauteous, having the image of his Father. ... Holy is God, the Father of all things. ... Holy art thou, that by thy Word hast established all things. Holy art thou, of whom all Nature is the Image. [II:18; 86-90]

Such expressions are very reminiscent of the views of Philo, who was very probably exposed to some form of Hermetic tradition. Of course, the above-mentioned concepts of the Word’s identity with God, the Word being the creative agency of God, the Word being the “Son of God,” and the Word’s “Life” and “Light” being reflected as a divine quality in humanity, all reappear at the beginning of the Gospel of John. This strongly suggests that the writer of this gospel was familiar with some form of Hermetic tradition. (The frequent references to the Gospel of John, in the present article, provide further clues as to Hermetic influences in the Johannine tradition.)

As John's gospel continues, the writer refers to John the Baptist as bearing witness or offering proclamation concerning the "light." Elsewhere, John is the voice "crying out" in the wilderness, who instructs his hearers to get baptized. Similarly, the *Divine Pymander* mentions, along with a "Cup" motif (which is both Eucharistic and representative of the baptismal font):

Filling a large Cup or Bowl therewith, [God] sent it down, giving also a Cryer or Proclaimer. And he commanded him to proclaim these things to the souls of men. Dip and wash thyself, thou that art able in this Cup or Bowl: Thou that believeth that thou shalt return to him that sent this Cup; thou that acknowledgest whereunto thou wert made. As many, therefore, as understood the Proclamation, and were baptized, or dowsed into the Mind, these were made partakers of knowledge, and became perfect men, receiving the Mind. [XII:13-16]

Closely echoing the latter part of this passage, John's gospel records:

But as many as did receive him [the Word / the light], to them he gave authority to become children of God, because they were believing in his name; and they were born, not from blood or from man's will, but from God. [1:12-13]

Providing more detail on the original, Hermetic baptismal tradition, Dr. Hoeller states:

The Hermeticists had their own sacraments as well. These appear to have consisted primarily of a form of baptism with water and an anointing resembling "a baptism and a chrism" as mentioned in the *Gnostic Gospel of Philip*. The *Corpus Hermeticum* mentions an anointing with "ambrosial water" and a self-administered baptism in a sacred vessel, the *krater*, sent down by Hermes from the heavenly realms.¹³

Thoth/Hermes and the Sign of the Fish

The idea of baptism, since it involves being "born of water," naturally invokes the image of a fish – just as early Christians symbolized Christ using the *ichthus* (fish) symbol – also known as the *vesica piscis* (sign of the fish). As noted by Freke & Gandy,¹⁴ the *vesica piscis* symbol was well known to the Pythagoreans, who formed it by intersecting two circles so that the circumference of each touches the

centre of the other circle. (Measurements based on these two circles then produce the sacred ratio 153:265; interestingly, the number 153 is specifically mentioned in relation to fish, at John 21:11.) The two intersecting circles were seen as a unification of spirit and matter – as echoed in the simultaneous “human and divine” nature of Christ, and in the idea that the soul/spirit has entered into (or, become entombed in) flesh, or in Nature. Thanks to Hermes Trismegistus, the *Divine Pymander* gives a complex account of divinity ‘separating’ into seven primal Circles (emanated aspects of divinity) to achieve self-reflective Gnosis, and apparently recognizing the *vesica piscis* or fish shape – representing humanity’s inherent divinity – now formed within the intersecting Circles, or, like fish, “in the Water”:

For indeed God was exceedingly enamoured of his own form or shape, and delivered unto it all his own Workmanships. ... he considered the Operations or Workmanships of the Seven; but they loved him, and every one made him partaker of his own order. And he learning diligently, and understanding their Essence, and partaking their Nature, resolved to pierce through the Circumference of the Circles, and to understand the power of him that sits upon the Fire. And having already all power ... [he] peeped through the Harmony, and breaking through the strength of the Circles, so shewed and made manifest the downward-born Nature, the fair and beautiful Shape or Form of God. ... he smiled for love, as if he had seen the shape or likeness in the Water, or the shadow upon the Earth, of the fairest Human form. And seeing in the Water a Shape, a Shape unto himself, in himself he loved it, and would cohabit with it ... Nature presently laying hold of what it so much loved, did wholly wrap herself about it, and they were mingled, for they loved one another. And from this cause Man above all things that live upon earth is double: Mortal, because of his body, and Immortal, because of the substantial Man. For being immortal, and having power of all things, he yet suffers mortal things, and such as are subject to Fate or Destiny. [II:19-26]

Rethinking Early Christianity

The way ‘traditional’ Christianity (that is, Christianity as modified and promoted by the Roman Church from the time of Irenaeus) has been presented would lead us to think that the process of its development was one of progressive enlargement and deepening of theology. This view begins with the simple life and maxims of Jesus,

as recorded in the canonical gospels, and then expands into the theological musings of Paul, to be advanced by the ante-Nicene Fathers, and to blossom into the fully-developed theology of Augustine *et al.* However, the discovery that Paul's letters are the earliest canonical writings began to destabilize this picture within scholarly circles. Pauline theology emerges as if suddenly, as a complex and profound edifice of theological speculation; some years later (up to a century later, according to some liberal scholars) gospels of "Jesus' life" emerge – and there is no evidence that Paul knew of any such gospels (indeed, many scholars have conclusively determined that he cannot possibly have been aware of them, nor could he have relied upon some much-touted "oral" biography of Jesus, which is clearly wishful thinking on the part of certain orthodox scholars). What is strange here is that Christianity, far from blossoming from simple sayings and traditions into a complex and profound theological system, appears to be evolving backwards (i.e. devolving): *first* the sophisticated theology, *then* the simple 'wise teachings' of the Master, a few details of his life, and so on. Of course, the written gospel tradition did *develop* – but was this a matter of progress, or a case of acute romanticizing, where the profound theological musings of Paul *et al* gave way to romantic fictions about Jesus, replete with dazzling miracles to entertain the pious, ignorant masses?

Many liberal scholars are, nowadays, leaning towards the latter outlook. With the discovery of the Nag Hammadi gospels in the twentieth century, the traditional picture is falling apart; every indication is that, at the earliest stage, Christianity was a profound, complex, metaphysical system. However, with the passage of time, "votes" by unenlightened bishops as to what the truth should be, and the intervention of politics in particular, Christianity collapsed into a puerile system of blind faith in mythology, unquestioning appeal to human authority, belief in sacramental magic, and superstitions involving such things as virginity, rubbing crucifixes, and worrying about when to eat fish. (So much for the *vesica piscis*...)

Hermeticism, as previously discussed, provides another dimension to our understanding of the rise (or, *fall*) of Christianity; like its counterpart, Gnosticism, Hermeticism reflects an advanced stage in late Hellenistic thought. But, like Gnosticism, Hermeticism was not to survive (except as a secret, underground movement); forces of

ignorance, superstition and fanaticism would wreak havoc upon the sublime, Hellenistic vision, one which had helped carry the flame of Gnosis from ancient Egypt. Perhaps, like Icarus who flew too near the sun, the Hellenistic vision had become too profound, too complex. In humanity's desire to reach up and touch the divine, to express the inexpressible, perhaps humanity 'flew too near the sun,' and came crashing down. This appears to have happened as only the most highly learned and profoundly spiritual individuals could grapple with the sophisticated theology they had developed; increasingly, they found themselves in the minority, and subject to persecution. The common people, who were largely illiterate, had no tolerance for theological and philosophical musings; they wanted a scapegod who "died for them," magically washing their sins away. They wanted firm leadership from priests, dressed in colorful finery to titillate the visual faculty – priests who could, with a sacred hand gesture here, or a flick of magical oil there, expel demons, and bless the faithful (evidently, even the "atoning blood" of the murdered God incarnate was not quite enough to assuage the wretched parishioners' troubled consciences). Perhaps most of all, the common people wanted assurance of a prime location in the Elysian fields; they were not particularly interested in knowing God, in touching the face of the divine. It is little wonder, then, that the Christian world descended into a mire of crass superstition, its citizens barely held in check from total anarchy even by the threat of eternal torment. Thus, the Dark Ages began – a thousand years in which the manifestations of the divine human spirit, the most ecstatic heights of philosophy and knowledge, were eclipsed. A thousand years, in which all noble individuals who tried to relight the flame of ancient wisdom were summarily tortured, and executed at the stake. But in the darkness, in secret, enlightened monks, nuns and assorted intellectuals – risking their lives at every turn – hid their precious manuscripts, trained apprentices in absolute secrecy, and helped keep alive the weakened spiritual pulse of humanity. Those who were found out by the Church often paid the ultimate penalty. However, their sacrifices have not been in vain, for the divine human spirit lives on; yet we are mindful of how much has been lost.

Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,

Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

—Tennyson.

1. Lucia Gahlin, *Egypt: Gods, Myths and Religion*. Lorenz Books: London (2002). 46.
2. *ibid.*, 47.
3. Stephan A. Hoeller, *On the Trail of the Winged God: Hermes and Hermeticism Throughout the Ages*. Internet article at <http://www.webcom.com/~gnosis/>.
4. *ibid.*
5. *ibid.*
6. Euripides, *Ion* (prologue).
7. Hoeller, *op. cit.*
8. John Everard (trans.), *The Divine Pymander of Hermes*. Wisdom Bookshelf: San Diego (1994). vi, x-xii.
9. Timothy Freke & Peter Gandy, *The Jesus Mysteries: Was the 'Original Jesus' a Pagan God?* Thorsons: London (2000). 264h.
10. *The Divine Pymander of Hermes, op. cit.*, xi.
11. Hoeller, *op. cit.*
12. *ibid.*
13. *ibid.*
14. Freke & Gandy, *op cit.*, 48-9.

THE NATURE OF HERMETIC WISDOM

by Author Unknown

As it is below, so is it above; As on the earth, so in the sky.

There are 2 states of being; one is mortal, the other Immortal.

That which is mortal is dissolvable, and dissolvable bodies pass away like a mist in the morning.

An Immortal Body is an essence which is eternal and incorruptible.

But the twain, the mortal and the Immortal, cannot exist together forever, but each returneth to the place from whence it came.

The mortal body is sensible, but the Immortal is reasonable.

**The former contains nothing which is perfect,
the latter nothing which is Imperfect;
for the one is the essence of the Spirit,
the other is the essence of Matter,
and man, the microcosm, holds the balance between the twain.**

**And there is a fierce warfare for the Victory,
between the upper and lower,
as they both desire to obtain the body as their prize;
for the state of man is envied by the lower
and glorified as a noble estate by the higher.**

**Now as the man inclines toward the lower Nature which is mortal,
he thereby aids the lower imperfect powers to oppose the higher which is
Immortal,
and must suffer the pains of slavery for his disobedience to the workman his
maker.**

But if he inclines to the higher, then he is truly wise and blest.

**Should man, after being attracted by the vanities of the world
and then after obtaining a knowledge of the things that really are,
return to the vanities of the world,
he will be punished with torments and fire
in the darkest states of disembodied Souls.**

**Should man, after knowing the things that are,
become rebellious of restraint to that part which is Immortal,
and return to the vanities of the world,
the higher essence will straightaway depart from him,
and he will become the slave of the lower essence
which will seize upon him and drive him to all sorts of wicked arts and evil
ways.**

**When a man has thus impiously disobeyed nature
and turned his face away from that which is Immortal,
behold, he is then disinherited from his birthright,
and is no longer counted among the children of Nature**

**because he has become an evil perverse thing,
possessing only those whose things which are mortal,
and he is punished with death.**

**And so death is meted out to all those who rebel against Nature impiously,
because they know the things that are.
But to these foolish souls who are ignorant,
and who have not knowingly rejected Nature, behold,
they are purified after much suffering and are sent to the world again.**