

"*Philosophia Perennis*--the phrase was coined by Leibniz; but the thing--the metaphysic that recognizes a divine Reality substantial to the world of things and lives and minds; the psychology that finds in the soul something similar to, or even identical with, divine Reality; the ethic that places man's final end in the knowledge of the immanent and transcendent Ground of all being--the thing is immemorial and universal."

Aldous Huxley. (1944). *The Perennial Philosophy*

This book provides an entrée into the Perennial ¹ Tradition, the *secret legacy*, the single stream of initiatory teaching

flowing through all the great schools of mysticism. Relative to the time and place in which they work, teachers within the Perennial Tradition adapt earlier and contemporary teachings to meet the needs of their students.

"I have meditated on the different religions, endeavoring to understand them, and I have found that they stem from a single principle with numerous ramifications. Do not therefore ask a man to adopt a particular religion (rather than another), for this would separate him from the fundamental principle; it is this principle itself which must come to seek him; in it are all the heights and all the meanings elucidated; then he will understand them."

Al-Hallaj, a Sufi Perennialist teacher

"Hence there is a single religion and a single creed for all beings endowed with understanding, and this religion is presupposed behind all the diversity of rites."

Nicolas of Cusa

The conception that the Perennial Tradition is the single stream of initiatory teaching flowing through all the original, authentic expressions of the great religions and philosophies does not point to an indiscriminate syncretism or a vacuous eclecticism.

It is important for seekers to realize what a unique approach to teaching the Perennial Tradition embodies. Non-Perennialist books on philosophy, religion, mysticism, or the occult are the results of teachers of a specific era borrowing from the ideas and practices of former thinkers and creating a syncretism of doctrines and procedures which they then

represent as their own new system.



Perennialist teaching material and teaching methods are, on the contrary, the outcome of creative adaptation to contemporary needs of the identical stream of Perennialist truth by the initiated teacher. Certain material within the tradition becomes superseded and a Perennialist teacher does not repeat it just because it had been used at an earlier time.

Each Perennialist teacher will arrive at a different embodiment of the fundamental truths, not because she is borrowing from her predecessors and building her own philosophical system on the basis of their ideas, but because the needs of her students, relative to her own time and place in history, require new compilations and techniques. The Perennialist teacher makes genuine contact with the essence of the Perennial Tradition and the originating impulse indicates what and how instructional material is to be used.

In many instances, the immediate disciples of Perennialist teachers do not understand their masters' esoteric teachings,

misinterpreting and distorting the genuine precepts, creating a fixed system of senseless dogma. As we'll see in chapter thirteen, this is precisely what occurred with Jesus' teachings: his immediate disciples distorted his ideas into a neo-Jewish travesty of what Jesus had taught. It took Paul, a disciple of Jesus by virtue of his mystical experience, to understand the true nature of what Jesus had taught.

When disciples of a Perennialist master are able to follow in the same line as the original teacher, it is because they have tapped into the Perennialist initiatory current in an authentic way.

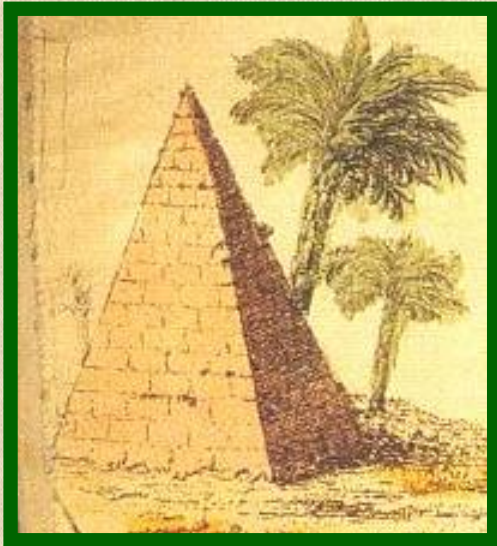
"Only by a rare stroke of fortune has one or another of these pioneers of thought found a single disciple who could grasp his meaning well enough to perform the task of handing it on. Even so, there arises a curious dilemma, which can hardly be escaped. Unless this disciple is himself a man of genius, he is not likely to rise to the height of his argument. If he is a man of genius, he will not stop short at a mere reproduction of what he has understood from his master. He will carry the thought farther, following out its implications in fields beyond its original scope; and in so doing he may transform the truth into a shape the master would hardly recognise.

"Something of this sort happened in the case of Socrates and Plato. It was the unique good fortune of Socrates to have, among his young companions, one who was not only to become a writer of incomparable skill, but was, by native gift, a poet and a thinker no less subtle than Socrates himself. Plato was about twenty-eight when Socrates died, and he went on writing till his own death at the age of eighty. A philosopher of his calibre could not limit himself to reproducing the thought of any master, however great. True, the central germ of Platonism, from first to last, is the new Socratic morality of spiritual aspiration; but under Plato's hands this germ has grown into a tree whose branches cover the heavens."

F. M. Cornford, *Before and After Socrates*

Seekers can understand and assimilate the dynamic contained in Perennialist teachings at several different levels,

depending on their capability. An attentive reader, with appropriate goals, preparation, and motivation, can use this book to develop a heightened capacity for discernment.



In this book we will concentrate on the Perennial Tradition in Western Civilization, including the Near-Eastern Perennialist² teachers, but excluding Asian or Oriental sages such as Zoroaster, Buddha, Lao Tzu, Confucius, Shankara, Patanjali, and others. The extant works of the Asian masters contain innumerable direct references to Perennialist themes.

Focusing on Western themes, we will review material from a variety of expressions of the Perennial Tradition: Sufism, Hermeticism, Neo-Platonism, Illuminism³, Cabala, Alchemy, Magic, Mysticism, and Gnosticism.

"It is necessary, my dear brothers in the Lord, to give you a clear idea of the interior Church; of that illuminated Community of God which is scattered throughout the world, but which is governed by one truth and united in one spirit. This enlightened community has existed since the first day of the world's creation, and its duration will be to the last day of time. This community possesses a school, in which all who thirst for knowledge are instructed by the Spirit of Wisdom itself; and all the mysteries of God and of nature are preserved in this school for the children of light. . .

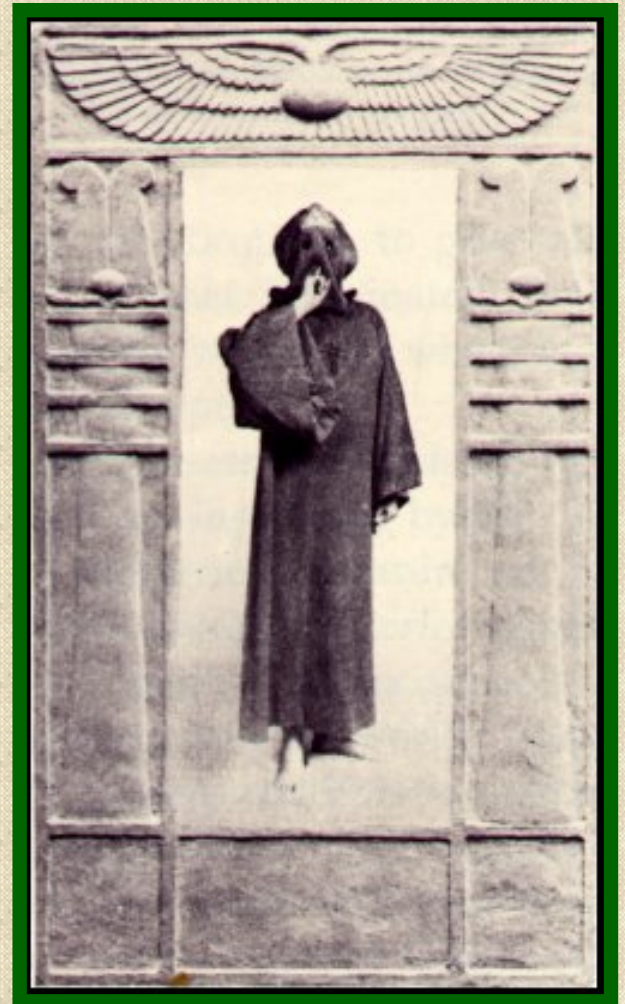
"Perfect knowledge of God, of nature, and of humanity are the objects of instruction in this school. It is from her that all truths penetrate into the world, she is the School of the Prophets, and of all who search for wisdom, and it is in this community alone that truth and the explanation of all mystery is to be found. It is the most hidden of communities yet possesses members from many circles; of such is this school. From all time there has been an exterior school based on the interior one, of which it is but the outer expression. From all time, therefore, there has been a hidden assembly, a society of the Elect, of those

who sought for and had capacity for light, and this interior society was called the interior Sanctuary or Church."

Karl von Eckhartshausen, *The Cloud Upon the Sanctuary*, 1795

In Chapter One we will examine the defining characteristics of the Perennial Tradition and trace the Perennialist line of transmission, from the ancient Semitic and Persian savants to modern-day teachers within the Perennial Tradition.

With sound preparation, a seeker can discern whether particular teachers--living or dead--reside within the Perennial Tradition, not by looking for secret handshakes, outlandish garb, mysterious rituals, or esoteric symbols, but by discovering distinctive characteristics in the teachers' words and actions. We'll examine the defining themes of the Perennial Tradition in Chapter Two, those concepts and activities which constitute crucial criteria for determining whether a person worked within the Perennial Tradition or was merely touched or influenced by this spiritual legacy.



One of the extraordinary characteristics of Perennialist concepts and exercises, including those in this book, is that they merely seem like nonsense or imponderable speculation to readers not properly prepared for the subtle dimensions

involved.

" Words should not be withheld from the worthy, but the unworthy will be annoyed by the words of real men. The hearts of the unworthy and those who are alienated from reality are like wicks that have been drenched in water instead of oil. No matter how much fire you put to such a wick it will not burn."

Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi *The Mystical and Visionary Treatises*

The Perennial Tradition teaches a new way of discerning the world, different from ordinary intellect or reason, requiring training in this way of Higher Cognition, and involving both seeing subtle or "invisible" entities and "not-seeing"--freeing oneself from the ordinary visual and mental conditionings. We will examine the Perennialist conception of knowledge in Chapter Three: knowledge through prescribed experience.

We've been taught to assume that we can gain immediate and total understanding of anything we read. But the Perennial Tradition teaches that we must be awakened by stages. We might say to a teacher,

"If, as you say, I have foolishly thrown myself from a great mountain height, then why don't you simply teach me how to pull the rip cord of my parachute?"

"Because," the teacher might reply, "you are not only falling to your death, you have also put yourself into a straitjacket, so that you cannot move your arms. I must first help you free yourself from your straitjacket and then help you learn to pull the parachute rip chord to bring you to safety."

According to the Perennial Tradition, spiritual development is a step-by-step process which must occur over a period of time--unlike gaining intellectual comprehension which can occur in one reading (or several readings) of a chapter or an entire book. Spiritual development involves many disparate skills and insights which must be acquired in sequence, each building on the ones before. We must test to see if one step has been achieved before proceeding to the next. We'll examine the various states of consciousness having to do with spiritual enlightenment in Chapter Four.

"Rudiments of the Perennial Philosophy may be found among the traditionary lore of primitive peoples in every region of the world, and in its fully developed forms it has a place in every one of the higher religions."

Aldous Huxley. (1944). *The Perennial Philosophy*

The Perennial Tradition involves actual, not merely theoretical, contact with the spiritual realm. In Chapter Five we examine the means of making initial contact with this world and in Chapter Ten we explore the transcendental experience, Illumination. Chapter Twenty will explicate some of the features of the higher unitive consciousness, beyond initial contact and beyond the inaugural experience of illumination. And Chapter Twenty-One explores the process of transformation into a higher consciousness.



The Hermetic writings, including the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Asclepius*,



and the Sufi teachings were important elements in Western Europe's re-discovery of

the Perennial Tradition beginning in the twelfth century C.E. We'll examine the Hermetic tradition in Chapter Six and explore the "renaissance" or re-birth of Perennialist teaching in Western Europe in Chapter Fifteen.

"This overcoming of all the usual barriers between the individual and the Absolute is the great mystic achievement. In mystic states we both become one with the Absolute and we become aware of our oneness. This is the everlasting and triumphant mystical tradition, hardly altered by differences of clime or creed. In Hinduism, in Neoplatonism, in Sufism, in Christian Mysticism, in Whitmanism, we find the same recurring note, so that there is about the mystical utterances an eternal unanimity which ought to make a critic stop and think, and which brings it about that the mystical classics have, as has been said, neither birthday nor native land. Perpetually telling of the unity of man with God, their speech antedates languages, and they do not grow old."

William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

In Chapter Seven, we'll see how the invention of language enabled a lower species to evolve into humans and how language actually creates the reality to which it points. The importance of humor in the Perennial Tradition is the subject of Chapter Nineteen.

The transformative character of Perennialist art and artistic creativity are reviewed in Chapters Eight and Nine. In Chapter Eighteen we'll explore several examples of contemporary literature containing Perennialist strains.

The



Perennial Tradition is the single stream of transformative wisdom which has been given many names. This wisdom is termed

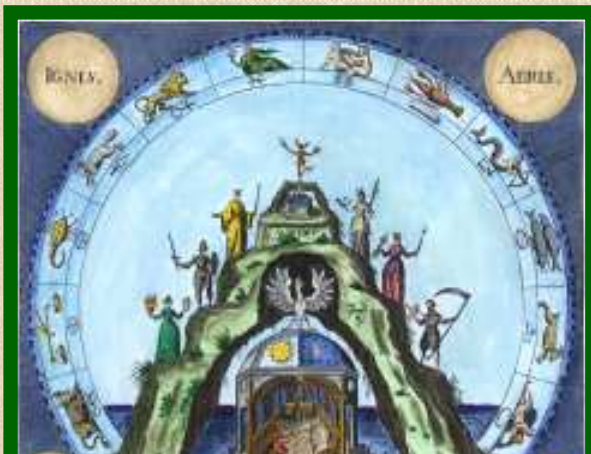
σοφία (sophia) in Greek and *hikma* (wisdom) or *marifat* (deep knowledge) in Arabic. The love of and the search for this wisdom was called φιλοσοφία (*philosophia*), philosophy, by the Greeks. We'll examine *philosophia*, in Chapter Eleven.

In Chapter Twelve, we'll discuss how Plato can only be understood if he is recognized as a Perennialist teacher. Jesus as a teacher within the Perennial Tradition is the focus of Chapter Thirteen, including a review of the life and teachings of Marcion, Valentinus, and Origen, who believed that Jesus' teachings had been completely distorted by Roman Christianity.



Philosophia is a Greek word composed of two parts:

| | |
|-------------|--------|
| philo | sophia |
| φιλο | σοφία |
| the love of | wisdom |



Shakespeare's Perennialist-inspired play *The Tempest* is the subject of Chapter Sixteen; we'll discover that this is a Mystery Play on the order of the Eleusinian Rites.



Stewart Edward White and Betty White are two of the most important Perennialist savants of the twentieth century; their teachings and activities are reviewed in Chapter Seventeen.

We're fortunate to have a small number of movies which contain strains of the Perennial Tradition; we'll examine three such movies in Chapter Fourteen.

You cannot prevent persons merely reading a book, such as this one, and assuming that they "understand" and "grasp" what it says--even if the book is a specially constructed system of training in a process of more-than-intellectual development which can't be understood merely by reading. The most one can say is that spiritual enlightenment involves the development of entirely new organs of perception.

"The Pythagoreans . . . in their conversations and discussion, their notes and records . . . did not use common, vulgar, ordinary language, which could be superficially understood by anyone who heard it, in an attempt to make what they said easy to follow. Instead, they kept Pythagoras' rule of 'holding your peace' about the divine mysteries, using secret devices to exclude the uninitiated and protecting their exchanges of speech and writing by the use of symbols. Unless one can interpret the symbols, and understand them by careful exposition, what they say would strike the chance observer as absurd--old wives' tales, full of nonsense and idle talk. But once they are deciphered as symbols should be, and become clear and transparent instead of obscure to outsiders, they impress us like utterances of the gods or Delphic oracles, revealing an astounding intellect and having a supernatural influence on those lovers of learning who have understood them."

Iamblichus. *On Pythagoreanism*

Important Aspects of this Book

This book is part of a more comprehensive curriculum in the Perennial Tradition, which includes other books and individually prescribed instruction. The complete curriculum is designed to assist persons at various levels gain the capabilities required for the unitive experience:

- Seekers who need information about concepts and practices of the Perennial Tradition
- Seekers who genuinely desire to learn how to learn about Perennialist concepts and practices
- Seekers who have developed initial capabilities and have a genuine desire to develop advanced understanding and proficiency

As a prerequisite for reading this book, which teaches about and provides exercises in the Perennial Tradition, the reader must develop critical thinking skills, gain self-awareness, and achieve critical consciousness. At the present time, the only reliable source for gaining these prerequisites is the book entitled *Progressive Awareness*.

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— You should study that book, developing the prerequisite capabilities, while assimilating the material in this book.

Two additional books are complementary to this book and should be read along with or after studying this one:

1. Portals to Higher Consciousness
2. Realizing a New Culture

The Perennial Tradition should help you explore the teachings and activities of



savants within the Perennial Tradition. The exercises are designed to throw light on the subtle aspects of the Perennialist world.

The Perennial Tradition is embodied in the teachings of many different illumined seers over centuries and no single expression can contain the whole. The Perennial Tradition is, among many other things, a process--the development of understanding of Higher Truth. This process takes place within the interaction between a Perennialist teacher and a seeker. The Perennial Tradition is known by means of its total operation--all components which produce Higher Awareness. Hence no one can successfully study the Perennial Tradition entirely from the outside. As a process, the Perennial Tradition is something which a seeker achieves through personal effort, not something which is given to her.



This book is intended only for those persons who have some connection with the unique supersensible psychic stream through which Perennialist teachings communicate with those few persons who are attuned to this psychic stream and to an element within each human's psyche which has innate connection to this transcendental current.

Readers who intellectually grasp the higher awareness explicated in this book gain a limited understanding of it, while those who follow the book's precepts in experiencing this higher level can achieve a great deal more.

Perennialist knowledge is actually a highly developed technology which can reveal its successive levels of meaning relative to the degree of preparation of each individual approaching it. While a book such as this can provide an entrée into the Perennial Tradition, the complete process can only be made available within a course of study

in a specially designed school.

"I have composed this book for polishers of hearts which are infected by the veil of 'clouding' but in which the substance of the light of the Truth is existent, in order that the veil may be lifted from them by the blessing of reading it, and that they may find their way to spiritual reality.

Al-Hujwiri. (1055 C.E.) *Kashf Al-Mahjub*
(The Revelation of the Veiled)

¹ **Perennial:** enduring for an indefinite or infinite time; lasting, permanent, never failing, continual, perpetual, everlasting, eternal

² **Perennialist:** this is a new term I am coining to refer to teachings, activities, and teachers having to do with the Perennial Tradition.

³ **Illuminism: Distinguishing Illuminism from Noxious Cults**

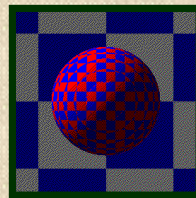
Illuminism, one of the many embodiments of the Perennial Tradition, as elucidated in this book must be clearly distinguished from false teachings which share similar titles:

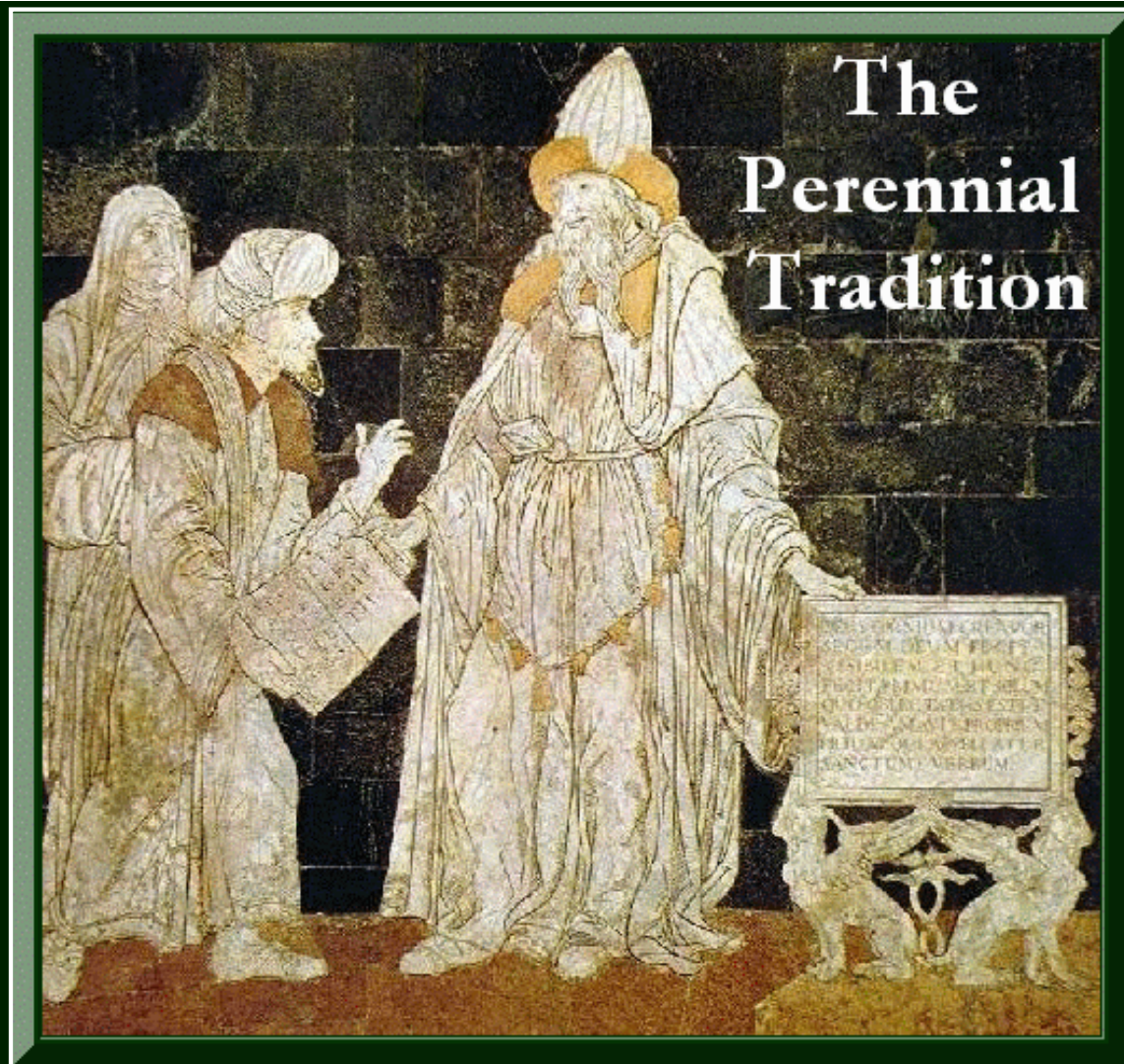
- **the sixteenth century Afghani secret society called the Roshaniya, the illuminated ones: a murderous cult founded by Bayezid Ansari of Afghanistan**
- **the Alumbrados, the illuminated ones of Spain: condemned in an edict of the Grand Inquisition in 1623 C.E.**
- **the "illuminated" Guerinets of France who came into public notice in 1654 C.E.**

- the Bavarian Illuminati formed by Adam Weishaupt in 1776: a secret society designed to infiltrate political and Freemasonry circles to gain social and financial power

Each of these noxious cults was formed to undermine the established order of the day and psychologically manipulate their disciples into unthinking obedience and acts of mayhem or murder. These venomous secret societies had nothing in common with the illuminist embodiment of the Perennial Tradition as explicated by such a master as Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi.

⁴ *Progressive Awareness* is available for order [here](#).





By Norman D. Livergood

Return to New Enlightenment

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Ch. 2: Distinctive Themes of the Perennial Tradition

Ch. 3: Knowledge Through Prescribed Experience

Ch. 4: States of Consciousness

Ch. 5: Initial Contact With Spiritual Forces

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Ch. 8: Perennialist Art

Ch. 9: Perennialist Artistic Creativity

Ch. 10: Illumination

Ch. 11: *Philosophia*: the Search for Wisdom

Ch. 12: Plato As A Perennialist Teacher

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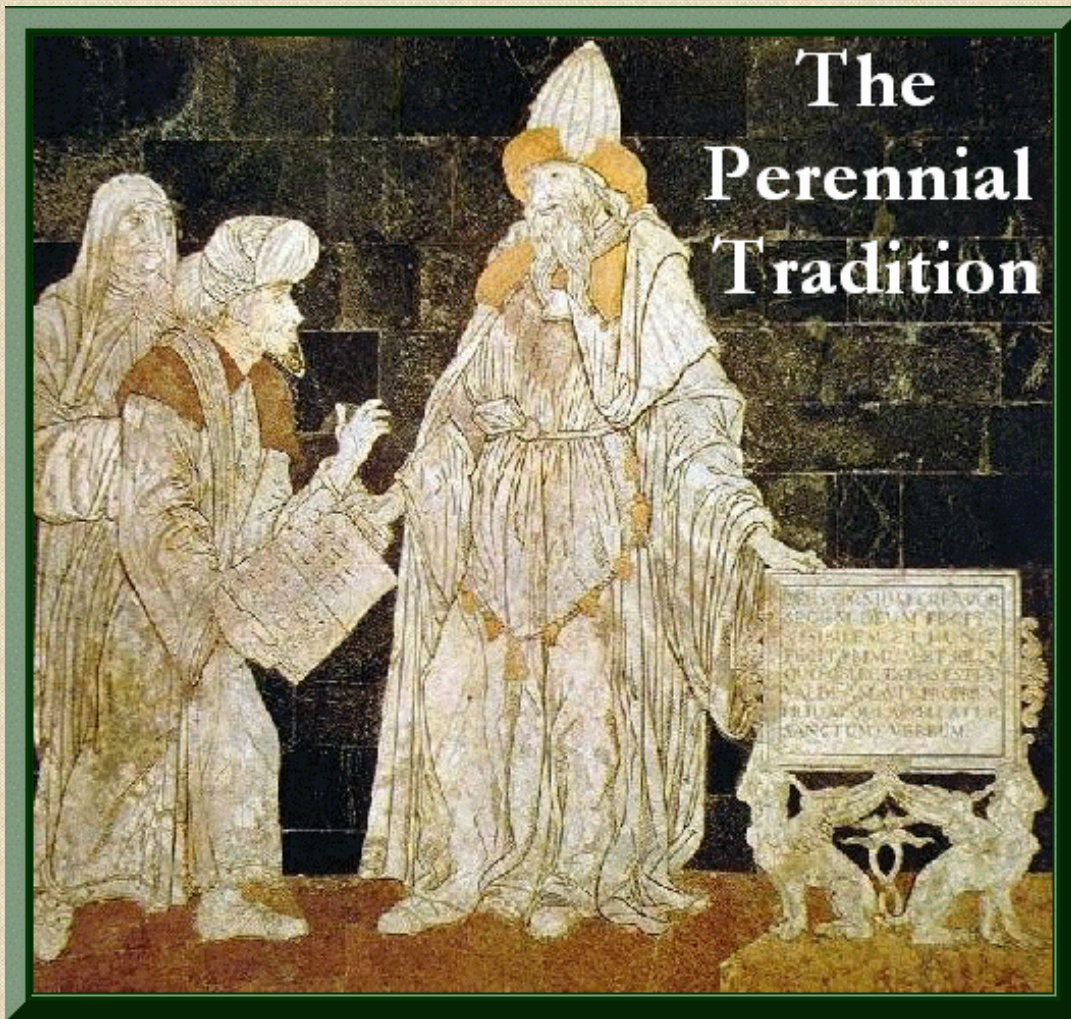
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Study Program in the Perennial Tradition



Chapter One

The Perennial Tradition

We have been living on the legacy of the Perennial Tradition for over twenty-five hundred years, a heritage with which we are still basically unfamiliar. This Perennial Tradition is not taught in public institutions, for it is the inner, secret teaching concealed within every religion and philosophy.

As Augustine explained, "that which is called the Christian religion existed among the ancients and never did not exist from the beginning of the human race." (*Epistolae*, Lib. I, xiii)

The Perennial Tradition has taken



many names over the centuries such as

Hermeticism, *Philosophia*, Neo-Platonism, Illuminism, Alchemy, Cabala, Magic, Gnosticism, Esotericism, Sufism. This Hidden Tradition has been the single stream of initiatory teaching flowing through all the great schools of mysticism.



Certain expressions of the teaching have been perverted by bureaucratized, totalitarian institutions such as organized religions, but the core ideas and practices have persisted in every age, with teachers reinterpreting the esoteric discipline according to the needs of students at that time. While the essence of the teaching of the Perennial Tradition has remained the same, the expressions of the teaching and processes of teaching are adapted to the necessities of the particular time and place.

"The spirit of God is vigilant to note in every nation those who are able to receive light, and they are employed as agents to spread the light according to man's capacity, and to re-vivify the dead letter. Through these divine instruments the interior truths of the Sanctuary were taken into every nation, and modified symbolically according to their customs, capacity for instruction, climate, and receptiveness. So that the external types of every religion, worship, ceremonies and Sacred Books in general have more or less clearly, as their object of instruction, the interior truths of the Sanctuary, by which man . . . will be conducted to the universal knowledge of the one Absolute Truth."

Karl von Eckhartshausen, *The Cloud Upon the Sanctuary*, 1795

Because scholastics and sensation seekers adopt a totally different viewpoint and methodology, they cannot possibly comprehend a Perennialist teacher such as Plato, Jesus, or Shahabudin Suhrawardi. The uninformed metaphysician attempts to place the teacher on his scholastic Procrustean bed, assuming that he can get at the essence of the teacher's "philosophy" by analyzing the reports of his teachings by equally uninformed chroniclers and self-appointed "experts."

Illustrated below are three of the most notorious instances of pompous scholastics trying to pick apart the shadow of an ember of the flame of a genuine earlier teacher.

"Was it the best thing for Athens that during all these years of foreign war and domestic tension Socrates should have spent day after day, not in a study but in public discussion, probing in his negative way the accepted principles of morals and showing their

inadequacy? . . . We may realize that the enemies of Socrates had a case."

Sir Richard Livingstone,
Introduction to *Portrait of Socrates*

"In the following pages an attempt has been made to give a summary of the Mystical Philosophy of Shayk Muhyid-Din Ibnul'Arabi. . . . Nowhere in his numerous works can one find his mystical philosophy expressed as a whole or with any appreciable degree of coherence or order. The *Fususul Hikam*, perhaps, may be said to sum up the maturest form of his pantheistic doctrine; but what an unintelligible and disorderly summary! One has to do so much hunting through other books by Ibnul 'Arabi besides the *Fusus*, so much analyzing and synthesizing and gathering relevant points scattered haphazardly amongst masses of trivial or irrelevant details, before one can arrive at anything like a system."

A.E. Affifi. *The Mystical Philosophy of
Muhyid Din-Ibnul Arabi*

"Hujwiri was neither a profound mystic nor a precise thinker . . ."

The Kashf Al-Mahjub by Al-Hujwiri

Translated by and Introduction by R. A. Nicholson, Litt.D., Ll.D., F.
B.A.

As illustrated above, most scholarly books written about Perennialist teachers assume that they can be understood only through scholastic

methods:

- Analyzing specific doctrines in their teachings
- Collating doctrines shared with other teachers to determine intellectual lineage
- Creating vast systems of "interconnections"
- Ignoring the teachers' practices as irrelevant
- Omitting the organic element, i.e., that teachings are nutrients meant to be metabolized, not to remain in their original, unaltered state

It is refreshing when we read a book about a Perennialist sage written by a person who realizes that this teacher cannot be "explained" by scholastic concepts.

"The time for an over-all interpretation [of Ibn 'Arabi] is far off; countless preliminary studies will still be needed before we can hope to orient ourselves amid all the aspects of so colossal an opus, the work of a spiritual genius who was not only one of the greatest masters of Sufism in Islam, but also one of the great mystics of all time. It is not even our ambition to make a 'contribution to the history of ideas.' A thematization of this kind often tends to 'explain' an author by tracing him back to his sources, by listing influences, and demonstrating the 'causes' of which he is supposedly the mere effect. In speaking of a genius as complex as Ibn 'Arabi, so radically alien to literal, dogmatic religion and to the schematizations such religion encourages, some writers have employed the word 'syncretism.' This is the summary, insidious, and facile kind of explanation that appeals to a dogmatic mind alarmed at the operations of a thinking which obeys only the imperatives of its internal norm but whose personal character does not impair its rigor. To content oneself with such an explanation is to confess one's failure, one's inability to gain so much as an intimation of this norm which cannot be reduced to a school or other collective conformism."

Henry Corbin. *Alone With the Alone:
Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*

It's interesting when certain scholars or organizations come into proximity to the Perennial Tradition, experience an intimation of something profound and imperishable, but miss its deeper significance. Some scholars become fascinated by a single embodiment or theme, happening upon the Perennial Tradition in their efforts to support their particular religious credo.

For example, in 1889, J. W. Hanson, D.D., a Universalist minister, wrote *Universalism: The Prevailing Doctrine Of The Christian Church During Its First Five Hundred Years*. "The purpose of this book," Hanson wrote in the preface, "is to present some of the evidence of the prevalence in the early centuries of the Christian church, of the doctrine of the final holiness of all mankind."

"The seat and center of Christianity during the first three centuries was Alexandria. West of Alexandria the influence of the Latins, Tertullian, Cyprian, Minucius Felix and Augustine prevailed, and their type of Christianity was warped and developed by the influence of Roman law."

Hanson wanted to prove that the original Christian teaching had not included the need for salvation from eternal damnation and punishment. He stumbled on the Perennial Tradition in the life and writings of the early Christian gnostics: Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Valentinus, and Marcion. Hanson found that these early Christian savants taught that all of humankind would ultimately experience enlightenment, which he expressed as "universal salvation."

"The deeper secrets and laws of our being are self-protected; to learn them requires an adaptation of character and purpose, and a humility of mind and spirit, inconsistent with those displayed by the perverse or merely curious enquirer. To understand, let alone practically to explore, the Hermetic Mystery is not for every one--at least, at his present state of evolutionary unfolding. . . . Only to those whose spiritual destiny has already equipped them with a certain high measure of moral and intellectual fitness will even a rough notional apprehension of it be practicable."

Mary A. Atwood. *Hermetic Philosophy and Alchemy*

Hanson was quite correct, the early gnostic teachers--Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Valentinus, and Marcion-(among many others)--did hold a very different view of Christianity from the later heresies of the creeds (as we shall explore in more detail in chapter twelve). Scholastic dogmas set forth in the Nicene Creed and other later formulations were created after Christianity had been deformed into sacerdotalism in the service of the Roman state.

Hanson happened on teachers of the Perennial Tradition and was pleased that they had taught, as he understood it, "universal salvation." But he was unable to understand that these Perennialist sages represented the embodiment of a tradition which had existed before Christianity, the

unitary current of spiritual teaching running through all the historical schools of philosophy and mysticism. These Perennialists taught much more than "universalism." They engaged in real transformation of their students according to needs and insights of that time, just as the Perennialist teacher Jesus had during his lifetime.

In *Theosophy or Psychological Religion* (1892), Max Muller points out that the Alexandrine "current of Christian thought was never entirely lost, but rose to the surface again and again at the most critical periods in the history of the Christian religion. Unchecked by the Council of Nicaea, 325 CE, that ancient stream of philosophical and religious thought flows on, and we can hear the distant echoes of Alexandria in the writings of St. Basil (329-379 CE), Gregory of Nyssa (CE 332-395), Gregory of Nazianzus (328-389 CE), as well as in the works of St. Augustine (364-430 CE)."

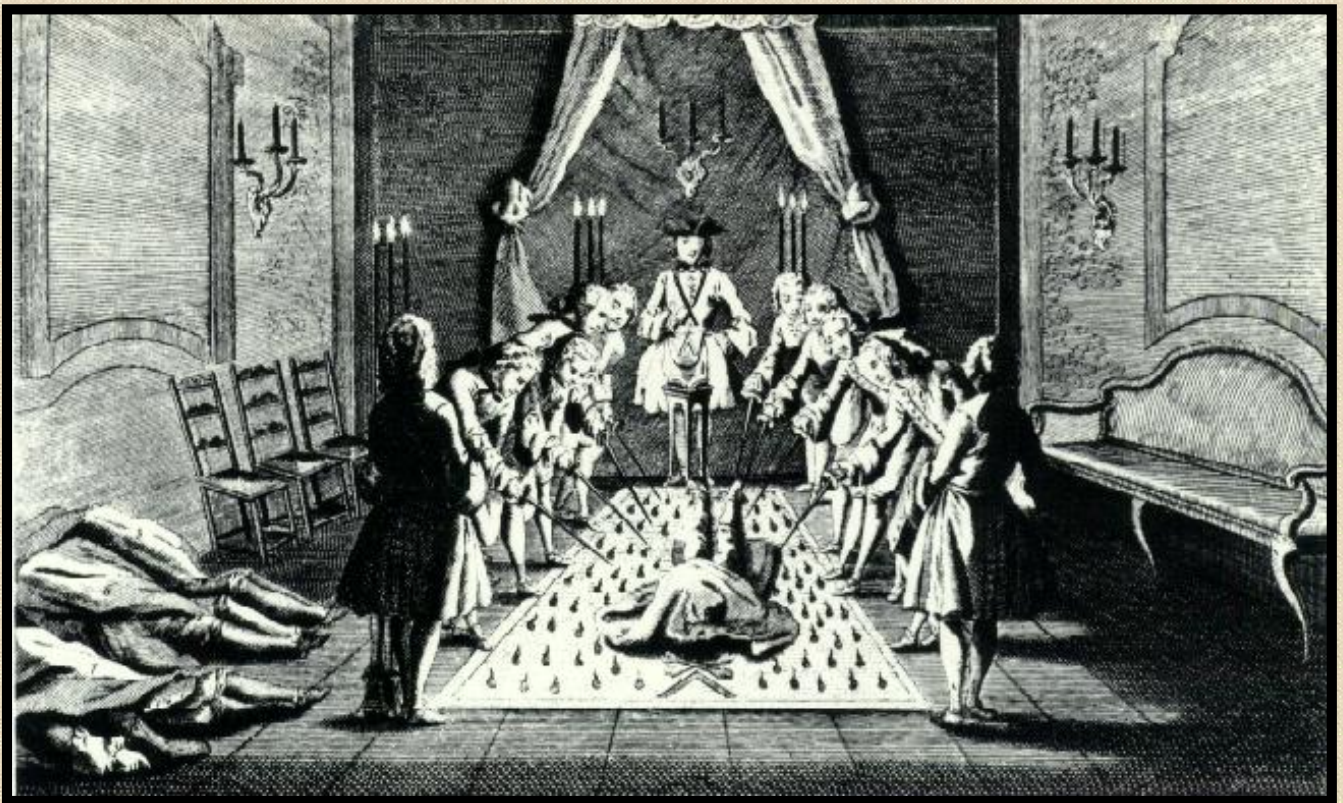
Muller did not recognize that this was not merely an "Alexandrine current," but a perennial heritage of transformative teaching.

In his *Omens of Millennium* (1996), Harold Bloom surmises that "there seems to be a common, perhaps Hermetist, strand in Gnosis, Sufi theosophy, and Kabbalah, which," he says, "I have tried to develop here into a mode that might elucidate aspects of the uncanny that now interest many among us, skeptics and believers alike, as we move towards the twenty-first century."

Bloom believes that there is an "American Religion" involving a personal knowing (*gnosis*) that our deepest self is a spark or particle of God. In his lifetime study of Shakespeare, Bloom has also encountered this "knowing" (gnostic) tradition. But Bloom has not discerned the elemental, consanguine Perennialist tradition, only its disparate appearances.

Esotericism

During times of religious and political tyranny, it's been necessary for the Perennial Tradition to take on a clandestine aspect. Perennialists might then work through other organizations or activities, making their esoteric teachings available to tested initiates and divulging secret knowledge only as a student became capable of using and preserving this higher knowledge. This is why we now find tinctures and traces of Perennialist concepts and practices in such organizations as the masons and in such traditions as magic, sorcery, shamanism, and alchemy.



Persons within these organizations or schools might be completely unaware of the Perennialist undercurrent, remaining on the surface because of their inability to qualify for esoteric instruction. Scholastics take great pride in pointing out what they call "mystical imprints" in these groups, complimenting themselves for discovering the hidden "mysteries." Often what they are tracking is only the spoor of a tradition in retrogression, a **Lamp Shop** which not only no longer contains lamps (illuminating elements) but contains no knowledge of what lamps are for or how to find a lamp.

Teachers *in* the Perennial Tradition, as distinguished from those who merely teach *about* the tradition, are not part of the *orthodox* religion of their time, even though some Perennialists such as Roger Bacon gave the appearance of being within the mainstream of the cultural religion. They always work within the esoteric or "secret" component of any religion or philosophy, because teachings concerning the development of higher states of consciousness can only be made available to select seekers who have completed initial training exercises.

The only persons who deny any element of esotericism in Christianity and other mystical traditions are those scholastics whose biases prevent them from objective investigation. The Jesuit scholar Martin C. D'Arcy, for example, asserts that there was no esoteric strain in original Christianity.

"From the importance given to the clergy and from the habit in the early Christian Church of keeping certain doctrines secret from the pagan--the so-called *disciplina arcani*--some have assumed that Christianity too has a similar division [between esoteric and exoteric]. But this would be a mistaken conclusion. There is no esoteric as contrasted with an exoteric doctrine, and all are called to the same spiritual perfection. The reserve of the early Church was due to its fear of the coarse-minded pagan misunderstanding such spiritual doctrines as the Eucharist, the partaking of the Body and Blood of Christ. The wisdom of the other religions, on the other hand, is almost always a form of gnosis, something secret and hidden, and it belongs to a chosen few. Even amongst the few there are degrees of initiation, as there are in jujitsu, and the rare masters hand on their technique and their counsels and sayings to disciples who create a school and a tradition."

Martin C. D'Arcy, S.J. *The Meeting of Love and Knowledge*

If we examine the overwhelming evidence of an esoteric tradition in original Christianity and other schools of mysticism, we find a wide diversity of sources which all refer to the esoteric nature of Perennialist teachings.

The Esoteric Tradition

Plato: "To find the Father and Maker of this universe is a hard task; and when you have found him, it is impossible to speak of him before all people."

Mark 4: "Then when they were by themselves, his close followers and the twelve asked about the parables, and he told them: 'The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those who do not know the secret, everything remains in parables, so that, seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand lest haply they should turn again, and it should be forgiven them.'"

"So he taught them his message with many parables such as their

minds could take in. He did not speak to them at all without using parables, although in private he explained everything to his disciples." [Phillips translation]

Matthew 13: "The man who has ears to hear should use them"

"At this the disciples approached him and asked, 'Why do you talk to them in parables?

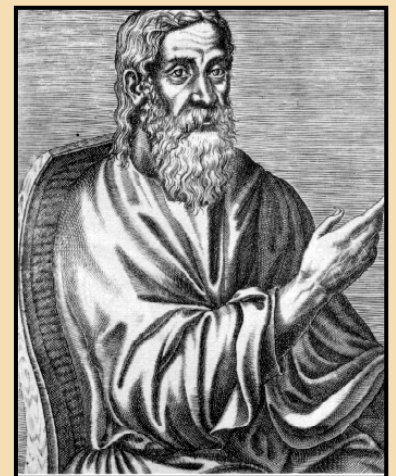
"'Because you have been given the chance to understand the secrets of the kingdom of Heaven,' replied Jesus, 'but they have not. For when a man has something, more is given to him till he has plenty. But if he has nothing even his nothing will be taken away from him. This is why I speak to them in these parables; because they go through life with their eyes open, but see nothing, and with their ears open, but understand nothing of what they hear.'" [Phillips translation]

1 Corinthians 1: "We do discuss 'wisdom' with those who are mature; only it is not the wisdom of this world or of the dethroned Powers who rule this world, it is the Mysterious Wisdom of God that we discuss, that hidden wisdom which God decreed from all eternity for our glory."

"We interpret what is spiritual in spiritual language. The unspiritual man rejects these truths of the Spirit of God; to him they are 'sheer folly,' he cannot understand them. And the reason is, that they must be read with the spiritual eye. The spiritual man, again, can read the meaning of everything; and yet no one can read what he is."

Clement of Alexandria (died 220 CE)

- **"The Lord . . . allowed us to communicate of those divine Mysteries, and of that holy light, to those who are able to receive them. He did not certainly disclose to the many what did not belong to the many; but to the few to whom He knew that they belonged, who were capable of receiving and being moulded according to them. But secret things are entrusted to speech, not to writing, as is the case with God."**



- **"Many things, I well know, have escaped us, through length of**

time, that have dropped away unwritten."

- "Even now I fear, as it is said, 'to cast the pearls before swine, lest they tread them underfoot, and turn and rend us.' For it is difficult to exhibit the really pure and transparent words respecting the true Light to swinish and untrained hearers."

Maurice Nicoll. *The New Man*

- "In the esoteric schools of which we can see traces in ancient literature, many very severe disciplines existed before a candidate was allowed to receive esoteric knowledge. He might have to serve in a most menial position for years, subject to insults that were a test on the side of being. If he passed these tests successfully and developed in himself strength and patience he was allowed to receive some knowledge. But if he broke, if he pitied himself, if he complained, if he was weak in his being, if he lied, if he behaved maliciously, if he took advantage of others, if he was resentful, if he thought he was better than other people, he received no knowledge."
- "In spite of the fact that the Kingdom of Heaven - that is, the highest possible level of a man - is said to be *within*, and to be the object of final attainment, they think that it refers to some state *after death*, in future time, and not to a state attainable or at least to be striven after, *in this life on earth* - a new state of themselves that actually exists as a possibility now, *as something above what one is . . .*"

Ouspensky. *A New Model of the Universe*

"Esoteric knowledge can be given only to those who seek, only to those who have been seeking it with a certain amount of consciousness, that is, with an understanding of how it differs from ordinary knowledge and how it can be found . . . This preliminary knowledge can be gained by ordinary means, from existing and known literature, easily accessible to all. And the acquisition of this preliminary knowledge may be regarded as the first test. Only those who pass this first test, those, that is, who acquire the necessary knowledge from the material accessible to all, may hope to take the next step, at

which point direct individual help will be accorded them. A man may hope to approach esotericism if he has acquired a right understanding from ordinary knowledge, that is, if he can find his way through the labyrinth of contradictory systems, theories and hypotheses, and understanding their general meaning and general significance. This test is something like a competitive examination open to the whole human race, and the idea of a competitive examination alone explains why the esoteric circle appears reluctant to help humanity. It is not reluctant. All that is possible is done to help men, but men will not or cannot make the necessary efforts themselves. And they cannot be helped by force."

***The Perennial Tradition* is an esoteric tradition. All genuine religious and mystical schools distinguish between the exoteric, or public, and the esoteric, or secret, teachings. The exoteric teachings are available to all alike, recorded in the various scriptures and other public spiritual writings. The esoteric concepts are reserved for those who assimilate the public teachings and then continue beyond into the secret wisdom.**

"The occult is what is hidden. But not to everyone. Wherever there is something hidden, there is necessarily someone who knows. Nor is the occult something that is merely ignored. It has, by implication, been concealed, by some agent and to some purpose, to all except those same inevitable knowers. Thus to ignore the occult would be folly, the equivalent, in parabolic terms, of failing to submit a bid on the Pearl of Great Price.

"The occult is doubly occult: it is a hidden knowledge of hidden truths or powers. These latter were concealed, it is agreed, by the Maker of Truths who appears to have been generally reluctant to cast his Pearl before swine, while those who possess them are careful to keep a close guard on their treasure. Indeed, in many societies those 'knowers,' who everywhere and always constitute an elite, banded together in guilds and brotherhoods to stand guard over the extremely useful and valuable knowledge that was theirs.

"The secret knowledge these adepts possessed--*gnosis* for the Greeks, *hikmah* to the Arabs--was more than useful; it was highly sensitive and indeed dangerous, having passed, as it did, from the dimension of the divine, the Other, into the realm of the human."

Francis E. Peters, "Hermes and Harran: The Roots of Arabic-Islamic Occultism," *Intellectual Studies on Islam*

It sometimes seems that the Perennial Tradition is reluctant to help seekers, but it only seems that way because, as Meister Eckhart explained in his writings, "If you haven't the truth of which we are speaking in yourselves, you cannot understand me." It's not a matter of the Perennial Tradition making things deliberately arcane, it's simply the fact that unless you have made a truth a part of your being you have no capability of understanding it.

"The heart of "esotericism" has long been centered around the belief that certain spiritual (or religious) teachings are best transmitted to others only after sufficient preparation and initiatic training. Such preparations are regarded as requiring long periods of discipline and often special empowerment rituals. Historically, such knowledge has not been accessible in popular formats nor readily available for study without membership in a relatively small circle of usually male practitioners. Further, esoteric traditions have tended to develop often in contrast to more orthodox and "external" paternal religions whose orthodox members have tended to regard esotericism with some suspicion and, at times, have attacked such societies with strategies of repression. Such tactics suggest an additional layer of meaning in the concept of "esoteric" as teachings or practices that resist orthodox interpretations and are "hidden" because of issues of political or religious persecution. A third meaning of the term stems from an extrapolation of this tension between the "known" or commonly accepted orthodoxy of a religious tradition and the "unknown" (or institutionally unrecognized) teachings or practices of various esoteric groups within that religious tradition. The status of such groups is often marginalized by the refusal of the parent religion to recognize the legitimacy of various non-conventional interpretations or practices. In the third sense, esoteric means "unsanctioned" or "unrecognized" by majority practitioners of a local conventional religious tradition.



"Often these three aspects of esotericism intersect, creating a group mentality that is hierarchical (thus initiations are given in stages, from masters to disciples), socially secretive (because of disruptive pressures from more orthodox factions of a related major tradition) and relatively unknown or marginalized by a conservative majority."

**Lee Irwin, "Western Esotericism, Eastern Spirituality,
and the Global Future"**

Perennialist teachings are preserved in an esoteric state to protect them from a hostile environment.

"The wisdom of the Mysteries is like a hot-house plant, which must be cultivated and fostered in seclusion. Any one bringing it into the atmosphere of everyday ideas brings it into air in which it cannot flourish."

Rudolph Steiner, *Christianity as Mystical Fact*

| Physical Existence: TV Life | Ignorance, Sleep, Loss of Awareness | Spiritual Being: Real Life |
|--|---|--|
|  <p>We take the image of ourselves in the physical world to be the real essence of ourselves.</p> <p>Progressive possession by the TV world until finally all of one's existence is "in" that world</p> | <p>As we sometimes become so identified with what's happening in a movie or a TV show as to lose awareness of ourselves....</p> <p>Ordinary Persons are the "creation" of the TV world: we have been formed, psychically and physically, out of the ideology that we are material beings and that the physical TV world is the only real world.</p> | <p>The Perennial Tradition refers to spiritual beings who take physical form to teach the secondary importance of the physical TV life compared to the spiritual life.</p>  |

The esoteric Perennial Tradition instructs deserving students in the science of achieving *a higher state of being.*

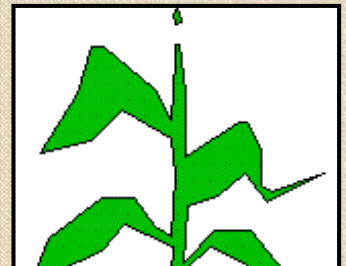
We live in a state of sleep or amnesia,

not aware that what we imagine to be our "selves" is "concocted from beliefs put into us by others and is not ourselves at all."

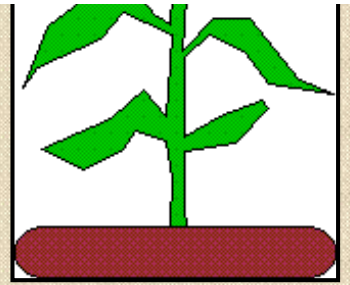
We totally identify with our physical self, unaware that we also have a spiritual self which is our ultimate reality. Spiritual teachers *remind* us who we are and assist us in learning how to "come awake" or "remember ourselves."

According to the esoteric tradition, man in his present state is unfinished; he is a seed.

- a seed may remain a seed - and enjoy a seed existence - or



- a seed may die and become a *different kind of being* - a plant.



What in a seed would keep it a seed?

- The assumption that its present state of being is complete and final
- Fear of what it means to die as a seed
- The presumption that it is already a plant (There are many seeds pretending to be plants.)
- Suspicion of the idea that seeds can become plants
- Complete satisfaction with its present state as a seed
- Laziness, lethargy, obsession with seed-pleasures



An esoteric tradition such as *the Perennial Tradition* never evangelizes, never tries to convince people they ought to achieve a higher state of being, never argues with a seed that it should become a plant.

The Perennial Tradition simply makes available the knowledge that a seed can become a plant - if it learns how to die to being a seed.

To be able to hear about the Perennial Tradition, a seed must realize that:

- It is a seed, an unfinished being with a potential for a higher state of being
- It does not now have the capacity to understand what plants are or how to become one
- It must study itself to see what keeps it a seed - what conditionings limit its being
- Knowledge of an esoteric tradition is not a right but a privilege

earned by effort

- There is no automatic development - correct desire must be followed by sustained effort

"The esoteric teaching about knowledge and being refers to the fact that knowledge cannot be understood unless there is a corresponding development of being. A man may know a great deal and understand nothing because his being is not equal to his knowledge. As a consequence, no inner union can take place between his being and his knowledge . . . The man of poor being and great knowledge can only give out meaningless material that leads nowhere. And not only this, but he can only complicate everything and make it unintelligible . . . The conditions of knowledge are no longer understood because the side of being is ignored."

M. Nicoll. *The New Man*

The Lineage of the Perennial Tradition

The "secret teachings" were passed from generation to generation through the line of transmission within the Perennial Tradition.

"Once he has recognized his invisible guide, a mystic sometimes decides to trace his own *isnad*, to reveal his spiritual genealogy, that is, to disclose the 'chain of transmission' culminating in his person and bear witness to the spiritual ascendancy which he invokes across the generations of mankind. He does neither more nor less than to designate by name the minds to whose family he is conscious of belonging."

Henry Corbin. *Alone With the Alone:
Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*

◦ Semitic and Persian sources.

- Isaiah (8th century BCE)
- Zoroaster (6th century BCE)





○ Oriental sources:

- **Gautama**, the Buddha (563-483 BCE)
- Hinduism
- Taoism
- Shankara (510-478 BCE) (788–820 CE)



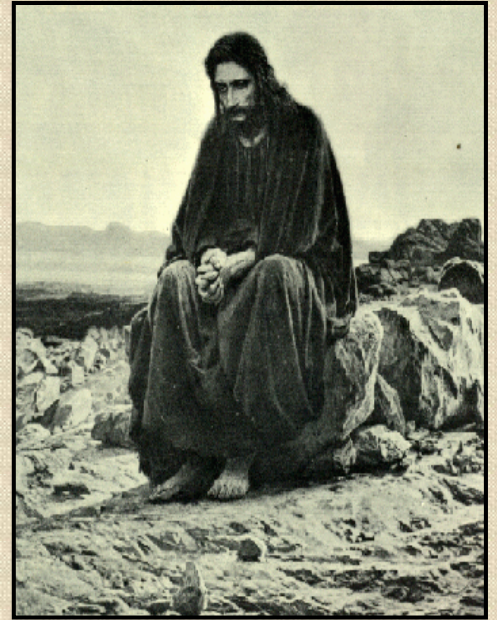
○ Western Sources

- **Hermes** (indeterminate) [see chapter on Hermes]
- **Pythagoras** (died 497 BCE)
- **Empedocles** (492-432 BCE)
- Socrates (470-399 BCE) [see chapter on *Philosophia*]
- Plato (427-347 BCE) [see chapter on *Plato As A Perennialist Teacher*]

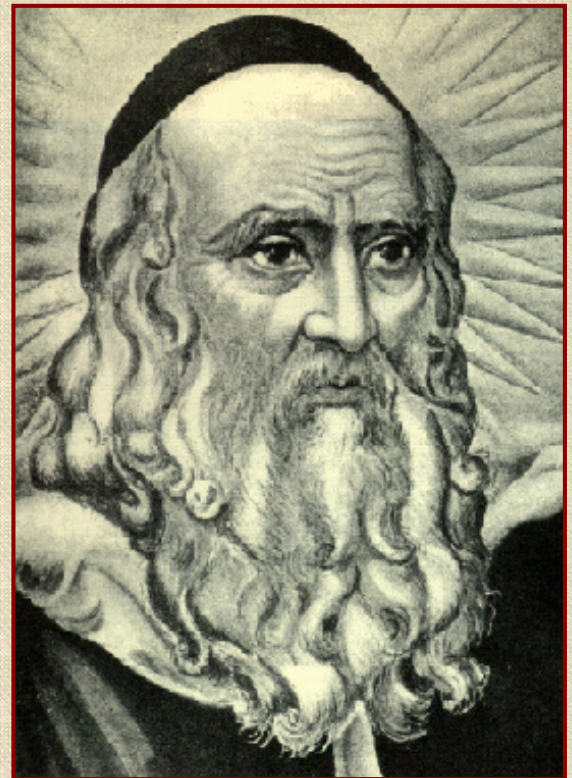




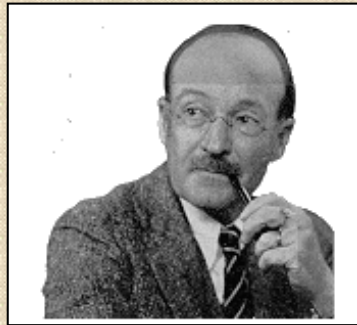
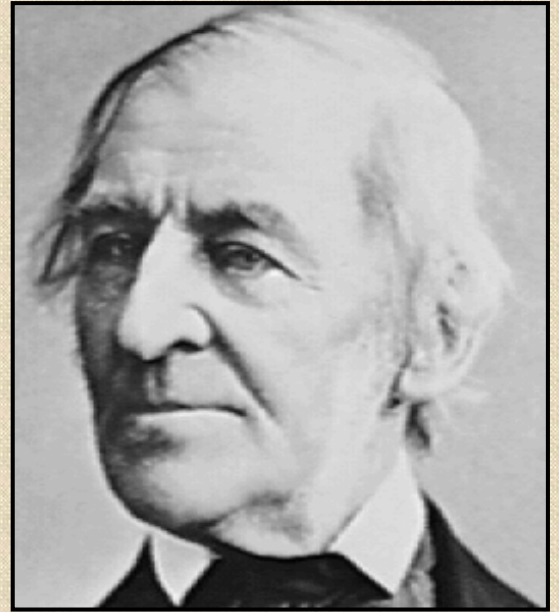
- **Jesus of Nazareth** (4 BCE-29 CE)
- Paul the Apostle (7-67 CE)
- **Dionysius the Areopagite** (1st century CE)
- Marcion (85-144 C.E) [see chapter on Jesus as a Teacher In the Perennial Tradition]
- Valentinus (second century CE) [see chapter on Jesus as a Teacher In the Perennial Tradition]
- Clement (150-220 CE) [see chapter on Jesus as a Teacher In the Perennial Tradition]
- Origen (185-252 CE) [see chapter on Jesus as a Teacher In the Perennial Tradition]
- **Plotinus** (205-270 CE)
- Boethius (475-525 C.E)
- **Geber** (721-766 CE)
- **Gerbert d'Aurillac (Pope Sylvester II)** (born 940 CE)
- Hujwiri (died 1063 A.D) *The Revelation of the Veiled*
- **El-Ghazali** (1059-1111 CE)
- Shahabudin Suhrawardi (1145-1235) *Gifts of Deep Knowledge* [see chapter on Illumination]



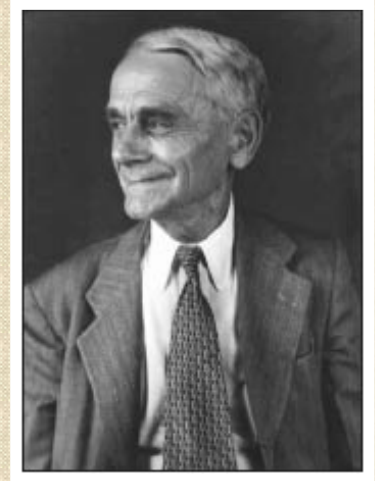
- Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi (1154-1191 CE)
The Wisdom of Illuminism [see chapter on Illumination]
- Ibn el-Arabi (1164-1240 CE)
- St. Francis (1182-1226 CE)
- Frederick II (1198-1250 CE)
- Rumi (1207-1273 CE)
- Albertus Magnus (1206-1280 CE)
- Roger Bacon (1214-1294 CE)
- Raymond Lully (1235-1315 CE)
(pictured right)
- Meister Eckhart (1260-1329 CE)
- John Colet (1467-1519 CE)
- Thomas More (1478-1535)
- Paracelsus (1493-1541 CE)
- St. John of the Cross (1542-1591)
- Giordano Bruno (1548-1600 CE)
- William Shakespeare (1564-1616 CE)
- Jacob Boehme (1575-1624 CE)
- Benjamin Whichcote (1609-1683 CE)
- George Fox (1624-1691 CE)
- William Law (1686-1761 CE)



- **Emmanuel Swedenborg** (1688-1772 CE)
- **William Blake** (1757-1827 CE)
- **Ralph Waldo Emerson** (1803-1882 CE) (pictured right)
- **Mary A. Atwood** (1817-1910)
- **Henry David Thoreau** (1817-1862 CE)
- **Frank C. Laubach** (born 1884 CE)
- **Paul Brunton** (1898-1981)
- **Betty White (d. 1939) and Stewart Edward White** (1873-1946)



- **Rufus Moseley** (mid 20th century)



In the first edition of this book, I had included Idries Shah (1924-1996) as a representative of the Perennial Tradition. I have since revised my opinion of him, relative to my own experience and published reports of his ideas and behavior by such persons as J.G. Bennett, *Witness* (1974), L. P. Elwell-Sutton, "Sufism and Pseudo-Sufism," *Encounter*, Vol. XLIV No. 5, May 1975, pp. 9-17, Peter Washington, *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon* (Conclusion), and [James Moore](#), "Neo-Sufism: The Case of Idries Shah," *Telos*, Volume 6, Number 4, Autumn.

I now hold the opinion that Idries Shah was a clear example of a [conduit teacher and cult leader](#). I studied with Shah a short time beginning in 1971, but discontinued in 1972. Idries Shah was a writer who was able to transmit valuable information about spiritual matters but seems not to have been positively affected by the knowledge he conveyed. I continue to find useful ideas in his writings despite the unfortunate flaws in his personality and behavior as documented by the sources referenced above and as borne out in my own experience.

As we explore Perennialist teachings in the following chapters, we will review specific themes and many of the individual teachers listed above.

Relationship With a Teacher

A seeker within the Perennial Tradition follows either of two primary paths:

- **Learning with a physical teacher--as in the case of Jesus' disciples learning from him while he was in physical form**
- **Learning with an inner or invisible teacher--as illustrated in Jesus' immediate and contemporary disciples learning from him while he is in spiritual form: disciples such as John in the *Acts of John* or Rufus Moseley, a twentieth-century disciple of Jesus.**

In the Sufi expression of the Perennial Tradition, seekers who learn from an inner or invisible teacher are said to be in the Uwaysis tradition. The name derives from Uways al-Qarani, a seeker who was contemporary with Mohammed who had no visible human guide. He is said to have known Mohammed without ever having seen him during his lifetime. Abu'l-Hasan Kharraqani (died 1034 CE), an Iranian Sufi referred to the Uwaysis tradition in this manner:

"I am amazed at those disciples who declare that they require this or that master. You are perfectly well aware that I have never been taught by any man. God was my guide, though I have the greatest respect for all the masters."

Those in the Sufi lineage who learned from an inner, invisible teacher include:

- Ibn'Arabi (disciple of Khidr)
- Fariduddin Attar of Nishapur (guided by the "being of light" of Mansur Hallaj)

A number of the Perennialists we will review in this book, including Betty and Stewart Edward White, Rumi, and Rufus Moseley, learned from inner, invisible teachers.

"I was never meant to be disciple of any disciple; I can only be a disciple at first hand of the Teacher of Teachers. . . . I cannot be anything other than an immediate disciple of Jesus and the Spirit of truth, getting my orders direct from the Source, not through imperfect and too often blind guides."

Rufus Moseley. *Manifest Victory*

The Higher Orthodoxy of Perennialist Teachers

"There is thus a ground of psychological experience, potential in all men, actually realized in a few, common to all mystics of all lands and times and accountable for the similarity of their reports. But upon that common basis we need not be surprised to see them also erecting various superstructures in accordance with their particular tenets of philosophy or religion. At bottom, their actual experiences, at the highest point at least, will be amazingly alike, but their theories in regard to what has happened to them may be radically different."

Paul Elmer More. *Christian Mysticism*

We derive great benefit from the life and writings of Perennialist teachers, for each of these provides a lesson in developing spiritual

awareness. Such adepts as Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi, Jesus of Nazareth, and Meister Eckhart show us how one can live the Perennialist life even amidst the rigid orthodoxies of Islam, Judaism, and Roman Catholicism. In many instances, autocratic, non-spiritual, vicious "religious" tyrants judged Perennialist teachers to be subversive and sanctimoniously murdered these spiritual geniuses.

Many masters within the Perennial Tradition were condemned as seditious because they not only taught concepts heretical to orthodox ears but also revived orthodox teachings by recasting them in the image of their own deep, inner experiences, assisting others to discover hidden truths contained in them within their own souls.

One of the hallmarks of Perennialist teaching is an insistence that a teacher (or leader of any kind) should try to work herself out of a job--that is, the seeker should learn to experience truth within herself and should learn to discover truth for herself as soon as possible. This idea is anathema to any ecclesiastical organization which desires to retain perpetual control over believers.

Many teachings which seem to have become trite and hackneyed appear new and dynamic in the hands of Perennialist teachers because they do the unexpected: they take them seriously--*and literally*.

We should concentrate on whatever teachings help us realize the unitive state, not on the differences in the ways various teachers attained or taught the mystic art or on what is deemed "orthodox" by this year's self-appointed religious inquisitors or popularizers. Almost all teachers and teachings possess extraneous features which can trip us up: quirks of character, unusual means of expression, extraordinary methods of realizing unity, etc. Always, the important point is to concentrate on who and what can assist us in achieving the illuminative state of union with God.

Mystical Union

Plato defined mysticism as the art of union with Reality. We know persons or objects best through uniting or assimilating with them, a commingling of them and ourselves. The patriot knows his country because he has surrendered himself to it; the artist merges with his art, the lover with his beloved.

We can attain union with Reality only when we realize that most of the time we are not united with things as they really are, but with preconceptions, myths, images, notions, conditionings.



If we follow this path of the Perennial Tradition we can ultimately attain union with Reality.

"Who looks out with my eyes?

What is the soul?

I cannot stop asking.

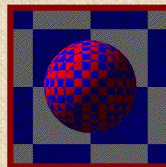
If I could taste one sip of an answer,

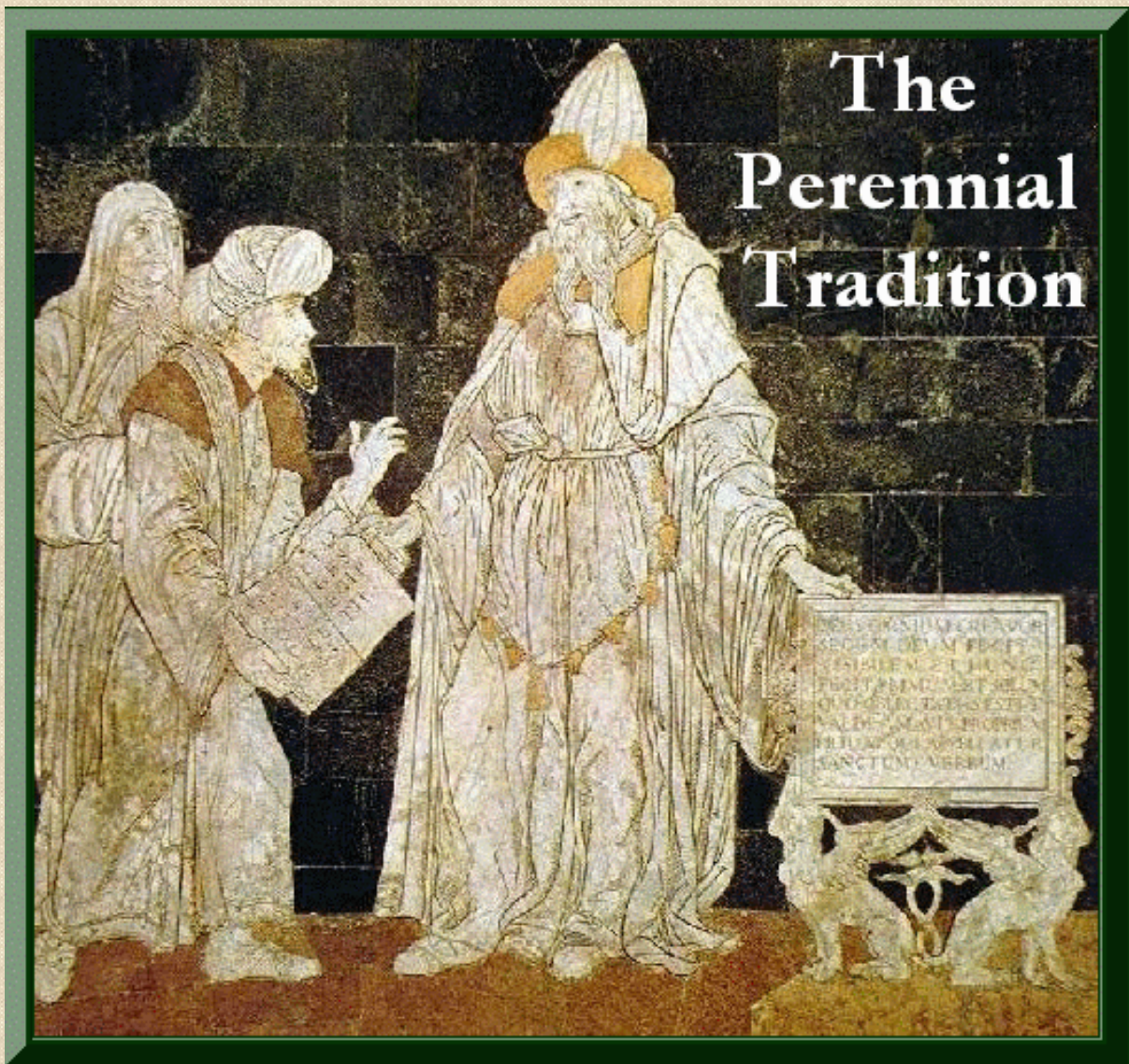
I could break out of this prison for drunks.

I didn't come here of my own accord, and I can't leave that way.

Whoever brought me here will have to take me home."

Rumi





Chapter Two

Distinctive Themes of the Perennial Tradition

Authentic participants in the Perennial Tradition can be found in any profession: medicine, teaching, painting, drama, writing, law, construction, farming, etc. The practice of the Perennial Tradition can take place in any way of life, while persons acquainted with the Perennialist may or not be aware that she is spiritually advanced.

As we study the lives and concepts of transformative persons

throughout human history, we shall attempt to determine which were in the lineage of the Perennial Tradition and which were merely influenced by this legacy. For example, Dante was clearly influenced by the Perennialist Ibn 'Arabi, but Dante was not a participant in the Perennial Tradition.

A number of books on mystical traditions have taken the opposite approach, using a term, as for example Gnosticism, to include anyone who is referred to as a Gnostic. This is the approach adopted by Hans Jonas in his comprehensive book entitled *The Gnostic Religion*. Carl W. Ernst employed this same kind of approach in his book *Sufism*.

"In this book, I use the term *Sufism* in the broadest descriptive sense, to include not only those people who describe themselves or are described by others as Sufis but also the whole range of historical traditions, texts, cultural artifacts, and practices connected with Sufis. By using such a 'family resemblance' approach to Sufism, I am deliberately shelving any attempt to decide who is a 'true Sufi,' or what is the proper relationship of Sufism and Islam."

Carl W. Ernst. *Sufism*

As Ernst recognizes, the difficulty with the all-embracing approach is that it fails to identify who are authentic members of a tradition and who are not. If an author's purpose is merely to write a treatise *about* a tradition, perhaps in the line of a history, then such differentiation may not be required.

With the indiscriminate approach, a term encompasses so many contradictory concepts and practices that it loses all essential meaning. In Jonas's book on Gnosticism, we find irreconcilable differences between persons deemed to be Gnostics. In Jonas's estimate, for example, a Gnostic can be either a monotheist or a polytheist.

Admittedly, taking the approach I have in this book-- attempting to distinguish those persons who were authentic members of the Perennial

Tradition from those who were not--is a hazardous venture and subject to error. But having undertaken to write a book not only *about* the Perennial Tradition, but also *providing practical experience in this heritage*, I find it necessary to differentiate between the authentic and the spurious.

I have also adopted this approach because from the beginning of the Perennialist Tradition its adherents have traced their lineage to earlier teachers, thereby distinguishing those they believed to be genuine teachers within their heritage and those who were not.

"In all that I have said about the science of lights and that which is and is not based upon it, I have been assisted by those who have traveled the path of God. This science is the very intuition of the inspired and illumined Plato, the guide and master of wisdom, and of those who came before him from the time of Hermes, 'the father of philosophers,' up to Plato's time, including such mighty pillars of wisdom as Empedocles, Pythagoras, and others. . . . This is also the basis of the Eastern doctrine of light and darkness, which was the teaching of Persian philosophers such as Jamasp, Frashostar, Bozorgmehr, and others before them. It is not the doctrine of the unbelieving Magi, nor the heresy of Mani, nor that which leads to associating other gods with God--be He exalted above any such anthropomorphism!"

Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi.
The Wisdom of Illumination

To determine the genuine members of a tradition, we develop operative criteria to include or exclude specific persons (examples of

persons excluded in parentheses):

- Persons who produced inspired works, (not merely studies of Perennialist-inspired works, e.g. Evelyn Underhill, Robert Graves, P. D. Ouspensky)
- Persons who **actually worked within** the Perennial Tradition, (not merely were influenced by it, e.g. Goethe, Duns Scotus, Gurdjieff, Castaneda)
- Persons whose early lives were influenced by the Perennial Tradition, but their lives later changed into reactionary conservatism and hence became antithetical to the Perennial Tradition: e.g. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Frances Bacon
- Persons who refer to a majority of the central Perennialist themes in their teachings in other than a scholastic manner (e.g. Madame Blavatsky refers to some of the Perennialist themes theoretically, but **it is clear** that she had no inner knowledge of the Perennial Tradition)
- Persons who taught esoterically (e.g. Miguel Asin Y Palacios, the renowned Spanish Arabist, taught about the Perennial Tradition publicly but, not being a Perennialist himself, did not transmit the tradition esoterically to a select group of students)
- Persons who experienced personal illumination, not merely studied this phenomenon (e.g. William Inge wrote about Christian mystical experiences but did not experience personal enlightenment)



"By the word 'mystic' I shall always mean a person who himself has had mystical experience. Often the word is used in a much wider and looser way. Anyone who is sympathetic to mysticism is apt to be labeled a mystic. But I shall use the word always in a stricter sense. However sympathetic toward mysticism a man may be, however deeply interested, involved, enthusiastic, or learned in the subject, he will not be called a mystic unless he has, or has had, mystical experience."

Walter T. Stace. *The Teachings of the Mystics*

In our review of the teachings of Perennialist sages over many centuries, our **touchstone** is the awareness of the crucial difference between the Perennialist view of teaching and the scholastic view.

| Perennialist View of Teaching | Scholastic View of Teaching |
|---|--|
| The major goal is helping students develop a higher state of consciousness | The major goal is helping students develop intellectual knowledge |
| Genuine teachings speak of higher faculties dormant through generations of neglect, so instead of trying to explain these faculties in ways familiar to our intellect, a true teacher attempts to exhaust or divert our | Scholastic teachings speak of the intellect and logic being the highest forms of knowledge |

intellectualizing to help us gain an understanding of a higher, spiritual faculty

Teachers must have achieved a higher state of consciousness to be able to teach

Teachings are adapted relative to the needs of the people in a particular culture and time

Teachings are organic nutrients not meant to remain in unaltered, undigested form merely for curiosity seekers or theoreticians

Teachings are transmitted by a human exemplar, the teacher, who conveys the experience face-to-face or in experiential teaching material

Teachers need only to have studied the theories and practices of earlier teachers

Teachings are adopted by one teacher from an earlier teacher

Teachings become the dogma of new schools of thought to be studied and followed by later students and believers

Teachings are transmitted through books and lectures on books

Religions are fossil remains of earlier powerful, dynamic teachers who provided prescribed experiences only for the people at the time and place

Religions are the ritual and dogma from earlier teachers applicable to all peoples at all times

Genuine teachings are esoteric, to be transmitted only to selected, prepared students

Teachings are exoteric, transmitted to all believers

Characteristic Perennialist Themes

In this section we will identify and explicate those themes within the Perennial Tradition which help us define this tradition and which any genuine Perennialist teacher holds to and explores in his or her writings.

All Beings Are Part of the One Unity

"All that a man has here externally in multiplicity is intrinsically One. Here all blades of grass, wood and stone, all things are One. This is the deepest depth."

Meister Eckhart, 1260-1329

**"There is no reality but God."
Koran**

Through Informed Effort We Can Achieve Illumination

"When the nun Chiyono studied Zen under Kukko of Engaku she was unable to attain the fruits of meditation for a long time.

"At last one moonlit night she was carrying water in an old pail bound with bamboo. The bamboo broke and the bottom fell out of the pail, and at that moment Chiyono was set free!

"In commemoration, she wrote a poem:

***In this way and that I tried to save the old pail
Since the bamboo strip was weakening and about to break
Until at last the bottom fell out.
No more water in the pail!
No more moon in the water!"***

from *Zen, Flesh, Zen Bones*, compiled by Paul Reps

"I stood in this resolution, fighting a battle with myself, until the light of the Spirit, a light entirely foreign to my unruly nature, began to break through the clouds. Then, after some farther hard fights with the powers of darkness, my spirit broke through the doors of hell, and penetrated even unto the innermost essence of its newly born divinity where it was received with great love, as a bridegroom welcomes his beloved bride.

"No word can express the great joy and triumph I experienced, as of a life out of death, as of a resurrection from the dead! . . . While in this state, as I was walking

through a field of flowers, in fifteen minutes, I saw through the mystery of creation, the original of this world and of all creatures. . . . Then for seven days I was in a continual state of ecstasy, surrounded by the light of the Spirit, which immersed me in contemplation and happiness. I learned what God is, and what is his will. . . . I knew not how this happened to me, but my heart admired and praised the Lord for it!"

Jacob Boehme (1575-1624 C.E.)

Perennialist Teachings Change According to the Time, Place, and the Awareness of People

The High Knowledge

"Anis was asked:

'What is Sufism?'

He said:

'Sufism is that which succeeds in bringing to man the High Knowledge.'

'But if I apply the traditional methods handed down by the Masters, is that not Sufism?'

'It is not Sufism if it does not perform its function for you. A cloak is no longer a cloak if it does not keep a man warm.'

'So Sufism does change?'

'People change and needs change. So what was Sufism once is Sufism no more. 'Sufism,' continued Anis, 'is the external face of internal knowledge, known as High Knowledge. The inner factor does not change. The whole work, therefore, is the High Knowledge, plus capacity, which produces method. What you are pleased to call Sufism is merely the record of past method.'"

from *Thinkers of the East* by Idries Shah

"Every Scripture must necessarily contain two elements, one temporary, perishable, belonging to the ideas of the period and country in which it was produced, the other eternal and imperishable and applicable in all ages and countries. Moreover, in the statement of the Truth, the actual form given to it, the system and arrangement, the metaphysical and intellectual mould, the precise expression used must be largely subject to the mutations of Time and cease to have the same force; for the human intellect modifies itself always; continually dividing and putting together it is obliged to shift its divisions continually and to rearrange its syntheses; it is always leaving old expression and symbol for new or, if it uses the old, it so changes its connotation or at least its exact content and association that we can never be quite sure of understanding an ancient book of this kind precisely in the sense and spirit it bore to its contemporaries. What is of entirely permanent value is that which besides being universal has been experienced, lived and seen with a higher than the intellectual vision."

Sri Aurobindo. *Essays On the Gita*

**Ordinary Consciousness is Only One of
Many Possible States of Consciousness**

"The first act of a teacher is to introduce the idea that the world we think we see is only a view, a description of the world. Every effort of a teacher is geared to prove this point to his apprentice. But accepting it seems to be one of the hardest things one can do; we are complacently caught in our particular view of the world, which compels us to feel and act as if we knew everything about the world. A teacher, from the very first act he performs, aims at stopping that view. Sorcerers call it stopping the internal dialogue, and they are convinced that it is the single most important technique that an apprentice can learn."

Carlos Casteneda. *Tales of Power*

"One conclusion was forced upon my mind at that time, and my impression of its truth has ever since remained unshaken. It is that our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation. No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. How to regard them is the question--for they are so discontinuous with ordinary consciousness. Yet they may determine attitudes though they cannot furnish formulas, and open a region though they fail to give a map. At any rate, they forbid a premature closing of our accounts with reality. Looking back on my own experiences, they all converge toward a kind of insight to which I cannot help ascribing some metaphysical significance."

William James. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

We Find Ultimate Reality Within Us

"The Kingdom of Heaven is within you."

Jesus of Nazareth

"Abandon the search for God and the creation and other matters of a similar sort. Look for him by taking yourself as the starting point. Learn who it is who within you makes everything his own and says: my God, my mind, my thought, my soul, my body. Learn the sources of sorrow, joy, love, hate. Learn how it happens that one watches without willing, rests without willing, becomes angry without willing, loves without willing. If you carefully pursue these matters you will find God in yourself."

Monoimus, a first century (C.E.) Gnostic

We Must Practice Death and Resurrection Before Final Death

"So then, as the apostle [Paul] said of him [Jesus], we have suffered with him, and arisen with him, and ascended with him."

"Now, since we are manifestly present in this world, the world is what we wear (like a garment). From him (the savior) we radiate like rays; and being held fast by him until our sunset--that is, until our death in the present life--we are

drawn upward by him as rays are drawn by the sun, restrained by nothing. This is resurrection of the spirit, which overcomes animate resurrection along with resurrection of the flesh. . . .

"Everyone should practice in many ways to gain release from this element (the body), so that one might not wander aimlessly but rather might recover one's former state of being."

Epistle to Rheginus, a third or fourth century, C.E.,
letter from a Perennialist teacher to a student

Mohammed. "Die before your death."

Live a Full, Non-Ascetic Life

"[O]ur main future danger is likely to be a swing back to the narrow, ungodlike, inhuman 'spirituality' that mortifies the flesh, passes blue laws, neglects plain business, and lets the world go hang. . . . Only by a hearty mingling in all worldly matters, a complete sharing of physical life, a whole-souled attention to our own business and our relations to people, will we, or anybody else, ever get anywhere."

Stewart Edward White *The Betty Book*

Mohammed. "No monkery in Islam."

Creation Was Created So That We Might Know God

"The Father existed alone, unbegotten, without place, without time, without counsellor, and without any other property that could be thought of . . . solitary and reposing alone in himself. But as he had generative power, it pleased him once to generate and produce the most beautiful and perfect that he had in himself, for he did not love solitude. For he was all love, but love is not love if there is no object of love. So the Father, alone as he was, projected and generated 'Mind' and 'Truth.'"

Hippolytus, a first century (C.E.) Gnostic

**"He said:
'I was a hidden treasure;
creation was created
so that you might know me.'"**

**Hakim Sanai (died 1150 C.E.)
*The Walled Garden of Truth***

Distinguishing Genuine Mysticism from Aberrant Mysticism

There are a number of persons who appear to have a connection to the Perennial Tradition in particular and mysticism in general who in fact have no genuine connection. Some of these persons give the appearance of being in the mystical tradition, but actually exemplify a pseudo-mysticism. The most challenging example of this phenomenon is Teresa of Avila.

It's easy to be deceived by Teresa's writings into thinking that she was a genuine mystic, because she speaks of mystical themes and appears to have had unusual experiences typical of the ecstatic. Even Evelyn Underhill was taken in by Teresa's writings, and claimed that she was one of the "greatest mystics," though Underhill does make the distinction that Teresa achieved this rank only "in her later stages." Underhill acknowledges that Teresa was said to be the "patron saint of hysterics," but defends her experiences as psychologically normal. We understand that we cannot depend on Underhill's evaluation of specific mystics when she venerates Teresa but claims that Plato was not a "pure mystic." Underhill also is unmistakably biased in favor of her own Catholicism and sneers at "Oriental" mysticism.

"Thus sang the initiates of Dionysus; that mystery-cult in which the Greeks seem to have expressed all they knew of the possible movement of consciousness through rites of purification to the ecstasy of the Illuminated Life. The mere crude rapture of illumination has seldom been more vividly expressed. With its half-Oriental fervours, its self-regarding glory in personal purification achieved, and the spiritual superiority conferred by adeptship, may be compared the deeper and lovelier experience of the Catholic poet and saint, who represents the spirit of Western mysticism at its best."

Evelyn Underhill. *Mysticism*

"St. Teresa remarks how much easier it is to impose great penances upon oneself than to suffer in patience, charity and humbleness the ordinary everyday crosses of family life (which did not prevent her, incidentally, from practising, to the very day of her death, the most excruciating forms of self-torture.)"

Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*

It's no wonder Teresa of Avila was canonized, for she represents a perverted mysticism at the service of "the Holy Roman Catholic Church." She serves as a model for setting up convent life where everything is totally abberant:

- **no friendships (for fear of leading to insubordination)**
- **little if any talking (lest it lead to gossiping)**
- **questioning every motive or act (as likely springing from the Devil)**
- **viewing the outside world as totally depraved and evil**
- **male chauvinism (against the "Raptures of Feminine Weakness")**
- **practicing the masochism of health-destroying purgations, entering into abnormal psychological experiences in which pain is said to be "sweet," and relying only on one's superior for approval**

"I saw an angel. . . . I saw in his hand a long spear of gold, and at the iron's point there seemed to be a little fire. He appeared to me to be thrusting it at times into my heart, and to pierce my very entrails; when he drew it out, he seemed to draw them out also and to leave me all on fire with a great love of God. The pain was so great that it made me moan; and yet so surpassing was the sweetness of this excessive pain that I could not wish to be rid of it."

"As long as the pain lasts we cannot even remember our own existence; for in an instant all the faculties of the soul are so fettered as to be incapable of any action save that of increasing our torture. Do not think I am exaggerating; on the contrary, that which I say is less than the truth, for lack of words in which it may be expressed. This is a trance of the senses and the faculties, save as regards all which helps to make the agony

more intense. The understanding realizes acutely what cause there is for grief in separation from God: and our Lord increases this sorrow by a vivid manifestation of Himself. The pain thus grows to such a degree that in spite of herself the sufferer gives vent to loud cries, which she cannot stifle, however patient and accustomed to pain she may be, because this is not a pain which is felt in the body, but in the depths of the soul. The person I speak of learned from this how much more acutely the spirit is capable of suffering than the body."

"Perhaps we do not know what love is: it would not surprise me a great deal to learn this, for love consists, not in the extent of our happiness, but in the firmness of our determination to try to please God in everything, and to endeavour, in all possible ways, not to offend Him, and to pray Him ever to advance the honour and glory of His Son and the growth of the Catholic Church."

"As I write this, the noises in my head are so loud that I am beginning to wonder what is going on in it. As I said at the outset, they have been making it almost impossible for me to obey those who commanded me to write. My head sounds just as if it were full of brimming rivers, and then as if all the waters in those rivers came suddenly rushing downward; and a host of little birds seem to be whistling, not in the ears, but in the upper part of the head, where the higher part of the soul is said to be."

"He [the Devil] inspires a sister with yearnings to do penance, so that she seems to have no peace save when she is torturing herself. This, in itself, is good; but, if the prioress has ordered that no penance is to be done without leave, and yet the sister thinks that she can venture to persist in so beneficial a practice, and secretly orders her life in such a way that in the end she ruins her health and is unable to do what her Rule demands, you see what this apparently good thing has led to."

As we've seen, Aldous Huxley describes Teresa's experiences as "self-torture." In a similar vein, William James saw Teresa of Avila as what he

called a "shrew" type of personality.

"In spite of the sufferings which she endured, there is a curious flavor of superficiality about her genius. A Birmingham anthropologist, Dr. Jordan, has divided the human race into two types, whom he calls 'shrews' and 'non-shrews' respectively. The shrew-type is defined as possessing an 'active' unimpassioned temperament.' In other words, shrews are the 'motors,' rather than the 'sensories,' and their expressions are as a rule more energetic than the feelings which appear to prompt them. Saint Teresa, paradoxical as such a judgment may sound, was a typical shrew, in this sense of the term. The bustle of her style, as well as of her life, proves it. Not only must she receive unheard-of personal favors and spiritual graces from her Saviour, but she must immediately write about them and *exploiter* them professionally, and use her expertness to give instruction to those less privileged. Her voluble egotism; her sense, not of radical bad being, as the really contrite have it, but of her 'faults' and 'imperfections' in the plural; her stereotyped humility and return upon herself, as covered with 'confusion' at each new manifestation of God's singular partiality for a person so unworthy, are typical of shrewdom: a paramously feeling nature would be objectively lost in gratitude, and silent. She had some public instincts, it is true; she hated the Lutherans, and longed for the church's triumph over them; but in the main her idea of religion seems to have been that of an endless amatory flirtation--if one may say so without irreverence--between the devotee and the deity; and apart from helping younger nuns to go in this direction by the inspiration of her example and instruction, there is absolutely no human use in her, or sign of any general human interest."

William James. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

To discern the essence of the Perennial Tradition, it's necessary to distinguish between persons and concepts which seem to be genuine--but

are actually counterfeit or deformed--and those which are authentic. Teresa of Avila provides the student a test case of a person who speaks of seemingly spiritual ideas--*but always with a twist of perversion.*

Modern Mystics

On the basis of the criteria outlined in the first part of this chapter, we can conclude that certain persons were within the Perennial Tradition. In the twentieth century they include:

- Frank C. Laubach (1884-1970)
- Betty and Stewart Edward White (early 20th century)
- Rufus Moseley (mid 20th century)
- Paul Brunton (1898-1981)

I believe that these persons were genuine Perennialists on the basis of my study of their writings (e.g. I've studied the Whites' and Moseley's writings since the 1950s), in reference to my having met them (Laubach, Moseley, and Brunton). It's likely that there are other genuine Perennialists who lived within the twentieth century, but I have not come across any others whose writings, lives, and teachings place them within this tradition without question.

Betty and Stewart Edward White are particularly significant because they demonstrate a number of essential factors:

- They are the only twentieth century individuals who practiced what is now called "channeling" who are undeniably within the Perennial Tradition. Many earlier mystics--especially Socrates and Rumi--entered an altered state of consciousness and communicated with an "inner teacher" in a similar manner.
- They did not have affiliation with an organized religion. It's difficult for us to appreciate that until very recently in the Western world any exploration in the spiritual dimension had to take place within an organized religion, or the explorer might be branded as heretical or evil. This makes it necessary, in the case of such persons as St. John

of the Cross and Meister Eckhart, to separate the elements in their lives and writings which were required or engendered by orthodoxy and the elements primarily free from such constraints.

- They were among the first in the twentieth century to make familiar such terms as: higher states of consciousness, spiritual body, and higher spiritual dimensions.

Rufus Moseley is significant in demonstrating that even in the twentieth century a person can:

- live within a religious tradition and still be a genuine mystic
- center his devotion on one spiritual leader (Jesus) and yet revere other teachers

Paul Brunton pursued a successful career in journalism, developing an interest in comparative religion, mysticism and philosophy. He travelled extensively in the Orient, living among yogis, mystics and holy men. His writings on the Asian mystics and on general transcendent themes are of importance for Perennialist studies.

Hidden Perennialists

The Perennial Tradition speaks of "hidden sages," persons who have achieved wisdom but may not be fully aware of it and do not call themselves Perennialists or gnostics.

"God . . . has made the Saints the governors of the universe. . . . Among them there are four thousand who are concealed and do not know one another and are not aware of the excellence of their state, but in all circumstances are hidden from themselves and from mankind. Traditions have come down to this effect, and the sayings of the Saints proclaim the truth thereof, and I myself--God be praised!--have had ocular experience of this matter."

**Al-Hujwiri. *The Kashf Al-Mahjub*, [Revelation of the Veiled],
translated by R. A. Nicholson.**

The New Testament refers to this "hidden sage" tradition in the Gospel According to Matthew, chapter 25 (J.B. Phillips translation):

25:31-33 - "But when the Son of Man comes in his splendour with all his angels with him, then he will take his seat on his glorious throne. All the nations will be assembled before him and he will separate men from each other like a shepherd separating sheep from goats. He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left.

25:34-36 - "Then the king will say to those on his right 'Come, you who have won my Father's blessing! Take your inheritance - the kingdom reserved for you since the foundation of the world! For I was hungry and you gave me food. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was lonely and you made me welcome. I was naked and you clothed me. I was ill and you came and looked after me. I was in prison and you came to see me there.'

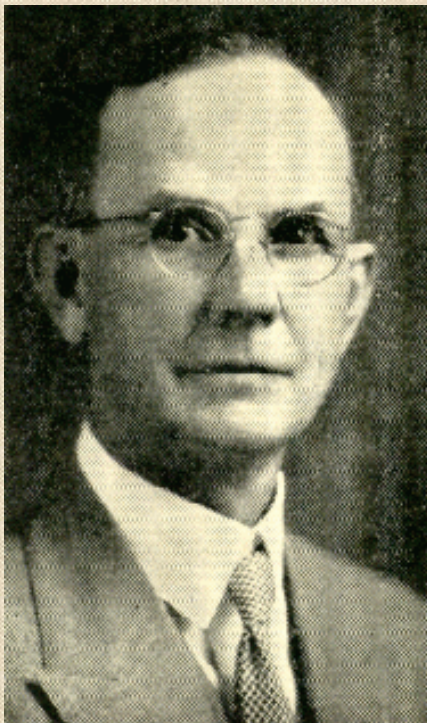
25:37-39 - "Then the true men will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and give you food? When did we see you thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you lonely and make you welcome, or see you naked and clothe you, or see you ill or in prison and go to see you?'

25:40 - "And the king will reply, 'I assure you that whatever you did for the humblest of my brothers you did for me.'

In this rendition, the "true men" were not aware that they had served their Lord. They are told that insofar as they have served even "the least" of their fellow humans, they have served him.

E. H. Whinfield, who translated Rumi's *Mathnawi*, referred to this tradition of hidden sages.

"A very remarkable doctrine is that of unrecognized saints. There are always on earth four thousand persons who are, so to speak, saints without knowing it. These are they who are born with a natural goodness, which lifts them without effort to a point that most labor to reach in vain--loyal, gentle, unselfish souls, endowed with a natural intuition of good and a natural inclination to pursue it, the stay and comfort of those who enjoy the blessing of their society, and, when they have passed away, perhaps canonized in the hearts of one or two who loved them. Spontaneous goodness of this sort is not to be submitted to rules or forms; the inward inclination, not the outward ordinances, is the source of their goodness. 'Against such there is no law.' They have a standard of thought and character of their own, quite independent of the praise or blame of 'men of externals.'"



I had the very great privilege to come in contact with one such "hidden sage" when I was in middle and high school. Mr. O. H. Attebery was the director of our high school orchestra. This was in a small hamlet in Oklahoma, population twenty-five hundred, yet in fifty district, state, tri-state and national contests, this orchestra won highest honors in forty of them and second highest honors in the others--a remarkable achievement. Mr. Attebery possessed extraordinary qualities of being, inspiring all his students to achieve to the height of their capability. Yet his advanced spiritual state was "hidden" within his work as an orchestra director, discernible only to those "with eyes to see."

It was only at the time of his retirement that Mr. Attebery verbally expressed his philosophy or religion.

"The outstanding achievements of the orchestra are a stimulus to the pride of every person in the community but to me there is a far greater satisfaction in what has been done. This

calls for a brief explanation of my philosophy and perhaps my religion.

"Doubtless it was and is the purpose of the Creator that man shall develop every faculty and talent with which he has been endowed. We do not have to go back to the stone age to see that the race is in evolution; the advance made in the last fifty years is sufficient proof that this is true. Every human being that comes into this world starts from nothing and gradually develops a certain degree of intelligence and skill; it may be in the world of art such as music, painting, sculpture, architecture, in science, or other subjects.

"It is unthinkable that all this achievement is lost when we enter upon the next state of existence. If we do not take all we have gained here with us, then nothing we do here really is worthwhile. I am convinced that we shall begin life in the next world just where we leave off here and that we lose nothing at the time of our departure except the physical body.

"So, if I am permitted to have an orchestra in Heaven I hope and expect that those who have been in my orchestras here eventually become members there.

"This philosophy of mine has been arrived at through long, lonely hours of meditation and it will not seem unreasonable to any who will spend as much time and study of it as I have. It has been the motivating force of all my activities and if it is a false philosophy then all my activities have been largely in vain.

"If there is one thing I consider more important than another that I can say as a last word to my students it is: 'Whatever you do in the way of developing mind, talent, and character, be assured that your achievements are for eternity.' I like the following quotation of Daniel Webster:

**'If we write on brass, time will efface it;
If we write on marble, it will crumble into dust;**

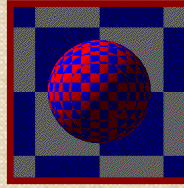
**But if we write on the tablets of the human mind
We write that which will brighten to all eternity.'**

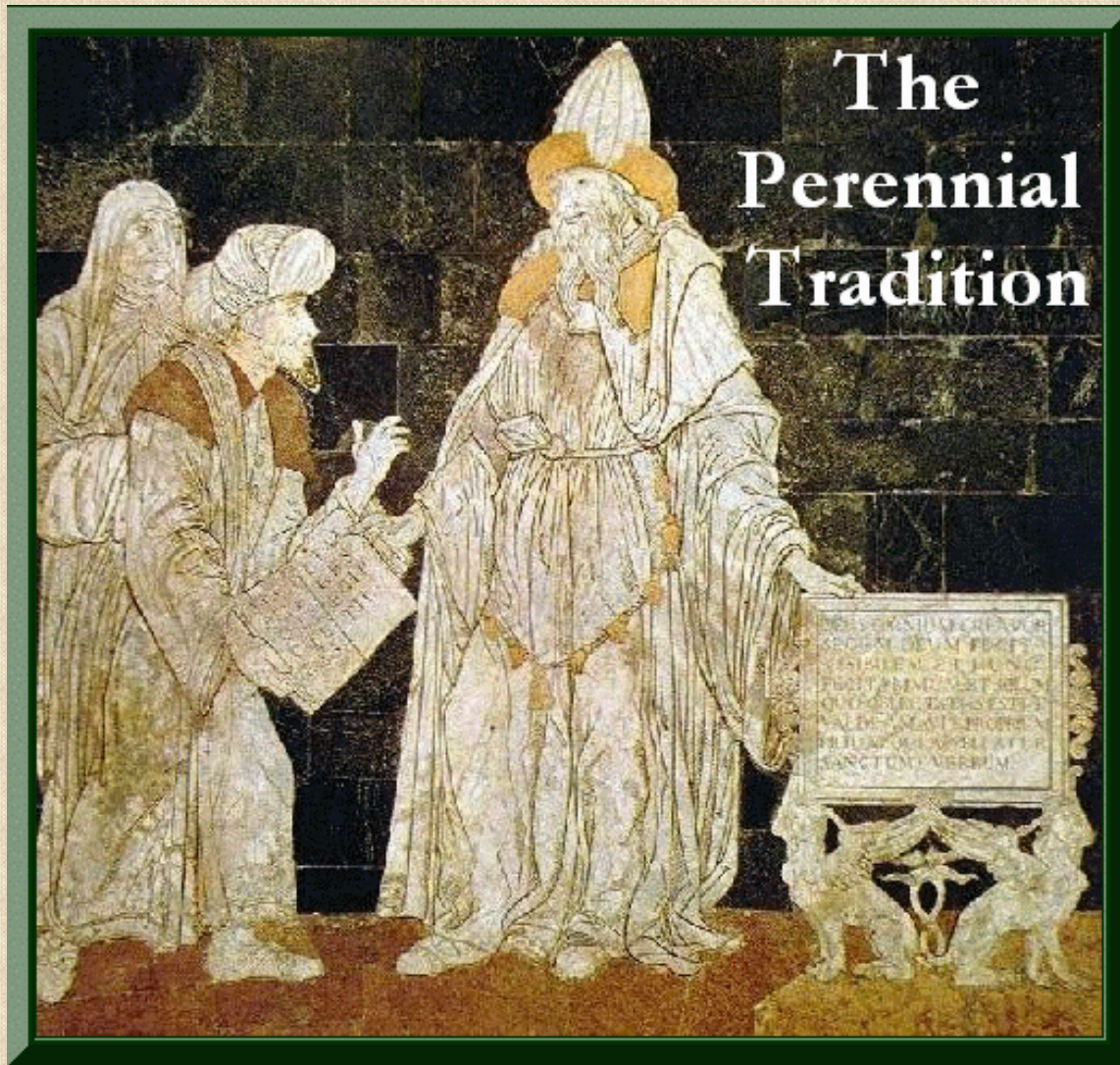
"Use what you have of time, talent, brains, opportunity--the emphasis in this sentence is rightly paced on the word 'use.' It is not the lack of any of the above listed qualifications that hinders development but the failure to make use of what we have. A small amount of any of these put to good use is better than a large amount that is not used. Never offer that oft repeated and feeble excuse 'I don't have time' or the other common one 'I can't do it.' You students have heard these admonitions often enough; it only remains now to practice them."

The content and style of the Perennialist Tradition is distinctive and can be recognized only by those who share the Perennialist frame of mind. There is an almost indescribable quality which a participant in the Perennialist Tradition possesses, that only another person sharing the same abilities and interests can recognize. It is somewhat similar to the way E. M. Forster described what he called "an aristocracy of the sensitive."

"I believe in aristocracy. Not an aristocracy of power, based upon rank and influence, but an aristocracy of the sensitive, the considerate and the plucky. Its members are to be found in all nations and classes, and all through the ages, and there is a secret understanding between them when they meet. They represent the true human tradition, the one permanent victory of our queer race over cruelty and chaos. . . . On they go--an invincible army, yet not a victorious one. The aristocrats, the elect, the chosen, the Best People--all the words that describe them are false, and all attempts to organize them fail. Again and again Authority, seeing their value, has tried to net them and to utilize them as the Egyptian Priesthood or the Christian Church or the Chinese Civil Service or the Group Movement, or some other worthy stunt. But they slip through the net and are gone; when the door is shut, they are no longer in the room, their

temple . . . is the Holiness of the Heart's Imagination, and their kingdom, though they never possess it, is the wide-open world."





Chapter Three

Knowledge Through Prescribed Experience



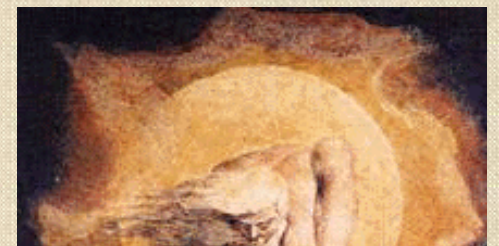
Roger Bacon, a Franciscan monk heavily influenced by Perennialists such as Suhrawardi, wrote in his *Opus Maius* (1268):

"There are two modes of knowledge, through argument and experience. Argument brings conclusions and compels us to concede them, but it does not cause certainty nor remove doubts in order that the mind may remain at rest in truth, unless this is provided by experience."

Throughout the Middle Ages, European thought stagnated largely because of its conception of knowledge as derived from *argument* from authority--whether the authority of the Church or the State. Europe languished in intellectual and cultural retrogression during the Dark Ages, while the light of wisdom was preserved and advanced by those they labeled "the infidel Saracen." The reintroduction of the Classical (Greek) Tradition and the Perennial Tradition through the confluence of European and Muslim thought, beginning around 1000 CE, revitalized earlier conceptions of knowledge as derived from *experience*.

The Perennial Tradition

Renaissance scholars pored over Classical and Perennialist writings which had been preserved and studied by Moslem scholars. Over time the authority of Plato and other Classical thinkers supplemented that of Aristotle, the Church and the State. The churchmen had interpreted



Aristotle in ways to support their own view of knowledge and the re-introduction of Plato and other Perennialist writers laid the foundation for the Renaissance. However, many European scholastics simply dismissed the Perennialist writings as being tainted by occult influence.



In Roger Bacon's terms, the Middle Ages held argument to be the primary path to knowledge: argument from authority. Experience, the other mode of knowledge to which Bacon refers, was slowly beginning to make its way into Western life. We can get a feeling for the medieval mode of knowledge from the anecdote about the stable boy who heard the scholars arguing about how many teeth a horse had. The scholars consulted Aristotle concerning this weighty issue, while the stable boy went to the barn and counted the actual number of teeth a horse had. After reporting his findings to the learned gentlemen, the stable boy was, of course, summarily dismissed, because experience had nothing to do with knowledge. Knowledge was found in authority and system.



"The mediaeval way of thinking differed fundamentally from ours as solely ideas alone were real, facts and things only in so far as they participated in the reality of ideas."

Heinz Gotze, *Castel del Monte*

The Perennial Tradition was preserved in its Moslem repository while Europe suffered through the intellectual and cultural retrogression of the Dark Ages. Now this Tradition burst forth throughout Europe by way of scholars and scientists who had carefully studied and imbibed its teachings: Raymond Lully, Alexander Hales, Duns Scotus, Paracelsus, Geber, Albertus Magnus, Pope Gerbert, Pope Silvester II, St. John of the Cross, and others. Anselm, known as Sufi Obdullah el Tarjuman, translated parts of the *Encyclopaedia* of the Arab Brethren of Purity in his book, *Dispute of the Ass with Brother Anselmo*.

Experience As Experimentation

The first steps in understanding that knowledge is achieved through experience were halting and often misdirected. Natural philosophers, who came to be called scientists, began to see that experience as observation was not just a way of developing hypotheses, but a means of describing the actual workings of phenomena. This was the real impact of what came to be called the scientific method--that scientists such as Kepler and Galileo began to assert that their hypotheses not only "saved the appearances" of observable data, but were in fact physically true.

This was a revolutionary idea; no longer was it argument from theological or political systems of authority, but scientific experimentation--observation and hypothesis--formation--which could determine what is true. The Church was not afraid of the heliocentric hypothesis--it had been around for centuries. It was when this hypothesis--based on the experiential observations of Copernicus, Kepler, and Galileo--were said to



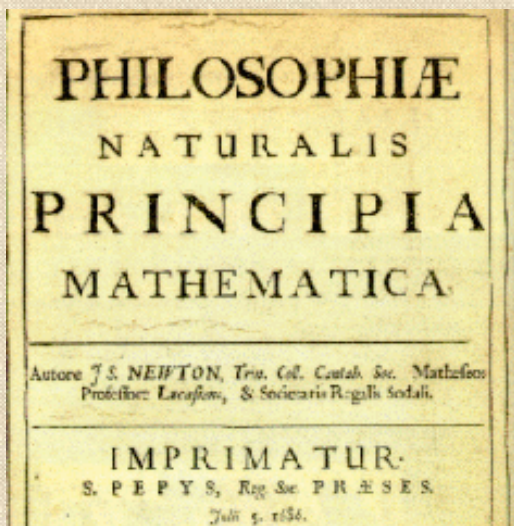
be *true* that the Church and State began their murderous inquisitions.

The two slogans of the eighteenth century Enlightenment were:

- Voltaire's *Ecrasez l'infame*--Crush the infamy
- Kant's *Sapere aude*--Dare to know!

It was indeed daring to know in this new *experiential* mode, for there were still plenty of knees that bent to argument from dogmatic authority who were quite willing to force other knees to bend as well.

In many of the significant seventeenth and eighteenth century Enlightenment philosophers, there was a hint of the esoteric in their lives and writings. Western scholars had assumed that a totemic figure such as Isaac Newton was above such offensive occult influence--a man of purely materialistic science. It thus came as a shock when in 1936 Newton's manuscripts were auctioned off by his descendants at Sotheby's. John Maynard Keynes summarized what came to light about Newton:



"Newton was not the first of the age of reason. He was the last of the magicians . . . He looked on the whole universe and all that is in it *as a riddle*, as a secret which could be read by applying pure thought to certain evidence, certain mystic clues which God had laid about the world to allow a sort of philosopher's treasure hunt to the esoteric brotherhood. He believed that these clues were to be found partly in the evidence of the heavens and in the constitution of elements (and this is what gives the false suggestion of his being an experimental natural philosopher), but also



partly in certain papers and traditions handed down by the brethren in an unbroken chain back to the original cryptic revelation in Babylonia. He regarded the universe as a cryptogram set by the Almighty." ¹

Newton believed he was among the few who were privileged to receive the Hermetic wisdom. He dealt in alchemy as a method of discovering truth, and his conception of gravity is directly tied to the Hermetic principle of sympathetic forces, sources of divine energy in the universe.

But Newton was only one of many philosophers influenced by the Perennialist Tradition. There were periods of decline and resurgence in esoteric investigation, depending on religious and political tolerance. The decade of 1650 to 1660, for example, saw more alchemical and astrological books translated into English than during the entire preceding century.

Enlightening Experience Orchestrated By A Teacher

The Enlightenment *philosophes* developed new conceptions of knowledge, influenced by subtle clues provided by Perennialist teachings. For Newton and his followers, experiential observation produced the data and the investigation resulted in generalized principles of measure and number. The Perennial Tradition spoke of *knowledge coming through the deliberate arrangement and provocation of the learner's experience by the teacher*. The natural philosophers took the first part of that legacy but ignored the second. The development of science as the deliberate arrangement of experience to test a hypothesis was the result--a truncated teaching at best.

The teachings available to the astute European thinker included such works as Ibn Sabin's *Secrets of Illuministic Wisdom* and Shahabudin Suhrawardi's *Gifts of Deep*

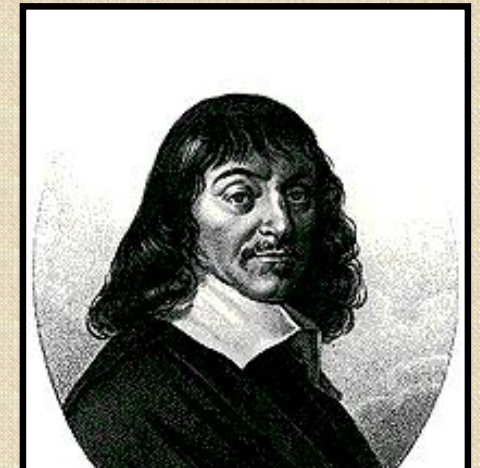
Knowledge (Awarifu-l-ma'arif) ². Frederick II von Hohenstaufen, ruler of Sicily, corresponded with Ibn Sabin ³, Roger Bacon cites Ibn Sabin in his own writings, and Suhrawardi's ideas provided the foundation for Dante's works. In his *Gifts of Deep Knowledge*, Shahabudin Suhrawardi indicates that *true knowledge is attained through a spiritual guide prescribing enlightening experience for a seeker*. The guide must thoroughly understand the learner's personality and provide the precise kinds of experience which will facilitate understanding and probity.

The Apostasy of Western Thought

Western thought from this point on is the result of misinterpreting or ignoring this fundamental teaching about knowledge through illuminating experience provided by a spiritual guide. Shahabudin Suhrawardi was able to foretell of the experience of people such as Descartes, the victim of false and truncated teachings.

"If the spiritual advisor (*murshid*) be not perfect and excellent, the student (*murid*) wasteth his time. . . . He will seek relief in . . . doubting all that he hath heard or read; and regarding as fable the accounts of holy men who have reached truth (*hakikat*)."

Having studied in a Jesuit seminary, the *Ecole de La Flèche*, Descartes believed he had received the best education available. Yet, he says, he had learned nothing he could call certain. He began his own self-education by disbelieving everything. He supposed that there could be a malignant demon that deceived his senses. Assuming without foundation that he had shed all credulity, Descartes then asserted that he possessed a true self whose reality was proved by its own experience. "I think, therefore I am,"



Descartes averred. And Western thought has ever since assumed that we possess an authentic self which possesses the power to force reality to reveal the truth.

Descartes' ideas about doubting all concepts and finding proof for his existence in his thinking were actually not original. In his *Metaphysics* Aristotle says:

"He who seeks to acquire knowledge must first know how to doubt, for intellectual doubt helps to establish the truth."

And Augustine had written:

"If I make a mistake, I conclude that I exist; for he who does not exist cannot make a mistake, so that the fact of having made a mistake is proof that I exist."

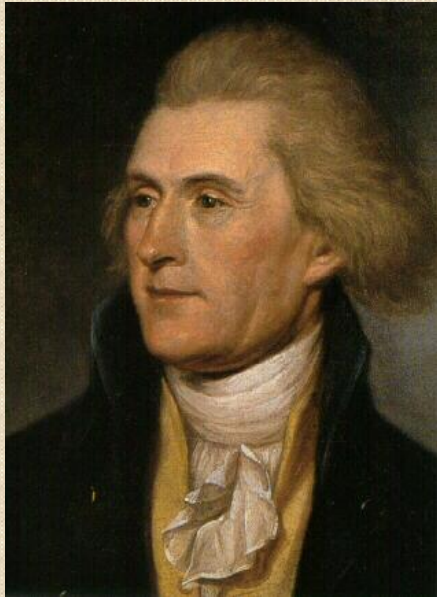
Philosophers such as Bradley and psychologists such as Skinner have shown that the concept of the Self or Ego is, at best, problematic and that basing one's understanding of reality on such a slender reed is logically unwarranted.

"You shall become aware, through daily practice, that what you imagine to be your self is concocted from beliefs put into you by others, and is not your self at all."

Iskandar of Balk (a Perennialist Teacher) ⁴

The Western mind has remained in an arrested state of development by assuming that the Cartesian/Hobbesian/Lockean view of reality is ultimate truth. We no longer need to ask what reality is; it is the booming, buzzing, money-capitalist, technological, scientific, imperialist world that any sane person takes for granted. And life is for the purpose of satisfying all the desires of the self.

The Perennial Tradition Prevails



Some eighteenth century thinkers--especially American philosophers such as Patrick Henry, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson--were able to tap into the dynamic energy of the Perennial Tradition. Their immersion in this older tradition made it possible for them to help create an entirely new nation and establish its foundations on the fundamental civil liberties set forth in the Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.

Unfortunately, the general mind set resulting from the eighteenth century Enlightenment has produced a series of concepts which are, at best, partial representations of the Perennial Tradition. Perennialist teachers have, for example, spoken of the need to cleanse one's mind from delusions and free oneself from political and social manipulation. Some European *philosophes* misinterpreted this to mean skepticism and anarchy--and the French revolution was the outcome.

Pursuing the Cartesian delusion of an authentic, all-powerful self, *philosophes* believed they could force nature to reveal her secrets. Assuming they could discover truth through their own speculations and observations, they merely produced new dogmas of empiricism, rationalism, materialism, and pragmatism. Their ideas helped to overthrow old forms of ideological and political tyranny, but these were immediately

replaced with newer forms of mental and political dictatorship.

There were essential elements lacking in all this fury of eighteenth century thought:

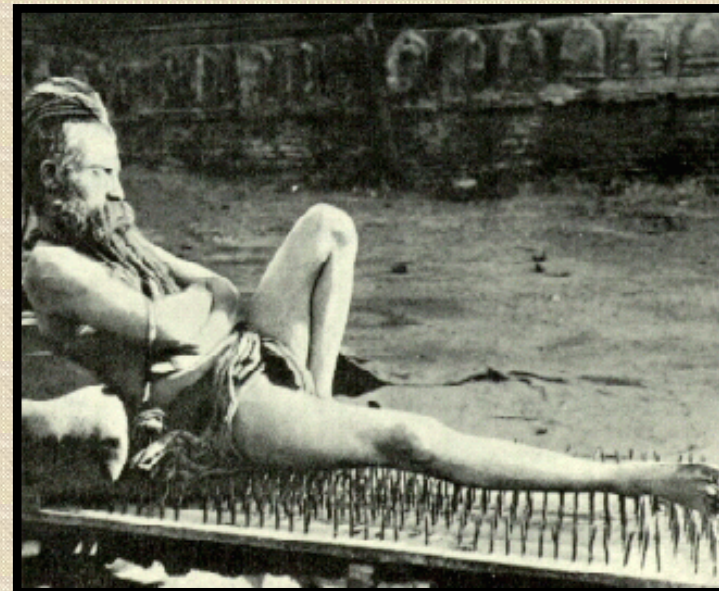
- Enlightened teachers who had traveled the path to knowledge
- Enlightened teachers who could *prescribe* specific kinds of experience to assist the seeker develop heightened awareness
- Seekers of truth who did not assume they
 - already possessed the capacities required for a genuine search for truth
 - already knew the truth
- An awareness that seekers can learn very little on their own from their unorganized experience
- An awareness that most seekers are initially incapable of gaining knowledge and must first learn how to learn

The eighteenth century Enlightenment mind set, embodied in the Newtonian world view and its Einsteinian revision, has produced an industrial revolution, electronic and mechanical technology, and improved material conditions for some humans. But we are still suffering from its mutilated reading of the Perennial Tradition. Humans are now afflicted by new political and social tyrannies embodied in globalist monetary capitalism, egomania, and conditioned ignorance.

Recognizing An Authentic Teacher

To gain knowledge we must connect with new, authentic teachers who can help us return to a genuine search for the truth. But this is not an easy task, since, as Shahabudin Suhrawardi warns, "false teachers and deceived seekers vainly pursue the desert vapor--and wearied return, the dupe of their own imagination."

The authentic teacher finds the seeker, since "to discover him [the true teacher] is impossible." Our challenge is to *recognize* an authentic teacher, because our own misconceptions make us blind to a true mentor or lead us to clamor after a false guru who panders to our weaknesses. Very often we are so presumptuous in our self-importance that we approach a teacher with nothing but wrong assumptions. For example, a seeker may worry that a teacher will try to take his non-existent autonomy from him. For such a deluded seeker there is a sure way to distinguish an authentic teacher: any teacher who would accept that seeker is not a true teacher.



"A man knocked at a teacher's door. The teacher asked, 'Who is there?'

"The man answered, 'I.'

" 'Begone,' said the teacher, 'tis too soon: at my table there is no place for the raw.'

"How shall the raw one be cooked but in the fire of absence?

What else will deliver him from hypocrisy?"

Rumi

The role of the true teacher has been taken over by society and its rulers. They tell us what truth is and they provide the experiences (art, education, religion, labor, entertainment) that produce in us the belief that the Cartesian-Baconian world of mechanistic materialism is the only reality.

The concept of a genuine teacher has been driven out by the myth that humans are their own teachers and that unordered experience automatically produces understanding.

The seeker's path to knowledge is through illuminating experience prescribed by an external or inner teacher. The teacher does not presume that the seeker genuinely wants to gain knowledge, no matter what the seeker claims. The true teacher's approach to knowledge is the very opposite of that developed by some of the seventeenth and eighteenth century Enlightenment thinkers such as Francis Bacon. Bacon's conception of knowledge was to *force* nature to yield its secrets. The Perennial Tradition teaches that knowledge comes from *preparing oneself* to discern what is to be perceived in nature--the apparent and the hidden. Only a person who has successfully trod the path to knowledge--the teacher--can assist the seeker to prepare for knowledge. The teacher orchestrates the seeker's experiences so that necessary capabilities are developed according to the proper design and measure.

"Practice may change our theoretical horizon, and this in a twofold way: it may lead into new worlds and secure new powers. Knowledge we could never attain, remaining what we are, may be attainable in consequences of higher powers and a higher life, which we may morally achieve."

William James

Learning How to Learn



toward knowledge taught in the Perennial Tradition: that the seeker must first develop the capabilities necessary for discerning truth.

One of the major contemporary obstacles to knowledge is the Cartesian mind set that assumes that people are intrinsically capable of knowledge. Most of the eighteenth century Enlightenment *philosophes* assumed that they were already quite capable of discovering the truth, they just had to find the correct mathematical or psychological stratagem required. They had passed over an entire step

"It might be said that the scientific approach has most often been: 'I shall make this phenomenon yield its secrets', while the Sufic attitude is: 'Let the real truth, whatever it may be, be revealed to me'.

"The former is the 'heroic' mode: attempting something with insufficient knowledge, the latter the 'self-evolution' mode: fitting oneself to perceive that which is to be perceived. It eliminates heroism"

Idries Shah. *The Commanding Self*

The first step toward true knowledge--and true spiritual understanding--is to divest ourselves of cultural myths and spend time preparing our minds for a new manner of thinking.

"So remote . . . are these matters [concerning true knowledge] from our ordinary habits of thought, that their investigation entails, in those who would attempt to understand them, a definite preparation: a purging of the intellect. As with those who came of old to the Mysteries, purification is here the gate of knowledge. We must come to this encounter with minds cleared of prejudice and convention, must deliberately break with our inveterate habit of taking the 'visible world' for granted; our lazy assumption that somehow science is 'real' and metaphysics is not. We must pull down our own card houses--descend, as the mystics say, 'into our nothingness'--and examine for ourselves the foundations of all possible

human experience, before we are in a position to criticize the buildings of the visionaries, the poets, and the saints. We must not begin to talk of the unreal world of these dreamers until we have discovered--if we can--a real world with which it may be compared."

Evelyn Underhill. *Mysticism*

The Perennial Tradition teaches that knowledge of reality is gained through knowledge of self. The Moslem Perennialists harked back to Muhammed's teaching: "He who knows himself knows his Lord." Ibn 'Arabi, a Spanish Perennialist, taught that ordinary persons interpret reality only in the form of their personal beliefs. Hence it is necessary to study oneself--one's beliefs, one's habits of thought, one's preconceptions--in order to gain a truer perception of reality. One way to gain insight into one's self is by studying others.

"Hence man sees in his brother something of himself that he would not see without him. For man is veiled by his own caprice. But when he sees that attribute in the other, while it is his own attribute, he sees his own defect in the other." 5

Metaphysical Technology

The Perennial Tradition possesses an actual *technology* for helping people develop higher states of consciousness. Books and stories within the Perennial Tradition contain carefully designed elements which act on the reader's psyche (personality and mind) to produce precise effects. The prescribed results vary according to the capabilities of different readers and with a single reader who returns to the material over a period of

time. Our scholastic predispositions lead us to look at a book as a simple collection of words expressing ideas. It is difficult for us to conceive of a genuine science contained in Perennialist books and teachings which would be capable of producing evolutionary transformations in human beings.

The intellectual hangover from the Middle Ages was, as we've seen, a complete reliance on argument as a way to knowledge. This was formalized as scholasticism which led thinkers to believe that any subject could be mastered by an assiduous study of sources and piling word upon word to create a logical system of thought. In every graduate school in the world today, this scholastic method is assumed to be the one true way to knowledge.

We are just beginning to perceive that the Perennial Tradition possesses a vast science of knowledge of which we are largely ignorant. Our scholastic presumptions make us feel that if there is a "science of knowledge" then a genuine teacher would simply make it available to us in a straightforward manner. But there are elements in us--which this science delineates--which must be dealt with in a prescribed manner and order. For example, if we are truly blind to a higher dimension of knowledge, assuming that our present conception of knowledge is all there is, then we would first have to overcome our obsession with familiar forms of knowledge and acknowledge our blindness and learn to "open our eyes" by stages to discern higher knowledge.

"An alienated man can become sighted if he realises that his heart is blind. He is like a sick man suffering from delirium. So long as he is prisoner to his illness he knows nothing of himself or of his sickness because delirium affects the brain and weakens it. . . . When he realizes that his heart is blind, it means that he has gained a bit of sight."

The Mystical and Visionary Treatises of Shihabuddin Yahya Suhrawardi, Translated by W.M. Thackston Jr.

Regenerated Teachings

Modern thinkers completely overlook another element of the Perennial Tradition--that teachings must be revitalized relative to the needs of the people and the time involved. A Perennialist teacher selects insights from past and present material in assisting seekers to gain deeper perception. Past teachings in their original form become atrophied and useless. Very often, misguided, self-deluded counterfeit teachers attempt to use these obsolete teachings in their original form and produce nothing but anachronisms and deception.



The scholastic mind set views obsolete or merely theoretical teachings as a proper foundation for developing what it considers to be new systems of knowledge. It is as though we have come upon a number of prescriptions ⁶ written by a doctor many years earlier. We assume that the prescriptions still have some usefulness and try to apply them to our present maladies. But a genuine teacher provides *new prescriptions* for what seekers need now. Each assemblage of teachings by a genuine teacher is a temporary formula intended for specific purposes.

He Who Tastes Knows

True discernment in the Perennial Tradition is not gained through books or arguments, but through experience. Perennialist teachers distinguish between ordinary knowledge and a higher form of knowledge called *gnosis*, direct knowledge, unveiling, witnessing, and tasting. "He who tastes, knows."

"The knowledge of mysteries is always said to be 'beyond words.' Not because that knowledge cannot be communicated, but because the mode of communication it requires is an initiatory process which leads to seeing with one's own eyes. Spiritual masters are notorious for their elusiveness; they simply will not pass the mysteries along in the form of reports. Rather, their way is to *arrange* for the mysteries to be learned by direct, personal understanding; they create spiritual environments in which the desired experience may flower."

Theodore Roszak. *Unfinished Animal*

Ordinary knowledge through sense perception and reasoning is a necessary part of human experience. But Perennialist teachers point to a higher knowledge which seekers can attain through prescribed experience.

**"Understanding can be
acquired only by actual
participation in the reality." 7**

¹ Quoted in B.J.T. Dobbs. (1975). *The Foundations of Newton's Alchemy*, Cambridge University Press.

² H. Wilberforce Clarke. (1980). *Gifts of Deep Knowledge, Awarifu-l-ma'arif by Shahabudin Suhrawardi*, London: Octagon Press

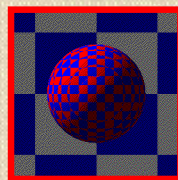
³ Hitti, *History of the Arabs*

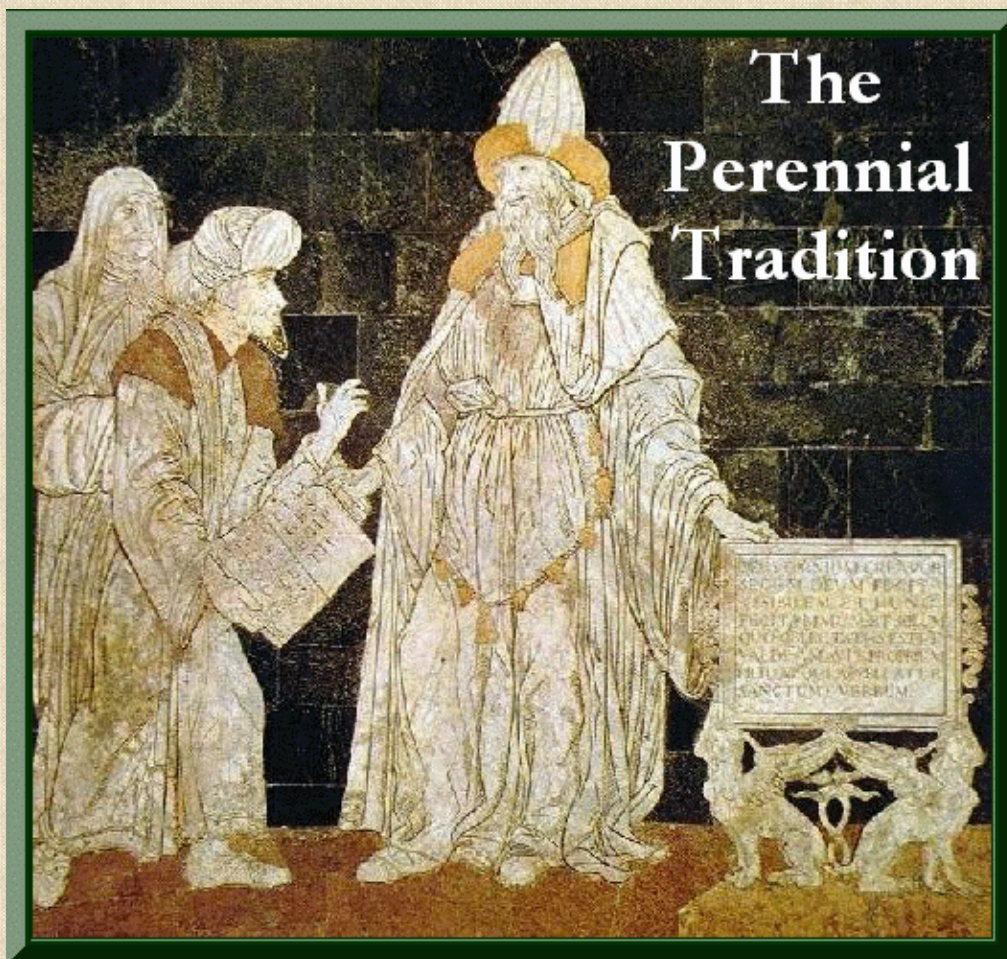
⁴ Narrated by Idries Shah in *Thinkers of the East*

⁵ W.C. Chittick, (1989). *The Sufi Path of Knowledge*, State Univ. of NY Press, p. 351

⁶ Shahabudin Suhrawardi speaks of the teacher prescribing specific remedies for the seeker's maladies. *The Mystical and Visionary Treatises of Shihabuddin Yahya Suhrawardi*, Translated by W.M. Thackston Jr., London: Octagon Press

⁷ Stewart Edward White, (1937). *Across The Unknown*





Chapter Four

States of Consciousness

A major element within the Perennialist teaching is the initiation of selected students into a higher state of consciousness. Thus it is necessary to examine the various states of human consciousness, how the heightened awareness of Perennialist initiation is achieved, and some of the counterfeits of this mystical experience.

In this chapter I'll use Steiner's definition of mysticism as "an immediate consciousness and feeling of the divine within the soul" (*Christianity as Mystical Fact*).

The Conspiracy to Debase Human Consciousness

"The only alternative explanation to the hundreds of carefully studied 'spontaneous' [psychic] incidents reported, and the hundreds of scientifically controlled laboratory experiments, was that the greatest conspiracy in history had been going on for more than eighty years."

**Lawrence LeShan. (1969).
*Towards a General Theory of the Paranormal***

Actually, it would be more accurate to say that the conspiracy to reduce consciousness to intellectual awareness of the physical world has been in evidence for at least five thousand years. Over the centuries the spiritual powers that Perennialist savants possess have been filtered out of most people, so that we now assume that our narrow, tightly-bound consciousness is normal and natural. "Ordinary consciousness" is "normal" only in the strict sense of "statistically most frequent," not inherently "good" or "natural" as the term is sometimes misconstrued to mean. When contrasted with supernormal consciousness experienced by some people, our current rigid, intellect-based awareness is highly abnormal and unnatural.

Reports of Supernormal Consciousness

"The boundary between my physical self and my surroundings seemed to dissolve and my feeling of separation vanished. . . . I felt as if I had suddenly come alive for the first time--as if I were awakening from a long deep sleep into the real world." (Wendy Rose-Neill)

"I saw that the universe is not composed of dead matter, but is, on the contrary, a living Presence; I became conscious in myself of eternal life. It was not a conviction that I would have eternal life, but a consciousness that I possessed eternal life then; I saw that all men are immortal." (Richard Maurice Bucke)

"I seemed to comprehend the nature of things. I understood that the scheme of the universe was good, not evil as our Western society had taught me as a child; all people were intrinsically good. Neither time nor space existed on this plane." (Claire Myers Owen)

Reported in Colin Wilson. *Beyond the Occult*

Human beings possess a whole range of dormant, "hidden powers" of which they are usually unaware. Experience of these latent powers occurs accidentally or to those who learn the necessary procedures. These powers include inspiration, clairaudience, clairvoyance, psychometry, precognition, and telepathy. In his book, *Beyond the Occult*, Colin Wilson conjectures that we have gradually lost these powers ". . . because we no longer need them." On the contrary, we have needed and continue to need such powers--for the completion of our potential and for participating in human evolution.

Our psychic powers have become forgotten and atrophied from neglect because the vast conspiracy of the ideology of Mammon (material wealth as the highest value) has conditioned untold generations to believe that mind-bound consciousness of the physical world is all there is. Non-ordinary states were said to be "psychotic"--evil, abnormal and debilitating. Persons who even spoke of spiritual or psychic powers were classed as weird, insane, and perverse.

We have very little understanding of "consciousness," since it is by definition a nonmaterial quality or state of being aware. Scientists study only the physical correlates of consciousness, such as brain waves, not consciousness itself.

From their early experiments with LSD, psilocybin, and mescaline at Harvard, Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert discovered the importance of set and setting:

- "Set is a person's expectations of what a drug will do to him, considered in the context of his whole life."¹
- "Setting is the environment, both physical and social, in which a drug is taken."²



Without the concepts of "set" and "setting" we're unable to explain why drugs vary so unpredictably in their physiological and psychological effects on various users.

"...the combined effects of set and setting can easily overshadow the pharmacological effects of a drug as stated in a pharmacology text. One can arrange set and setting so that a dose of an amphetamine will produce sedation or a dose of a barbiturate stimulation." ³

Thus it's absurd to speak of "the effect of marijuana," "the effect of meditation," and so on. The "effect" depends on what users expect and on the expectations of the social setting in which they take the psychedelic drug or carry out specific procedures. But federal and state governments have continued to oppose any use of psychedelic drugs, claiming that they're all bad under all circumstances. Our nation's leaders continue to push the mind-and body-destroying "official" drugs of alcohol, nicotine, and caffeine, among many others created by a pharmaceutical industry which buys politicians in large economy quantities.

What positive elements ⁴ assist us to break through to a positive ⁵ non-ordinary consciousness?

- Meditation
- Dreams
- Hypnosis
- Sex
- Contemplation of art (music, painting, prose, poetry, drama)
- Contemplation of nature
- Psychedelic drugs
- Brain stimulation and bio-feedback

Meditation

Meditation has been used for centuries by spiritual practitioners to achieve non-ordinary states of consciousness. Dreaming, especially lucid dreaming in which the dreamer controls the dream activity, is a particularly powerful means of entering an altered state of consciousness. Hypnosis induced by an informed hypnotist or by oneself can enable us to enter into non-ordinary states of consciousness wherein we are able to gain enhanced control of our mental and

physiological activities. Sex, within the proper context, enables us to achieve altered states.

Contemplation



Contemplation of art or nature can lead to epiphanies. The meaning of "epiphany" has expanded beyond its Greek origins--the manifestation of a god--to include special and sudden raptures. In this chapter I'm using the term epiphany to refer to an episodic mystical experience. These raptures occur to men and women from virtually every nation and culture. Throughout the ages, humans have undergone harrowing experiences,

braved drug intoxication and risked madness to experience intense altered states of consciousness.

Until recently, only mystics have described these encounters with another order of reality. If they talk about their experiences at all, mystics use words like ecstasy, illumination, and exaltation--after confessing that words fail them. Protesting all the while that their sensations cannot be explained, mystics, psychedelic explorers, meditators, and contemplatives of all stripes describe experiences of inspiration, peace, serenity, and all-rightness with the universe; of moving into another order or dimension of consciousness; of fusing in oneness with God, the universe, others, everything, eternity; of transcending time, space, and ego; of being infused with knowledge, recognition, awareness, insight, certainty, illumination; of having a sense of endowment, of gaining more from the experience than they can intellectually understand.

Mind-Altering Substances

With the proper set and setting, psychedelic drugs can produce an altered sense of reality. Such experiences of altered consciousness usually last from one hour to several days. Though alcohol is often used in a negative "setting" such as at a bar or a party, where the expectation is aggressive behavior, with the proper set and setting alcohol can promote a heightened state of awareness.

One of the great mysteries of human life, as Michael Pollan explains, is that "there are



plants in the garden that manufacture molecules with the power to change the subjective experience of reality we call consciousness." ⁶



"In ancient times, people all over the world grew or gathered sacred plants (and fungi) with the power to inspire visions or conduct them on journeys to other worlds; some of these people, who are sometimes called shamans, returned with the kind of spiritual knowledge that underwrites whole religions."

At the beginning of most of the world's religions we find some kind of psychoactive plant or fungus: the peyote cactus, the *Amanita muscaria* and psilocybin mushrooms, the ergot fungus, the fermented grape, ayahuasca, and cannabis. Ancient people experimented with these psychotropic (mind-altering) substances to achieve a heightened state consciousness.

Some of the most important Greek thinkers--Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Aeschylus, Euripides, and others--participated in the Mysteries of Eleusis. The Mysteries consisted of initiation rituals in which the participants ingested a powerful mind-altering potion--probably an alkaloid produced by a fungus (ergot) that closely resembles LSD in its chemical makeup and effects. The ecstatic ritual was so powerful that those who participated kept their vow never to reveal its nature.

Under the influence of psychotropic substances, humankind has invented or evolved new ideas and paradigms--new ways of viewing the world. The human mind, we have now discovered, has a built-in receptivity to a particular plant: marijuana. The evolution of this discovery is fascinating.

In the 1960s an Israeli neuroscientist named Raphael Mechoulam identified the chemical compound responsible for the mind-altering effects of marijuana. He named it delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol or THC, a molecule with a structure unlike any found in nature before or since.

Then in 1988 Allyn Howlett, a researcher at the St. Louis University Medical School, discovered a specific receptor for THC in the human brain--a kind of nerve cell that THC binds to as if it were a molecular key fitting into a lock. When this binding takes place, the nerve cell is activated.

The brain has a number of neuronal networks involving compounds such as dopamine, serotonin, and the endorphins, among others. Howlett discovered a new cannabinoid receptor network in the human brain which triggers mind-

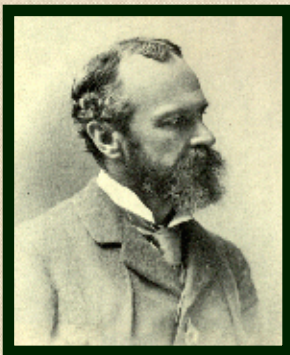
altering effects when THC is present.

Thirty years after his discovery of THC, Raphael Mechoulam--working with collaborator, William Devane--found that the brain produces its own THC-like substance which he named anandimide, from the Sanskrit word for "inner bliss."

We have to wonder why a plant such as marijuana evolved in exactly the way it has so that it produces an altered state of consciousness in humans. Among many other reasons is surely that this has resulted in humans having an intense and abiding interest in it, to make sure that it evolves in the direction of enhanced power to alter human mind states.

The U.S. government's hysterical, criminal warfare against marijuana involves taking away civil liberties through property confiscation, incarceration resulting from suspicion only, and using military personnel in contravention of the posse comitatus act. Along with its struggle to keep marijuana an illegal drug--so the power elite can reap huge profits from its sale on the black market--there may also be a subliminal realization of the strange and powerful connection the human brain has to THC. As the number of people using marijuana continues to grow, the old, violence-prone ways of thinking may be challenged and replaced by more positive ways of viewing the world.

The important factor in all of these approaches is whether or not the techniques or substances assist us in achieving a positive altered state of consciousness which provides an insight into deeper spiritual dimensions within us. The insights William James gained from his experiments with psychedelics provide an illustrative case.



"Some years ago I myself made some observations on this aspect of nitrous oxide intoxication, and reported them in print. One conclusion was forced upon my mind at that time, and my impression of its truth has ever since remained unshaken. It is that our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens,

there lie potential forms of consciousness entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation. No account of the universe in its totality can be final which leaves these other forms of consciousness quite disregarded. How to regard them is the question,--for they are so discontinuous with ordinary consciousness. Yet they may determine attitudes though they fail to give a map. At any rate, they forbid a

premature closing of our accounts with reality. Looking back on my own experiences, they all converge towards a kind of insight to which I cannot help ascribing some metaphysical significance. The keynote of it is invariably a reconciliation. It is as if the opposites of the world whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles, were melted into unity. Not only do they, as contrasted species, belong to one and the same genus, but one of the species, the nobler and better one, is itself the genus, and so soaks up and absorbs its opposite into itself."

William James. *The Varieties of Religious Experience*

In regard to altered--not necessarily higher--states of consciousness through the use of psychotropic drugs, we gain insight from Patanjali's admonishment:

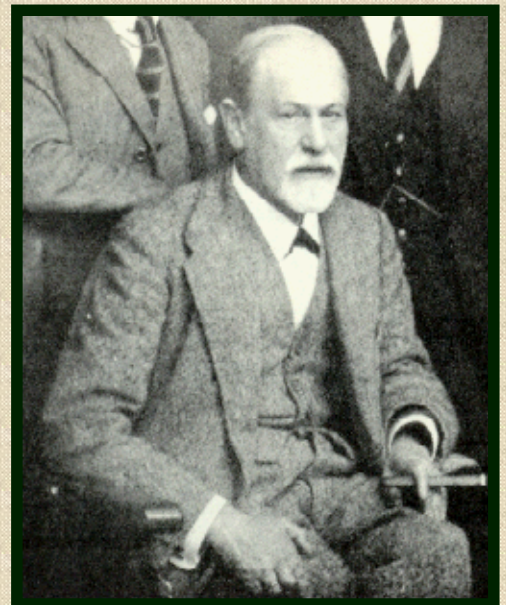
"Psychical powers may be gained by drugs, as poverty, shame, debasement may be gained by the self-same drugs. In their action, they are baneful, cutting the man off from consciousness of the restraining power of his divine nature, so that his forces break forth exuberant, like the laughter of drunkards, and he sees and hears things delusive. While sinking, he believes that he has risen; growing weaker, he thinks himself full of strength; beholding illusions, he takes them to be true. Such are the powers gained by drugs; they are wholly psychic, since the real powers, the spiritual, can never be so gained."

The Yoga Sutras

Brain Stimulation and Bio-feedback

Neurologists and psychologists for decades agreed that there were specific facts about the brain and intelligence that were unchanging:

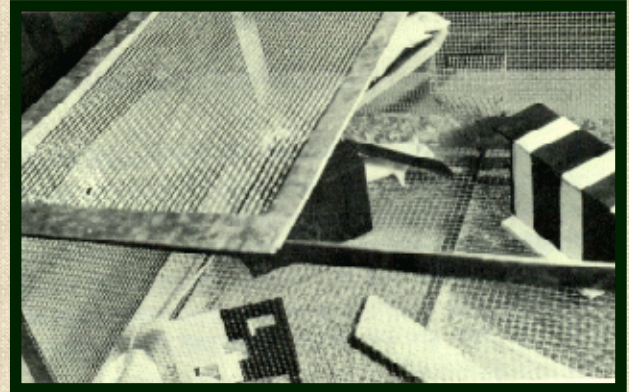
- intelligence is genetically determined
 - people with high intelligence are born that way
 - experience can't increase or decrease innate intelligence; experience can't change the structure of the brain



- growth in the total number of brain cells we have is completed by age two; neurons cannot reproduce themselves

However, psychologists at the University of California, Berkeley, conducted studies ⁷ which were to turn the world of brain and intelligence research upside down. They discovered that:

- rats showed higher levels of AChE (the brain enzyme related to learning and memory) when placed in "enriched environments" (well-lit, multilevel cages filled with swings, slides, ladders, bridges, an assortment of frequently changing stimuli, and a variety of challenges)



This meant that intelligence could be increased.

- the brains of rats placed in "enriched environments" increased in weight

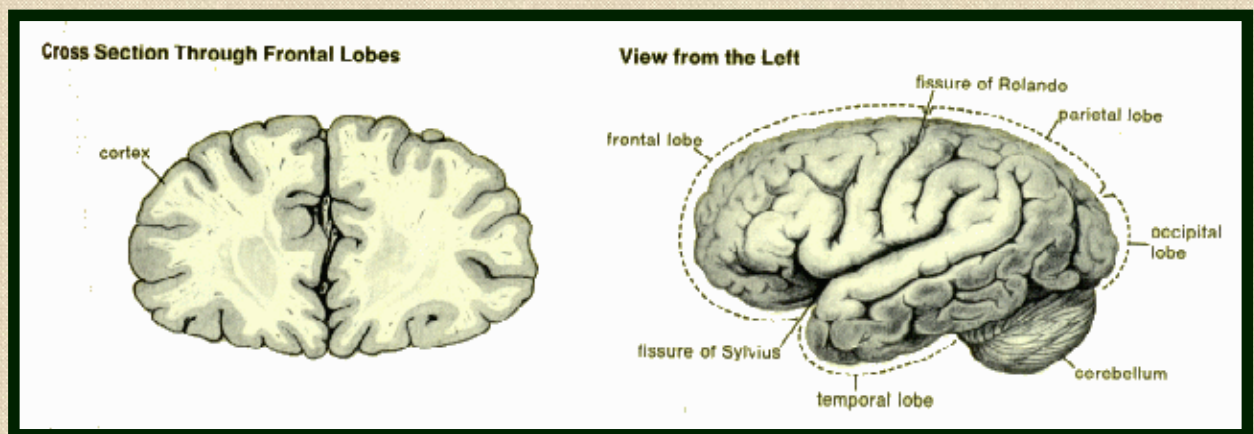
Stimulating experiences had caused the rats' brains to grow.

Neuroanatomist Marian Diamond proved that rats raised in "enriched environments" showed:

- increased thickness of the cerebral cortex or "gray matter"
- a 15 percent increase in the actual size of individual neurons in the cortex
- increases in protein in the brain paralleling the increases in cortical weight, proving that the growth effect was on tissue and not just on fluid content of the brain
- an increase in the amount of dendritic branching (dendrites are the hairy branching fibers which project in large numbers from the body of each neuron and which receive inputs from other neurons and conduct them to the cell body, thus, an increase in branching means a greater amount of potential information available to each neuron)
- an increased number of dendritic spines per unit length of dendrite (spines are the small projections that cover the surface of dendrites)

- increases in the number of synapses and in the size of synaptic contact areas (synapses are the spots where different neurons are connected and by means of which communication among neurons takes place)
- an increase in the ratio between the weight of the cortex and the weight of the rest of the brain (thus the enriched environment does not simply stimulate and trigger generalized growth throughout the entire brain, but is specifically beneficial to that area of the brain devoted to thinking, learning, and memory)
- a 15 percent increase in the number of glial cells, the "glue" cells that are the most numerous cells in the brain and which hold together, support, and nourish the brain neurons, act as guides for neural growth, assist in learning, and seem to form some mysterious communicating network of their own

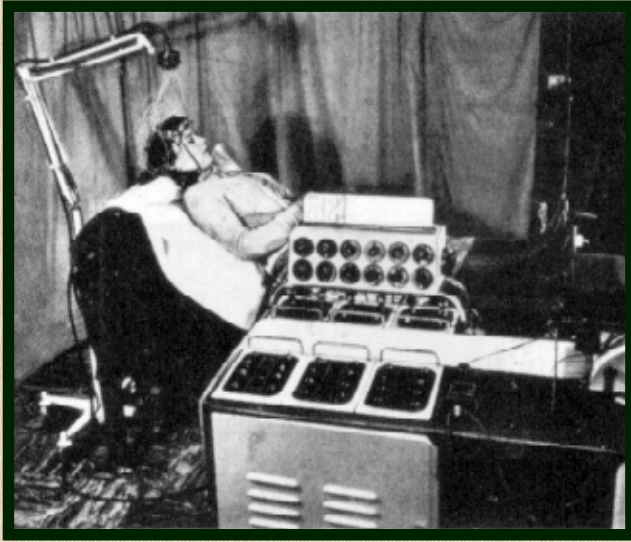
Later studies ⁸ showed that significant structural changes in the brains of rats in "enriched environments" can take place almost instantaneously.



The human brain is about five times as large as that of a chimpanzee, yet contains only about 30 to 50 percent more neurons. The difference between humans and chimps comes from the development of cerebral cortex and the larger number of glial cells. ⁹ The cerebral cortex is a layer of nerve cells forming a convoluted outer shell over the brain, the "thinking cap" or "gray matter" atop the brain, in which much of the thinking or higher intellectual activity of the brain takes place.

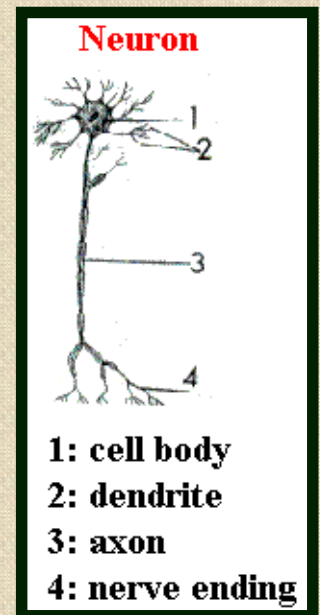
All these studies focused on one conclusion: increased brain stimulation in an enriched environment produces not only a growth in size and weight of the cortex but completely alters and enriches the quality of the entire cerebral cortex. ¹⁰

Stimulating the Brain and Mind

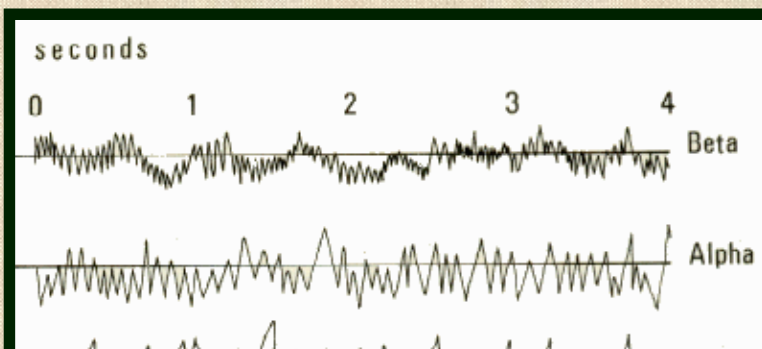


Human performance in all areas can be deliberately improved through environmental, biochemical, and psychophysiological manipulation of the brain and mind. One way this takes place is by using machines designed by researchers to stimulate the human neocortex through exposure to experiences which are novel, changing, and challenging, and which provide the brain and mind an opportunity to exercise themselves by means of self-observation and self-transformation.

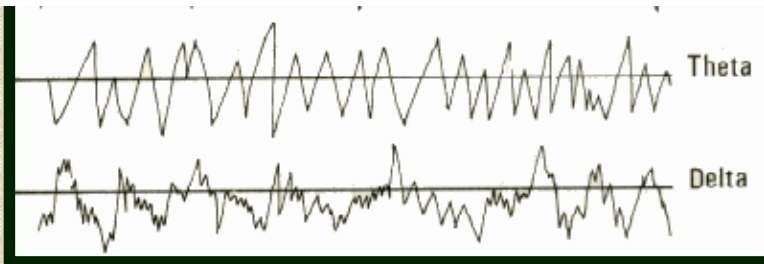
The brain is an electrically powered and electricity-generating organ. Composed of an estimated one hundred billion neurons, each neuron produces and transmits electrical impulses which travel from the cell body down long fibers called axons until they reach a junction, or synapse, with another neuron. At the junction point the electrical impulses fire chemical messengers, called neurotransmitters, across the synaptic gap to receptors on the next cell. Having received the message, that neuron then generates its own electrical impulse and sends it to other neurons to which it is connected. Each neuron can be connected to thousands of other neurons, each simultaneously sending and receiving impulses to and from thousands of other neurons--so one neuron can electrically alter millions of other neurons.



To get an idea of how complex this electrical system is, the National Academy of Sciences estimates that "a single human brain has a greater number of possible connections among its nerve cells than the total number of atomic particles in the universe."



In our ordinary waking state, we primarily experience beta brain waves (which vibrate at a frequency ranging from about 13 to 30 hertz or cycles per second). During deep relaxation, we move to alpha waves (8-13



Hz) and we ordinarily only experience theta waves (4-7 Hz) in those brief moments between waking and sleeping. The ultra slow delta waves (0.5-4 Hz) occur during sleep.

Scientists have found that when meditators reach a state of deep awareness and internal mental serenity the two hemispheres of their brain--which ordinarily generate brain waves of different frequencies and amplitudes--become synchronized, both hemispheres generating the same brain waves.

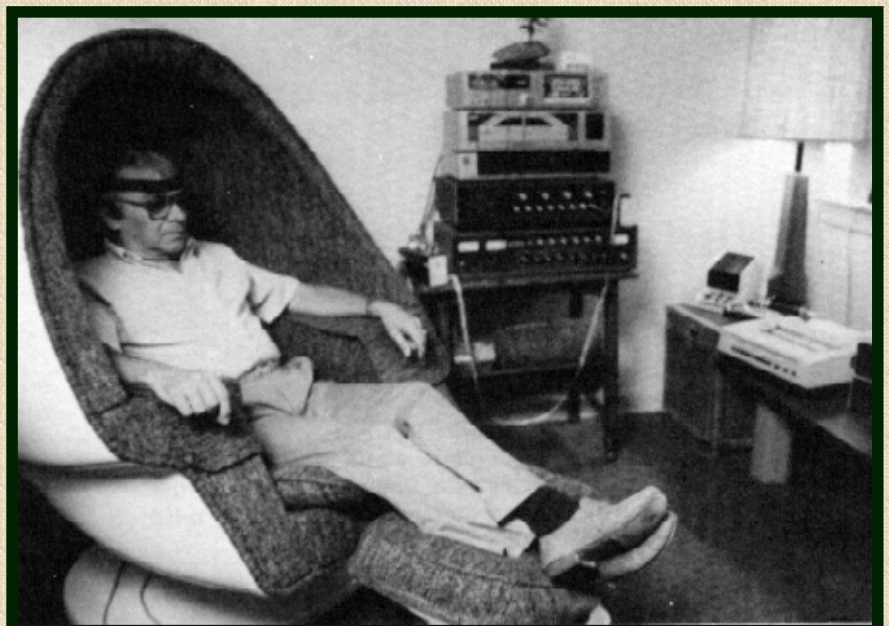
In 1956, James Olds reported on research in which he had electrically stimulated the brains of rats. Implanting electrodes in rats' pleasure center of the brain, he attached a device that allowed the rats to activate the electrical impulse. He found that the rats would become so obsessed with self-stimulation that they would literally starve themselves to death.

The human body has its own chemical self-stimulants, endorphins. Naturally produced in our bodies and brains, this group of molecules called endorphins reduces pain, alleviates stress, gives pleasure, enhances or suppresses memories, and determines what information we allow into our brains.

Dr. Robert Heath, head of the neurology/psychiatry department at Tulane University School of Medicine was the first to implant electrodes in the human brain. He found that each brain stimulus--pleasure or pain--is capable of overwhelming or inhibiting other stimuli. Thus, pleasure can overcome depression or pain and vice versa.

Biofeedback

Biofeedback is the use of mechanical means to amplify certain internal cues, make us aware of them, and make it possible to control mental and brain states. Extensive research has shown that what were thought to be "involuntary" psychophysiological states, such as blood



pressure, body

temperature, etc., are in fact controllable through the use of biofeedback.

"Biofeedback means getting immediate ongoing information about one's own biological processes or conditions, such as heart behavior, temperature, brain-wave activity, blood pressure, or muscle tension. Information is usually fed back by a meter, by a light or sound, or subjects simply watch the physiological record as it emerges from the monitoring equipment. Biofeedback training means using the information to change and control voluntarily the specific process or response being monitored."

Elmer Green, *Beyond Biofeedback*

In 1958, Joe Kamiya, a psychologist teaching at the University of Chicago, began experiments on brain wave frequencies. Kamiya attached a sensing electrode to the left side of the back of the subjects's head--the left occiput, where alpha brain waves are more evident. When a tone sounded, the subject was to guess whether he was in alpha. Kamiya was able to tell if the subject's guess was correct from the EEG (electroencephalograph) readings and answered "correct" or "wrong." The first subject Kamiya worked with, Richard Bach, reported correctly 65% on the second day of testing, and on the fourth day was able to report correctly 100% of the time. In a second experiment, the subject was able to enter the alpha state or not enter the state on a specific cue. It was thus established that people could control brain waves which had been thought to be involuntary states. This was the beginning of brain wave biofeedback. *Psychology Today* did an article on Kamiya in 1968 and the field exploded.

The first meeting of biofeedback professionals occurred as part of the 1968 International Brain and Behavior Conference in Colorado. The following year the first specific meeting of biofeedback researchers was held in Santa Monica, California, with 142 persons attending. It was at this meeting that the group decided to name their group the Biofeedback Research Society, later changed to Biofeedback Society of America and then to the Association for Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback.

One of the early researchers,



Elmer Green of the Menninger Clinic in Kansas, used biofeedback instruments to study Eastern yogis. He discovered that certain yogis could control their internal states merely through meditation and thought.

Maurice "Barry" Sterman, a professor emeritus in the departments of Neurobiology and Psychiatry at UCLA, began

an experiment in 1965 on brain wave states in cats. He accidentally discovered a specific EEG rhythm state during which the cat, waiting for a reward of food, became absolutely still, though extremely alert. Sterman named this frequency "sensorimotor rhythm" (SMR). He isolated the 12 to 15 hertz frequencies (SMR) in the EEG of the experimental cats and operantly conditioned them to create this state. Sterman then worked with a human subject, a young lady who suffered from epileptic seizures two or more times per month.

Epilepsy is accompanied by an invasion of unwanted theta wave frequency in the brain. The subject was connected to the EEG equipment and was tasked with keeping a green light on (presence of SMR) and a red light off (presence of theta waves). The subject was able to create SMR for long periods and her seizures reduced in number and intensity. She remained seizure-free after the experiment for a number of months.

Other researchers replicated Sterman's results with epilepsy and in 1982 Sterman received a research grant from the National Institute of Health (NIH). However, the disparity between biofeedback and ordinary medical procedures was becoming a major issue in the health care field and NIH pulled Sterman's funding. Ordinary medical procedures involve something being done to the "patient," the application of a drug, the use of surgery, etc. Biofeedback involves persons taking responsibility for their own conditions and actively participating in their therapy. Plus, biofeedback had arisen within psychology, not medicine.

"Occasionally I had heard half-joking remarks about researchers in biofeedback sounding like snake-oil salesmen. It didn't bother me until one of our own doctors cautioned against the concept of biofeedback as a panacea. Then I gave it serious thought. Why did biofeedback prove helpful in the treatment of so many and varied disorders? Suddenly I realized that it isn't biofeedback that is the 'panacea'--it is the power within the human being to self-regulate, self-heal, re-balance. Biofeedback does nothing to the person; it is a tool for releasing that potential."

Alyce Green, *Beyond Biofeedback*

The medical establishment began deriding biofeedback as an unproven, unscientific fad. The research of Sterman and others followed the most rigorous experimental requirements, but the medical mafia was intent on destroying this upstart phenomenon.

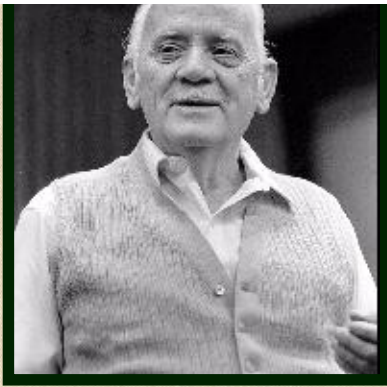
In the 1970s and 1980s, biofeedback research languished, though a few brave persons pushed forward and today there is a resurgence in the field. Margaret Ayers, whose graduate training was in clinical neuropsychology, uses biofeedback therapy with different kinds of medical problems: drug addiction, alcoholism, head injury, stroke, cerebral palsy, and coma. Coma is the condition of a brain which is accompanied by dominant theta wave activity. The biofeedback equipment used with coma patients trains them to inhibit theta wave frequencies. A number of Ayer's coma clients have regained a great deal of their normal functioning. Siegfried and Sue Othmer, Ross Quackenbush, Eugene Peniston, Roger Werholtz, Lester Fehmi, Bob DeBoer, and others are using similar biofeedback procedures on clients with a diversity of medical or psychological problems.

Higher States

Dr. Gerald Oster, a biophysicist at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City discovered that pulsations called binaural beats occurred in the brain when tones of different frequency were presented separately to each ear.



Robert Monroe claimed to have developed tapes which send signals separately to each ear--signals of



400 and 404 hertz, for example--resulting in the sounds blending inside the brain and setting up a binaural beat frequency of 4 Hz (theta waves), producing a state of brain hemisphere equilibrium and altered states. At his Institute of Applied Sciences in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains of central Virginia, institute employees claim to train people in achieving altered states using Hemi-Sync tapes. Some of the trainees feel they achieve out-of-body

experiences, but this may very well be fantasy. At present, a week's training session costs \$1695 at the Institute, plus, of course, transportation to the Institute and back.

Some brain state researchers are critical of Monroe's methods. Dr. Lester Fehmi, director of the Princeton Behavioral Medicine and Biofeedback Clinic, says that Monroe's effect is real, "but it doesn't teach you how to get there." Dr. Elmer Green of the Menninger Foundation agrees. "It's only when the volition is involved, and you *want* to do something, either to escape or to accomplish something, that you really learn something." The hypnogogic image states which Green discovered in his research sometime involve extra-sensory perception (ESP) and precognition. It may be that these states are the same as those which Monroe clients experience, which Monroe trainers interpret as out-of-body states but Green interprets as hypnogogic imagery.

The Monroe Institute demands (yes, demands, not merely recommends) that a person purchase its seven different training CDs in sequence. This allows them to demand that a person interested in their training material buy each of the CDs for a total of over \$800--an exorbitant amount. I personally know two persons who were hired as trainers in the Monroe techniques--and it's clear that neither of them received any lasting beneficial effect from their training and their work with clients. I would recommend that no serious seeker waste their money on Monroe Institute training sessions or products.

There is a thriving biofeedback industry, with pricey training programs and pricey machines. Some of the machines run as high as \$7,000 and one wonders why someone doesn't produce a reasonably-priced biofeedback machine for the average consumer who is also a serious student of altered states of consciousness.

States of Consciousness

Reality
Dimension

State of Consciousness

Activities Leading
to the State

| Higher Dimension of Reality | Higher State of Consciousness | Spiritual contact |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Non-Ordinary Dimension of Reality | Non-ordinary State of Consciousness | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Meditation ▪ Dreaming ▪ <u>Psychedelic Drugs</u> ▪ Sex ▪ Hypnosis ▪ Contemplation of Art ▪ Contemplation of Nature |
| Consensus Reality | Ordinary State of Consciousness | Physical activity, mental activity |

The state of ordinary consciousness, wherein we assume the physical world is the only reality and have no interest in deeper aspects of reality, is the norm in the United States and the world. In the early days of our history, American citizens were interested in understanding what was happening in the world. As a nation of informed citizens, we were able to maintain a form of government which followed the ideal of democracy. That situation continued through the middle part of the twentieth century. Beginning even as early as the 1910s, the rulers of the United States began to change our educational systems so that citizens were no longer capable of or interested in understanding what was happening about them.

Ordinary State of Consciousness: American Citizen

| Time Period | Major Paradigms | Major Activities | Political Structure |
|--------------|--|--|--|
| 1750 to 1950 | Attempting to understand the real nature of the physical world and the spiritual world | Informed reading and listening Appreciation of higher values (art and nature) | Some features of republican democracy within the general structure of plutocracy (rule by the wealthy) |

| | | | |
|---------------------|---|--|---|
| 1950 to 1990 | No genuine attempt to understand the real nature of the physical world or the spiritual world | Non-education leading to incapacity to read or listen | Plutocracy: rule by the wealthy buying politicians |
| 1990 to 2003 | No interest in understanding the real nature of the physical world or the spiritual world Splatter "reality" Incoherence | Conditioning leading to incapacity to read, write, listen, understand, appreciate higher values Splattering of images and sounds Creating incoherent pastiches: e.g. TV commercials with incoherent image flashes Movies with superimposing dialogue, music, and images: e.g. <i>Magnolia</i> | Globalism: imperialistic plutocracy Two distinct economic classes: the rich and the poor Anti-nationalism: fostered by the highest rate of immigration in U.S. history, resulting in ethnic and religious "balkanization" (splintering of the population into divisive, competing units) |

The majority of U.S. citizens is currently devolving to lower states of consciousness. The best way to "hear" this devolution is to listen carefully to the atavistic *tone* of the laughter of American audiences as they watch movies and TV sitcoms involving characters who are murderers but are made to appear sympathetic, persons who delight in mindlessness, etc. Even so, it is possible for interested persons to learn to use Perennialist procedures which can lead to higher states of consciousness as described in this book.

Counterfeit States of "Religious Consciousness"

As we saw in chapter two, there have always been persons who pretended to be participants in the Perennial Tradition who were decidedly not. The same is

true in regard to Higher States of consciousness: there are people who experience counterfeit states and try to fool themselves and others that these are genuine.

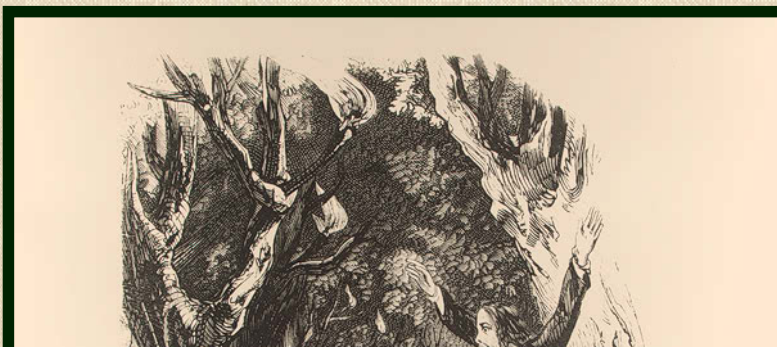
Occurring within all religions, the phenomenon called "conversion" is actually nothing more than mind-control, programming, or brainwashing-- frightening a repentant, submissive person or group into a state of terror and subsequent release. Counterfeit "conversion" experiences were, for example, widely experienced in nineteenth century America, especially in what were called "revivals." Even today, "revivals" of one form or another are used by all so-called Christian faiths in gaining obedient followers.



"Conversion" is an artificial, deleterious state induced in a submissive person by a self-serving religious leader. As the basis of his 1914 book entitled *The Psychology of Religion*, Dr. Edwin D. Starbuck examined a significant number of persons who had undergone the "conversion" experience. He found that

"conversion does not occur with the same frequency at all periods in life. It belongs almost exclusively to the years between 10 and 25. The number of instances outside that range appear few and scattered. That is, conversion is a distinctively adolescent phenomenon."

Starbuck also discovered that imagination and social pressure were the two dominant factors in "conversion," and he was able to determine what "a small part rational considerations play in conversion as compared with instinctive." Surrender to the religious authority figure (minister or priest) is necessary for "conversion" to occur and results in the subject's ego being "lifted up into new significance."



The essence of "conversion" is the induction of a state of mere feeling which, when it has passed, leaves no spiritual improvement and often results in the subject feeling like a victim. Frequently the



experience is so humiliating after the fact that the subject rejects not only the "conversion," but anything having to do with religion.

Starbuck discovered that the forces working in revivals are identical to suggestion and hypnosis--what we today would call brainwashing. The negative aspects of "conversion" are primarily caused by the self-serving religious leaders.

"An unwise and unfortunate use of revivals is that they take certain social standards and attempt to force them indiscriminately on all persons alike. The notion is formed, and, doubtless, rightly, that the only means of escape for one whose evil habits are deeply ingrained is through repentance, a definite regeneration and conversion. There seems to be practical ignorance of the other type of conversion, i.e., sudden awakening following the sense of imperfection, and still greater disregard of the fact that it is not natural for certain temperaments to develop spasmodically, or even to exhibit marked stadia in their growth.

Consequently, the normal means of regeneration for the wayward and for hardened sinners becomes a dogma, and is held up as the only means of escape for children, for natures spiritually immature, for the virtuous, and for those



temperamentally unfit. A certain competition for supremacy among churches, and for success among individual workers, exaggerates the evil. Each new convert is sometimes vulgarly called by revivalists another star in the crowns which they will wear in the future life. If there were only power of discrimination, they would see that their success in dragging many so-called converts into the whirl of excitement, hypnotising them, and leaving them empty afterward, is more fitly

likened to the triumph of a man of prowess who wears scalps of victims as trophies."

The psychological manipulation of Christian believers has a long history. Leaving aside the peculiar mind manipulation practiced by Roman Catholicism, we can see that the basic tenets of Protestantism, from the time of Luther, were particularly well-suited to inducing terror in a submissive penitent.

"God," says Luther "is the God of the humble, the miserable, the oppressed, and the desperate, and of those that are brought even to nothing; and his nature is to give sight to the blind, to comfort the broken-hearted, to justify sinners, to save the very desperate and damned. Now that pernicious and pestilent opinion of man's own righteousness, which will not be a sinner, unclean, miserable, and damnable, but righteous and holy, suffereth not God to come to his own natural and proper work. Therefore God must take this maul to hand



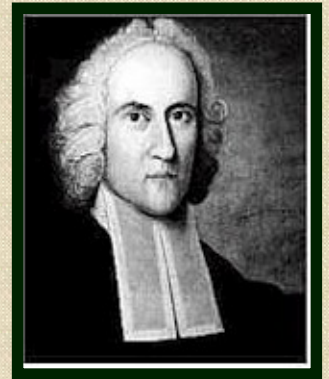
(the law, I mean) to beat in pieces and bring to nothing this beast with her vain confidence, that she may so learn at length by her own misery that she is utterly forlorn and damned. But here lieth the difficulty, that when a man is terrified and cast down, he is so little able to raise himself up again and say, 'Now I am bruised and afflicted enough; now is the time of grace; now is the time to hear Christ.' The foolishness of man's heart is so great that then he rather seeketh to himself more laws to justify his conscience. 'If I live,' saith he, 'I will amend my life: I will

do this, I will do that.' But here, except thou do the quite contrary, except thou send Moses away with his law, and in these terrors and this anguish lay hold upon Christ who died for thy sins, look for no salvation. Thy cowl, thy shaven crown, thy chastity, thy obedience, thy poverty, thy works, thy merits? what shall all these do? what shall the law of Moses avail? If I, wretched and damnable sinner, through works of merits could have loved the Son of God, and so come to him, what needed he to deliver himself for me? If I, being a wretch and damned

sinner, could be redeemed by any other price, what needed the Son of God to be given? But because there was no other price, therefore he delivered neither sheep, ox, gold, nor silver, but even God himself, entirely and wholly 'for me,' even 'for me,' I say a miserable, wretched sinner. Now therefore, I take comfort and apply this to myself. And this manner of applying is the very true force and power of faith. For he died not to justify the righteous, but the un-righteous, and to make them the children of God."

Commentary on Galatians

In the nineteenth century this Protestant dogma so suitable to psychological manipulation was refashioned by revivalists such as Jonathan Edwards. His tormented parishioners left their nail marks as they gripped the church pews in paroxysms of terror while listening to Edwards rail about "Sinners In the Hands of an Angry God."



In the Perennial Tradition, *regeneration* is the genuine state of higher consciousness achieved by the sincere seeker, of which "conversion" is the counterfeit.

"Hermetism. . . was in its primary intention and office the philosophic and exact science of the regeneration of the human soul from its present sense-immersed state into the perfection and nobility of that divine condition in which it was originally created."

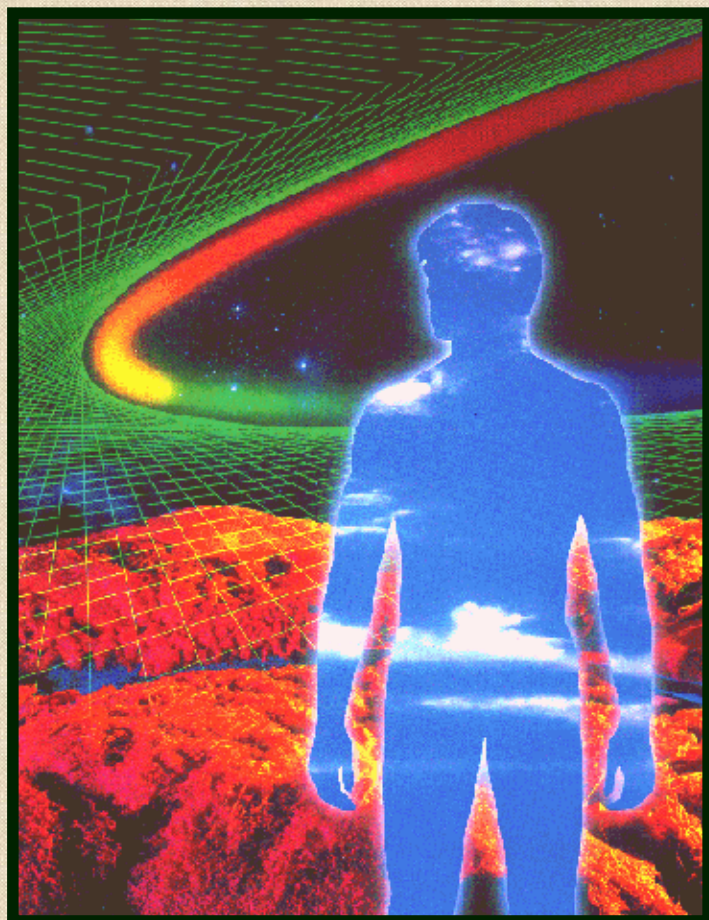
M. A. Atwood, *Hermetic Philosophy and Alchemy*, 1850

Starbuck, Coe, and other researchers into the phenomenon of "conversion" discovered that it was essentially an experience of compliant adolescents, men and women who had not yet developed the ability to think and act for themselves. In the Perennial Tradition, candidates for "regeneration" must be mature philosophers--lovers of wisdom--in the sense that Pythagoras and Plato would have understood the term.

"Candidates for the regenerate life, moreover, were such as were

prepared, as how few of to-day are?, to renounce and transvalue all the world's values, to step entirely out of the world-stream by the current of which the majority are content to be borne along, to negate the affirmations of the senses and natural reason which for the multitude provide the criterion of the desirable and the true, and generally to adopt towards phenomenal existence an attitude incomprehensible to the average man to whom that existence is of paramount moment. They were animated by no motives of merely personal salvation or of spiritual superiority over their fellows; on the contrary they will be found to have been the humblest, as they were the wisest, of men. They had advanced far beyond that complacent stage where religion consists in fidelity to certain credal propositions and in 'being good' or as good as one can, and where sufficiency and robustness of faith are represented by the facile optimism of 'God's in His heaven; all's right with the world.' Their philosophic basis was rather that 'the world is out of joint' and all men with it, and in a condition sorely needing saviours and co-operators with God to reduce and adjust the dislocation."

M. A. Atwood, *Hermetic Philosophy and Alchemy*, 1850



We must understand that "regeneration" is an actual fact within the Perennial Tradition, no mere allegory or metaphor. As we have been "generated" in the physical world, so we can--through the proper preparation and knowledge--experience "regeneration" into a Higher Consciousness. Even though we have become entranced by the physical world, there still abides in us, though in a state of atrophy, a residual germ of the divine principle which can be stimulated into activity to raise the personal consciousness to the point of unity and identity with the Universal Mind. [Regeneration is explored in more detail in chapter twenty.]

The Evolutionary Function of Non-Ordinary States of Consciousness

A number of modern Perennialist teachers have pointed out that the next phase of human evolution will involve higher states of consciousness involving superseding of the old structures of time, space, and false consciousness.

Olga Kharitidi's book, *Entering the Circle: Ancient Secrets of Siberian Wisdom Discovered by a Russian Psychiatrist*, contains a most interesting passage in which she encounters a spiritual being while using a special apparatus to achieve an altered state:

"Humans of your time are the result of one particular path of evolution that a part of humanity had to experience. Your people developed special qualities of human nature that were mostly connected with intellectual thought. This evolutionary track required you to create a strict mythology in which reality and its laws were very rigid. These restrictions of perception enabled you to accomplish the tasks you were given, but they limited you in other ways."

When you speak of my people as humans, does that mean that you are not human?" [Olga asked]

"No, I am a human being, but I belong to a different branch of evolution. Your people are not the only representatives of humanity. There are streams of diversity within the human race. Each of them has a particular task. Each stream was meant to explore a different dimension of human potential. Their perceptions were separated so that each would know nothing about the others. Of course, there have been some inter-connections. Sometimes whole civilizations changed their evolutionary direction and as a result discovered others and joined with them. This left mysterious gaps in the history of your people as they remember it.

"Your presence here is a sign of increasing interaction between your civilization's reality and that of others. Our time spirals are approaching each other, and the final integration of all the different streams will take place soon. The whole of humanity is finishing its cocoon stage. It is not yet aware of this, just as the caterpillar is unaware of the butterfly's body forming



within it and has no knowledge of its future wings. Even the wings themselves don't understand their meaning until their first flight. The



people in your reality stream have steadily been forming the solid body of a new organism, and now the time is coming for it to emerge and integrate its state of development with other branches of humanity.

"Your people will go through tremendous personal changes. It may seem like the end of the world. In many ways it will be, for much of the old world will indeed be replaced by a new manner of existence. The psychological structure of each person will be transformed, because people's old model of reality will no longer be sufficient. Your people will experience and learn to understand another part of their being. This will happen differently for each person. For some it will be easy and almost instantaneous. Others will need to struggle through stress and pain. There will even be some people so deeply grounded in your old laws of reality that they won't notice anything at all." ¹¹

If this vision of human evolution is true--and other authentic spiritual leaders posit similar views--then the achievement of non-ordinary, higher states of consciousness becomes a necessity, not merely a pleasant option.

¹ Weil, Andrew. (1972). *The Natural Mind*, p. 29

² *Ibid.*, p. 29

³ *Ibid.*, p. 29

⁴ Non-positive elements such as physiological injury or fasting sometimes produce positive non-ordinary consciousness: e.g. near-death experiences, hallucinations

⁵ Alcohol, nicotine, and "hard drugs" (drugs shown by authentic research to produce physiological harm or addiction) produce *negative* non-ordinary consciousness: aggression, motor disfunction, mental illness, etc.

⁶ Pollan, Michael. (2001). *The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World*

⁷ Rosenzweig, Mark R. "Experience, Memory, and the Brain." *American*

Psychologist, April 1984

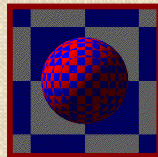
⁸ Ferchmin, P.A., and V.A. Eterovic. "Four Hours of Enriched Experience Are Sufficient to Increase Cortical Weight of Rats." *Society for Neuroscience Abstracts*, Vol. 6, p. 857

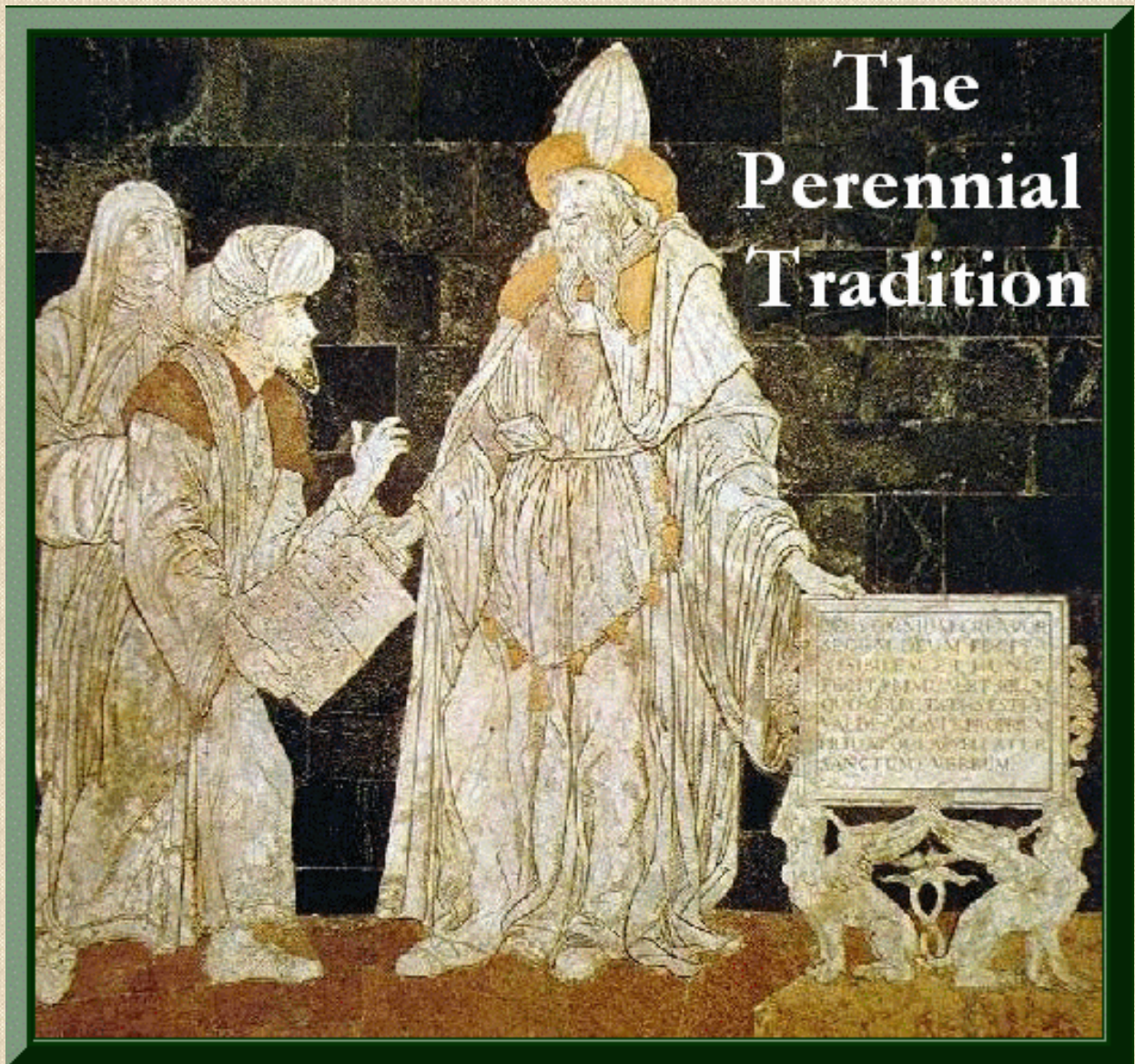
⁹ Diamond's study of the brain of Albert Einstein showed that his brain contained more glial cells per neuron in all four of the brain areas compared with samples from brains of eleven normal males ranging from age forty-seven to eighty.

Marian Diamond. "A Love Affair With the Brain." *Discover*, May, 1984

¹⁰ "Instead of seeing the brain as rigid, fixed in mode, programmed like a computer, there is now a much more biological and powerful notion of 'experiential selection,' of experience literally shaping the connectivity and function of the brain (within genetic, anatomical, and physiological limits, of course)." Oliver Sacks, "In the River of Consciousness," *The New York Review of Books* (1/15/2004). In this review, Mr. Sacks refers to research by Gerald M. Edelman (*Neural Darwinish; Wider than the Sky: the Phenomenal Gift of Consciousness*) and Jean-Pierre Changeux (*The Physiology of Truth*).

¹¹ Kharitidi, Olga. (1996). *Entering the Circle: Ancient Secrets of Siberian Wisdom Discovered by a Russian Psychiatrist*





Chapter Five

Initial Contact With Spiritual Forces

As a seeker, you've come to realize that your ordinary faculties cannot reveal to you the ultimate reality beyond what your sense impressions hint at.

Humankind has developed the intellect to the point that it believes the mind can know ultimate reality. But the Perennialist is convinced that the mind has become the dupe of its own

ideas and assumptions. Through the centuries, adepts in the Perennial Tradition have demonstrated that humankind possesses spiritual faculties which can apprehend a deeper reality beyond the surface consciousness. The Perennialist mystic sees humankind as crippled at present because of its withered spiritual faculties.

Even though humans have developed the ability to gain material abundance, we stagnate, sink backward, and imprison ourselves in material existence unless we permeate our lives with the spirit. We must learn how to rejuvenate our atrophied spiritual senses, dormant through generations of neglect.

It is all very well to say "let us be more spiritual," but precisely how do we go about this? The average person is understandably repelled by airy-fairy theories about "spiritual contact" and "virtuous living." Religious teachings speak of communion with the Divine, but always as something that was realized by special persons but is no longer possible for humankind in general.

Especially in an unfamiliar endeavor such as this, the amount of success we achieve depends on the amount of energy we put into it. These principles about how to contact spiritual forces about us must be made manifest in our lives. Actual reawakening of our dormant spiritual faculties is the goal, not merely a mental acceptance of ideas. We must soak up these prescriptions, live them, let them permeate us, let them control our lives.

Descriptions of the stages of spiritual development, by various Perennialist teachers, are remarkably similar, for example, the Sufi "seven stages" as described by Idries Shah in his book *The Sufis*:

1. "The individual out of personal control, believes himself to

be a coherent personality, starts to learn that he, like all undeveloped individuals, has a multiple and changing personality"

2. "The dawn of self-awareness and 'accusation,' in which automatic thoughts are seen for what they are"
3. "The beginning of real mental integration when the mind is becoming capable of operating on a higher level than was its previous futile custom"
4. "Serene balance, equilibrium of the individuality"
5. "Power of fulfilment, new ranges of experience not susceptible to description beyond approximate analogy"
6. "A new activity and function, including extra dimensions of the individuality"
7. "Completion of the task of reconstitution, possibility of teaching others, capacity for objective understanding"

Evelyn Underhill identifies five stages in the mystic quest:

1. **Awakening of the self to consciousness of Divine Reality**
2. **Purgation:** "The Self, aware for the first time of Divine Beauty, realizes by contrast its own finiteness and imperfection the manifold illusions in which it is immersed, the immense distance which separates it from the One. Its attempts to eliminate by discipline and mortification all that stands in the way of its progress towards union with God constitute *Purgation*: a state of pain and effort."
3. **Illumination:** "When by Purgation the Self has become detached from the 'things of sense,' and acquired those

virtues which are the 'ornaments of the spiritual marriage,' its joyful consciousness of the Transcendent Order returns in an enhanced form. Like the prisoners in Plato's 'Cave of Illusion,' it has awakened to knowledge of Reality, has struggled up the harsh and difficult path to the mouth of the cave. Now it looks upon the sun. This is *Illumination . . .*"

4. **Purification of the Spirit or *Dark Night of the Soul*:** "learning to dissociate the personal satisfaction of mystical vision from the reality of mystical life"--the complete surrender of the self
5. **Union:** "In this state the Absolute Life is not merely perceived and enjoyed by the Self, as in Illumination: but is *one* with it."

In our discussion below, we will simplify these states as:

1. **Purgation**
2. **Illumination:** the initial stages of this state will be explored below and the latter stages in more detail in chapter 10
3. **Union:** this state will be explored in chapter 18

Purgation

To pursue the Perennialist path, we must purge from our personality the illusions, myths, presumptions, and self-righteous posturings which imprison us in an earth-bound state. The Sufis call this the conquest of the Commanding Self, the taming of the archaic consciousness which believes it knows everything and has the right to bend everything to its

own purposes.

Purgation involves recognizing that one is, to begin, merely a bundle of conditionings--fixed ideas, prejudices, automatic reactions--which has been concocted by our culture and foisted on us as our "self." The Sufis describe this conditioned consciousness as composed of a series of "selves," an aggregation of shifting moods and personalities which moves so quickly that it fools us into thinking that we have a unified consciousness. Our intellect is nothing more than a mutating series of feelings and thoughts which take possession of our consciousness.

Much of Plato's teaching focused on freeing oneself from the "chains of illusion" fashioned in the cave-world of delusion in which we live. We begin our "spiritual ascent" when we experience an "awakening of the self," a re-birth, a disturbance of the equilibrium of the self resulting in a centering of one's life on the search for the ultimate unitive state. Plato explained this process as the soul returning to itself, passing into the region of that which is pure and everlasting, immortal and unchangeable.

"The struggle for reality must be a struggle on man's part to transcend the sense-world, escape its bondage. He must renounce it, and be 're-born' to a higher level of consciousness; shifting his centre of interest from the natural to the spiritual plane. According to the thoroughness with which he does this, will be the amount of real life he enjoys. the initial break with the 'world,' the refusal to spend one's life communing with one's own cinematograph picture, is essential if the freedom of the infinite is to be attained."

Evelyn Underhill. *Mysticism*

So begins the Perennialist journey, from unproductive self-centered drifting to a transcending of the unreal.

**"Come, my soul, depart from outward things
and gather thyself together into a true interior
silence, that thou mayst set out with all thy
courage and bury and lose thyself in the desert
of a deep contrition."**

Suso

The Perennial Tradition assists us in acquiring a deeper understanding of reality without disturbing either our own equilibrium or that of our society. As with each stage on the Perennialist quest, we can pervert purgation into self-flagellation and lose all its positive effect. This is a time when we examine ourselves objectively, observing our reactions and notions, while avoiding unproductive self-abasement, questioning one's assumptions without becoming compulsive about the process.

"Faults will turn to good, provided we use them to our own humiliation, without slackening in the effort to correct ourselves. Discouragement serves no possible purpose; it is simply the despair of wounded self-love. The real way of profiting by the humiliation of one's own faults is to face them in their true hideousness, without ceasing to hope in God, while hoping nothing

from self."

Fenelon

A Perennialist teacher comes in contact with a large number of self-proclaimed "seekers" who are merely emotional or sanctimonious and imagine that they understand deep spiritual truths because they have an airy-fairy feeling of "everything being so wonderful and fabulous." The teacher knows that spiritual capabilities neither can be nor should be grafted onto such unsuitable personalities.

In this purgative stage, the writings of earlier Perennialist sages are particularly instructive, such as St. John of the Cross's delineation of the "imperfections of beginners" and Fenelon's appraisal of a self-satisfied imposter:

1. Secret pride

- "And hence there comes to them likewise a certain desire, which is somewhat vain, and at times very vain, to speak of spiritual things in the presence of others, and sometimes even to teach such things rather than to learn them."**
- "They condemn others in their heart when they see that they have not the kind of devotion which they themselves desire; and sometimes they even say this in words, herein resembling the Pharisee, who boasted of himself, praising God for his own good works and despising the publican."**

2. Spiritual avarice

- Can never have enough of listening to counsels and learning spiritual precepts and of possessing and reading many books which treat of this matter
 - Spend their time on talking and reading rather than on works of mortification and perfecting inward poverty of spirit
3. **Sin of luxury: taking sensual pleasure in spiritual things**
 4. **Sin of wrath**
 - When their delight and pleasure in spiritual things comes to an end they become embittered and intolerable
 - Becoming irritated at the sins of others and keep watch on others with a sort of uneasy zeal
 5. **Spiritual gluttony**
 - Going to extremes, passing beyond the bounds of moderation
 - Killing themselves with penances, weakening themselves with fasts, etc.

"You have spent all your life in the belief that you are wholly devoted to others, and never self-seeking. Nothing so feeds self-conceit as this sort of internal testimony that one is quite free from self-love, and always generously devoted to one's neighbours. But all this devotion that seems to be for others is really for yourself. Your self-love reaches to the point of perpetual self-congratulation that you are free from it;

all your sensitiveness is lest you might not be fully satisfied with self; this is at the root of all your scruples. It is the 'I' which makes you so keen and sensitive. You want God as well as man to be always satisfied with you, and you want to be satisfied with yourself in all your dealings with God.

"Besides, you are not accustomed to be contented with a simple good will--your self-love wants a lively emotion, a reassuring pleasure, some kind of charm or excitement. You are too much used to be guided by imagination and to suppose that your mind and will are inactive, unless you are conscious of their workings. And thus you are dependent upon a kind of excitement similar to that which the passions arouse, or theatrical representations. By dint of refinement you fall into the opposite extreme--a real coarseness of imagination. Nothing is more opposed, not only to the life of faith, but also to true wisdom. There is no more dangerous illusion than the fancies by which people try to avoid illusion. It is imagination which leads us astray; and the certainty which we seek through imagination, feeling, and taste, is one of the most dangerous sources from which fanaticism springs. This is the gulf of vanity and corruption which God would make you discover in your heart; you must look upon it with the calm and simplicity belonging to true humility. It is mere self-love to be inconsolable at seeing one's own imperfections; but to stand face to face with them, neither flattering nor tolerating them, seeking to correct oneself without becoming pettish--this is to desire what is good for its own sake, and for God's."

Fenelon

The sole purpose of purgation is to move us forward on the Perennialist quest for the unitive state. We do this by forming a higher consciousness capable of union with Reality.

"My soul is my kingdom, for I can so rule my senses inward and outward, that all the desires and power of my soul are in subjection and this kingdom is greater than a kingdom on earth."

Meister Eckhart

Illumination

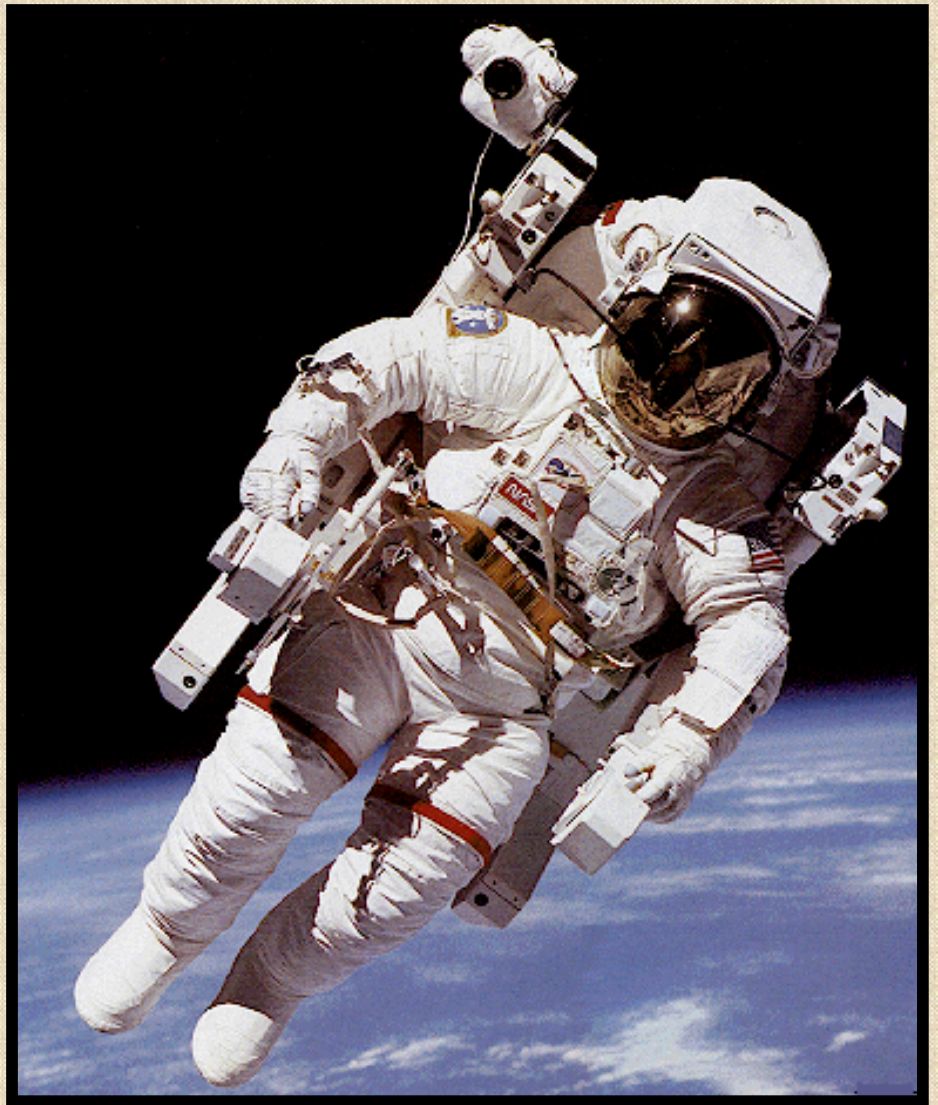
Illumination is the stage of spiritual adventures of the soul, the development of a kind of discernment radically different from that of ordinary awareness.

We begin by recognizing and acknowledging the spiritual forces encompassing us, allowing them to permeate us. We exist in a Reality composed of many dimensions, with invisible, spiritual entities and substances surrounding us.

But we lead our lives as though encased in space suits

which do not allow a single breath of the life-giving spirit to enter us. On rare occasions, when we are unaware, the spiritual forces break through in an instantaneous spark of inspiration or epiphany.

However, we soon return to our mind-absorbed preoccupation with ordinary realities.



We can learn to activate this contact and permeation through definite procedures, consciously developing our capacity to discern subtle essences. To make safe and effective contact with these elusive realities we must have some rudimentary awareness of them and we must have a genuine, suitable desire to make contact. Our humble but unwavering aspiration for contact provides our spiritual impetus, for the force of our desire calls forth its complement in the higher dimensions.

"Possessed like other men of powers of feeling, thought, and will, it is essential his [the seeker's] love and his determination, even more than his thought, should be set upon Transcendent Reality. He must feel a strong emotional attraction toward the supersensual Object of his quest: that love which scholastic philosophy defined as the force or power which causes every creature to follow out the trend of its own nature. Of this must be born the will to attain communion with that Absolute Object. This will, this burning and active desire, must crystallize into and express itself by that definite and conscious concentration of the whole self upon the Object, which precedes the contemplative state. We see already how far astray are those who look upon the mystical temperament as passive in type."

Evelyn Underhill. *Mysticism*

The kind of contact with spiritual forces we're seeking is not a self-absorbed search for "psychic powers." Trying to develop extrasensory "gifts" for personal aggrandizement can be dangerous. Many people go off on occult tangents and wind up in psychotic or cultish detours.



**We
seek to
create a
dynamic
channel
between
spiritual**



realities
and
earthly
concerns.
We're not
trying to
contact a
spiritual
current
so we
can fill up

a pond for our personal enjoyment; such a dead pool soon stagnates. It must be a stream which originates in the higher dimensions and flows continuously to become transmuted into an effective life force.

Contacting the spiritual forces about us is not as difficult as we might think. We actually do it quite often, unawares. Our usual state is one of mind-absorbed preoccupation--living in our thoughts and desires. Our self-absorption makes us blind and deaf to realities about us. We focus on our worries or our hopes and fail to hear the birds singing in the trees or see the breathtaking cloud formation ahead of us or hear the haunting melody of the Bach piano concerto on our stereo.

But once in a while we open ourselves to the beauty and wonder about us: we see the grandeur of the stand of redwoods by the stream, we smell the luscious odor of food being prepared by loving hands, we discern the deeper meanings in a Wallace Stevens poem, or we hear the mystic clap of thunder in the distant clouds.

So this
is our first
exercise:
a shift



from a busy mental concentration within to a voluntary, wide opening to realities from without. That is an elementary and vital form of



spiritual contact. As we expand with our heart we come in contact with spiritual essences which surround us. It is a mixture of energy, the desire to reach higher, and the intense happiness and serenity that beauty gives us. Beauty in all its guises is a great and quiet revealer of spiritual realities. This out-going expansion and familiarity with the wide-hearted feeling is the first stage of spiritual contact.

"The true order of going is to use the beauties of Earth as steps along which one mounts upwards for the sake of that other Beauty."

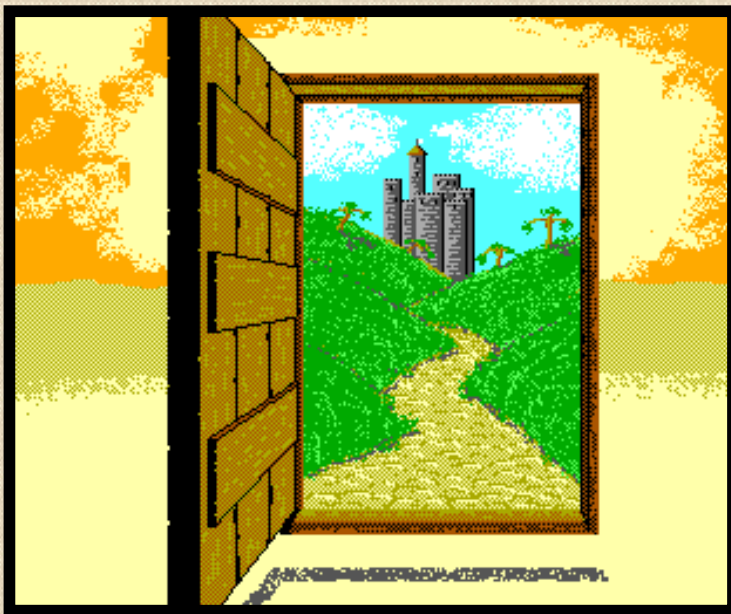
Plato

When we gain a sensibility for this enlargement and open-heartedness we seek it for its own sake. It teaches us that all reality about us vibrates with hidden meaning, that there are

subtleties which a mind-absorbed or ego-obsessed consciousness is simply incapable of registering.

Having gained a feeling for expanded consciousness, our next step is to achieve the first dead lift to gain a new level of contact with the spiritual forces about us.

Emanations from the spiritual dimension are direct responses to the impelling force we create within ourselves. Whatever inspirational force we experience is the issuing forth of energy from a higher dimension in direct proportion to our self-invigoration. We acquire spiritual contact in direct proportion as we arouse ourselves to take. This first step, then, is our responsibility alone; spiritual forces can only respond to genuine effort on our part. We must achieve that first *breakthrough* for ourselves--and then we will receive assistance in abundance according to our capacity to receive.



To develop a new center of consciousness capable of spiritual contact, we must learn a special kind of meditation. This involves a distinct form of physical and mental relaxation combined with spiritual alertness and determination. We learn to relax physically by

imagining ourselves free from tension, picturing to ourselves the condition of serenity as though it already existed.

We remove mental tension by turning our attention to casual sense impressions, without regard to their significance.

Thus we empty the foreground of our consciousness, usually teeming with thoughts, and replace them with little discontinuous sounds, passive and placid scenes of beauty, anything not actively stimulating. Focusing on these unremarkable sense impressions our compulsive mind-jabbering quickly subsides, leaving the consciousness like a calm lake.

Reality Check

"It is most important not to think of this as a pious, posey, parsony sort of thing. There is nothing at all of the See-how-holy-and-calm-I-am idea about it. Nor is it any affectation of a benign pussy-cat smile towards all humanity."

Stewart Edward White. *Across the Unknown*

Once we've gained a modicum of true serenity, we then reach out for contact with the spiritual world, not presuming to delineate what form of contact it should be. We evoke exactly the same wide-hearted, expansive, outside-ourselves feeling that we gained in our surrender to the influence of the beauty and wonder of nature and await the response.

Spiritual contact is at first so subtle and so unaccustomed that it seems to be a groping for the intangible and the unattainable. It's easy at this point to become



discouraged and turn away from the effort.

The first experiences of spiritual connection grow in us from so subtle a beginning that they do not even reach our watchful consciousness for some time. An inspiration related to something we're writing or planning or doing may come to us so subtly, so enigmatically that it will not register at once. An event may occur which hints of arcane purposes beyond our ken.



What we're after is habitual consciousness of spiritual association, the steady habit of keeping open to the subtleties about us. We learn to avoid settling down into a mind-absorbed, ego-obsessed insensibility. We gain a steadfast desire for companionship of the spirit through habitual wide heartedness and receptivity.

Our development of spiritual sensitivity must be natural, vital, and straightforward; we're not seeking to become "Superior Beings" but spiritually aware humans. Our efforts can easily slump into a kind of mechanical ritual, conscientiously and laboriously performed for the good of our soul. We must persist in our efforts for months, perhaps years, until we become saturated, permeated with the energizing vitality of spiritual contact.

Reality Check

"There is a difference between the sloppy, sentimental, emotional thing commonly known as feeling, and the feeling of strength and stability that is absorbent of wisdom."

Stewart Edward White. *Across the Unknown*

Through our persistence in seeking spiritual contact we gain a fundamental core around which our active lives can be organized. This center becomes our port during the storms of life. It is to this center that we repair when the stresses and challenges of life threaten to overcome us.

Persistence is essential because we are learning to use a new faculty: spiritual cognition. Our ordinary senses go after something by first seeing it clearly and then striving toward it. Spiritual perception operates by struggling for something dimly sensed which is seen clearly only *after* it is attained. Each insight we attain then provides strength for further effort toward a subtle, inchoate element tenuously discerned.

As we gain a stabilized wider consciousness it gradually develops in us a spiritual body whose inner senses reveal a spiritual world.

"The flute of interior time is played whether we hear it or not.

What we mean by 'love' is its sound coming in.

When love hits the farthest edge of excess, it reaches a wisdom.

And the fragrance of that knowledge!

It penetrates our thick bodies,

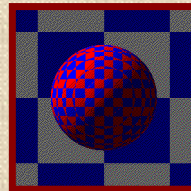
It goes through walls--

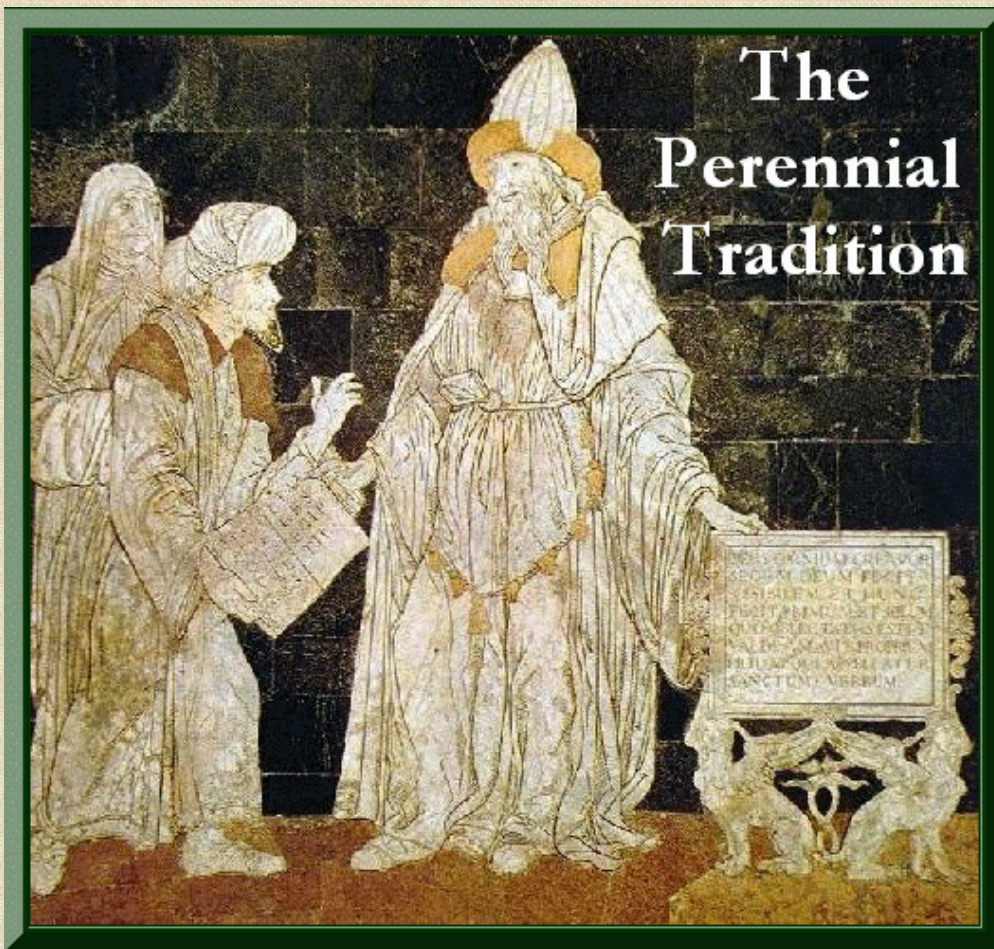
Its network of notes has a structure as if a million suns were arranged inside.

This tune has truth in it.

Where else have you heard a sound like this?"

Kabir, fifteenth century Perennialist poet





The Perennial Tradition

Chapter Six

Hermes Trismegistus the Thrice-Great

I interpret Hermes as a figure associated with wisdom transmitted to man from divine sources.

Historically, the name Hermes referred to several different personages:

The Greek god Hermes, son of Zeus and Maia

- messenger for Zeus
- god of commerce and the market; patron of traders, merchants and thieves
- the Divine Herald who leads dead souls down to the underworld
- inventor of the lyre, the pipes, the musical scale, astronomy, weights and measures, boxing, gymnastics and the care of olive trees



Thoth, Egyptian god of wisdom and sciences

- the moon-god, represented in ancient paintings as ibis-headed with the disc



- and crescent of the moon
- the god of letters and the recording of time



The Roman god, Mercury, messenger of the gods

- messenger for Zeus
- had winged sandals, a winged hat, and a golden Caduceus, or magic wand, with entwined snakes and rising wings
- believed to possess magical powers over sleep and dreams

The mystic figure, Thrice-Great Hermes, who may have represented three different teachers in the Perennial Tradition:

- is described as a very powerful ancient mage, not a god
- in his writings, is collectively called the *Corpus Hermeticum*, Hermes describes himself as "Philosopher, Priest, and King"
- wrote the Emerald Tablet and taught Pythagoras, among other exploits



"Hermes is a generic name, like Manou and Buddha. It means, at the same time, a man, a caste, and a god. As a man, Hermes is the first, the mighty initiator of Egypt; as caste, it is the priesthood, guardian of occult traditions, whilst as god, it is the planet Mercury, assimilated to a whole category of spirits, divine initiators; in a word, Hermes presides over the supraterrrestrial region of the celestial initiation. . . The name of Hermes is a talisman which sums them all up, a magic sound evoking them into existence. Hence the prestige it possessed. The Greeks, disciples of the Egyptians, called him Hermes Trismegistus, or Thrice-Greatest Hermes, because he was looked upon as king, law-giver, and priest. He typifies a period in which the priesthood, the magistracy, and the kingship were united in a single governing body. The Egyptian

chronology of Manetho calls this period the reign of the gods."

Edouard Schuré, *Hermes and Plato*

In his major work, *The Sufis*, Idries Shah states that "both the Sufis and the alchemists claim Hermes as an initiate of their craft." Many Sufis, including al-Farabi, Geber, and Roger Bacon, among others, were described as "Hermetic."



Hermeticism is one of the many streams of transmission of the Perennial Tradition, the inner, secret teaching concealed within every genuine religion and philosophy.

Noel Cobb's "Prayer to Hermes" captures some of the many meanings of Hermes Trismegistus:

"Old knower of roads, chief connoisseur of pathways,
Traveller! Over all the herms and cairns of memory
Your smiling, ectoplasmic form
Hovers like a silent sphinx of starlight.

Dream peddler! Comrade of outlawed night! Daimon!
Whimsical hinge of the floating world!
I think I have always coveted your quicksilverness,
Gypsy trickster with eyes of modest diamond.

You angel of mischief and hanger-out-in-doorways!
You spectral familiar of the shades of hell! Chthonios!
Diaphanous master, rattling your handsome knuckle-bones
Inlaid with moons of mother-of-pearl! Playmate of the Muses,

blessed by oracles of bees,
You ornament dread death with necklaces of poetry.
And just when roads are blocked, the situation lost,
You sidle up with visions rich as eyes in peacocks' tails.

Rogue! Shameless one! Father of all ithyphalic pride,
Arch-fiend of staid propriety!
You honour the darkness of the perfumed garden.
You hide the drunken lovers in a cloud of credibility.

Swift as death, you always appear in the nick of time!
O breath of the breeze, O brilliant flash from the depths!
Nothing is safe from your light-fingered touch.
Cattle-rustler! Wily Highwayman! Thief of every certitude!

Dusty celestial! You of the Seraphic voice
And helpless fits of laughter! Verdigris and gold,
You beckon ever on. Who can resist you?
O, Cornerless corner of the King's Highway!

Hermes, hear me! Work through my work. Let me be
Among those who carry out transfiguration on the earth.
Give my speech an eloquence. Let my life end well.
And grant me knowledge of the way to return.

The Emerald Tablet of Hermes Trismegistus

True it is, without falsehood, certain
and most true. That which is above is like
that which is below and that which is
below is like that which is above, to
accomplish the miracle of unity.

Everything is formed from the
contemplation of unity, and all things
come about from unity, by means of
adaptation.

. . .

Thus you shall have the glory of the
illumination of all the world, and all
obscurity will fly far from you.



This is the power of all strength--it overcomes every subtle thing and penetrates every solid substance.

This was the means of the creation of the world.

In the future wonderful adaptations will be achieved, and this is the way.

I am Hermes the Threefold Sage, so named because I hold the three elements of all wisdom. And thus ends the revelation of the

work of the Sun.

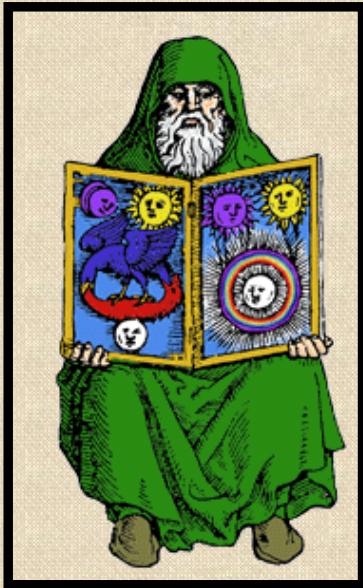
"And thus the origin of the term Hermetic; for as, with the Greeks, Zeus omnipotent, the demiugos and lord of the lightnings, personified the generative source of the electrical or 'fiery' energies of Nature, and Hermes was the divine 'messenger,' it is easy to see that, apart from the possible existence of any historic teacher of this science named Hermes, the term 'messenger' was none other than an allusion to the vibrant universal Ether which in its various modes is in fact the medium and vehicle of all interaction between the different planes and intelligences of the Kosmos. Hermetism, therefore, is the science of the Ether and of its modes and potentialities in the human organism and the subhuman kingdoms."

Introduction to Mary A. Atwood's *Hermetic Philosophy and Alchemy*, by Walter Leslie Wilmhurst

The Corpus Hermeticum

Controversy remains as to the actual date of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. In 1614 C.E., Isaac Casaubon, a Greek scholar, in his *de rebus sacris et ecclesiasticis exercitationes XVI*, argued that the *Corpus Hermeticum* could not possibly have been written by an ancient Egyptian sage--whether Hermes Trismegistus or anyone else. The Greek style of the *Corpus*, he maintained, was of the period of Plotinus (second and third Century C.E.) However, the *Corpus Hermeticum* as we have it now could have been a first to third century C.E. translation of extremely ancient writings. Casaubon's argument that the writings could not have been by Hermes Trismegistus because neither Plato nor Aristotle nor other pagan sources refer to him specifically, doesn't hold water. If we read Plato carefully we find him referring to ancient wisdom which has much in common with the the Hermetic writings.

The most famous of the Hermetic writings is the "Divine Pymander" or *Poimandres* (Gk. *Poimen Anthropos*, "the Shepherd of Men"). The first part of this treatise is given here:



Pimander, who is the Nous, or divine *mens* [mind, intellect, intelligence], appears to Trismegistus when his corporeal senses are bound as in a heavy sleep.

Trismegistus expresses his longing to know the nature of beings and to know God.

Pimander's aspect changes, and Trismegistus sees a limitless vision which is all light. Then a kind of obscurity or darkness appears, out of which comes a kind of fire in which is heard an indescribable sound, like a fiery groan, while from the light issues a holy Word, and a fire without mixture leaps from the moist region up to the sublime, and the air, being light, follows the fiery breath. "That light," says Pimander, "is I myself,

Nous, thy God and the luminous Word issuing from the Nous is the Son of God. "

Trismegistus then sees within himself, in his own Nous or mens, the light and an innumerable number of Powers, a limitless world and the fire enveloped in an all powerful force. He asks Pimander, "Whence then arise the elements of nature?" and Pimander replies, "From the Will of God, which received into itself the Word. . . . And the Nous-God, existing as life and light, brought forth a second Nous-Demiurge, who being the god of fire and breath, fashioned the Governors, seven in number, who envelop with their circles the sensible world." The Word united itself with the Nous-Demiurge, being of the same substance, and the Nous-Demiurge conjointly with the Word moves the Seven Governors on which all the lower elemental worlds depend.

After the Nous-Demiurge-Word of fire and breath had fashioned the Seven Governors and set them in motion, there comes in Trismegistus' account the creation of Man, which is the direct action of the Nous-Father.

Now the Nous, Father of all beings, being life and light, brought forth a Man similar to himself, whom he loved as his own child. For the Man was beautiful, reproducing the image of his Father: for it was indeed with his own form that God fell in love and gave over to him all his works. Now, when he saw the creation which the Demiurge had fashioned in the fire, the Man wished also to produce a work, and permission to do this was given him by the Father. Having thus entered into the demiurgic sphere, in which he had full power, the Man saw the works of his brother, and the Governors fell in love with him, and each gave to him a part

in their own rule. Then, having learned their essence and having received participation in their nature, he wished to break through the periphery of the circles and to know the power of Him who reigns above the fire.

Then Man, who had full power over the world of mortal beings and of animals, leant across the armature of the spheres, having broken through their envelopes, and showed to the Nature below the beautiful form of God. When she saw that he had in him the inexhaustible beauty and all the energy of the Governors, joined to the form of God, Nature smiled with love, for she had seen the features of that marvelously beautiful form of Man reflected in the water and his shadow on the earth. And he, having seen this form like to himself in Nature, reflected in the water, he loved her and wished to dwell with her. The moment he wished this he accomplished it and came to inhabit the irrational form. Then Nature having received her loved one, embraced him, and they were united, for they burned with love.



Man having taken on a mortal body, in order to live with Nature, is alone of all terrestrial beings of a double nature, mortal through his body, immortal through the essential Man. Although in fact immortal and having power over all things, he has also through his body the condition of mortality, being under Destiny and the slave of the armature of the spheres. "Now," says Pimander, "I will reveal to you a mystery which has been hidden until now. Nature being united to Man in love produced an amazing prodigy. Man, as I said, had in him the nature of the assembly of the Seven, composed of fire and breath. Nature from her union with

Man brought forth seven men corresponding to the natures of the Seven Governors, being both male and female and rising up towards the sky." The generation of the seven first men was made in the following fashion. Female was the earth, water the generative element; the fire brought things to maturity, and from ether Nature received the vital breath, and she produced the bodies with the form of Man. As for Man, from life and light which he had been, he changed to soul and intellect, the life changing to soul and the light to intellect. And all the beings of the sensible world remained in this state until the end of a period.

At the end of this period, continues Pimander, the link which bound all things was broken by the will of God. Man and all animals, which till then had been both male and female, separated into two sexes and God spoke the word, increase and multiply.

Then Providence, through destiny and the armature of the spheres, established the generations, and all living things multiplied, each according to their species.

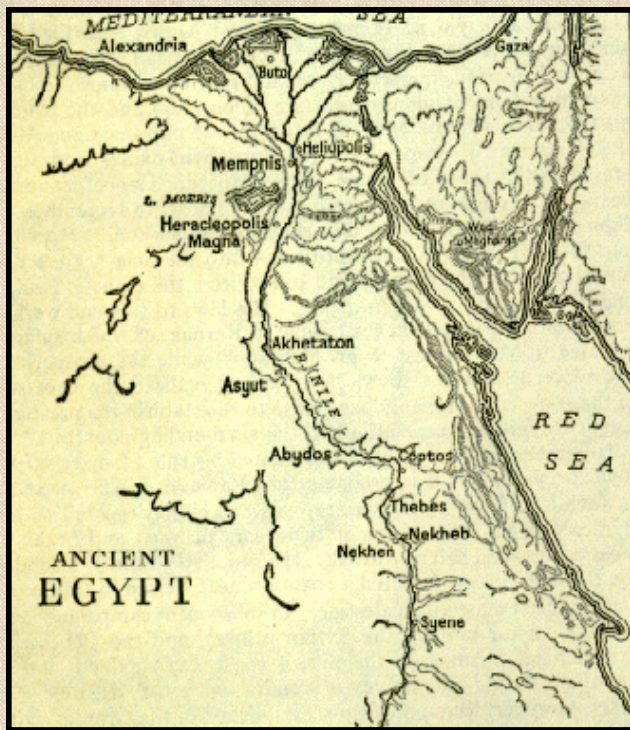
Pimander gives Trismegistus advice as to how he is to comport himself in life in view of the mystery which has been imparted to him. He is to know himself, because "he who knows himself goes towards himself," that is towards his true nature. "You are light and life, like God the Father of whom Man was born. If therefore you learn to know yourself as made of light and life ... you will return to life." Only the man who has intellect (not all men have it) can thus know himself. And Trismegistus must live a pure and holy life, rendering the Father propitious to him through filial love and uttering benedictions and hymns.

Trismegistus gives thanks to Pimander for having revealed all things to him, but wishes also to know about the "ascension." Pimander explains that at death the mortal body dissolves into its corporeal elements but the spiritual man goes up through the armature of the spheres leaving at each sphere a part of his mortal nature and the evil it contains. Then, when entirely denuded of all that the spheres had imprinted on him, he enters into the "ogdoadic" nature, hears the Powers singing hymns to God and becomes mingled with the Powers.

Trismegistus is now dismissed by Pimander, "after having been invested with powers and instructed in the nature of the All and the supreme vision." He begins to preach to the people urging them to leave their errors and to take part in immortality.

Plato's *Timaeus* and *Critias* indicate that about 560 B.C.E. in the temple of Neith at Sais in Egypt there were secret halls containing historical records which had been kept for

more than 9,000 years. Proclus gives the name of the high priest with whom Plato spoke in Sais as Pateneit. Perennialist literature, then, would have been available to Plato in these ancient archives in Egypt. The high priest of Egypt, Psonchis, teacher of Pythagoras, is said to have referred to sacred registers which spoke of a collision of the Earth with a giant asteroid in a remote past.



was likely a compilation of ancient wisdom by scholars in Alexandria in the second or third century C.E. which survived in Greek libraries and later in the Arab world. It was, however, lost to the West except for the hints and allusions that bled through from Arabic sources. The Perennialist, al-Farabi (890-954 C. E.), is described as "Hermetic," and it is likely that the alchemical writings of Geber (721-766 C.E.), Rhazes (850-924 C.E.) and Avicenna (980-1036 C.E.) draw on the *Corpus* to some extent.

After the rise of the Ptolemaic dynasty in 323 B.C.E in Egypt, Greek and Egyptian teachings came together in Alexandria, making it the intellectual, scientific, philosophic and religious center of the Hellenistic World. Manetho, the Egyptian priest of Heliopolis--whose hieroglyphic name meant "Gift of Thoth"--was famous for translating the Babylonian and Egyptian mysteries into Greek. He lived during the final years of the fourth and first half of the third centuries B.C.E. in the reign of the last two Ptolemies.

The *Corpus Hermeticum*, then,





The Arab

Perennialist writings began to filter into Europe following the Papacy of Sylvester II (999-1003 C.E.) and were eventually disseminated in such a manner that the legend of Hermes the Thrice-Great achieved a certain degree of recognition. The *Corpus Hermeticum* did not become available to the West until 1460 C.E., when documents salvaged from Constantinople surfaced in Florence. Their translation in 1471 C.E., by Marsilio Ficino, set off the great explosion of Western interest in Hermeticism as represented by Dee, Trithemius,

Agrippa, and Paracelsus.

The copy of the *Corpus Hermeticum* belonged to Cosimo de Medici. Cosimo also had the manuscripts of Plato in his possession. But he ordered Ficino to translate the work of Hermes Trismegistus before beginning on the Greek philosophers.

"It is an extraordinary situation There are the complete works of Plato, waiting, and they must wait whilst Ficino quickly translates Hermes, probably because Cosimo wants to read him before he dies. What a testimony this is to the mysterious reputation of the thrice Great One! Cosimo and Ficino knew from the Fathers that Hermes Trismegistus was much earlier than Plato. They also knew the Latin *Asclepius* which whetted the appetite for more ancient Egyptian wisdom from the same pristine source. Egypt was before Greece; Hermes was earlier than Plato. Renaissance respect for the old, the primary, the far-away, as nearest to divine truth, demanded that the *Corpus Hermeticum* should be translated before Plato's *Republic* or *Symposium*, and so this was in fact the first translation that Ficino made."

Frances A Yates. *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*

One of the influential works, which bears on Hermeticism, is the *Picatrix*. Originally written in Arabic, probably in the twelfth century, it is not attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, but speaks of him and provides a startling view of his supernatural powers. The *Picatrix* states that Chaldean masters of the art of

magic saw Hermes as an early, powerful nature magician who constructed images by means of which he could regulate the Nile relative to the motion of the moon. The Picatrix also relates that Hermes built a "Temple to the Sun" in which he could become invisible. Hermes is said to have fashioned animal images into which he introduced spirits which spoke with voices.

The Picatrix represents the magical formulation of the Hermetic tradition and is not a subject which we will pursue in this book. The magical interpretation of the Perennial Tradition requires special knowledge and skill and is beyond the purview of this introduction to Perennialist adepts and teachings. For those who want to pursue the magical tradition, I would recommend these three books:

- Idries Shah. *Oriental Magic*, 1956
- Arkon Daraul. *A History of Secret Societies*, 1961
- Idries Shah. *The Secret Lore of Magic*, 1970

Most of the enduring themes of the Perennial Tradition are contained in the *Corpus Hermeticum*. We shall see that many of the Perennialist teachers, including Plato, Shahabudin Suhrawardi, and Giordano Bruno refer to Hermes as a predecessor within their spiritual lineage.

This interesting passage occurs in Hermetic Tractate 7.

That the Greatest Human Evil is Unacquaintance With God

"People, where are you rushing, so intoxicated and having so fully drunk the strong wine of reasoning unaccompanied by acquaintance? You cannot hold it; already you are about to throw it up. Stop, get sober! Look up with the eyes of the mind--and if you cannot all do so, at least those of you who can! For the imperfection that comes from unacquaintance is flooding the entire earth, corrupting the soul along with the body that encloses it and preventing it from putting in at the havens of enlightenment.

"So do not be swept away by the main current! Rather, you who can must avail yourselves of a countercurrent, take to the haven of enlightenment, put in there, and look for a leader to show you the way to the doorway of acquaintance, where there is bright light, pure from darkness, where no one is intoxicated, but all are sober, fixing their eyes on that being who wills to be seen--with the heart, for that being cannot be heard or told of or seen by eyes, only by intellect and mind.

"But first, you must tear off the tunic that you are wearing, the robe of unacquaintance, the foundation of imperfection, the bond of corruption, the dark enclosure, the living death, the perceptible corpse, the portable grave, the resident brigand, who acts in hatred through what he loves and with his instruments of hatred causes corruptions.

"Such is the tunic, the enemy, that you have put on, which strangles you and pulls you down toward itself, lest by looking up and beholding the beauty of truth and the good that lies in it you should come to hate the body's imperfection, once you know about its plot that it has plotted against you in rendering insensible the higher sensory organs by stopping them up with a mass of matter and filling them with loathsome pleasure: to keep you from hearing what you ought to hear, to keep you from seeing what you ought to see."

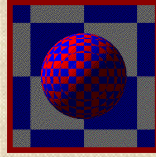
I have quoted and summarized some of the important passages of the *Corpus Hermeticum* to illustrate the correlation between its teachings and those of later Perennialist thought. For example, the discussion of the divine *Nous*, the creation of man, and the seven Governors in *Poimandres* likely refers to man's development of understanding during earthly life and the life beyond. The seven circles or spheres represent humankind's evolution to higher levels of wisdom.

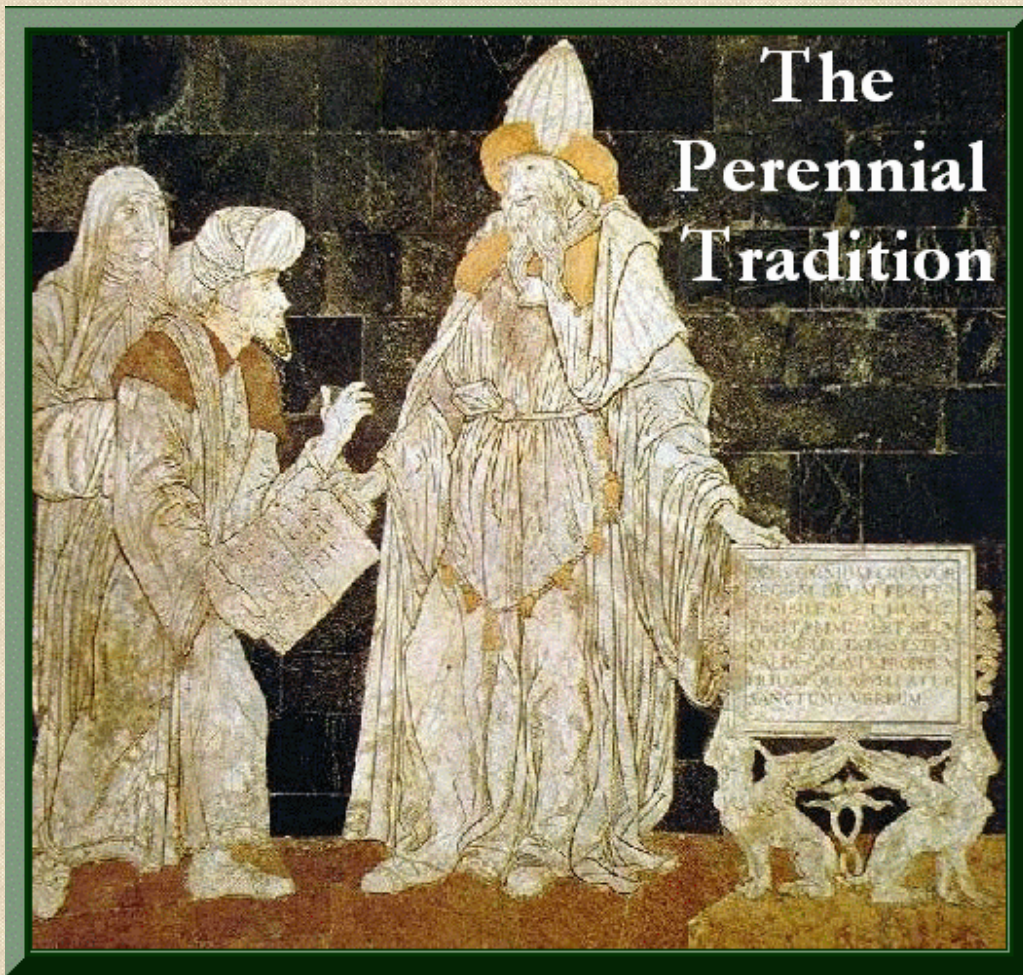
These are probably the teachings which later became distorted and corrupted in gnosticism, resulting in the idea of hundreds of spheres and a multiplicity of archons or rulers. Within the Perennial Tradition, there is the teaching that humans achieve various levels of understanding, during earthly life and beyond. We see this teaching, for example, in the writings of Betty and Stewart Edward White who distinguish between the levels of understanding of the various Invisibles with whom they communicated.

A constant theme within the Hermetic writings is the idea that we are trapped in a bodily prison from which we must escape. In *Hermetic Tractate 7*, the body is seen as a "robe of unacquaintance, the foundation of imperfection, the bond of corruption," "rendering insensible the higher sensory organs by stopping them up with a mass of matter and filling them with loathsome pleasure." Our goal is to put off this "portable grave" of the body and regain the higher organs of perception.

As I suggested earlier, scholars in Alexandria in the second or third century C.E. probably compiled the fifteen tractates of the *Corpus Hermeticum* as a treasury of ancient wisdom. This repository survived in Greek libraries and later in the Arab world. With the rediscovery of Greek sources and the influence of the Arab teachers and scholars, the Perennialist teachings, in their Hermetic rendering, became available in the West in the fifteenth century C.E. Since

Hermes likely represents several teachers and teachings, we can best interpret this figure as a dynamism involving the transmission to humankind of divine wisdom.





Chapter Seven

Language and Human Evolution

Humankind possesses two connatural objectives in its physical and mental evolution :

The development of the individual

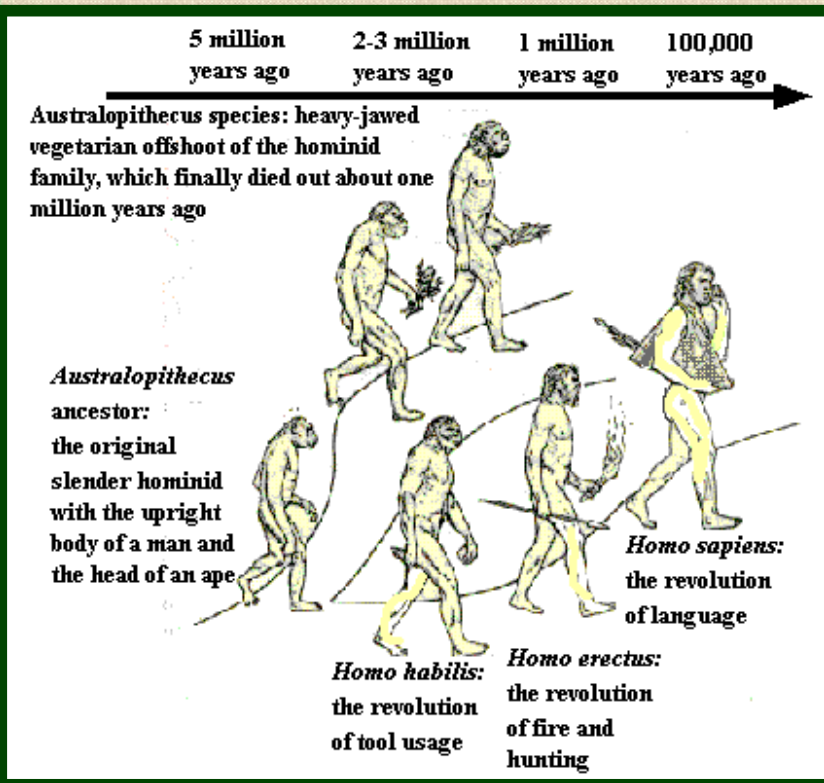
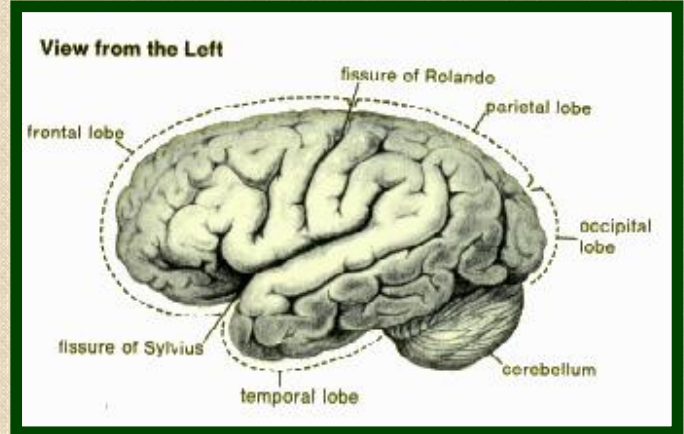


The coordination of the individuals so developed into a functioning unity



How We Evolved into "Intelligent Man," Homo Sapiens

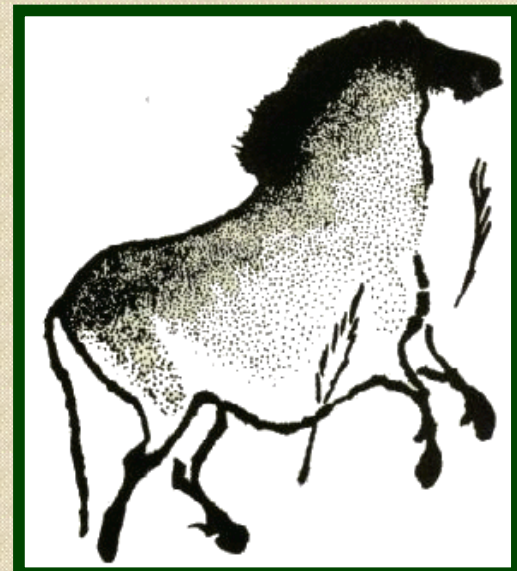
The animal brain took approximately 600 million years to evolve from a pinhead-sized knot of nerves in slime-dwelling creatures to the complex 35-ounce brain of *Homo erectus*, our most recent "apeman" ancestor.



The *Homo habilis* species of mammals proved superior to others because of its ability to develop and use tools. Though *Homo erectus* had developed a large brain, this species lacked an essential capability which would prove to be the distinguishing characteristic of *Homo sapiens*, "intelligent man."

In a mere tenth of a million years after the appearance of the *Homo erectus* species, a split-second, *Homo sapiens* emerged, capable of:

- inventing finely crafted tools
- building huts and shelters
- creating carved ornaments
- designing vivid cave paintings
- BEHAVING INTELLIGENTLY
 - solving problems through planning and carrying out plans



▪ building cohesive groups

The pace of evolution accelerated from a slow walk to a frantic dash when *human intelligence* burst onto the scene! What had *Homo sapiens* developed in themselves that caused such an unprecedented change in human evolution?

- Brain size? *Homo sapiens'* brain is four times as big as that of our ape ancestors. But whales and elephants have brains four times the size of human brains, so the answer is not the sheer size of the brain.
- Change in makeup of the brain? Human brain cells function similarly to those of a fish or squid and the makeup of a human brain is almost identical to that of a chimpanzee or other apes.
- Change in genes? 97% of the genes of a human are identical to those of a chimpanzee.

Homo sapiens unlocked the awesome power of their brain through the invention of language.

- Language enables humans to develop such internally directed activities as reminiscing, imagining, thinking rationally, and being self-aware.
- *Homo sapiens* developed the voice box and flexible tongue that allows us to speak in rapid collections of words, and also the greatly increased brain capacity to control this new equipment. Thus humans can speak and understand speech at a rate of more than five syllables a second - a 'rate of handling' which is about six times faster than for any other sensory system. The human brain cannot deal with a succession of visual patterns or non-speech sounds with anything like the same speed.

"We must recollect that our primitive [*Homo erectus*] ancestor had no words with which to name and tell about things. He was speechless. His fellows knew no more than he did. Each one learned during his lifetime according to his capacity, but no instruction in our sense of the word was possible. What he saw and heard was not what we should have called seeing and hearing. He responded to situations in a blind and impulsive manner, with no clear idea of them. In short, he must have thought much as a wolf or bear does, just as he lived much like them."

James Harvey Robinson. (1921), *The Mind in the Making*

Modern man's advanced development began with the appearance of *homo sapiens*, the first creatures who, through their creation of language, were capable of understanding. Prior to *homo sapiens*, members of the *homo habilis* and *homo erectus* strains had trained themselves in such skills as fire-making, hunting, shelter-building, and food gathering. But to them, human experience was merely a series of events without long-term significance.

With humankind's development of language it became possible to pass down one generation's accumulated understanding to the next generation, to create what we now call a culture.

"All animals gain a certain wisdom with age and experience, but the experience of one ape does not profit another. Learning among animals below man is individual, not co-operative and cumulative."

James Harvey Robinson. (1921), *The Mind in the Making*

When *homo sapiens* tribes invented language, they represented events and objects by written and spoken signs and gestures, which they understood to have *meaning*, that is, they signified some entity such as a person, animal, plant, place, thing, substance, quality, idea, action, or state.



A sign, such as the word, "fire," could be communicated from one person to another. Now humans could not only see, feel, and make fire, for example, but understand its significance: warmth, cooking, protection from predators, sterilization, and destruction.

With the development of language, the communication of meaning began. Now, meanings could be transmitted from one person to another, one generation to another.

The Magic of Meaning

Meaning is truly a magical element. Perhaps the best way to grasp the *mystery of meaning* is by *thoughtfully* viewing the movie "The Miracle Worker," the story of the early life of Helen Keller.

As a young blind and deaf child, Helen lived much like an animal, rushing from one sensation to another. Within a month after becoming Helen's teacher, Anne Mansfield Sullivan was able to impart the gift of language to her. The awakening to *meaning*, as demonstrated in the film, was the event which made it possible for Helen to begin understanding instead of simply repeating what Anne was teaching her. Helen had been trained to repeat the word "water," but it wasn't until she combined the experience of feeling water and trying to communicate the word "water" simultaneously, that Helen gained the magical gift of *meaning*--and hence language and understanding.



Up to that point, Helen had been like a well-trained animal, memorizing words, communicating them, and receiving praise from Anne. But now, suddenly, it came to her! The word "water" actually *referred to, pointed to, meant* this marvelous liquid reality that ran through her fingers.

If we look discerningly at children learning to read and write, we can perceive the magic of language:

- first, children must learn to form sounds and recognize parts of the written alphabet
- next, they must learn to form words and sentences vocally and in writing
- then they must learn to recognize the *meanings* contained and conveyed in vocal and written words
- and if they are fortunate enough to have a teacher with a higher understanding, they learn:
 - the difference between the common (socially normative) meaning of words and the higher meanings of words (for example, the common meaning of "personal freedom" and the higher meaning)

- how language can *inspire* (a very advanced knowledge)

"For language, as Richard Trench pointed out long ago, is often 'wiser, not merely than the vulgar, but even than the wisest of those who speak it. Sometimes it locks up truths which were once well known, but have been forgotten. In other cases it holds the germs of truth which, though they were never plainly discerned, the genius of its framers caught a glimpse of in a happy moment of divination.'"

Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*

Homo sapiens won out in the evolutionary race for survival because their invention of language allowed them to develop mentally and psychically:

- To solve problems by reflection and planning
- To remember the past and imagine the future
- To understand what is in their individual best interest and the best interest of their group
- To be self-aware and improve performance

"Minds are formed by the character of language, not language by the minds of those who speak it."

Giambattista Vico

Beginning: 20 million years ago

Miocene Era
10 million years ago

hot, wet era with
lush forests; many ape
species (more than the
5 ape lines that still
survive):

A) *Homo Habilis*

tool-using;
21-ounce brain

B) *Homo Erectus*

walked upright;
invented fire-building;
spread world wide.

The thinking brain is
a large consumer of
energy

Homo sapiens' brain
is over 4 times as

Through the use of
language-- spoken and
written --humans have
created society. But the
large brain of Homo

3 ape lines that still survive):
gibbons, chimps, orangutans, gorillas, man

Then earth became cooler - forests retreated, replaced by open grassy plains

Two species of ape survived the Miocene Era:

1) *Australopithecus*:
ape head with small brain; confined to Africa

2) *Homo*: weak jaw but large brain

invented fire-building; spread world-wide; from 1.5 million years ago to 100,000 years ago;

35-ounce brain
C) *Homo Sapiens*
52.5-ounce brain; invented language; CRITICAL THINKING

is over 4 times as large as its ape ancestors

The human brain is about 1/15th of the body weight, BUT IT BURNS ABOUT 1/5TH OF THE OXYGEN TAKEN IN BY THE LUNGS

The new SPEAKING BRAIN had to be extremely useful to make up for its greatly increased energy consumption!

sapiens is a tremendous consumer of energy, and only if this expanded brain enhanced the species' survival skills would it have been retained.

Though humankind had invented language and developed beyond the mere beast, the human mind was still largely a "hive mind"

phenomenon, not yet capable of reflecting in a thoroughly self-aware and rational manner.

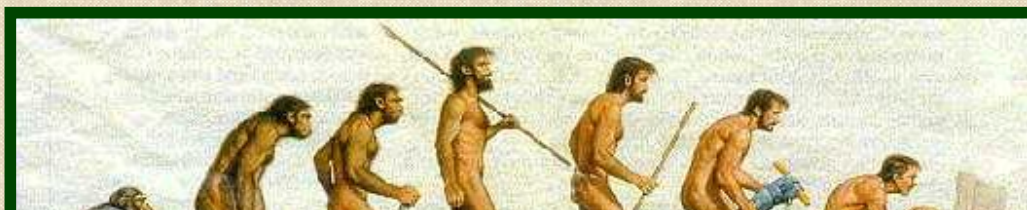
Plato's Contribution to Human Evolution

As an illustration of the impact of Perennialist teachings on humankind's intellectual and social evolution, we can focus on the teachings and activities of Plato. As a Perennialist master, Plato made certain knowledge available which has been instrumental in the development and improvement of Western civilization.

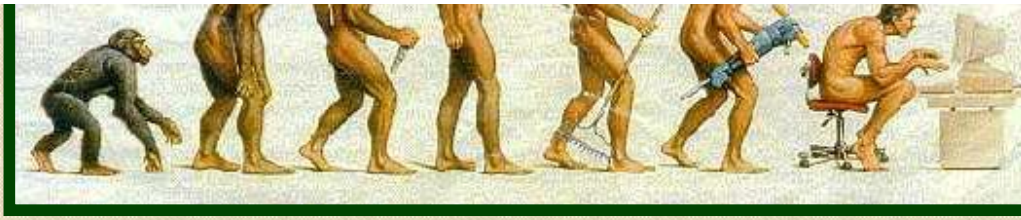
"The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato"

Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 1929

We can expand Whitehead's statement to say that the essence of what we know as Western civilization derives from Plato and the other teachers within the Perennial Tradition.



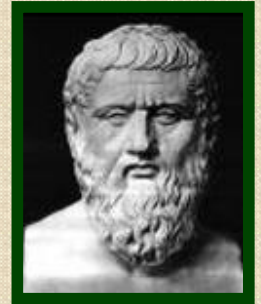
It's easy enough to understand that technological



objects--such as a computer--and social structures--such as democracy--are

human inventions: at one time these things did not exist and some person, or group of persons, thought of them and developed them.

It's difficult for us to realize that the powers of **mind** that we call "rational intelligence" were actually invented by Plato and the thinkers who followed in his path. When it comes to *critical thinking* we find it hard to understand that at one time this capability of the human mind did not exist and had to be deliberately invented.



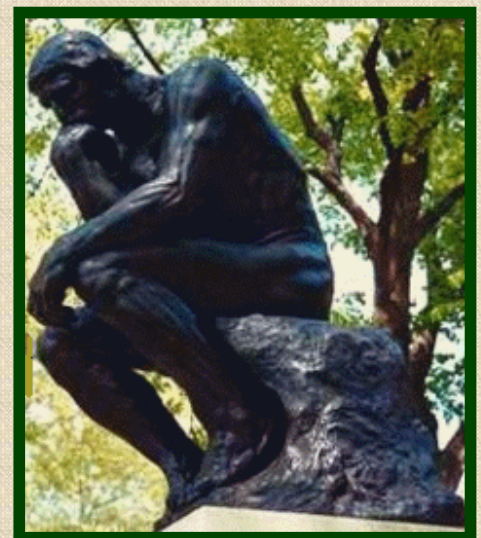
It's also a challenge to understand that humankind's capability of critical thinking is a proficiency that can be LOST. That is, reason and reflection can become no longer available to a particular culture if the capability of critical thinking is destroyed or abandoned.

"Out of Plato come all things that are still written and debated among men of thought."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

In Western culture we define intelligence as:

- "the ability to learn or understand or to deal with new or trying situations"
- Reason and "the skilled use of reason"
- "the ability to apply knowledge to manipulate one's environment or to think abstractly as measured by objective criteria"
- "the act of understanding" -- comprehension



How Greece Transmitted Its Culture

In each society, the public meanings, ideas, and skills are transmitted through cultural institutions (theater, schools, academies, monasteries, universities) and through the media (newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, Internet).

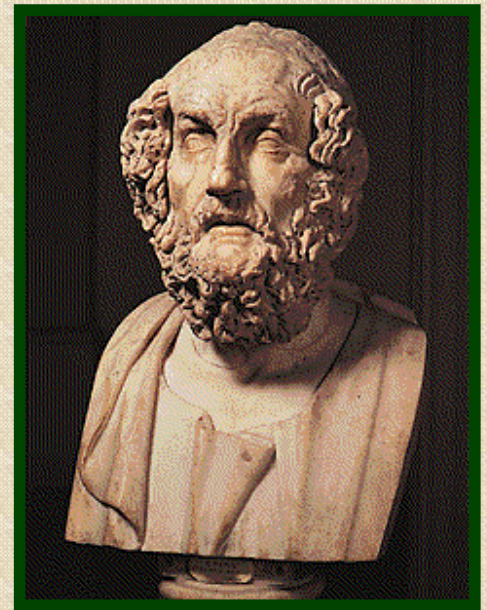


A culture is formed around a distinct ethos: a collection of public and private mores expressive of its coherence as a social unit. This ethos or "tradition" requires embodiment in formulations which both delineate and enforce the normative behavior patterns.

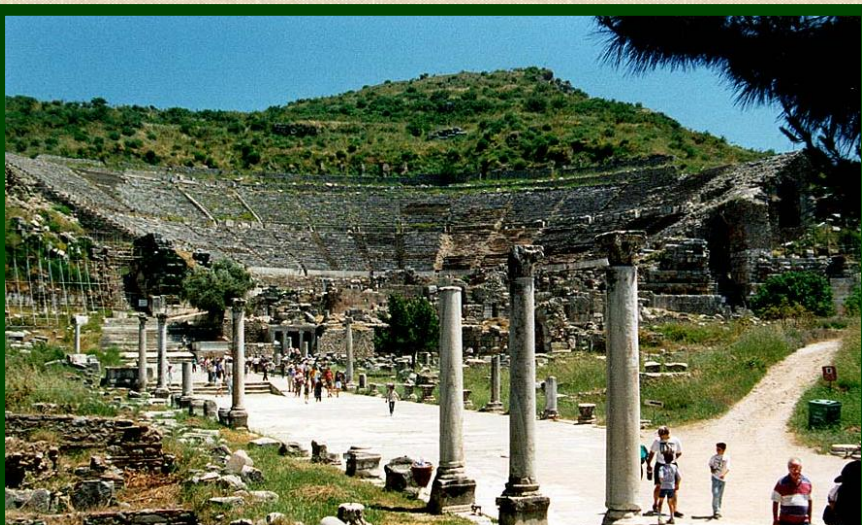
By adherence to and preservation of these formulations the culture develops a *common consciousness* and a distinctive set of values. The ethos is embodied in verbal expressions such as constitutions, laws, literature, and drama. The normative archetypes of the ethos become the content of education, entertainment, and human behavior.

Prior to Plato (347-427 B.C.E) Greece had transmitted its cultural ethos through the *oral tradition* of the major Greek "poets" from Homer to Euripides. In such a *preliterate* society the ethos must be preserved and transmitted in the *memories* of successive generations.

A preliterate culture's survival depends on its collective social memory, which must be passed down in a linguistic form which can be *memorized* and constantly re-presented.



The verbal configuration that guarantees the preservation of a preliterate culture is rhythmic statements in metrical patterns unique enough to retain their shape as they pass from mind to mind. In other words, Greek *lyric and epic poetry, music, and drama!*





This is the phenomenon the Greeks called *mimesis* presently defined as "art's

imitation of life: the imitation of life or nature in the techniques and subject matter of art and literature." Contemporary scholars sometimes mis-identify *mimesis* with "poetry," "music," and "drama" in our current meaning of those terms

Once we recognize the comprehensive reach of the Greek term *mimesis*, which encapsulates all verbal and behavioral formulations of the ethos, we can understand that Plato was referring to something much different--and more inclusive--than our term "poetry."

"All human civilisations rely on a sort of cultural 'book', that is, on the capacity to put information in storage in order to reuse it. Before Homer's day, the Greek cultural 'book' had been stored in oral memory. . . . Between Homer and Plato, the method of storage began to alter, as the information became alphabetised, and correspondingly the eye supplanted the ear as the chief organ employed for this purpose."

Havelock, Eric A. *Preface to Plato*

When we read *The Republic*, Plato's discussion of an ideal society, it's possible to be shocked by his insistence that "poets" and "poetry" are not to be allowed, unless we realize that Plato was referring to "poets" and "poetry" not in our sense but in his sense of the "oral state of mind."

"Once it is accepted that the oral situation had persisted through the fifth century, one faces the conclusion that there would also persist what one may call an oral state of mind as well; a mode of consciousness so to speak, and . . . a vocabulary and syntax, which were not that of a literate bookish culture. And once one admits this and admits that the oral state of mind would show a time lag so that it persisted into a new epoch when the technology of communication had changed, it becomes understandable

that the oral state of mind is still for Plato the main enemy.

"Plato



characterized the oral state of mind as 'a crippling of the mind.' It is a kind of disease, for which one has to acquire an antidote. The antidote must consist of a knowledge 'of what things really are'. In short, poetry is a species of mental poison, and is the enemy of truth. This is surely a shocker to the sensibilities of any modern reader and his incredulity is not lessened by the peroration with which, a good many pages later, Plato winds up his argument: 'Crucial indeed is the struggle, more crucial that we think--the choice that makes us good or bad--to keep faithful to righteousness and virtue in the face of temptation, be it of fame or money or power, or of poetry--yes, even of poetry.' If he thus exhorts us to fight the good fight against poetry, like a Greek Saint Paul warring against the powers of darkness, we can conclude either that he has lost all sense of proportion or that his target cannot be poetry in our sense, but something more fundamental in the Greek experience, and most powerful."

Havelock, Eric A. *Preface to Plato*

Given that a preliterate culture's ethos must be preserved and transmitted to and by each generation, how did an individual Greek citizen memorize the dramatic formulations--Homer and the other Greek "poets" and dramatists--so

as to retain in his memory the verbal tradition on which his culture depended?

He imbibed Greek poetry and drama which was constantly performed in the theaters, recited by his family and friends, portrayed in paintings and murals, represented in pottery, and referred to in his school lessons. He then repeated it and added to his repertoire to the the limits of his mental capacity.



The primary psychological factors that helped the Greek layman to retain at least a minimal grasp of the cultural ethos were a state of total personal involvement and the resultant emotional identification with

the essence of the poetized drama that he was required to keep in memory.

He identified with the words and actions of the poetic drama as an actor does with his lines. He "became" Achilles, he identified with his grief and his anger. Years later he could still automatically recite what Achilles said and recall what heroic acts he performed.

As Plato points out, such enormous feats of memorization resulted in the total loss of objectivity. You did not *think* about the drama; you merely memorized it. Plato recognized that this was a cultural indoctrination procedure, an entire way of life inimical to reflection and reason.

We must realise that works of genius, composed within the semi-oral tradition, though a source of magnificent pleasure to the modern reader of ancient Greek, constituted or represented a total state of mind which is not our mind and which was not Plato's mind; and that just as poetry itself, as long as it reigned supreme, constituted the chief obstacle to the achievement of effective prose, so there was a state of mind which we shall conveniently label the 'poetic' or 'Homeric' or 'oral' state of mind which constituted the chief obstacle to scientific rationalism, to the use of analysis, to the classification of experience, to its rearrangement in

sequence of cause and effect. That is why the poetic state of mind is for Plato the arch-enemy and it is easy to see why he considered this enemy so formidable. He is entering the lists against centuries of habituation in rhythmic memorised experience. He asks of men that instead they should examine this experience and rearrange it, that they should think about what they say, instead of just saying it. And they should separate themselves from it instead of identifying with it; they themselves should become the 'subject' who stands apart from the 'object' and reconsiders it and analyses it and evaluates it, instead of just 'imitating' it."

Havelock, Eric A. *Preface to Plato*



The Athenian ruler Pisistratus gave state support for stage plays. Many of these dramatic performances "spoke" in a dialect closer to the vernacular. These became a kind of supplement to Homer as a way to preserve the cultural memory. The plays were memorised, taught, quoted and recited in everyday conversation. Each dramatic performance was a

lesson in the wit and wisdom of the Hellenic culture.

"Control over the style of a people's speech, however indirect, means control also over their thought. The two technologies of preserved communication known to man, namely the poetised style with its acoustic apparatus and the visual prosaic style with its visual and material apparatus, each within their respective domains control also the content of what is communicable. Under one set of conditions man arranges his



experience in words in some one given way; under the second set of conditions he arranges the same experience differently in different words and with different syntax and perhaps as he does so the experience itself changes. This amounts to saying that the patterns of his thought

have historically run in two distinct grooves, the oral and the written. . . . Plato . . . seems to have been convinced that poetry and the poet had exercised a control not merely over Greek verbal idiom but over the Greek state of mind and consciousness. The control in his view had been central and he describes it as though it were monopolistic."

Havelock, Eric A. *Preface to Plato*

Plato's momentous contribution to the evolution of the human mind was in replacing the "oral state of mind"--memorisation through association--with his conception of the process of reasoned reflection.

"The Greek tongue therefore, as long as it is the speech of men who have remained in the Greek sense 'musical' and have surrendered themselves to the spell of the tradition, cannot frame words to express the conviction that 'I' am one thing and the tradition is another; that 'I' can stand apart from the tradition and examine it; that 'I' can and should break the spell of its hypnotic force; and that 'I' should divert some at least of my mental powers away from memorisation and direct them instead into channels of critical inquiry and analysis. The Greek ego in order to achieve that kind of cultural experience which after Plato became possible and then normal must stop identifying itself successively with a whole series of polymorphic vivid narrative

situations; must stop re-enacting the whole scale of the emotions, of challenge, and of love, and hate and fear and despair and joy, in which the characters of epic become



involved. It must stop splitting itself up into an endless series of moods. It must separate itself out and by an effort of sheer will must rally itself to the point where it can say 'I am I, an autonomous little universe of my own, able to speak, think and act in independence of what I happen to remember'. This amounts to accepting the premise that there is a 'me', a 'self', a 'soul', a consciousness which is self-governing and which discovers the reason for action in itself rather than in imitation of the poetic experience. The doctrine of the autonomous psyche is the counterpart of the rejection of the oral culture."

Havelock, Eric A. *Preface to Plato*

Aldous Huxley reminds us that "certain thoughts are practically unthinkable except in terms of an appropriate language and within the framework of an

appropriate system of classification. Where these necessary instruments do not exist, the thoughts in question are not expressed and not even conceived. Nor is this all: the incentive to develop the instruments of certain kinds of thinking is not always present." [*The Perennial Philosophy*]

Plato's momentous contribution to humankind's development was in creating or expanding:

- the activity of sheer thinking
- words and concepts having to do with critical, autonomous thinking
- the conception of a personality which thinks and knows
- the notion of an independent, invisible, timeless body of knowledge which is thought about and known (explored in chapter eleven)



How Human Intelligence Can Be Lost

Our study of Plato's struggle to replace the "oral state of mind" with a rational mind-set is particularly timely because the twenty-first century is experiencing precisely the opposite trend: the deliberate destruction of the rational mind-set and devolution to the "oral state of mind."



In the new "oral tradition" that has overwhelmed our culture, we have a new Homer. Homer Simpson serves as a clear representation of the current "imitative," anti-intellectual, "whatever-feels-good," anti-mind, "truth-is-relative," barbarism.

Plato saw the oral, non-literate state of consciousness as a crippling or poisoning of the mind, the creation of a false "reality" which individuals are made to believe in. In our current TV-movie-music culture a total counterfeit "reality" is created, people do not see what is really going on--only what the media tells them is happening.



This is why Homer Simpson is a revealing icon for the contemporary retrogression to a state of "exuberant ignorance." Homer is not only a TV character--one step from reality, he is also a cartoon character--another step removed. The fact that people watch this cartoon character means that they have become entranced by a shadow on Plato's cave, a phantom specter. They are losing any taste for reality.

"When a population becomes distracted by trivia, when cultural life is redefined as a perpetual round of entertainments, when serious public conversation becomes a form of baby-talk, when, in short, a people become an audience and their public business a vaudeville act, then a nation finds itself at risk: culture-death is a clear possibility."

Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*

Plato clearly recognized that man's evolutionary advancement required that he come out of the primitive mind-set and gain the capabilities of rational thought and self-consciousness. Plato had experienced first hand how anti-intellectual drama can cause terrible havoc. In 419 B.C.E, Aristophanes had written a treacherous play entitled "The Clouds" featuring a character by the name of Socrates who is a sophist, does not believe in Zeus or the Olympian gods, who introduces new gods, and who corrupts young people by teaching them tricks of rhetoric and setting them against their elders. This ridiculous, deliberately false image of "Socrates," created merely for the amusement of the theater audience, became part of the basis for the Athenian prosecutors' indictment of the real Socrates.

At the start of his self-defense, Plato's Socrates complains that his reputation has been smeared, and that the charges against him really came from Aristophanes' murderous caricature of him:

"I have had many accusers, who accused me of old, and their false charges have continued during many years; and I am more afraid of them than of Anytus and his associates, who are dangerous, too, in their own way. But far more dangerous are these, who began when you were children, and took possession of your minds with their falsehoods, telling of one Socrates, a wise man, who speculated about the heaven above, and searched into the earth beneath, and made the worse appear the better cause. These are the accusers whom I dread; for they are the circulators of this rumor, and their hearers are too apt to fancy that speculators of this sort do not believe in the gods. And they are many, and their charges against me are of ancient date, and

they made them in days when you were impressionable in childhood, or perhaps in youth, and the cause when heard went by default, for there was none to answer. And, hardest of all, their names I do not know and cannot tell, except in the case of a comic poet."

Plato had seen first hand the power of destructive burlesque to form prejudices based entirely on lies and falsehoods. Little wonder that Plato feared the corrupting influence of "popular art" (mimesis) on society!

In most cultures, the "ruling ideas" have fostered violence and class warfare. In only a few instances in history, have the "ruling ideas" fostered the betterment of common people and society at large. One example of such a benevolent era was the eighteenth century Enlightenment, which encouraged humans to develop broad understanding in all fields of knowledge. Highly educated, intelligent groups in Europe and America developed toward a democratic way of life, created constitutions, and founded institutions for public education.



During this Enlightenment period, words and phrases such as "liberty," "freedom," "natural rights," "pursuit of happiness," "consent of the governed," "informed citizenry," came into being for the first time or were first understood by humans through their own experience.

America has served as the beacon of these Enlightenment ideals, maintaining its faith in "the power of knowledge and reason in self-determination."

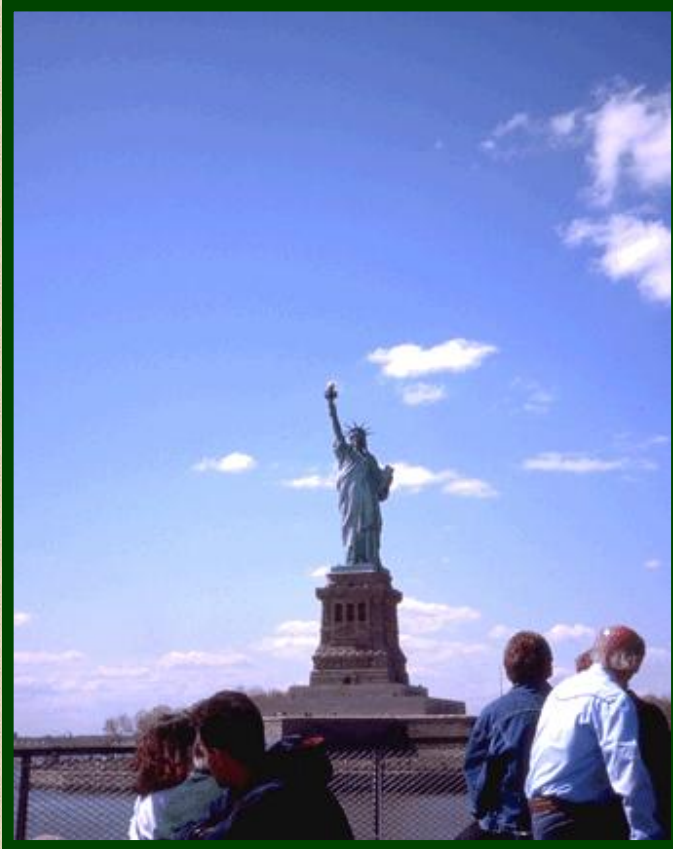
"There can be no real question that the Enlightenment promoted the cause of freedom, more widely, directly, positively than any age before it. It not only asserted but demonstrated the power of knowledge and reason in self-determination, the choice and realization of human purpose.

"For the first time in history it carried out a concerted attack on the vested interests that opposed the diffusion of

knowledge and the free exercise of reason.

"As thinkers the men of the Enlightenment were conscious revolutionaries, very much aware of a 'new method of philosophizing' that amounted to a new living faith, the basis for a new social order."

Herbert J. Muller. (1964). *Freedom in the Western World*



Culture as a creation of humankind is a neutral element--it can be used for positive or negative ends. Through the process of acculturation, the process beginning at infancy by which human beings acquire the culture of their society, individuals are stamped with social norms.

Vested, monied interests have constantly sought to demolish the American traditions of democracy, plotting to destroy the enlightening "diffusion of knowledge and the free exercise of reason." Their method of rule is not by "consent of the governed" or rational discourse, but by arbitrary dictate of a tyrant's

fascistic tactics.

Humankind's Evolution and Possible Devolution

| Man's Achievement of Language | The Oral Frame of Mind | Man's Achievement of Reason | The Enlightenment | Reversion to Oral Frame of Mind | Back to the Stone Age |
|-------------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------|
| | | | | | |



As our contemporary American culture devolves to the Homer Simpson "oral frame of mind," people are beginning to lose the very capabilities which have distinguished them from the lower animals: language and critical awareness.

"On every societal front, nonsense is replacing good sense in our once-pragmatic nation. It is accompanied by a distortion of thought that weakens our ability to distinguish truth from falsity, the basic skill of a civilized society."

Martin L. Gross. (1997). *The End of Sanity: Social and Cultural Madness in America*

Humans today are rapidly losing the intellectual ability to realize or be concerned that their very lives are threatened by the loss of the ability to use language to understand and communicate. As Thomas Jefferson made clear, "no people can be both ignorant and free."

Among a large number of studies of the contemporary "oral" MTV culture of illiteracy, violence, and anti-intellectualism, one book stands out in exposing the ruinous nature of this barbarity, Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death*.

"In saying that the television news show entertains but does not inform, I am saying something far more serious than that we are being

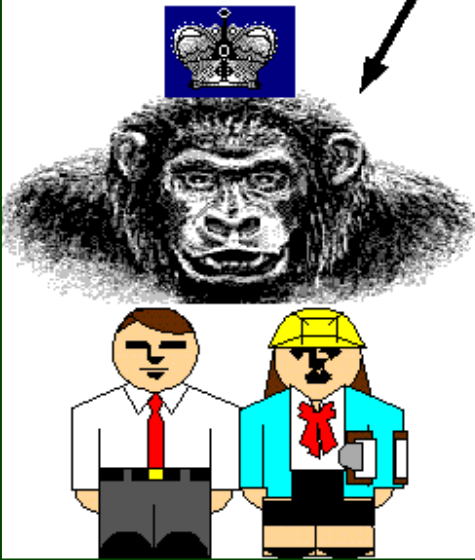
deprived of authentic information. I am saying we are losing our sense of what it means to be well informed. Ignorance is always correctable. But what shall we do if we take ignorance to be knowledge?"

The invention of language enabled a species of ape to evolve into humans. Language, like any technology, can be used for creative or destructive ends:

- enabling humans to develop enhanced consciousness and continue human evolution
- enabling a debased cabal of obscenely wealthy people to manipulate and control others, leading to a degenerate species obsessed by egomania and greed

Human Evolution Can Now Go Either of 2 Ways

**A debased plutocracy
turning humans into
robots**



**An enlightened
democracy enabling
humans to reach their
full potential**



"So essential is language to man's humanness, so deep a source is it of his own creativity, that it is by no means an accident in our time that those who have tried to degrade man and enslave him have first debased and misused language, arbitrarily turning meanings inside out. "

Lewis Mumford. *The Conduct of Life*

We are allowing our institutions of "learning" to deteriorate to the point that ordinary citizens are progressively losing the ability to use language effectively. We allow communication media to condition us with their truncated lexicon of meanings so that we lose even the awareness of essential concepts such as "inspiration" or "liberty."

An increasing number of people have no understanding of or competency in language and communication:

- Increasing numbers of high schools and college students are effectively illiterate
- Multiculturalism is creating a Tower of Babel, with, for example, twelve different languages being taught in Los Angeles schools

"In confronting an environment, the superiority of the individual, of the population, of the race at our stage of human history must rest in large portion on the capacity to learn."

Robert Ardrey. *The Social Contract*

The Next Step in Human Evolution

The Perennial Tradition distinguishes two different strains or "types" within the human species:

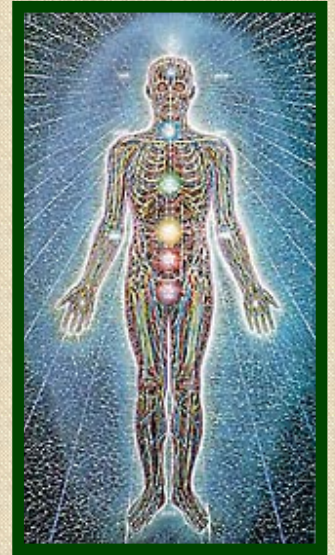
- ordinary human beings within a culture
- human beings who have undergone a spiritual transformation through initiation into the Perennial Tradition

I am using the word "type" in a very specific manner, referring to "the general form, character, or structure distinguishing a particular kind, group, or class of

beings or objects; hence, a pattern or model after which something is made." [Oxford English Dictionary]

The Perennial Tradition has used different terms to refer to this advanced "type" of human:

- "Priests of the Living God" -- the designation given to adepts in the Hermetic tradition
- "Sons of God" or the "New Men" -- the terms used by Jesus, the apostles, and Paul in referring to those Christians who had experienced rebirth
- "True Gnostics" -- the title Clement of Alexandria gave to initiates in the Perennial Tradition, those who, according to Clement, "have already become God"
- "Pneumatics" -- Origen's term to refer to Christian gnostics who had been initiated into the mystical meaning of Perennialist writings
- "Philosophers" [lovers and seekers of wisdom] - the designation Plato gave to initiates in the Perennial Tradition



"True Gnostics" (to use Clement of Alexandria's term) are not just superficially different in degree from ordinary humans; they are a different "type" altogether. They represent a distinct "type" within the Man (Homo) genus and the Homo sapiens species. They are distinguished from ordinary Homo sapiens by their:

- achievement of a higher understanding
- experience of a spiritual transformation (explored in chapter 20)
- ability to live in both the terrestrial and the spiritual world simultaneously

Outwardly, participants in the Perennial Tradition appear the same as ordinary human beings; the difference is internal and spiritual and can only be discerned by members of the same "type."

Invisible

"A well-known Sufi was asked, 'What is invisibility?'

He said: 'I shall answer that when an opportunity for a demonstration of it occurs.'

Some time later that man and the one who had asked him the question were stopped by a band of soldiers.

The soldiers said: 'We have orders to take all dervishes into custody, for the king of this country says that they will not obey his commands, and say things which are not welcome to the tranquility of thought of the populace.'

The Sufi said: 'And so you should, for you must do your duty.'

'But are you not Sufis?' asked the soldiers.

'Test us,' said the Sufi.

The officer took out a Sufi book. 'What is this?' he said.

The Sufi looked at the title page. 'Something which I will burn in front of you, since you have not already done so,' he said.

He set light to the book, and the soldiers rode away, satisfied.

The Sufi's companion asked: 'What was the purpose of that action?'

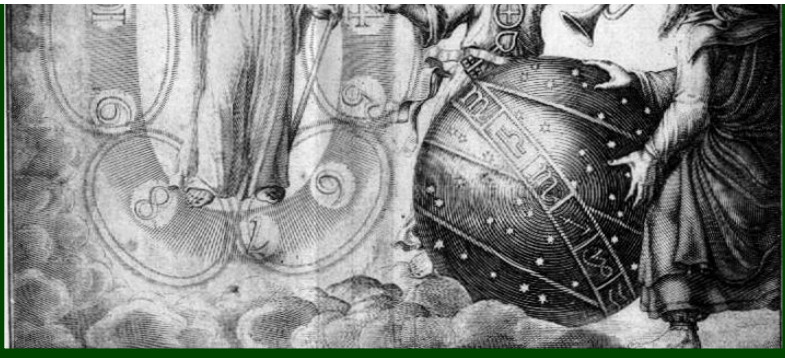
'To make us invisible,' said the Sufi, 'for to the man of the world, 'visibility' means that you are looking like something or someone he expects you to resemble. If you look different your true nature becomes invisible to him.'"

Idries Shah, *The Dermis Probe*

In each era of human history, adepts in the Perennial Tradition have made exoteric knowledge available to the people in general. This knowledge has served as the basis for periodic social advancement, as in Pythagoras' cultural center at Croton, Plato's Academy, and the eighteenth century Enlightenment in Europe and America. To specific students, they have taught the esoteric knowledge of spiritual regeneration.



Perennialists books and symbols contain, in an "invisible" manner, knowledge of the secret processes by which the regeneration of individuals and humanity in general is to be accomplished. These works usually



contain both exoteric and esoteric strains and also serve as the key to other Perennialist writings.

We must regain the understanding, taught by Perennialist sages throughout the ages, that there is a magic in

language which contributes to human evolution. Language in some way creates the very reality in which we live. Words and concepts point to realities beyond the sensory world and assist us in making contact with a higher dimension.

Intangible Ideas, in Plato's conception--supersensible realities beyond human thought--are appropriated through words, as birds in our hands, and released by the act of discernment, setting the birds free. These Ideas reside in the words independent of the books or the sounds in which the words are encased.

"Yet how and where, in the interval between their setting down and their taking up, do they abide? By what secret tract is their existence in the mind of the author connected with their resuscitation in the mind of the reader? Why at the sight of certain lines and figures on the voiceless page do these particular thoughts spring up into renewed activity? What is the undiscoverable nexus between the physical vibrations of light and these immaterial substances of our noetic life?

"And the riddle does not end here. This phantom world into which my soul is carried by the magic of petrified language has its own scale of degrees and distinctions. All these images and emotions are real in a sense, but not with the same order of reality. As in reflection I separate those which recur and hold me day by day from those which flit accidentally before me and as quickly disappear, I begin to understand that their power depends not simply on their deftness in embodying the past life of this or that eager soul, but on the greater or less correspondence with a world of inanimate Ideas which exist in their own right and cannot be created or destroyed by any mind, and to know which is truly to live. Not every man's thoughts and visions and desires,

as by them he would remould the gross material of experience, are capable of passing into enduring literature, but rather those which conform with actual truths, visualizing a beauty finer than that comprehended by the seeing eye, grasping a law of justice more infallible than the tangled events of this earth ever obey, conveying a significance beyond any evaluation of the senses. By such distinctions I lay hold of a strange philosophy which tells me that the soul's assurance of truth is not a dream evoked arbitrarily by any man's imagination, but an intuition more or less perfectly grasped of veritable realities. These books on which I depend for most of my noetic life are effective just as they are a history of what has been known of these realities by other souls in the past and set down for the recreation of any who can spell out the record. So do they charm into peace because they lure us to the belief that some time, if not here and now, our soul may be lifted to that world of immutable Ideas which lie in all their splendour before the eye of Plato's God."



Paul Elmer More. *Christian Mysticism*

"The shapes of beauty haunting our moments of inspiration. . . [are] a people older than the world, citizens of eternity, appearing and reappearing in the minds of artists and of poets. . . , and because beings, none the less symbols, blossoms, as it were, growing from invisible immortal roots, hands, as it were, pointing the way into some divine labyrinth."

W. B. Yeats

Evolution through Adaptive Capacity

Adaptive capacity allows a group to survive so the capacity becomes an inherited trait

Though ordinary humans are rapidly

inherited trait



Homo erectus:
the revolution
of fire and
hunting



Homo habilis:
the revolution
of tool usage



Homo sapiens:
the revolution
of language



Modern human:
the revolution of
technology



Future human:
the revolution of
spiritual development

Loss of
understanding
of reality

Re-awakening of
supernormal
powers in a few

Regaining of
understanding
of reality

Full development
of supernormal
powers

losing the ability to understand reality, a small contemporary group is developing supernormal powers through revitalizing the Perennial Tradition.

There is now present an entirely new factor in human evolution which began about ten thousand years ago. Whereas up to that time, human evolution had been primarily powered

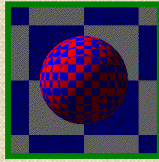
by unconscious physical and social stimuli, it is now possible for human evolution to be advanced through *conscious effort*.

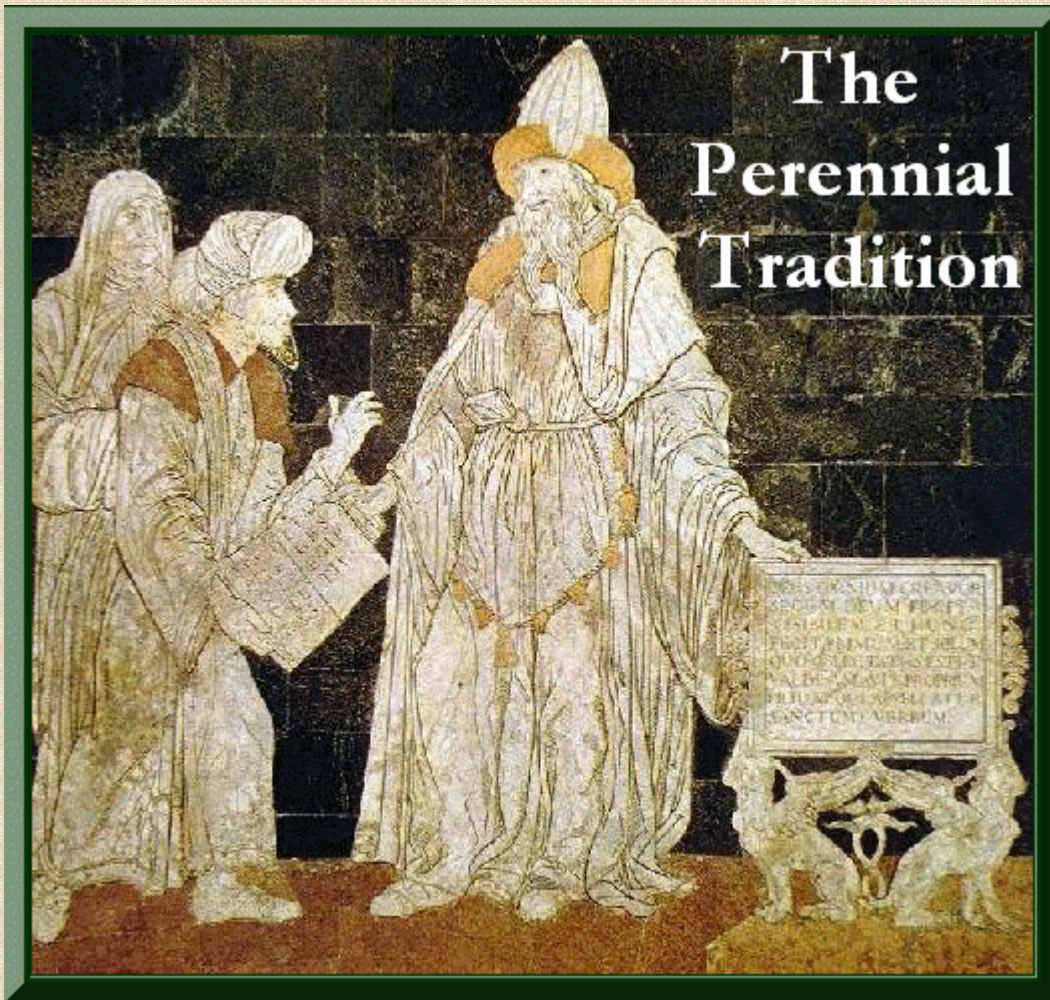
"Sufis believe that, expressed in one way, humanity is evolving to a certain destiny. We are all taking part in that evolution. Organs come into being as a result of the need for specific organs (Rumi). The human being's organism is producing a new complex of organs in response to such a need. In this age of the transcending of time and space, the complex of organs is concerned with the transcending of time and space. What ordinary people regard as sporadic and occasional bursts of telepathic or prophetic power are seen by the Sufi as nothing less than the first stirrings of these same organs. The difference between all evolution up to date and the present need for evolution is that for the past ten thousand years or so we have been given the possibility of a conscious evolution. So essential is this more rarefied evolution that our future depends upon it."

Idries Shah. *The Sufis*

Perennialists are a race of adventurers, dwelling invisibly among mankind, who have evolved to the point of being able to deliberately and actively return to the divine Fount of Reality. They have attained Being, union with the One, and teach

these mysteries to authentic seekers. Because of this, they have a unique importance for the human race in revealing humankind's full potential and how this potential can be realized.





Chapter Eight

Perennialist Art

Psychic Upheaval and Epiphany

The distinguishing feature of Perennialist art is its power to produce psychic upheaval in a prepared mind and transport that mind to a higher dimension. I am using the term "Perennialist art" to include the conscious production or arrangement of words, sounds, colors, forms, movements, or other elements in a manner that enables a person to understand Justice, Truth, Beauty, and the other Forms in the Higher Realm.

Within the term "Perennialist art," then, I include those specially created instances of literature (prose and poetry), drama (including screenplays), painting, sculpture, music, dance, or illustration (including illustrated books and Web sites) which possess the distinguishing quality of empowering a reader or viewer to gain a higher state of consciousness.

The person must have carried out specific preparation to be able to conceive of new possibilities, understand new concepts, and participate in transformative experiences. To an unprepared psyche, Perennialist art appears lackluster or bizarre.

Preparation

"For a Sufi at a *sama'*, ¹ prepared readiness involves a special attentive listening. In the Muslim tradition, hearing is the most highly valued sense, the ear the way to spirituality and gnosis. One does not read scripture silently to oneself; one listens to it being recited by others, or recited aloud by oneself. The *habitus* of the Sufi listener at a *sama'* in New Delhi begins with the listener's understanding of the passages in the Qur'an that remind the faithful of the need to be a careful listener. . .

Sufis are concerned to bring about a transformation of ordinary consciousness to make receiving spiritual knowledge possible. Attentive listening is the path."

Judith Becker, *Deep Listeners: Music, Emotion, and Trancing*, 2004

Transformative art leads the readied psyche to dimensions higher than previously experienced, to epiphanies. These epiphanies involve inspiration, a fusing with the universe, transcending time-space-ego, infusion with knowledge and awareness, and gaining a sense of endowment. Psychic upheaval and transport to higher awareness can occur in any area of human life at a multiplicity of levels. Illuminating art has been with humankind since its beginning, leading humans in their evolutionary ascent.

Upheaval is required to displace the psyche--mind and personality--from its entrenched intellectual and emotional routines. This is not some vague feeling of uplift or emotion; it is an eruption within the soul.

**"The *metaphysica*, the plastic parts of poems
Crash in the mind."**

Wallace Stevens. "The Glass of Water"

As Stevens indicates, the metaphysically unconstrainable elements of poetry CRASH IN THE MIND. They do not merely suggest quietly or show gently. The ontologically astonishing, fantastic, outlandish, or contradictory concepts smash into one another, creating cacophonies and eruptions.

Virginia Woolf felt that the upheaval element was a key component of her being a writer.

"And so I go on to suppose that the shock-receiving capacity is what makes me a writer. I hazard the explanation that a shock is at once in my case followed by the desire to explain it. I feel that I have had a blow; but it is not, as I thought as a child, simply a blow from an enemy hidden behind the cotton wool of daily life; it is or will become a revelation of some order; it is a token of some real thing behind appearances; and I make it real by putting it into words. It is only by putting it into words that I make it whole; this wholeness means that it has lost its power to hurt me; it gives me, perhaps because by doing so I take away the pain, a great delight to put the severed parts together. Perhaps this is the strongest pleasure known to me. It is the rapture I get when in writing I seem to be discovering what belongs to what; making a scene come



right; making a character come together. From this I reach what I might call a philosophy; at any rate it is a constant idea of mine; that behind the cotton wool is hidden a pattern; that we--I mean all human beings--are connected with this; that the whole world is a work of art; that we are part of the work of art."

Virginia Woolf. *Moments of Being*

Coleman Barks, the remarkably insightful interpreter of Rumi, speaks of how this psychic upheaval occurs in Rumi's poetry through the use of disparate, incongruous points of view.

"The voices in Rumi's poetry come from many points on the inner-outer spectrum. There's a modulation between realities. This is similar to what happens with the fluid pronoun in Rumi's poetry. The you and I are sometimes the lover talking to the beloved, the personal self and a without-form presence within and beyond the senses. Yet sometimes that presence, amazingly, speaks to Rumi through the poetry; voices slide back and forth within the same short poem! Often the poem serves as a slippery doorsill place between the two, 'partly in my self and partly outside,' the voices coming from a between-place. This expanding and contracting of identity is one of the exciting aspects of Rumi's art."

The Essential Rumi,
1995, Harper, San Francisco

To take another example, the Enlightenment art of the eighteenth century produced upheavals in religious and social dimensions, causing mental apoplexy in the dictators and their scholastic lackeys. When Voltaire

published his *Philosophical Letters Concerning the English*, extolling the intellectual emancipation fostered by Newton and Locke, the horrified French authorities had the book publicly burned as a "scandalous work, contrary to religion and morals and to the respect due to the established powers." King Louis XVI of France would later say that Voltaire and Rousseau had destroyed France.

And so they had--they and the other Enlightenment thinkers. The previous intellectual and social realities of the Old World had been done away with by the salvoes of men such as Benjamin Franklin, Voltaire, Thomas Jefferson, Diderot, Thomas Paine, D' Alembert, Patrick Henry, Kant, and Rousseau, among others.

Along with this overwhelming psychic upheaval, intellectually and metaphysically prepared thinkers both within and outside the Enlightenment movement gained a new awareness of higher dimensions. Socially these new dimensions included a realization of greater possibilities for human life--beyond the stunting limitations of ecclesiastical and state totalitarianism. New words such as "happiness" were coined and the common people realized that they had a right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Enlightenment thinkers created ideas to illumine the people's minds and create a new social order. Franklin, Henry, and Paine wrote attacks on British imperialism which was trying to make raw-materials-slave-colonies of the British dependencies. Voltaire created a famous motto: crush the infamy.

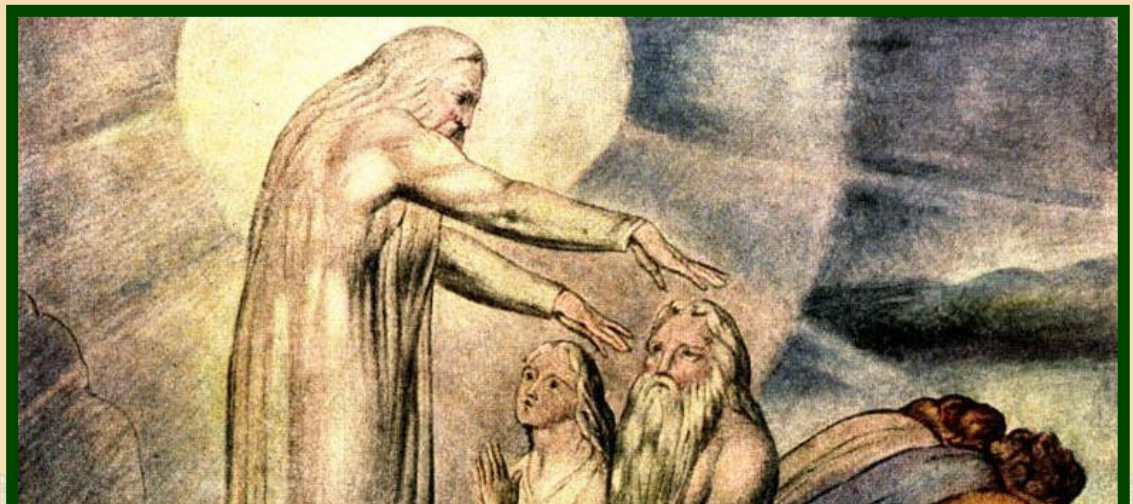
The Enlightenment activists saw their task as initiating intellectual upheaval that would lead an awakened populace to create a freer, more equitable, liberating social order. They demonstrated to the world the power of ideas to arouse people to recognize oppression under despotism. Perennialist ideas created an empowered activism built on solidarity. Since that time, rulers by whatever name have seen the necessity of creating celebrity mandarins who preach the propaganda of their masters and counter radical thinkers who might awaken the populace to an awareness of modern oppressions.

"The artist . . . possesses the capacity to discern the element of reality which is latent in the object, to disentangle it from the sensuous material in which it is embodied, and, by expressing his vision of it in his picture, to enable us to glimpse the pure form which he has visualised.

It is for this reason that, though the form of artistic expression changes from age to age, the feelings which great art awakens have been the same in every age. The forms of art are inexhaustible, but they all lead along the same road of aesthetic emotion to the contemplation of the same ultimate reality . . .

And since art enables us to glimpse a reality which lies outside the realm of that of which we are normally aware, the emotions which it arouses are not of this world. Aesthetic emotion is emotion felt not for this world but for reality; it is, therefore, unlike all other emotions, being both unanalysable and unique . . . So long as the vision which art vouchsafes endures, we are shut off from the interests which this world begets . . . It is as if we were enabled for the moment to escape from the stream of life and, forgetful of the turmoil of want and desire, of striving and seeking, which life involves, to be at peace upon the banks . . .

If he [the artist] possesses the capacity for vision, in virtue of which he is able to disentangle the manifestation of the Form of Beauty from the physical setting in which it appears, then the work which he produces will possess that quality of significant form in virtue of which we say that it has aesthetic value . . .



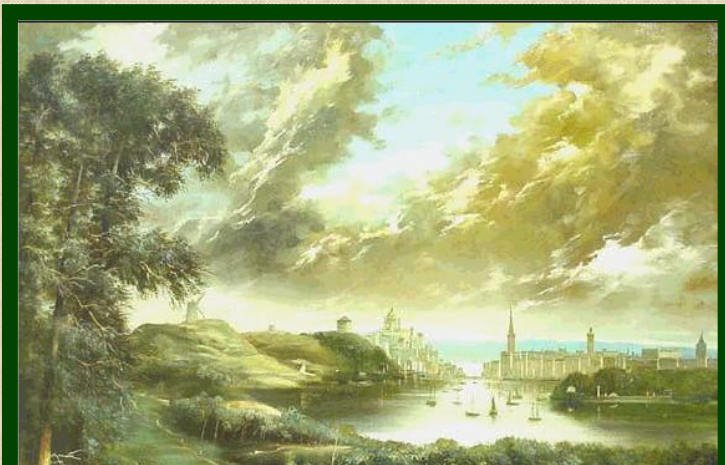


There is--the fact is obvious--no known formula for securing the manifestation of the Form in a work of art. If there were, art would not be art but science . . .

. . . Training and study will not enable the artist to command the Form, or to ensure that beauty will clothe his work. The coming of the Form knows no law. It is the incalculable element in all art; it can neither be compelled nor cajoled . . .

This explains also why beauty attaches to the work of some men who disregard all the rules, and throw all canons of taste overboard, whilst it eschews the laboured productions of those who follow rigorously and with perfect taste the best traditions of the elders. But it is equally true that the Form of Beauty is more likely to be attracted where a knowledge of technique is present than where such knowledge is absent, and that, other things being equal, knowledge and skill are more likely to produce works of beauty than the so-called inspiration which is too often devoid of them."

C.E.M. Joad, *Guide to Philosophy*



Perennialist art leads to human liberation in all areas of life. We understand social liberation to include some means of control of rulers by the ruled, protection of the individual against government by legal rights and civil liberties. In a broader context, liberation means the ability to make



decisions and carry out purposes, free from internal and external coercion, using the powers of the psyche to develop human potentialities, some of

which may be unknown until revealed by illuminating art.

In studying the Perennial Tradition it's necessary to develop an understanding of the subtleties and power of illuminating art currently available to us. We can more easily discern the dislocation produced by illuminating painting than the upheaval of illuminating poetry. Not only because painting is often more explicit, but because in this TV era we have allowed ourselves to be conditioned to a devaluation of and deafness to poetry. If, as some modern Perennialist figures have said, the Perennial Tradition is transmitted through poetry, as well as other forms of literature, art, and ordinary human experience, then we must study the nature of transformative poetry in gaining intellectual and spiritual awareness.

Part of readying ourselves for illuminating poetry is gaining the ability to read thoughtfully and with focused attention. When we begin a search for transformative poetry--for it is undeniable that only some poetry is illuminating--then the two characteristics we earlier examined stand out in bold relief. Illuminating poetry produces an upheaval in the prepared reader's psyche and assists the person to gain a heightened state of consciousness.



To illustrate the first of these attributes, the upheaval of the mind caused by transformative poetry, we examine a poem by Coleridge. The dislocation of the psyche begins even with the title:

Kubla Khan; or, a Vision in a Dream--a Fragment.

We begin by thinking this poem is going to be about a man named Kubla

Khan. But the psychic roller-coaster starts at once and we are swept into a different meaning: the poem is **"a vision in a dream"**--whatever that might mean. But we're then jolted again--this is only **a fragment**. A fragment of what?

Then begins the extreme psychic dislodging as we are yanked from one meaning-experience to another totally different meaning-experience without any bridging transitions whatsoever. (You can actually "hear" the clash of one universe of meaning against another.)

**In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree;
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.**

Head-over-heels our psyche plunges:

- The poem's about a country named Xanadu
- No, it's about a ruler named Kubla Khan
- Wrong, a stately pleasure-dome
- Nope, a sacred river named Alph
- Now we're rushing through caverns measureless to man (measurable to God?)
- And we plunge pell-mell down to a sunless [?] sea.

For discerning readers, this headlong jolting from meaning-experience to meaning-experience produces a strange heightened state of consciousness. Something you can only see out of the corner of your mind's eye.

**So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round;
And here were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Emfoling sunny spots of greenery.**

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!

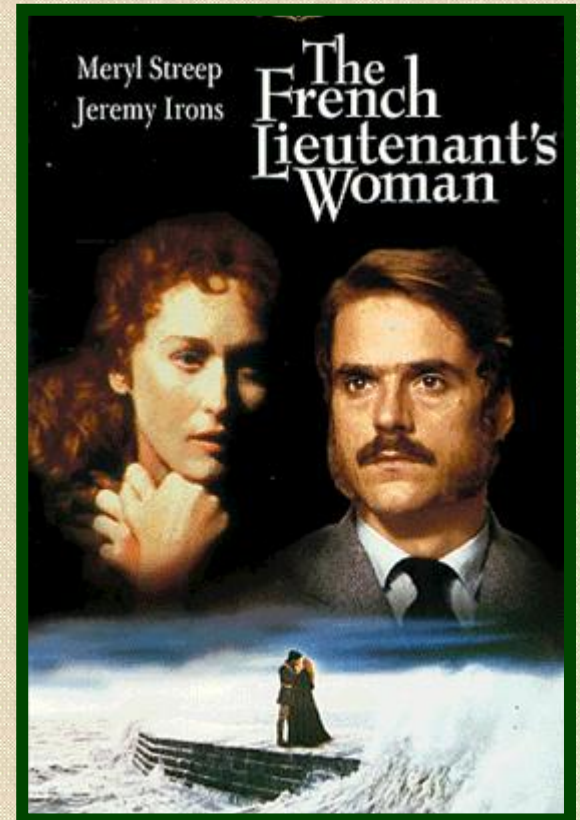
[How did a demon-lover get in here?]

And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momentarily was forced;
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail;
And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
It flung up momentarily the sacred river.
Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war!
The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves;
Where was heard the mingled measure
From the fountain and the caves.

It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!
A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid,
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora.
Could I revive within me,
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight t'would win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!

His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

A forceful way to experience the psychic upheaval of illuminating art is to view, with receptive mindfulness, the movie, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*. The screenplay by Harold Pinter wrenches us from one world of meaning-experience--the lives of the actors making the movie in the late twentieth-century--to a totally different world of meaning-experience--the lives of the nineteenth-century characters of the movie. At one point, for example, the two actors are practicing a scene where the woman falls. Suddenly, as the actors in the twentieth century are practicing, we are propelled *into* the experience-events of the nineteenth-century characters as she falls in front of him.



Pinter's screenplay involves the overlapping of the two experience-event worlds. For example, we think of the female actor's feelings as she relates to the male character of the movie, the amateur paleontologist who is smitten by the allegedly scarlet woman. The female actor likes the male actor but he is married--as the male character in the story is betrothed. We experience the emotions and thoughts of both the actress and the French Lieutenant's "woman" in the single dramatic enactment of the character.

In Coleridge, the tumultuous plunge from one meaning-idea to another takes place primarily stanza by stanza. Other transformative poets such as Wallace Stevens and Shakespeare sometimes thrust us from one meaning-event to a totally different meaning-event *word-by-word*. The speed of being wrenched from meaning-world to meaning-world is so fast-paced that we must carefully focus our attention on each word.

Wallace Stevens begins this poem with a seemingly academic title:

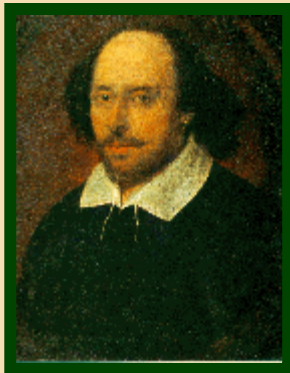
"ANALYSIS OF A THEME"

Then we're told that next comes the:

"THEME"

When we're then given the theme, the psychic upheaval occurs in a split second!

"How happy I was the day I told the young Blandina of three-legged giraffes . . ."



To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day.
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted
fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief
candle!

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more. It is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

William Shakespeare

The defining characteristics of Perennialist art, as we've seen, are psychic upheaval and epiphany: the disruption of the psyche and the production of a higher state of consciousness. Having seen this illustrated in poetry and drama, let's examine how this occurs during contemplation of a Perennialist mystical writing.

This is a partial record of a meditation on a Perennialist mystical writing. The writing is by an unknown author who called himself Dionysius the Areopagite. To highlight the characteristics of upheaval and epiphany that occur during contemplation of a mystical composition, we'll scrutinize each segment by itself.

| The Mystical Formulation | Contemplation and Meditation | |
|---|---|--|
| "The simple | clear, direct, plain, uncomplicated | I wonder to what these words are referring |
| "The simple, absolute | certain, positive, undeniable, supreme | Whatever these words are referring to, it is something unusual |
| "The simple, absolute, and immutable | constant, enduring, unchanging, everlasting | Okay, it is uncomplicated, undeniable, and unchanging |
| "The simple, absolute and immutable mysteries | mysteries? | How can mysteries be uncomplicated? Undeniable and unchanging, maybe |
| "The simple, absolute and immutable mysteries of divine Truth | mysteries of divine Truth? | An extraordinary kind of <i>divine</i> Truth whose mysteries are uncomplicated, undeniable, and unchanging |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| <p>"The simple, absolute and immutable mysteries of divine Truth are hidden in the super-luminous darkness</p> | <p>gleaming, glowing, light-producing darkness?</p> | <p>So this is something other than what is encountered in the "natural" world</p> |
| <p>"The simple, absolute and immutable mysteries of divine Truth are hidden in the super-luminous darkness of that silence which revealeth in secret.</p> | <p>The psyche experiences upheaval; the intellect cannot fathom this</p> | <p>I must use spiritual discernment if I am to understand this</p> |

This is a single illustration of how one meditation proceeds. You'll be able to meditate in your own individual manner on Dionysius' mystical formulation.

"The simple, absolute and immutable mysteries of divine Truth are hidden in the super-luminous darkness of that silence which revealeth in secret. For this darkness, though of deepest obscurity, is yet radiantly clear; and, though beyond touch and sight, it more than fills our unseeing minds with splendours of transcendent beauty. . .

"We long exceedingly to dwell in this translucent darkness and, through not seeing and not knowing, to see Him who is beyond both vision and knowledge--by the very fact of neither seeing Him nor knowing Him. For this is truly to see and to know and, through the abandonment of all things, to praise Him who is beyond and above all things.

"For this is not unlike the art of those who carve a life-like image from stone; removing from around it all that impedes clear vision of the latent form, revealing its hidden beauty solely by taking away. For it is, as I believe, more fitting to praise Him by taking away than by ascription; for we ascribe attributes to Him, when we start from universals and come

down through the intermediate to the particulars. But here we take away all things from Him going up from particulars to universals, that we may know openly the unknowable, which is hidden in and under all things that may be known. And we behold that darkness beyond being, concealed under all natural light."

Dionysius the Areopagite (translation by C. E. Rolt)

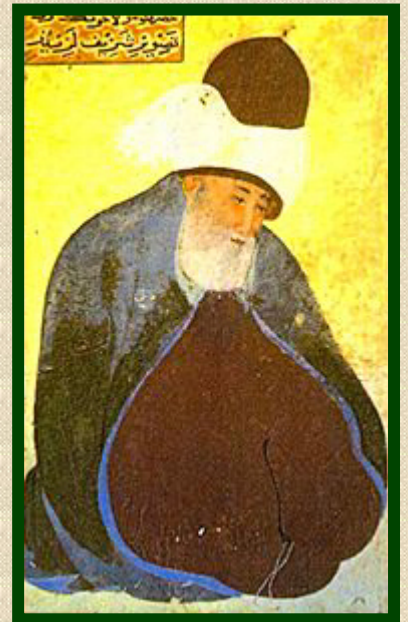
To get the full effect, it's necessary to read this mystical composition several times in succession--each time coming to it with a new mind. Meditating on this composition while reading it *can* (not absolutely will) produce an altered state of consciousness in an earnest, receptive reader.

When we experience Rumi's poetry, we are thrust not merely from one meaning-world or event-experience to another, but from one realm-of-being to a completely different realm-of-being.

"In the orchard a certain Sufi laid his face in Sufi fashion upon his knee for the sake of mystical revelation.

Then he sank deep down into himself. An impertinent fellow was annoyed by his semblance of slumber.

'Why,' said he, 'dost thou sleep? Nay, look at the vines, behold these trees and marks of Divine mercy and green plants.



'Hearken to the command of God, for He hath said, "Look ye!": turn thy face towards these marks of Divine mercy.'

"The Sufi replied, 'O man of vanity, its marks are within the heart: that which is without is only the marks of the marks.'

The real orchards and verdure are in the very essence of the soul: the reflection thereof upon that which is without is as the reflection in running water.

"In the water there is only the phantom





reflected image of the orchard, which quivers on account of the subtle quality of the water. The real orchards and fruits are within the heart: the reflection of their beauty is falling upon this water and the external world."

Perennialist Music As A Portal to Higher Consciousness

"The Egyptians believed that sound was the basis of creation; their most sacred ceremony, the Mystery of Mysteries, used sound frequencies to create a connection between the earth's center and the pole star of the heavens. The frequency codes of this sacred ceremony, was called 'The Raising of the Djed.'. (The Djed is the earliest known World Tree archetype and was the central focus of the Osirian mysteries.) A cylindric column of light, it was considered the cosmic axis that linked Earth to the Pole Star, the still-point around which the heavens revolved. The ceremony, prefaced by the reenactment of a mythic cosmological drama, was performed to evoke stability, continuity and regeneration during unstable periods between cycles. Historically, the Djed was raised at Winter Solstice, and was a time of intense joy and celebration. The event was orchestrated with resonant acoustic formulas performed by sacred drummers and chanters. Rhythms of systum and cymbal filled the air, along with the percussive clapping of hands and beating of feet. Research of the texts of the Temple of Horus indicate that the Djed served its greatest purpose at the ending of one world age and the beginning of another. According to ancient calendric reckoning, Winter solstice December 21, 1992 inaugurated such a period."

fusionanomaly.net

A Perennialist musical composition contains various levels of spiritual meaning. Only a small number of musical compositions are actually Perennialist in reference to their source--created by a Perennialist artist--and meaning. Some

musical compositions--"high musical art"--contain the essence of Perennialist music while other musical pieces contain Perennialist strains only.

An artist's--soloist's or conductor's--rendition of a Perennialist or "high" music composition can be at any of the various levels, depending on his or her level of spiritual awareness. Only an artist who has an understanding of the highest level of meaning of a musical composition can reveal the true essence of the piece. A soloist must be a master of his or her instrument to perform a rendition of the composition which is at the highest level.

To get a sense of the different *levels of renditions* performed, listen first to:

- **Herman Scherchen** conducting the Vienna State Opera Orchestra performing Ravel's Bolero; then listen to
- Leonard Bernstein conducting the New York Philharmonic performing Ravel's Bolero.

No matter how many times you may have heard Ravel's Bolero, when you hear Scherchen's rendition of it, you will be hearing it for the first

Sufi dancers

time--since this is the Real essence of the composition--its true sound and spirit. The Bernstein/New York Philharmonic rendition of Ravel's Bolero is at a much lower level of meaning--and hence you get almost none of its essence.

Scherchen's rendition of the Bolero allows us to understand that this is an Eastern Perennialist composition--there is nothing Western in it. Ravel apparently was allowed by a genuine Sufi group to hear the actual Bolero. He was then able to reproduce--in the first part of his composition--the exact sound he had heard. Then, in the second part of his Bolero, Ravel interprets the essence in a more orchestral framework. When experiencing this work of art, the same sort of psychic upheaval occurs in us as in our experience of all other Perennialist art.

The level of a rendition of a piece of music is in relation to the performer's understanding of that particular composition. So, for example, the Bernstein/New York Philharmonic rendition of Rachmaninoff's Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini is at a higher level than the Leonard Slatkin/Abbey Simon (pianist)/ St. Louis Symphony Orchestra rendition of the same composition by Rachmaninoff.



While most soloists merely play the notes and produce what they understand to be the sounds, master soloists are able to reveal the essence of musical compositions. To experience

this phenomenon, listen to Edward Kilenyi's rendition of Chopin's Twelve Etudes and then listen to any other soloist's rendition of the same pieces.

Chopin knew spiritually the essence of the piano, so he was able to write music which could reveal this essence--if performed with perfection--as in the case of Kilenyi.

Part of the magick of an "advanced" musical artist is to reveal not only the essence of musical compositions but the "reality" of a musical instrument. When we listen to Kilenyi playing Chopin's Twelve Etudes, we suddenly, for the first time, realize that the piano is actually ten different instruments. The sounds Kilenyi produces with a piano reveals that it is a multi-faceted reality, not the simple instrument we had thought.

"Each adept has a particular grade in listening to transformative music and the feelings which he gains therefrom are proportionate to his grade. Listening to transformative music is like the sun, which shines on all things but affects them differently according to their level: it burns or illumines or dissolves or nurtures.

"Seers in listening to transformative sounds penetrate to the reality. When a man attains so high a degree as this he hears spiritual truths from every object in the universe."

Hujwiri, *The Revelation of the Veiled Mysteries*

In 1935, when Sir Thomas Beecham, famed English conductor, first heard Edward Kilenyi play, he remarked: "That's the way to play the piano!" and booked young Edward on a concert tour to introduce him to the entire English music loving nation. Born in 1910 in Philadelphia, Edward Kilenyi was the son of violinist-composer Edward Kilenyi Sr., with whom George Gershwin studied composition from 1919 to 1921. Edward studied in Hungary with Ernő Dohnányi.

An appreciator--reader, listener, viewer, experiencer--must *be* at a certain level of understanding to even experience--hear, see, etc.--the higher level of meaning and excellence in a rendition of a musical composition or in the performance on a specific instrument.

Trance Dancing

"At the still point of the turning world, there the dance is. Without the point, the still point, there would be no dance, and there is only The Dance."

T.S.Eliot

Dance is found in every human culture. Dance scholar Alfred Gell has defined dance as "a stylized deformation of nondance mobility, just as poetry is a deformation or modulation of language, a deviation from the norm of expression that enhances expressiveness (Gell, Alfred. 'Style and Meaning in Umeda Dance' in: Spencer, Paul, Ed. Society and the Dance. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)."

"Let us say, to sum up, that music, words, and dance create at the same time a great physical effervescence and a state of 'monoideism' that, in combination, create psychophysiological conditions apparently very favorable to the occurrence of trance. . .

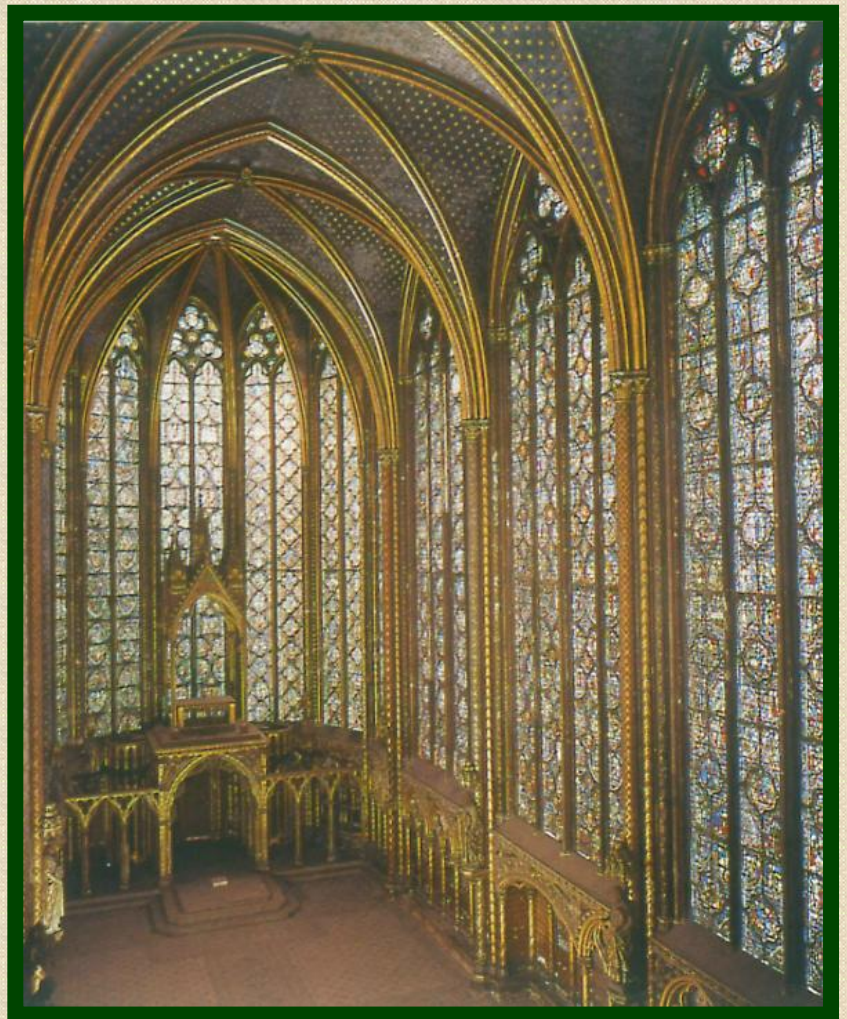
"But the power of music alone cannot be held

responsible for the shaman's entry into trance, anymore than in the case of the Sufi. This trance must still be willed."

Gilbert Rouget, *Music and Trance: A Theory of the Relations between Music and Possession*, 1985

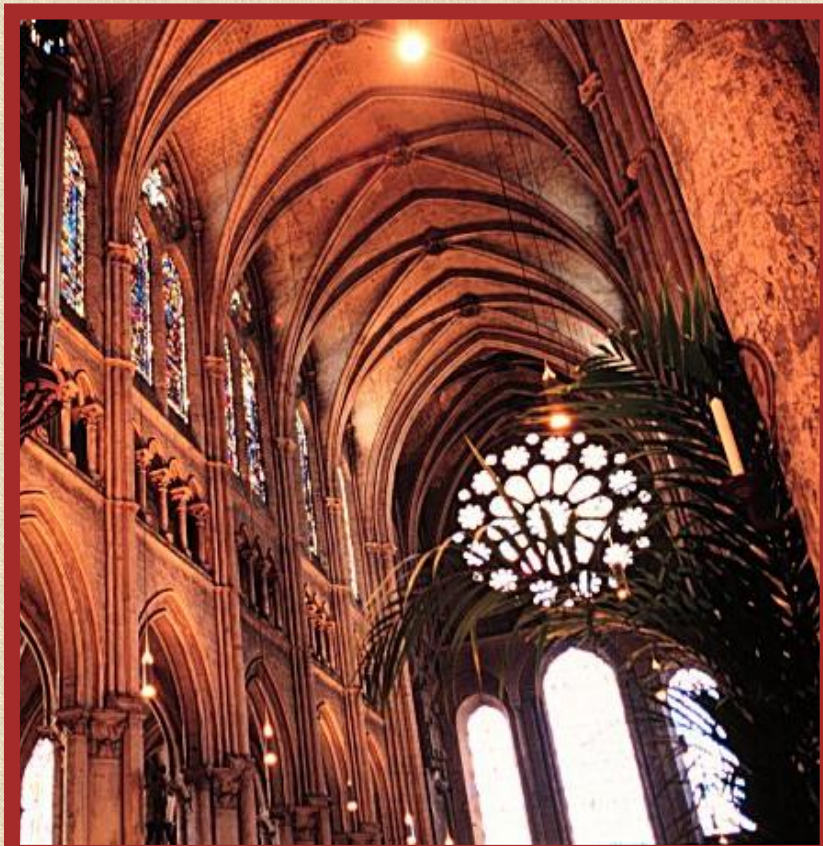
Transformative Painting As A Portal to Higher Consciousness

Our study of transformative sanctuaries revealed that Gothic cathedrals such as Chartres are portals to a higher state of consciousness. The Chartres Mystery School taught the esoteric knowledge of how we can apprehend representations of sacred reality with our senses and our emotions in a special manner. The initiatory training of the Chartres School allowed initiates to experience a Cathedral (or other sacred place) as a reality on the threshold of the spiritual dimension through which we can gain access to an actual experience of ultimate reality.



"Chartres embodies the most profound expression of the Dionysian divine darkness that the world has, or probably ever will see. For Chartres, even in summer is always dark, and yet its darkness is by no means ordinary, for it has a jewelled darkness. It mediates a dappled, jewelled light which comes through countless windows of the most beautiful and priceless stained glass. Quite apart from the biblical stories depicted in them, or the huge biblical characters who look down as from on high,

the colours of the glass itself, the deep reds and blues, create a light which is mystical, which transforms the vast emptiness of the building to a sacred space, as if by some alchemical magic.



"The primary reason why pilgrims still flock to Chartres, consciously or unconsciously, is to experience the beauty of this dark alchemical light.. . The primary reason for building it architecturally in the way we see it today, was to express and embody the mystical theology of Dionysius, and to increase the possibility of experiencing the darkness of God as on the mystic journey-- through the vibrations, the aura, the subtle body of the building itself.

to all through the beauty of the stained glass, which bathes the carefully crafted and finely tuned sacred space in mystical light. No one can be entirely free from the possibility that their soul will be touched by this beauty, which speaks of the darkness and of the light of God together; of light in the darkness, of the light behind the darkness. . . This is the journey towards the darkness of God in which, paradoxically, we eventually find ourselves nearer to the transfiguring light of his presence." ²

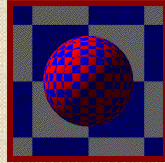
This same magical use of light and darkness became the theme of painters such as Vermeer, Van Eck, and Van Gogh. Vermeer "suspended the war between light and darkness, gave the victory to light, and made light a

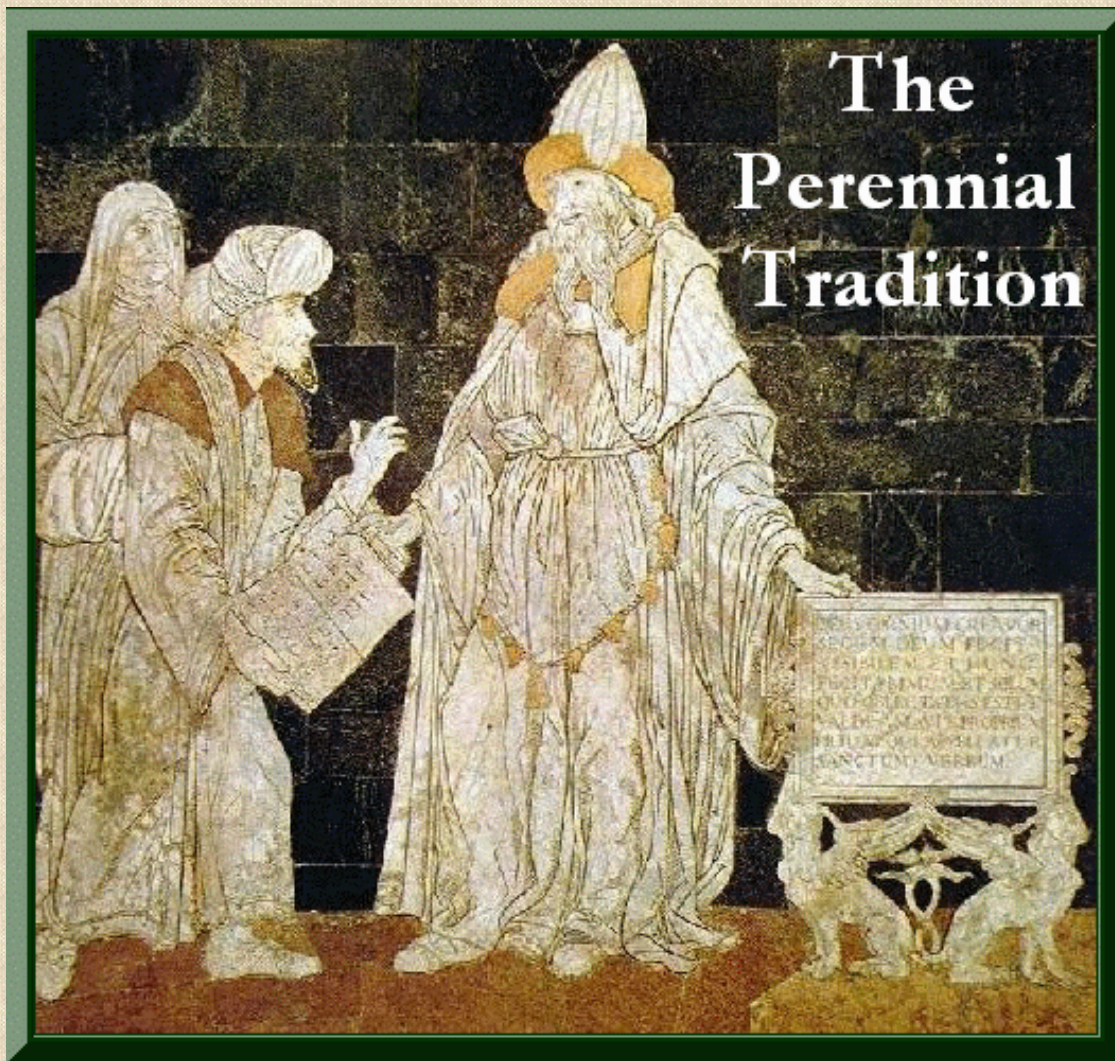
manifestation of living-kindness. Even when stealing into Vermeer's darkest interior by a narrow window, light is welcomed as a lover, The far corners whisper hello to light. Instead of humping their backs like angry cats the

Vermeer

shadows under the furniture are purring. A lady smooths a table-cloth: light
smooths it for her and gently holds her hand upon it, saying, 'This usual busy
morning is forever.'" 3

Perennialist art produces psychic upheaval in us, thrusting us into another
state of consciousness, and, with Rumi, we wake up asking, "Who looks out with
my eyes?"





Chapter Nine

Perennial Artistic Creativity

"When I am finishing a picture I hold some God-made object up to it--a rock, a flower, the branch of a tree or my hand--as a kind of final test. If the painting stands up beside a thing man cannot make, the painting is authentic. If there's a clash between the two, it is bad art."

Marc Chagall (1889-1985), French artist

**Perennialist art is the deliberate use of skill and imagination in manifesting individual inspiration. The outcome of this creative act results in a myriad of expressions: painting, sculpture, drama, *
- symphony, novel, cartoon, Internet Web page, movie, illuminated manuscript, or a finely crafted self.**

Perennialist art involves:

- media--e.g. painting, writing, self-development
- forms--e.g. representational painting, novel, social awareness
- content--e.g. seashore, romance, election reform

Today, various art forms are being devastated before our very eyes. What makes it worse is that the devastation is not even recognized. The desolation is, in fact, being celebrated as "high art." Debased public taste, molded by this wreckage, "grows by what it feeds on." So a still-born counterfeit of a movie such as "Pulp Fiction" is touted by *Time* magazine as a "2 1/2-hour tapestry" which "weaves four tales into a meditation about tough guys with too much or too little time on their hands. What do you talk about before a killing?" The crude ramblings of a bogus novel, such as Bret Easton Ellis's *Less Than Zero* are acclaimed by *USA Today* as "*Catcher in the Rye* for the MTV Generation."

" Good authors, too, who once
knew better words
Now only use four-letter words
Writing prose ...
Anything goes".

Cole Porter

Increasing numbers of "movies" are based on screenplays lacking the essentials of plot, character, or climax. All other art forms are experiencing a similar debasement. In this age when art has become, as Al Capp put it, "a product of the untalented, sold by the unprincipled to the utterly bewildered," it becomes necessary, therefore, to re-examine the essence of authentic art.

"Bad art is a great deal worse than no art at all."

Oscar Wilde

Searching for the essence of genuine, transformative art is a tremendous challenge, for, as Beethoven said: "Art! Who comprehends her? With whom can one consult concerning this great goddess?" I suggest that there are five aspects of enlightened artistic creativity:

- appreciative discernment of artistic manifestations
- opening oneself to inspiration from higher sources
- selective envisioning of artistic expression
- creative manifestation
- rediscovering and preserving the human wealth of art

Appreciative Discernment

The appreciative discernment aspect of authentic artistic creativity is the least understood. And this is a major cause of the current debasement of art forms by counterfeit malformations. Sham artists simply do not have the capability of discerning the essence of an art form. They see, for example, a transformative movie such as *Casablanca* but do not understand its essence--how its elements interact to produce dramatic effect. They assume that a flair for lewdness and insolence epitomizes the skills necessary to write a great screenplay.

Part of being an enlightening artist, and a facet of artistic production, is the capability of appreciative discernment of the revelation of a

higher, inspirational source in a particular manifestation. An art object or event is only realized--made real, completed, and brought to fruition--by appreciative, discerning recipients. Those recipients can include the artist himself. A transformative poem such as Wallace Stevens's **"Analysis of a Theme,"** is only actualized and consummated by its being appreciated, understood, and enjoyed by a discerning reader.

A reader who merely passes over the words of such a poem, without genuine comprehension, leaves the poem in an unfinished state in regards to his own experience. If the reader, out of egotism or scholastic puffery, injects spurious, extraneous meanings into the poem, he creates a perversion of his own design totally unrelated to the real poem which Stevens created. The essential poem, containing multiple meanings, cascading associations, and profound metaphysical dimensions, is available to the appreciative, discerning reader who has prepared himself to discover what Stevens deposited in his artistic creation.

" All in all, the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act. This becomes even more obvious when posterity gives its final verdict and sometimes rehabilitates forgotten artists."

Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968), French artist.

Appreciative discernment of genuine artistic manifestations includes the ability to discriminate between:

- **New, authentic innovations in media, forms, or content--and**
- **New, counterfeit manifestations that are not innovative creations of media, forms, or contents, but are destructive of previous elements.**

Counterfeit art is destructive in pretending to be a new medium, form, or content when in fact it is nothing but a sham. It is destructive in adopting specious artistic criteria and values--e.g. assuming that a counterfeit, new "form" of novel or screenplay is genuine and superior because it has achieved the rank of a "best seller" or "an Oscar winner."

"Appreciation is as definite a contribution to whole creation as any of the other qualities which seem to us the peculiar property of genius. Appreciation too works in the substance of thought, and therefore joins hands as co-worker with the original creative impulse."

Stewart Edward White. *The Job of Living*

Appreciative discernment of the revelation of a higher, inspired source in a particular manifestation requires specific capabilities:

- Receptivity to new media, forms, or content
- Discernment of the essential elements of media, forms, and contents. For example, the discerning artist understands that poetry as a medium must involve words with multiple levels of meaning. The discerning appreciator of art recognizes that the novel as a form must involve:
 - A plot--story line
 - Characters who undergo development
 - Crisis-points--problems the characters face and respond to

- **A denouement--a climax to the story**

We use these criteria in determining if a particular object of art is an illumined manifestation:

- **The higher inspirational source is revealed in the object**
- **The manifestation is something other than itself--a revelation of a higher source**

"In the final analysis, a drawing simply is no longer a drawing, no matter how self-sufficient its execution may be. It is a symbol, and the more profoundly the imaginary lines of projection meet higher dimensions, the better."

Paul Klee (1879-1940), Swiss artist

- **The manifestation opens, for the appreciative, discerning recipient, into an experience of a different--sometimes higher--dimension**

"Perpetual modernness is the measure of merit in every work of art."

**Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82)
American essayist, poet, philosopher**

"It may be that occasionally some chance of angle or fall of light makes ours the only eye to see. There is in such cases laid upon us also the duty of interpretative creation that will shift the concept upon the visibility powers of others. Interpretative creation is thus a very high form of art, in that it implies a sympathetic understanding of the original artist's manifested intention; a clear-eyed understanding of one's own angle of view; and an intuitive understanding of the angles of view of one's fellow men."

Betty White. *Gaelic Manuscripts*

Openness to Inspiration

Having developed the capacity for discerning appreciation of artistic creations, the authentic artist must also gain a second capability: opening oneself to inspiration from higher sources.

"Inspiration is not a suggestion of detail ready formed. It is a pouring in of all essence in a vital stream, from which the creator segregates and absorbs those things appropriate to his vision, as the organs and functioning mechanisms and tissues of the body take from the homogeneous blood stream those elements only which make for their health and building."

Betty White. *The Gaelic Manuscripts*



It is here that we come to the tradition of the Muse. In Greek and Roman mythology, the Muses were the nine daughters of Mnemosyne and Zeus, each of whom presided over a different art or science.

The tuneful nine, as they were called, included:

- Erato: the Muse of lyric poetry and mime
- Euterpe: the Muse of lyric poetry and music



Clio

- Polyhymnia: the Muse of sacred song and oratory

- Calliope: the Muse of epic poetry
- Melpomene: the Muse of tragedy
- Thalia: the Muse of comedy and pastoral poetry and one of the three Graces (three sister goddesses, known in Greek mythology as Aglaia, Euphrosyne, and Thalia, who dispense charm and beauty)
- Urania: the Muse of astronomy
- Terpsichore: the Muse of dancing
- Clio: the Muse of History,



Urania

In more general terms, a Muse was considered to be a guiding spirit or a source of inspiration. Robert Graves, among many other artists, believed that art is produced by an actual experience of infusion from a guiding spirit, which he called the White Goddess.

"All works of art are commissioned in the sense that no artist can create one by a simple act of will but must wait until what he believes to be a good idea for a work "comes" to him.

W. H. Auden (1907-73)
Anglo-American poet.



Envisionment

Having developed appreciative discernment and the ability to open to inspiration, the authentic artist learns to carry out *selective planning of manifestation of inspiration*. In other words, the artist envisions and plans how he will express his inspiration in some object or event. This assumes that the artist has already developed skill in using various media, forms, and contents and has developed appreciative discernment of artistic manifestations.

This third aspect involves these activities:

- Selection of a medium--e.g. painting, writing, self-development
- Selection of a form--e.g. representational painting, novel, social awareness
- Selection of the content--e.g. seashore, romance, election reform

For a work of art to achieve any degree of excellence, the artist must carefully plan what structures he will use and what particulars he will include.

Creative Manifestation

The definite act of creation of a work of transformative art is primarily a giving of oneself to the higher creative dynamism. The artist has determined in what medium she will work, she has decided with what kind of content she will deal, but now she must, if she is to be successful, abandon all mental effort and open herself to a power beyond her.



"There is nothing more difficult for a truly creative painter than to paint a rose, because before he can do so he has first to forget all the roses that were ever painted."

Henri Matisse (1869-1954),



French artist

Paul Klee, the Swiss artist, described his experience of painting as his hand becoming the instrument of a remote will. It was, he said, as if works were born out of the void. "Ripe, graphic fruits fall off." But this pushing yourself aside so something creative can come through is a challenging process--hard work.

"Only amateurs say that they write for their own amusement. Writing is not an amusing occupation. It is a combination of ditch-digging, mountain-climbing, treadmill and childbirth. Writing may be interesting, absorbing, exhilarating, racking, relieving. But amusing? Never!"

Edna Ferber (1887-1968), U.S. writer

E. L. Doctorow, the American novelist, likened writing to "driving a car at night. You never see further than your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way." The artist--writer, painter, sculptor, dramatist, ordinary person developing herself--must work effectively to remain open to inspiration from "somewhere else," not allowing extraneous elements of strain or over-critical analysis to block the flow.



" Ideally a painter (and, generally, an artist) should not become conscious of his insights: without taking the detour through his reflective processes, and incomprehensibly to himself, all his progress should enter so swiftly into the work that he is unable to recognise them in the moment of transition. Alas, the artist who waits in ambush there, watching, detaining them, will find them transformed like the beautiful gold in the fairy tale which cannot remain gold because

some small detail was not taken care of."

Rainer Maria Rilke (1875-1926), German poet

As we've seen, there are several stages in artistic creativity. In the phase of selective envisioning of artistic expression, our conscious mind makes its contribution. In the phase of creative manifestation, the mind can be a definite hindrance. About the most we can do is to work to our highest capability. As Robert Browning, the English poet, advised:

**"Try to be Shakespeare,
leave the rest to fate!"**

Rediscovering and Preserving the Human Wealth of Art

One of the major aspects of transformative artistic creativity is to foster the continual rediscovery and preservation of the human wealth of art.

To understand what wealth really is, let's take the hypothetical situation in which a rich man named John D. Billionaire purchases an expensive set of the Complete Works of Shakespeare.

John D. can't really own the works of Shakespeare even though he has a bill of sale for the set. Why? Because to "own" Shakespeare in an authentic sense means that you have the capability of understanding his works and the sensibility to appreciate the subtle nuances and dimensions of



his writings.

Neither of which John D. has.

By saying this, it is not my intention to demean the money-laden John D. Billionaire or to presume a superior aesthetic sensibility. But it must be made clear that authentic wealth is something much different from mere affluence.



Defining Human Wealth

In a hundred years you and I--and Mr. Billionaire--will have our being in another realm where true wealth will be measured in terms of the capabilities we developed during our earthly life.



So at any given moment in human history, the people who possess true wealth are the women and men who have developed deathless qualities such as:

- compassion for others
- understanding of humans and the events in which they move
- appreciation of beauty, truth, harmony, justice, and freedom
- the ability to manifest what we understand
- the desire to continually evolve (supersede past shortcomings and develop new abilities)

"While I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy, exhorting any one whom I meet and saying to him, after my manner: 'You, my friend--a citizen of this great and mighty and wise city of Athens--are you not ashamed of devoting yourself to acquiring the greatest amount of money and honor and reputation, and caring so little about wisdom and truth and the greatest improvement of the soul, which you never regard or heed at all?' . . .

"I proceed to interrogate and examine and cross-examine him, and if I think that he has no 'virtue' in him, but only says that he has, I reproach him with undervaluing the greater, and overvaluing the less.

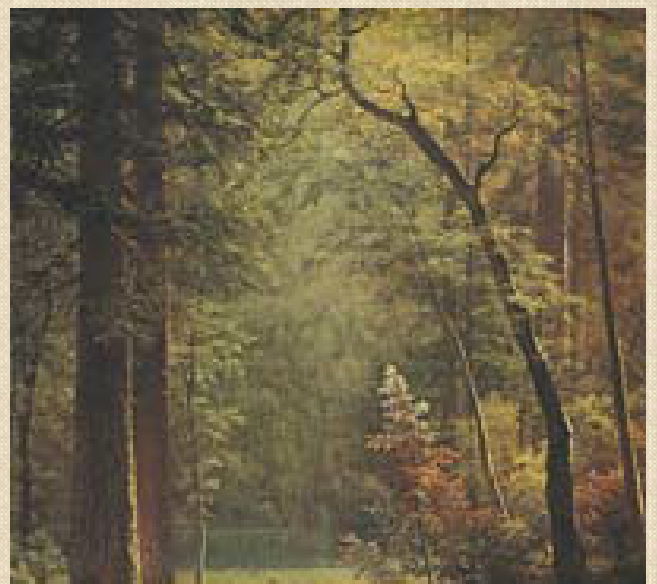
"For I do nothing but go about persuading you all, old and young alike, not to take thought for your persons or your properties, but first and chiefly to care about the greatest improvement of the soul."

Socrates's Speech Before the Athenian Senate

Humankind's Lost Treasures

Wealth is not physical objects at all, it is the possession of qualities which will survive the death of our physical body.

Genuine wealth requires specific capabilities, among many others, the discernment of subtlety, nuance, and hidden dimensions. These capabilities are not innate; they must be attained



by each individual. This means that humankind can lose its wealth if it loses its ability to:

- recognize its underlying values
- appreciate those values
- pass on essential capabilities to each generation



Recognizing and Appreciating the Foundations of Human Wealth



Humans can lose the ability to recognize higher values if they mistakenly identify lower values as supreme. For example, humans can mistake sheer violence and mayhem for bravery and courage. It can mistake mere crude, uncultivated, indecorous "self-expression" for authentic art or music. At present, the seemingly unfathomable appetite for mindless, inane TV sitcoms and rabid-right "news" shows

drives out the possibility of truly entertaining comedy or genuinely fair and balanced investigative reporting.

I'm not advocating the high-brow, pseudo-sophisticated, stuffy pretentiousness that now often passes for "culture."

We can
revitalize and
maintain our
priceless human



heritage by developing and then using our aesthetic and intellectual abilities. The concomitants of human wealth can only be taught or

transmitted by persons who have themselves developed the requisite capabilities, not merely studied them so as to be able to discourse learnedly about them.

"Have you thought out or taken stock of your first principles? What are your most valued possessions? Begin there: love, health, time, etc., to mention a few. Decide which they are and observe how you are guarding them, cultivating them and acknowledging them, your treasures. . . .

"The free choice is yours, only choose; do not muddle along until unconsciously you have fashioned habits which are your paste jewels. The time will come when you must abide for awhile by your choice, and your treasures will be ashes in your hands."

Betty and Stewart Edward White

At present, fewer and fewer persons know about this treasure trove we're speaking of, not many have any appreciation of it, and only a handful can recognize the capabilities which make it possible for a person to "possess" these riches.

We now live in a barbarous age in which humankind's heritage of literary, moral, and aesthetic values has not only been forgotten but is condemned by brutish, ignorant people.

This "letter to the editor" in a local California paper is representative of this savage temperament.

"Teaching poetry is a waste of taxpayer money

"The Dec. 20 column. . . about the state poet must have infuriated many people. Most of us realize that writing poetry is the refuge of the unstable and the preoccupation of many unteachable American students. The very act of writing poetry makes people narrow-minded and strangers, narcissistic and is a complete waste of time."

This was written by a man who lives on the shores of a polluted lake and who probably thinks that classical music is also a waste of time.

To such people the only response is silence, leaving them to their own barren lives.

Rediscovering Our Priceless Cultural Heritage

Below are links to several examples of material which encourages us to discover our hidden cultural treasures:

[Shakespeare's play *Othello*](#)

[Saki's "The Open Window"](#)

[Illuminated Manuscripts](#)



Our exploration of human artistic and literary treasures in this chapter presupposes an awareness, to whatever degree, on the part of the reader of a higher or spiritual dimension. If a person believes that mechanistic materialism (there is nothing but matter in motion) is the true interpretation of reality, then she or he would find our exploration humdrum or nonsensical.

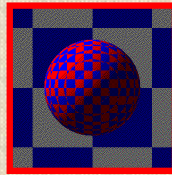


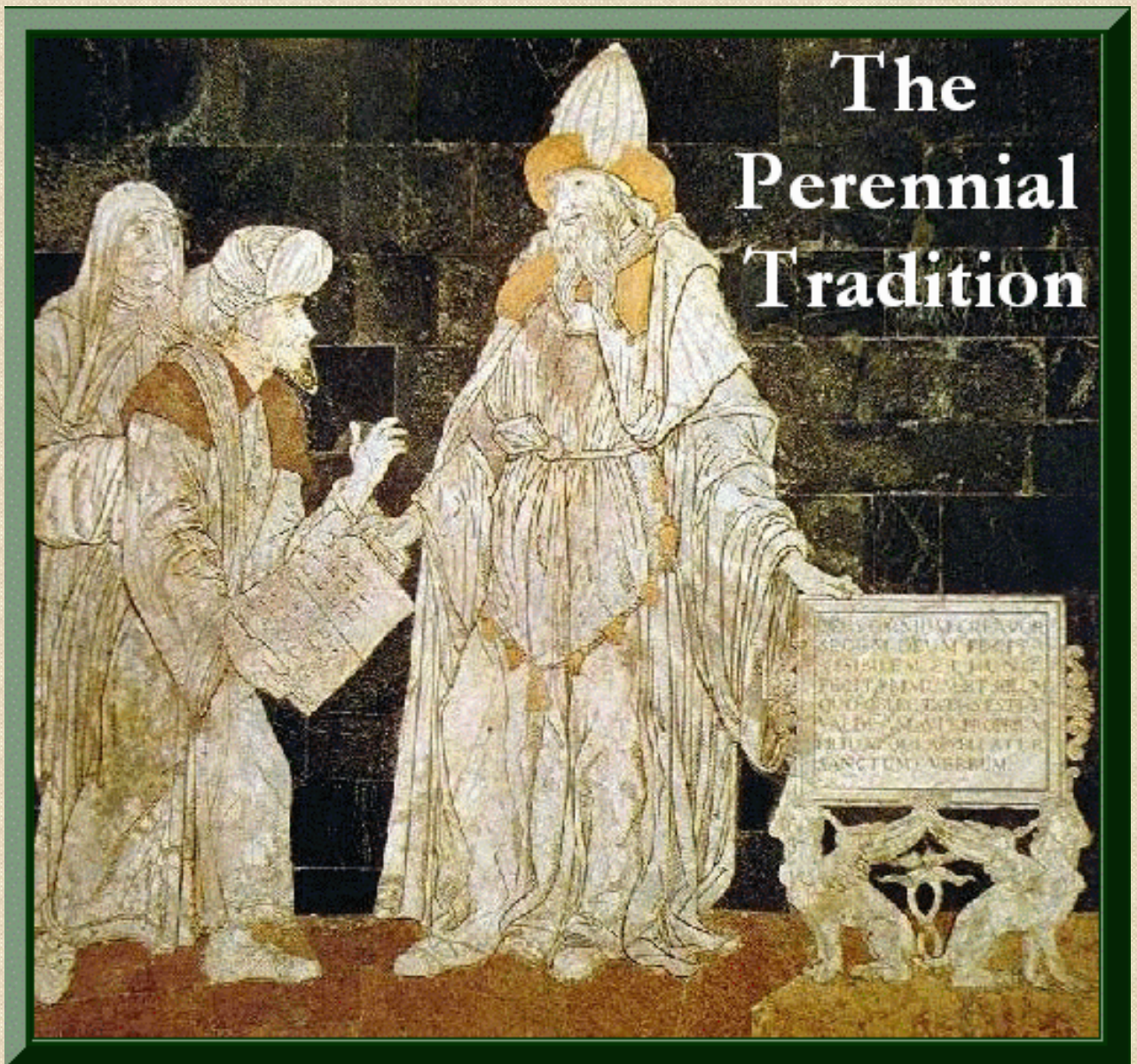
The Perennial Tradition--to which this chapter points--seeks to transform the entire structure and direction of society. Its goal is to infuse day to day living with a transcendent awareness that helps humans learn to commune with higher forces about them.

***"Religion is the creation and reenactment of myth for the purpose of realizing—in both senses of that word as "perceiving" and "making actual"—and celebrating the relationship of human beings with supra-human, spiritual forces. . . . Theatre, no matter how "secular" its content, is in this sense of the word, religion."**

Norman A. Bert, "Theatre is Religion"

(http://www.fa.mtu.edu/~dlbruch/rtjournal/vol_1/no_1/bert.html)





Chapter Ten

Illumination

Uniting With the Spiritual Light

"This exit into greater life is the crowning glory of our existence here. It means transfiguration into an electrified and eternal being. . . . The exit is through the doors of self."

Betty White. *The Road I Know*

In the chapter on "Initial Contact With Spiritual Forces," we examined our usual state of mind-absorbed preoccupation--living in our thoughts and desires, our self-absorption making us blind and deaf to spiritual realities about us. We saw that we must learn to shift from our busy mental concentration within to a voluntary, wide opening to realities from without, an elementary and vital form of spiritual contact. As we expand with our heart we come in contact with spiritual essences which surround us. We learned that beauty in all its guises is a great and quiet revealer of spiritual realities. Thus we saw that this out-going expansion and familiarity with the wide-hearted feeling is the first stage of spiritual contact.

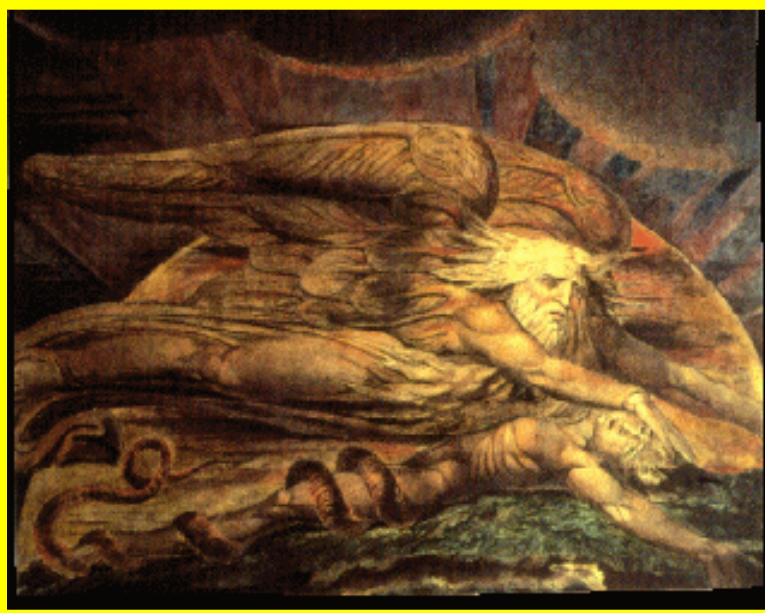
When we gain a sensibility for this elementary enlargement and open-heartedness we seek it for its own sake. It teaches us that all reality about us vibrates with hidden meaning, that there are subtleties which a mind-absorbed or ego-obsessed consciousness is simply incapable of registering.

Having gained a feeling for expanded consciousness, our next step is to achieve the first dead lift to gain a new level of contact with spiritual forces: a unity with the spiritual light, illumination. We'll examine a number of Perennialist teachings on the subject of illumination, drawing heavily from the teachings of Betty and Stewart Edward White.

Beyond Spiritual Contact: the Unitive State

This next step is our responsibility alone; spiritual forces can only respond to genuine effort on our part. A unitive experience of the spiritual dimension occurs as a direct response to impelling force we create within ourselves. Whatever integration we experience is the issuing forth of energy from a higher dimension in direct proportion to our self-invigoration. We unite with the spiritual light in direct proportion to our developing spiritual capability.

We must achieve that first *breakthrough* for ourselves. Somehow we must develop a higher understanding to overcome within ourselves the racially conditioned belief that we are our bodies and that the physical universe is the only reality. But how do we develop this higher understanding; is there a "course of study" which can help us gain these capabilities?



If the achievement of union with the spiritual light is in reality an integral part of human existence--as the Perennial Tradition maintains--then its development and use must be a practical matter that can be worked on just like any other desirable ingredient of life.

Historically, spiritual teachings have been acknowledged

as carrying within themselves the conviction of truth, but humans have then put them aside as unattainable. This book is part of a larger enterprise to make spiritual goals attainable. The gap between ideal and achievement has grown wider because of misguided training, lack of genuine knowledge, and blindness to the spiritual realm. *The Perennial Tradition* provides sequenced instruction from "kindergarten" up, a method of arousing, stimulating and strengthening spiritual faculties dormant through generations of neglect.

Step One: Clarifying Our Goal

Before we can proceed, we must understand precisely where we're going, what we're trying to achieve, what is the goal of our efforts. We first need to get the larger picture in mind. Each of us occupies not only a physical body that we see, but a second, spiritual body. The spiritual body will continue as the locus of our consciousness after physical death. Though this spiritual body is imperceptible to our ordinary senses, it is no mere concept or ghostly apparition. It has its own reality and functions in a spiritual realm corresponding to it.

"This world is as real and objective, as consistent and subsistent as the intelligible and sensible worlds; it is an intermediate universe 'where the spiritual takes body and the body becomes spiritual,' a world consisting of real matter and real extension, though by comparison to sensible, corruptible matter these are subtle and immaterial. The organ of this universe is the active Imagination . . ."

Henry Corbin. *Alone With the Alone:
Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*

The spiritual body has capabilities which are counterparts to our physical body: perception, motion, will, understanding. At present, we have almost no awareness of this spiritual body and are incapable of activating its capabilities. Unable to use the eyes of this spiritual body, we are blind to the spiritual universe.

"An alienated man can become sighted if he realizes that his heart is blind. . . . When he realizes that his heart is blind, it means that he has gained a bit of sight."

*The Mystical and Visionary Treatises of Shihabuddin Yahya
Suhrawardi,*
Translated by W.M. Thackston Jr.

The goal of Perennialist teachings is to assist us in learning to locate our consciousness in the spiritual body as well as in the physical body. At present, we are crippled because of our withered spiritual faculties. What we must strive for is a recognition of and a contact with the spiritual forces about us. In this way we can establish a more balanced proportion between the material and the spiritual in our lives, uniting with the spiritual light.

"I entered into the secret closet of my soul . . . and beheld with the mysterious eye of my soul the Light that never changes, above the eye of my soul, above my intelligence. It was not the common light which all flesh can see, nor was it greater yet of the same kind, as if the light of day were to grow brighter and brighter and flood all space. It was not like this, but different: altogether different from all such things."

St. Augustine

Our goal, then, is to expand in spirit, not in our mind. Our spirit is like an unused organ which we have forgotten. We must increase our awareness of the spiritual faculties that lie dormant in us. The culturally conditioned mind is a great problem to overcome. It's like a spoiled child who has been allowed to think that the world revolves around it.

As we try to gain cognizance of the highest faculty we possess, our eternal spirit, the more developed intellect constantly interferes, insisting on translating every experience into its own language and limiting us to its own comprehension. The muscle-bound intellect insists that we go no farther than the facile ready-made symbols its social conditioning sanctions. In activating our spiritual faculties, we have to keep the mind quiet by systematically baffling its efforts at restriction. Meanwhile, we work directly to stimulate the enduring part, developing spiritual awareness.

"The body is only an attribute of the spirit. Like the mind."

Betty and Stewart Edward White. *Across the Unknown*

Spiritual perception should be the dominating part in our makeup. To develop insights beyond intellectual comprehension, we must not just bring spiritual organs up to an equality with the brain but to a position higher than the intellect, until at last the spirit assumes control of the brain. The brain then becomes a functioning part of our overall being, which enables balanced comprehension.

When the intellect is adjusted to its proper proportion, then it will, later, become the channel for explaining the spiritual level of development to ourselves and others.

"What hinders men from seeing and hearing God, is their own hearing, seeing and willing; by their own wills they separate themselves from the will of God. They see and hear within their own desires, which obstructs them from seeing and hearing God. Terrestrial and material things overshadow them, and they cannot see beyond their own human nature. If they would be still, desist from thinking and feeling with their own self-hood, subdue the self-will, enter into a state of resignation, into a divine union with Christ, who sees God, and hears God, and speaks with him, who knows the word and will of God; then would the eternal hearing seeing and speaking become revealed to them. "

Jacob Boehme (1575-1624 C.E.)

Habitual Consciousness

Our goal is to develop the continuous habit of keeping open to spiritual forces. Otherwise the instant we relax spiritual awareness our thoughts and feelings lull us back into our customary internal mental preoccupation. We won't gain much if we practice spiritual cognizance only once in a while. Gaining spiritual awareness doesn't involve strained effort; it's a matter of how frequently we practice it, allowing it

to infuse our daily lives.

While developing a growing habit of spiritual contact, we must also keep it natural and vital, with eager and spontaneous freshness. It's easy to slump into a kind of mechanical ritual, conscientiously and laboriously performing spiritual exercises for the "good of the soul." You can readily become self-conscious and begin to delude yourself that this training is going to make you a Superior Being over night. Fortunately, as you practice making contact with spiritual realities, you gain a cleansing self-awareness which helps you keep your ego in perspective.

As you gain control of your spiritual body, you discover that it has a wondrous creative force. Your spiritual body possesses an engine of power, dynamically creative, capable of impressing and molding your material world in direct ratio to the creative force you produce in your inner being. This force is not a mental capacity, it's a higher spiritual power. It derives, not from that mere agent of the soul, the intellect, but from the spiritual center within us.

"We have within us the Lamp of the World; and Nature, the genie, is Slave of the Lamp, and must fashion life about us as we fashion it within ourselves. What we are alone has power. We may give up the outward personal struggle and ambition, and if we leave all to the Law all that is rightly ours will be paid. Man becomes truly the Superman when he has this proud consciousness. No matter where he may be, in what seeming obscurity, he is still the King, still master of his fate, and circumstance reels about him or is still as he, in the solitude of his spirit, is mighty or is humble. We are indeed most miserable when we dream we have no power over circumstance, and I account it the highest wisdom to know this of the living universe that there is no destiny in it other than that we make for ourselves."

A.E. The Candle of Vision

Our goal is to gain familiarity with our spiritual body which has its reality in a timeless, spaceless dimension. This higher body possesses powers which our earthly consciousness terms psychic or occult. In the more advanced stages of Perennialist teaching, persons may discover that they have telepathic, telekinetic, clairaudient, clairvoyant, or other powers. These powers are merely concomitants of spiritual development and must never be sought or used for their own sake. To make psychic powers the goal is to detour into perilous byways. Some uninformed people become so obsessed with these incidental forces that they miss the entire point of spiritual development: to transfer your headquarters for living from your old limited, earth consciousness to an expanded spiritual consciousness.

Step Two: Concentrating on Development, Not Mere Knowledge

The essential second step in this graded instruction is to realize the necessity of something besides intellectual recognition of truth. You must not only read and understand the concepts and exercises in this book; you must then practice what you have learned until you absorb it into your substance. We're training ourselves as "spiritual athletes," not merely persons who have read the rules of the game; we're developing ourselves as "painters" who have struggled with pigments, not art critics. You must not only recognize that a particular teaching is true: you must make it a part of your essence. *The goal of these teachings is spiritual development, not mere knowledge.*

Put your energy into carrying out the few simple exercises

provided, instead of trying to grasp too much intellectually at a time. Don't get the attitude of "All I need to do is read this and place it in my mental file." Proceed only as fast as you can develop genuine capability.

" For true illumination . . . one must attain, not only intellectual conviction, but emotional conviction . . . An intellectual conviction gained through study, through the reading of books, through the experimental examination of evidence, has one function and one function only; it moves the center of interest into the path in which personal experience is most likely to be encountered."

Betty and Stewart Edward White. *Across the Unknown*

"Any new thing must be acquired by action, by experience, before it can be told, either by you to yourself, or to you by somebody else. You can be *told* no new thing. You can be given the words, but you will not understand them."

Betty and Stewart Edward White. *With Folded Wings*

It's easy for your surface mind to go through surface evolutions which have no dynamic and put you no closer to the spiritual light. You must use and practice these teachings, not merely acknowledge them as interesting. Historically, persons have accepted comfortably certain teachings, and have felt that they fulfilled their obligations by acknowledging their truth and dismissing them; looking for something new before they had acquired or digested the old.

Step Three: Dedicating Time for Practice

You must make up your mind to set aside time, the same time if possible, every day for meditation and application. You

will need months of practice.

"Meditation is in truth higher than thought."

"The earth seems to rest in silent meditation."

The Upanishads

It all depends on priorities. Have you anything more important to do? Ask yourself that question when interruptions threaten and you are tempted to set this time aside. You won't achieve quick success, so don't expect it. It requires a great deal of assembling of forces and eliminating negative elements through thoughtful experiment. Setting aside a specific time every day is more important than anything else you can do. It is a crucial step.

Step Four: Personal Desire

Contact with the spiritual world can be brought about only by a definite process of personal desire. We must want to reach out to make contact with spiritual forces. That desire is essential, and it is all that is essential as a point of departure. This desire must be something more than a mental thought, it must be an essential part of us, a deep feeling of wanting to unite with our heart, our soul.

Only steadfast determination and striving will bring you the step further you must go to achieve unity with the spiritual light. Always hold in mind how much depends on arousing yourself.

"It took more than a year of hammering away at this desire concept before we felt we had really grasped it and could use it. They described it in a hundred different ways. 'It is a genuine aspiration, not an intellectual curiosity,' they told us, 'a yearning aspiration, almost like the attraction of needle and magnet; something above that can almost be recognized as a complement of what exists below. When this recognition, this genuine aspiration is established, then you have your spiritual impetus. It is humble but unwavering, not an arrogant demand. It is in reality a great natural instinct which life there generally inhibits. It is just a law. When you liberate certain gases chemically, they seek their chemical affinities. Just so you liberate your spirit and it automatically follows the law. Do you see the difference between this and letting go all holds and waiting for somebody to lift you up? The latter is enervating and quite useless. The energy with which you demand of us will be the measure of what you will get. It is not so much the energy of demand as the showing of a force that calls its complement.'"

Betty and Stewart Edward White. *The Betty Book*

Step Five: Relaxation

To halt the fixation on locating your consciousness in your body, you must learn to relax in a specific manner. The key to it is imagination, not will. You can't will yourself free from tension. Rather picture to yourself the condition as though it already existed, your body and mind fully relaxed. See that your breathing is regular and slow, and with each exhalation think of your body as sinking heavy and inert. Let go absolutely, as though you were falling through space. At first all this should be practiced lying down; later you'll be able to do it anywhere and at any time.

The kind of relaxation we're seeking is not one of total passivity. There is such a thing as too much abandon in which your personal force becomes inactive. We must strive for a subtle combination of relaxation and a certain subconscious determination. Keep all your faculties in mind,

but empty the foreground of your mind. The passivity we're seeking is entirely physical and mental, not spiritual or psychic. We must maintain ourselves forcefully so we have the strength to receive whatever is bestowed.

"Plato said: 'When freed from my body I beheld luminous spheres.' . . . Of himself, Plato said that in certain of his spiritual conditions he would shed his body and become free from matter. Then he would see light and splendors within his essence. He would ascend to that all-encompassing divine cause, and would seem to be located and suspended in it, beholding a mighty light in that lofty and divine place."

Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi.
The Wisdom of Illuminism

Ridding yourself of mental tension might seem more abstract and difficult, but actually the technique is just as simple. In fact we do it a thousand times a day without knowing it. Every time we turn our full attention upon sense

impressions, merely as such and without regard to their significance, our intellect pauses. So mental relaxation involves emptying the foreground



of our mind by replacing our usual intent intellectual foreground with a casual sensory one. Little discontinuous sounds, passive and placid vistas--anything not too actively stimulating--these are ideal for our purpose. Under their influence our usual headlong intellectual and emotional impetus quickly subsides, leaving the mind like a calm lake.

Step Six: Moving Out

Once the mental clamor is checked in this way, space is created in which to take the next step. We must now experiment in moving outside our ordinary consciousness into the spiritual world, employing that wide-hearted, expansive, outside-ourself feeling we reviewed previously. When we've gained full but purposeful relaxation, we can begin to learn how to move outside our usual consciousness to enter our spiritual body, allowing the spiritual forces to determine what kind of experience is appropriate for us individually. We must not expect anything specifically or try

for any definite kind of experience we may have read about or thought of. We merely open ourselves to spiritual forces, learning how to live outside our body consciousness.

The results grow in us from so feeble a beginning that they do not reach even our watchful consciousness for a long time. That is a period of faith. If we are not convinced that it is going to work, we can at least refrain from a conviction that it is not going to work. We must foredetermine success, but above all we must not expect anything. Our job is to thrust out the busy thoughts of the world we live in, to relax physically, and to strive with a real desire to move beyond our ordinary body consciousness.

" When you do not succeed, seek the reason in yourself."

Betty White. *The Road I Know*

This first step in moving outside our usual bodily focus of consciousness is the most difficult. It has the disadvantage of being something new and unaccustomed. It has the handicap of seeming to be groping and intangible until we have found for ourselves a handle by which to seize it. And above all, the first dead lift must be accomplished unaided. Once the process is started we will get help in abundance according to our capacity to receive, but we must by our own effort break through.

"Since thou canst not bear the unveiled Light, drink the Word of Wisdom, for its light is veiled,

"To the end that thou mayst become able to receive the Light, and behold without veils that which now is hidden,

"And traverse the sky like a star; nay, journey unconditioned without a sky.

""Twas thus thou camest into being from non-existence.

"How didst thou come? Thou camest insensibly.

"The ways of thy coming thou rememberest not, but I will give thee an indication.

"Let thy mind go, then be mindful! Close thine ear, then listen!"

Rumi

The vortex of relaxation is for the purpose of breaking our corporeal shell and releasing us into the surrounding spiritual dimension so it can explain itself. We must experiment to see what techniques will work for us in moving beyond our ordinary feeling that our consciousness is located in the body.

There are several factors which can help us in this challenging activity of moving outside our ordinary consciousness: playing, maintaining self-confidence, making the leap, and dying before we die.

Joyous Playfulness

We must not forget the importance of joyousness in everything we do in developing spiritual discernment. There's no excuse for making our search a deadly serious chore. We've got to learn to play and experiment in gaining the higher consciousness. We must carry out these activities because we want to, not out of a sense of duty or service.

Focus on savoring everything you experience, joyously absorbing what you get from your effort, however large or small.

In regard to entering the spiritual body, we've got to *play* with the idea so we can figure out how to do it. We're operating in an entirely new dimension which has its own substance and its own operating principles. Since we're not accustomed to these new principles, we must experiment--playing with different feelings, ideas, and procedures to find what works for us individually.

" The secret of success with the reinforcing power of the higher consciousness is to practice with it as a recreation. Then when the time comes you can test its reality by deliberately selecting an upsetting moment, a harassed moment, and applying it purposefully. But before you can use it in serious matters, you must first use it for you own pleasure. Otherwise, it won't hold up."

Betty and Stewart Edward White, *Across the Unknown*

Self-Confidence

One of the most powerful forces is belief in your power to do something. That combined with the effort to make good in it will accomplish almost anything. Without that you sink into your own limitations and consider them impossible to overcome. But if you develop the conviction that it can be done and back it up: presto! It is done and you have opened new doors. It is the halfness of trying doggedly without conviction that gets you nowhere.

We learn to take the physical forces of our universe for granted: ordinarily we wouldn't try to walk on water, but we step out on ice with perfect confidence. In the same manner, we must have confidence that there are natural forces in the spiritual world which we can rely on. One of our greatest sources of power is the sureness of our conviction in the existence of these higher forces and their assistance in our efforts to inhabit the spiritual world. In our inner being, we must believe that we can count on higher forces assisting our best efforts as they lead humankind in a constructive, forward movement in its evolution.

The Leap



In all these efforts in learning how to move beyond your body consciousness, you must continually make new leaps. Dare to do something which seems like it might work for you. Take chances;

experiment. You can't travel to a new dimension merely by an unbroken series of steps beyond what you know. The world of the spirit is not on the outskirts of your present world; a gap must be bridged to get over to a completely new reality. Hurl yourself into space, as it were; try new things to see what you learn by experimenting. You simply cannot creep up on this new world in a logical, rigid frame of mind. The leaping, hurling technique is the only way you'll be able to take possession of your new body.

Our pedestrian efforts to reach the spiritual dimension are like trying to fly by merely playing with the instruments in the cockpit of an airplane, like putting legs on an airplane and pretending that you're going to fly by making it walk around. Leaping off the ground into the air is essential if we're going to move beyond our ordinary earth-bound consciousness.

Use your imagination to gain the new territory, then work back through slow steps to connect it with your present understanding. Imagination is the very gateway to a higher reality. It is the power of conveyance that overrides space, time, and ordinary reality. By using your imagination you can put yourself anywhere, you can put new elements together in ways they've never been combined before. Imagination is the one power we possess that connects us to the spiritual world.

Corpus Hermeticum XI

"Unless you make yourself equal to God, you cannot understand God; for the like is not intelligible save to the like. Make yourself grow to a greatness beyond measure, **by a bound free yourself from the body**; raise yourself above all time, become Eternity; then you will understand God. Believe that nothing is impossible for you, think yourself immortal and capable of understanding all, all arts, all sciences, the nature of every living being. Mount higher than the highest height; descend lower than the lowest depth. Draw into yourself all sensations of everything created, fire and water, dry and moist, imagining that you are everywhere, on earth, in the sea, in the sky, that you are not yet born, in the maternal womb, adolescent, old, dead, beyond death. If you embrace in your thought all things at once, times, places,

substances, qualities, quantities, you may understand God."

Dying Before We Die

Stepping outside oneself is accomplished by making one's own in imagination the conditions of the hour of death. Contemplating the moment of one's death does not have to be morbid; it can actually be exciting. The old familiar physical realities are no longer yours: your body, your friends and family, your possessions. You're an embryonic being in a new world and all you have is what you made of yourself that is of an enduring, spiritual nature.

"The mightiest state is the state of death, by which the managing light sheds the darkneses. If it has no remnant of attachment to the body, it will emerge into the world of light and be attached to the dominating lights. There will it behold all the veils of light as though transparent in relation to the glory of the eternal, the all-encompassing Light: the Light of Lights. It will become, as it were, placed within the all-encompassing Light. This is a station mighty indeed! Plato spoke from his own experience of this station, as did Hermes and the great sages."

**Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi.
*The Wisdom of Illuminism***

This exercise of dying before we die involves liberating

ourselves from our body-bound consciousness. Periodically let fall your acquiescence to the impertinences of the body and its manufactured needs, its possessions and obsessions. Let them all fall deliberately from your consciousness. Following that, imagine yourself in the new spiritual world, with the values and capabilities that you've developed while on earth. Sweep your mind clean of its sense limitations and think of yourself, your true forever self, as of an entirely different substance.

"The disciple said to his master: 'How may I come to the supersensual life so that I can see God and hear Him speak?' The Master said: 'When you can leap for a moment into that where no creature dwells then you can hear what God speaks.'

"Disciple: 'Is it near or far?'
Master: 'It is within you. Could you halt volition and thought for but one hour then you could hear God's inexpressible words.'

"Disciple: 'How can I hear when I stop volition and thought?'
Master: 'When you stop willing and thinking self then the eternal hearing, seeing and speaking will be revealed within you, and God will see and hear through you. Your ego-centric hearing, willing and seeing hinders you from seeing and hearing God.'"

Jacob Boehme. *Of the Supersensual Life*

It appears that some persons approaching death naturally begin to experience their higher selves outside the body. They see themselves making journeys and experiencing new realities.

We must remember that our goal in all this is to learn to locate our consciousness in the spiritual body as well as in

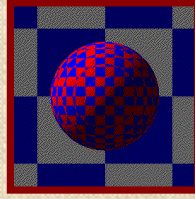
the physical body, establishing a more balanced proportion between the material and the spiritual. Getting outside the body is merely the means--not the end. The body is no stepchild. Any spiritual capability we achieve must ultimately be brought to the physical world and amalgamated with it in helping to improve human life. Moving outside the body is for the purpose of allowing us to inhabit our spiritual body as well, helping us to realize that the body is only an attribute of the spirit, like the mind. Getting outside the body, then, is a means to this larger end and is dangerous if done for and by itself. Attainment of the unitive consciousness is the ultimate goal.

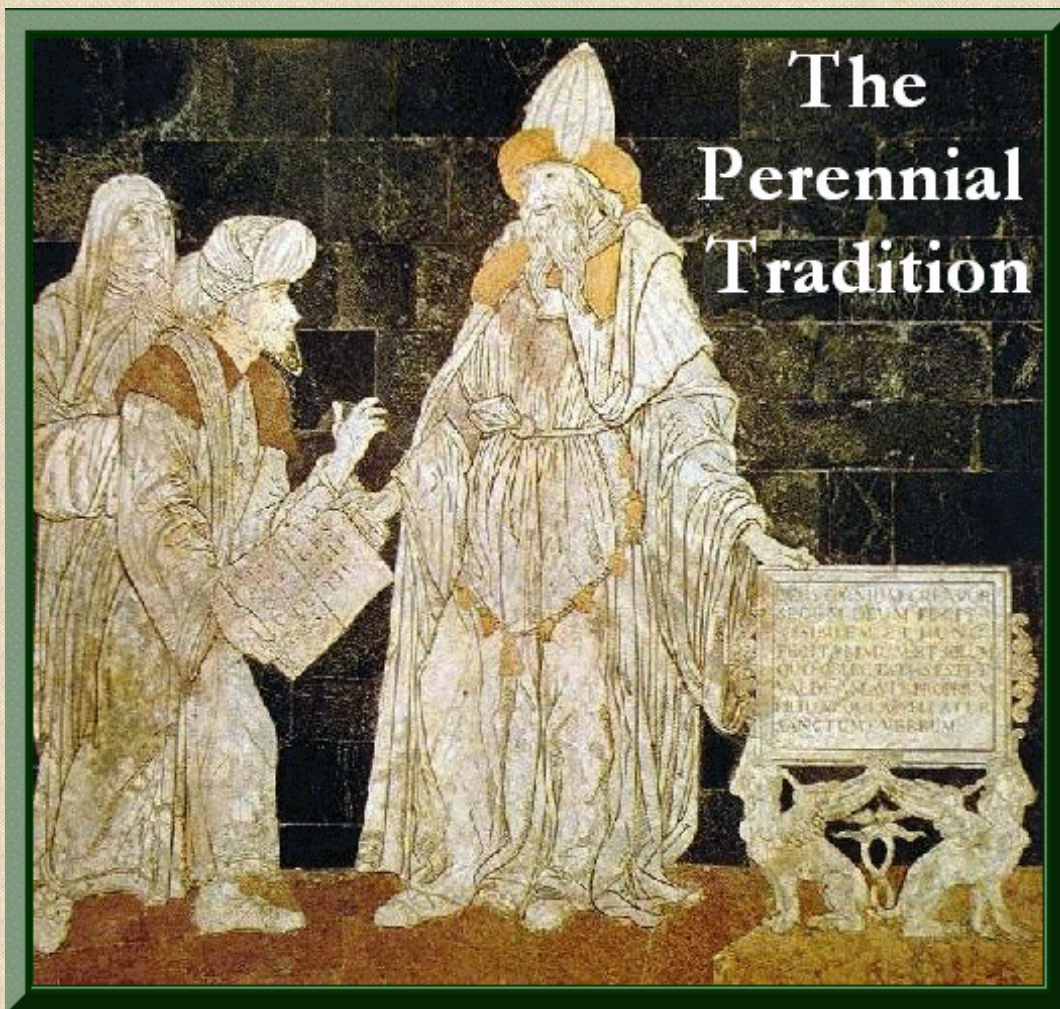
Having established a beachhead in the spiritual dimension, we then begin the hard pioneer work of conquering a new wilderness of lack of comprehension of this new world.

" One can develop to the point that one can leave one's physical form whenever one wants and go to the world of Divine Majesty, where one's ascent reaches the highest horizons. . . . Then, whenever one looks at one's essence one delights because one sees the light of God radiating upon oneself. This stage, however, is still incomplete.

"When one goes still further one passes beyond even this stage, one becomes such that one does not think of one's own essence and one's consciousness of self is obliterated. This is called Major Annihilation. When one forgets oneself and forgets forgetting, it is called Annihilation in Annihilation. . . . One reaches perfection only when cognition is lost in the object of cognition, for whoever delights in the act of cognition as well as in the object of cognition has, as it were, two objects. One is 'abstracted' when one leaves behind cognition for the object of cognition. when the last traces of corporeal humanity are expended, it is the state of Obliteration . . ."

Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi
The Mystical and Visionary Treatises





Chapter Eleven

Philosophia

The Love
of and the
Search for
Wisdom

In earliest times certain sages discovered the fundamental nature of ultimate reality. Their successors have taught select students how to reawaken organs of perception, resulting in a higher state of consciousness. This higher consciousness enables the student to discern that what we take to be reality is actually a kind of illusion and that there are higher dimensions of being. This state of higher discernment has been called wisdom and the teaching of the attainment of this state, the quest for wisdom.

The early Greek, Arabic, and Persian mystics called this tradition *philosophia*, the love of and the search for wisdom. From the earliest records of persons who



practiced *philosophia*, it is clear that for these individuals philosophy was a way of life, not merely an intellectual pursuit. Some of them--

Pythagoras, Socrates, Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi, and Jesus, among others--paid for their pursuit of wisdom with their very lives.

Philosophia is a Greek word composed of two parts:

philo

sophia

φιλο

σοφια

the love of

wisdom

"Suhrawardi's life and Suhrawardi's thought were intimately connected, just as they were for Pythagoras and many later philosophers who believed that philosophy required a philosophical life. Philosophy for him was the love of wisdom and implied the obligation to live his philosophy; it was not simply the love of talking about wisdom. To pursue the Illuminationist philosophy, it is necessary to seek enlightenment from the divine lights."

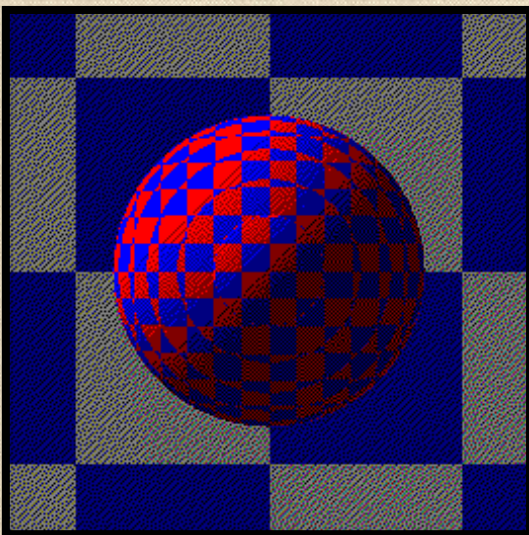
John Walbridge. *The Leaven of the Ancients: Suhrawardi and the Heritage of the Greeks*

The Perennialist teaching is the hidden secret which has been transmitted through all the world's major mystical and esoteric systems. In the Perennial Tradition we thus have teachers such as the author of the *Bhavadgita*, Buddha, Lao Tzu, Confucius, Plato, Jesus, Rumi, and Francis of Assisi. This teaching is adapted to the specific needs of the time and the people during each historic era. After the death of the original teacher, unenlightened disciples codify the teachings, which become largely fossilized and useless. But certain other followers of the teacher, who understand the genuine teachings and processes, continue in the Perennialist line.

In each age a teacher is active in the world to reinterpret the Perennialist teachings to people of that era. Thus the Perennial Tradition has been given varied names such as: Gnosticism, Illuminism, *Philosophia*, and Sufism, among others.

"Do not imagine that philosophy has existed only in these recent times. The world has never been without philosophy or without a person possessing proofs and clear evidences to champion it. He is God's viceregent on His earth."

**Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi (1154-1191),
*The Wisdom of Illuminism***



The Greek word, φιλοσοφία, *philosophia*, is translated into English as "philosophy." Contemporary philosophy--and other academic disciplines--are only fossilized remains of the genuine tradition called *philosophia*. We have almost entirely lost the ability to distinguish an authentic teaching from a petrified scholastic husk. With our present state of "learning," we are largely the product of ossified systems which teach us to pile opinion on top of assumption.

We've been trained to try to blow back to life the mere imagination of long-dead coals called Classical Philosophy or Classical Science until these areas of study have become mere "disciplines" within a university curriculum, the dead seeking to resurrect the dead.

"The modern philosopher is a professional pedant, paid to instruct the young in philosophical doctrines and to write books and articles. He is a professor of philosophy, not so very different from a professor of biology or of marketing. He need not reshape his inner being to the model of the doctrines he discusses in his classes. If pressed, he will perhaps claim that he is useful because he teaches the young to think more clearly and, less plausibly, that he forces his fellow professors in other departments to clarify their concepts. The proud cities of metaphysics were long ago abandoned as indefensible and have fallen into ruin. The philosophers have for the most part retreated to

the safer territory of language and logic, creating for themselves a sort of analytical Formosa."

John Walbridge. *The Leaven of the Ancients: Suhrawardi and the Heritage of the Greeks*

Plato's Conception of Initiatory *Philosophia*

To distinguish the modern counterfeit which is called "philosophy" from the genuine tradition of *philosophia*, we must study carefully the writings of Plato. Though the tradition of the search for wisdom is to be found in pre-Greek cultures such as Egypt and India, the tradition of *philosophia* was actually formulated by Plato.

"Greek philosophy is autochthonous,¹ and requires no Oriental antecedents. Greek philosophers themselves never say that they borrowed their doctrines from the East. That Pythagoras went to Egypt may be true, that he became acquainted there with the solutions of certain geometrical problems may be true also, but that he borrowed the whole of his philosophy from Egypt, is simply a rhetorical exaggeration of Isokrates. . . . That Plato travelled in Egypt need not be doubted, but that he went to Phoenicia, Chaldaea, and Persia to study philosophy is mere guesswork. What Plato thought of the Egyptians he has told us himself in the Republic (436) when he says that the special characteristic



of the Greeks is love of knowledge, of the Phoenicians and Egyptians love of money. If he borrowed no money, he certainly borrowed no philosophy from his Egyptian friends."

F. Max Muller. *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*, 1893

Immediately following Plato, beginning with his student Aristotle, the degradation of *philosophia* into "philosophy" began.

The "wisdom" which *philosophia* sought was not some vague conceptual understanding as we now use the term. It was the actual achievement of a higher state of consciousness, obtained by self-discipline and mystical contemplation.

"Plato yet more plainly declares that to know oneself is Wisdom and the highest virtue of the soul; for the soul rightly entering into herself will behold all other things, and Deity itself; as verging to her own union and to the centre of all life, laying aside multitude and the variety of all manifold powers which she contains, she ascends to the highest watch-tower of beings. According to Socrates, also, in the *Republic*, we read that Wisdom is generative of truth and intellect; and in the *Theaetetus* Wisdom is defined to be that which gives perfection to things imperfect, and calls forth the latent Intellections of the soul--and again, by Diotima, in the *Banquet*, that mind which is become wise needs not to investigate any further (since it possesses the true Intelligible); that is to say, the proper object of intellectual inquiry in itself; and hence the doctrine of Wisdom according to Plato may be sufficiently obvious."

M. A. Atwood, *Hermetic Philosophy and Alchemy*

Philosophia, properly understood, involves a transformation of one's inner being, a pursuit that rules every aspect of one's life. This acquisition of mystical knowledge does not come from doing research in a university library, it involves a special method of meditative contemplation and an

entire way of life.

"In both the classical and the late Christian writers the word philosophy. . . had a double application. At one time it was taken ethically, or practically, to designate a certain self-mastery in conduct, while at another time its sense is intellectual and seems to rise into the region of pure intuition. The point I would make is that no real inconsistency exists in this double aspect of the word, and that even when most theoretical philosophy still retains, in proper usage, something of its simpler, practical value; it implies always theory as concerned with actual life and as resting on a definite experience of the soul."

Paul Elmer More, *The Religion of Plato*

Philosophia, the quest for wisdom, brings the philosopher to higher levels of being. A genuine follower of the tradition of *philosophia* understands that this lower, terrestrial world is in some way a shadow of a higher world. "The key to the wisdom of inner meaning," Suhrawardi said, "is in the knowledge and ability to distinguish the material world from the spiritual world."

"Plato and his brilliant disciples of the Alexandrian School. . . continued to regard the human mind as an imperfect embryo, separated off from its antecedent Law; and, by this common outbirth into individual life, so made subject to the delusions of sense and phantasy, as to be incapable of true progress or wisdom until it had been rectified and re-related, as they assure us, even in this world it may be, by certain artificial aids and media, and made conformable to the Divine vision in truth, whence it sprang. And this was, in fact, though Peripatetics have wandered, the true initiatory object and comprehending whole of ancient philosophy; namely, to turn the eye of mind away from sensibles and fix its purified regard on the Supreme Intelligible Law within.

"We are well aware that this kind of



philosophy is obsolete; that the capacity of man is considered unequal to the discovery of essential Causes; and that all pretensions to interior illumination have appeared fanciful, and are lightly esteemed in the comparison with modern experimental sciences. It may be a question however whether they, who have determined thus, were competent judges; whether they have at all entered upon the ground of the ancient doctrine to prove it, or studied so far as even to surmise the Method by which the ancients were assisted to propound the mystery of the Causal Principle in life."



M. A. Atwood, *Hermetic Philosophy and Alchemy*

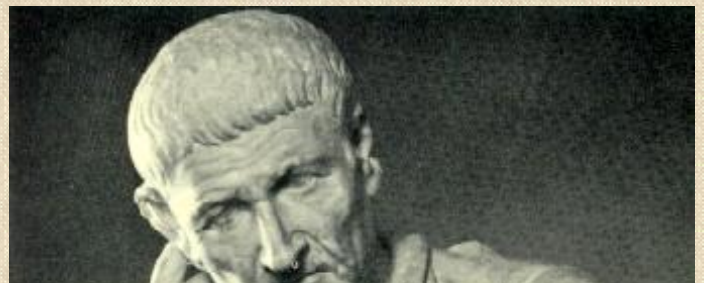
Ancient sages such as Pythagoras, Empedocles, Socrates, and Plato were genuine adepts in *philosophia*, so today they would be given the modern titles of shaman, mystic or magician. They were savants, not scholastics; their goal was to enable their students to *experience* a higher reality, not just comprehend some idea or concept.

"Aristotle's education was entirely different from that of Plato. Aristotle did not know the secret science of the 'initiates.'"

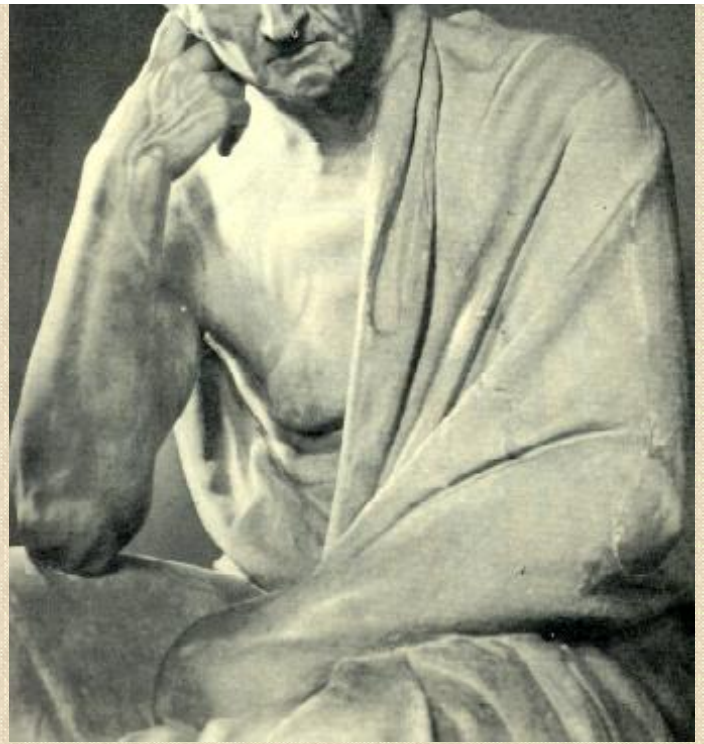
"We are therefore fully entitled to consider Plato as the last exponent and philosophic interpreter of 'ancient wisdom.'"

Andrew Efron, *The Sacred Tree Script*, 1941

Orthodox "philosophy," beginning with Aristotle, became a process of weeding out, as they put it, the esoteric and mystical and



proclaiming intellect as the supreme faculty. Aristotle and his successors believed that they were purging human thought of mythical rubbish and replacing it with rationalist explanations which met the tests of logic and common sense. So, from that time till today's inert, hard-headed college course in analytic philosophy, the counterfeit has been sold as the genuine.



"Philosophy, as a study of the deeper and more inward facts of consciousness, was rightly contrasted with those encyclical, or secular studies (grammar, rhetoric, mathematics, music, etc.) which are its handmaids; and, as still pragmatic in its method, it was distinguished with equal propriety, though perhaps not with equal regularity, from those bastard overgrowths of eristic, or metaphysics, which are its most inveterate enemies for the very reason that they so subtly resemble it."

Paul Elmer More, *The Religion of Plato*

Philosophia As An Esoteric Tradition



Philosophia, even after all these centuries, remains an esoteric tradition. A person can read, for example, the *Phaedo* of Plato and completely miss the meaning of *philosophia*, the search for a higher state of discernment. For many years, I did not fully understand what Plato and other "philosophers" were saying, only becoming aware of their true meaning after immersing myself in the Perennial Tradition.



I had studied with some of the best-known American "philosophers" at Yale University in completing my Ph.D., but in all my studies there was never a hint of the esoteric mystery of *philosophia*. With the understanding gained from my assimilation of the Perennial Tradition, I have been able to re-study "philosophy" in the entirely new mode of *philosophia*.

In my examination of Plato's writings in this new light, I have come upon extraordinary insights. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates (Plato) reveals the *secret nature of philosophia*. ²

"I hold that the true votary of philosophy [the search for wisdom] is likely to be misunderstood by other men; they do not perceive that his whole practice is of death and dying. . . . When the soul exists in herself, and is released from the body and the body is released from the soul--death, surely, is nothing else than this. . . . In matters of this sort philosophers, above all other men, may be observed in every sort of way to dis sever the soul from its communion with the body. . . .

"When does the soul attain truth? . . . Must not true existence be revealed to her in contemplation, if at all? . . . And contemplation is best when the mind is gathered into herself and none of these things trouble her--neither sounds nor sights nor pain nor any pleasure--when she takes leave of the body, and has as little as possible to do with it, when she has no bodily sense or desire, but is aspiring after true being. . . .

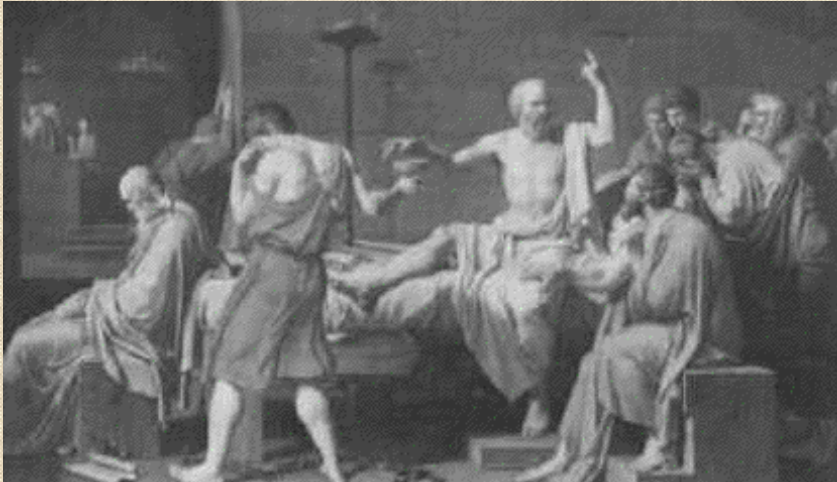
"If we would have pure knowledge of anything we must be quit of the body--the soul in herself must behold things in themselves; and then we shall attain the wisdom which we desire, and of which we say that we are lovers. . . .

"True philosophers. . . are always occupied in the practice of dying. . . ."

If we take that last statement seriously,



we're sure to experience psychic upheaval. *Philosophia* is the practice of dying!?



One of the things which makes it difficult to understand this teaching is that it occurs in the context of Socrates's own experience of final physical death. So it's easy to think that when Socrates speaks of death, he means only the cessation of bodily

functions.

But as with all esoteric Perennialist teachings, when interpreted in an unexamined manner, using commonplace meanings, it doesn't make sense. It would be absurd for Socrates to say that seekers of wisdom are always occupied in the practice of dying if what he means by dying is physical death.

What Plato is referring to is the teaching about "dying before you die" which we have seen to be one of the central concepts of the Perennial Tradition.³ *Philosophia*, the love of and the search for wisdom, is the actual practice of learning to leave the body and live in the soul, the spiritual body.

"Take an axe to the prison wall.
Escape.
Walk out like someone suddenly born into color.
Do it now.
You're covered with thick cloud.
Slide out the side.
Die, and be quiet.
Quietness is the surest sign that you've died.
Your old life was a frantic running from silence.
The speechless full moon comes out now."

Rumi

This *dying* Plato refers to is not a simple concept to understand or an activity easily practiced, since it contains several levels of meaning. As a preparatory discipline, authentic dying consists in giving up those things which enchain the spirit, divide its interest, and deflect it on the road to Reality--whether these are possessions, habits, friends, interests, hatreds, or desires. Perennialists through the centuries have described how they found it necessary to die to self-love and to all the foolish interests in which their surface consciousness was steeped. They called this purgation or mortification.

"This dying has many degrees, and so has this life. A man might die a thousand deaths in one day and find at once a joyful life corresponding to each of them. . . . The stronger the death the more powerful and thorough is the corresponding life; the more intimate the death, the more inward is the life. Each life brings strength, and strengthens to a harder death. When a man dies to a scornful word, bearing it in God's name, or to some inclination inward or outward, acting or not acting against his own will, be it in love or grief, in word or act, in going or staying; or if he denies his desires of taste or sight, or makes no excuses when wrongfully accused; or anything else, whatever it may be, to which he has not yet died, it is harder at first to one who is unaccustomed to it and unmortified than to him who is mortified."

Tauler. *The Inner Way*

In *philosophia*, "dying's" second level of meaning involves the actual practice of learning to leave the physical body and live in the spiritual body.

"Do we believe there is such a thing as death? . . .

"Is it not the separation of soul and body? And when the soul exists in herself, and is released from the body and the body is released from the soul--death, surely, is nothing else than this?

"Just so, he replied. . . . "Then must not



true existence be revealed to her [the soul] in contemplation, if at all?

"Yes.

"And contemplation is best when the mind is gathered into herself and none of these things trouble her--neither sounds nor sights nor pain nor any pleasure,--when she takes leave of the body, and has as little as possible to do with it, when she has no bodily sense or desire, but is aspiring after true being?

"Certainly."

Plato, *Phaedo*



"Plato said: 'When freed from my body I beheld luminous spheres.' . . . Of himself, Plato said that in certain of his spiritual conditions he would shed his body and become free from matter. Then he would see light and splendors within his essence. He would ascend to that all-encompassing divine cause, and would seem to be located and suspended in it, beholding a mighty light in that lofty and divine place."

Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi.
The Wisdom of Illuminism

This mystical experience is explored in more detail in Chapter Twenty-One: Regeneration Into A Higher Consciousness.

Philosophia As the Pursuit of Self-Knowledge

As I continued my new study of Plato's writings, I next examined the *Apology*, concentrating on





Plato's description of how his teacher, Socrates, had been sentenced to death for allegedly corrupting the Athenian youth and being an atheist.

Even though the ideal of democracy had been established by the Greeks, this era was still dominated by the practice of dictatorial rule. Even in Athens, democracy was subverted by powerful cabals, as was demonstrated in the experience of Socrates. Socrates was charged with subversion, corrupting the morals of young men and spreading atheistic heresy. The background of his political assassination is informative.

Socrates had grown up in a family of good standing, so he moved with ease in the most select circles of society. He served in the army, fighting with great bravery. Shunning luxury, he lived simply. He was unconventional but a patriotic citizen, considering it a great privilege to live in a democracy. He felt he had a serious mission to help his fellow citizens become aware of their assumptions and lack of knowledge and to search unremittingly for wisdom. Socrates pursued his mission by exploring the mind through verbal interchange--what became known as dialogue.

The previous summer the navy had barely been able to stave off a defeat at the hands of an enemy. The victory cost the navy twenty-five ships and four thousand lives; the commanders of the fleet were charged with criminal negligence for not trying to rescue their men. At that time Socrates had been a senator and a member of the executive committee. Certain political leaders demanded that the commanders be convicted en bloc by a single vote, suspending the regular legal processes. The question of whether or not to suspend the ordinary legal processes finally came to the executive committee and Socrates had alone stood firm, even though all its members' lives were threatened. However, Socrates's protest was overruled; the military leaders were tried and condemned in a body and six of them were executed.

When a new government came into power, Socrates refused to participate in arresting a rich man whose property the government wished to confiscate. The rich man was seized and murdered, but Socrates' refusal to participate created enemies for him.

It was Socrates' misfortune to have been a friend to persons who had changed allegiance during the recent war or who had been members of the

former government. Socrates was suspected of subversive activities, charged with advocating illegal religious concepts, introducing new and unfamiliar religious practices and corrupting the young. The death penalty had been demanded.

The charges against Socrates were the result of widespread hostility against him for his critical spirit of inquiry and his unconventional manner of life. Socrates was tried before five hundred jurors selected by lot. Socrates' defense before the jury was along these lines:

"These calumnies have been raised against me because of a peculiar kind of insight which I possess. I was first made aware of this gift when I heard that the oracle at Delphi had certified that there was no man more wise than Socrates. I began to reflect on this strange assertion. I knew that I was not wise in the ordinary sense, but then I began to realize what the oracle meant.

"I went to a man reputed to be wise, thinking that I would prove the oracle wrong. But as I spoke to this 'wise man' I began to see that he and his admirers only assumed that he was wise, whereas he was actually quite unenlightened and ignorant of many things. This man believed that he had knowledge when in fact he did not, whereas I at least was aware that I had no knowledge. After several such encounters, I realized that my so-called wisdom is in not assuming that I know things when I do not."



To realize that our knowledge is ignorance
This is a noble insight
To regard our ignorance as knowledge
That is mental sickness

Lao Tzu (Chinese Philosopher, 7th century B.C.)

Socrates here defines *philosophia* as freeing oneself from delusions--from assuming one knows things one does not actually know. *Philosophia* is the pursuit of self-knowledge and the escape from ignorance.

"The daemon involved in the Platonic conception of happiness is not to be taken as a power outside of our immediate experience, but as emphatically a power of the soul, as the very soul. The knowledge of the daemon and the knowledge of happiness are one and the same act of self-knowledge.

"Philosophy then may be defined to be the soul's discovery of itself, as an entity having a law and interests of its own apart from and above all this mixed and incomprehensible life of the body. That I take it--the soul's deep content in the recognition of itself--is the beginning of the Platonic religion and, if not the beginning, certainly the consummation of Christianity."

Paul Elmer More. *Christian Mysticism*

Most of our mistakes trace back to some deeply hidden self-delusion. For all the help we get in creating these delusions we have to take final responsibility for them. If we are true seekers after wisdom, once we learn that there is even one self-delusion we have allowed to cloud our perception or bias our thinking, we then have the responsibility to begin tracing all these self-defeating elements.

**Being asked what is difficult,
Thales (an ancient Greek philosopher) replied:**

"To know oneself."

But we have likely become habituated to hiding these self-delusions from others and ourselves because we've been conditioned to feel that we have to defend ourselves against all criticism or self-exposure. In many of our dealings with others we compete and struggle for supremacy; we try to get one up on them. Defending our image is of crucial importance; to let

others see us would destroy us. In the thick of these interpersonal battles, we develop the feeling, understandably enough, that we should try to hide and defend ourselves even against self-disclosure. We feel we can't admit who we are to others, so we don't, even for a moment, admit to ourselves that we are not the glorious creatures we pretend to be.

Lao Tsu (an ancient Chinese sage):

"In the pursuit of learning, every day something is acquired.

"In the pursuit of Tao, every day something is dropped."

Before long such deception becomes a way of life. We feel vulnerable when we seriously begin trying to discover who we really are. We feel we will be destroyed if we allow anyone, even ourselves, to see beyond the self-protective facade we create.

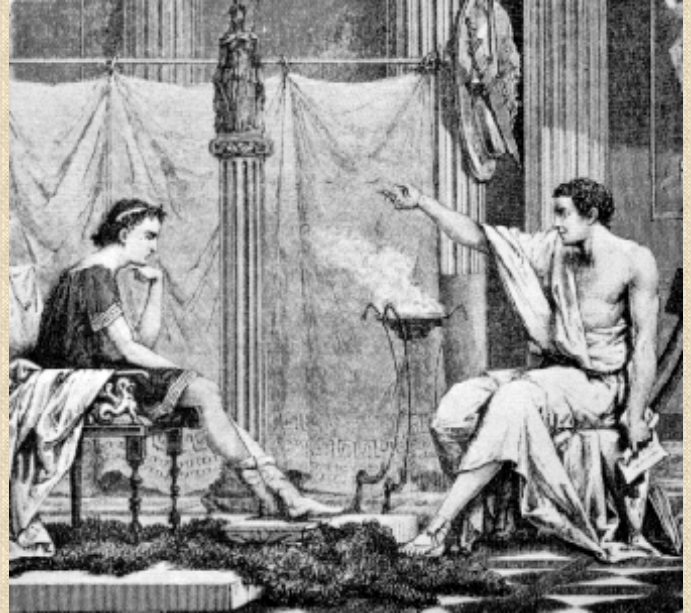
This was undoubtedly why Socrates met with such hatred, to the point of his being condemned to death. He not only worked to free himself from self-delusion but encouraged others to do so as well.

In gaining self-knowledge, we come to understand that we "are concocted from ideas put into us by others" and that what we take to be our self is not our self at all. So we're faced with learning what false and delusory ideas we must decondition from. We decondition so that we can remove ideas and obsessions which we carry around with us that keep us from thinking and behaving reasonably.

"Abandon the search for God and the creation and other matters of a similar sort. Look for him by taking *yourself* as the starting point. Learn who it is who *within you* makes everything his own and says, '*My god, my mind, my thought, my soul, my body.*' Learn the sources of sorrow, joy, love, hate. Learn how it happens that one watches without willing, rests without willing, becomes angry without willing, loves without willing. If you carefully investigate these matters you will find him *in yourself.*"

Monoimus (quoted by Hippolytus, *Refutations*)

We must first take full responsibility for our conditioning. The past, other people, our culture may have conditioned us, but we're now fully responsible for what we do with our present mental and emotional state. Most likely we've allowed ourselves to be conditioned to be almost totally other-directed mechanisms who believe whatever our culture or group tells us to believe. Very probably we've allowed ourselves to be conditioned to be persons who do not wish to be self-directed in a real sense--other than according to the myth of "just do what you feel like and you'll be okay." Hence we allow conditioning to take place and perpetuate its effects, the responsibility now accruing to us. So when I refer to being conditioned I mean: **ALLOWING ourselves to be conditioned.**



The difficulty with trying to understand conditioning is that we are conditioned to believe and feel that we are not conditioned. Or if at all, we believe it is in some minor ways which we either quite consciously chose or which we could easily overcome just by thinking about them. And if we identify culture with conditioning, then we excuse or "accept" conditioning as a necessary process. "Sure I'm conditioned; isn't everyone? So what?"

To explain the important facets of our conditioning, Plato created the Allegory of the Cave.

"Imagine men and women living as prisoners in an underground cave. These people have been here since birth, their bodies chained so that they cannot move. They can see only what is in front of them and can see no other prisoners.

"Behind the prisoners on a raised platform is a series of fires. Between the prisoners and the fires is a parapet, like the screen at a puppet show. Behind this parapet are people carrying various artificial objects, such as the figures of men and animals. The prisoners see nothing but the shadows of the artificial objects cast by the firelight onto the cave wall in front of them. The cave has an echo so that the when the people in back of them speak the prisoners believe the sounds come from the shadow figures on the cave wall.



"Suppose one of the prisoners became free from his chains. The firelight would be painful to his eyes and the objects in back of him would so terrify him that he might desire to regain his former chained situation.

"If this free person actually crept out of the cave into the sunlight, he would be completely dazed, unable to comprehend ordinary objects. Slowly this former prisoner might begin to understand that it is the sun which is the source of light and life. He would feel sorrow for his former fellow prisoners.

"If he did return to his chains and speak to his fellow prisoners, they would think he was insane. And if they could lay hands on him they would kill him."

In reference to Plato's Allegory of the Cave, not only have the "chains" of our conditioning programmed us to mistake the "shadows"--the delusions, the easy answers, the prejudices of our group--for reality, but we're afraid to find out the truth.

We usually learn the value of delusion-exposure the hard way: through making some catastrophic mistake. Suffering from such mistakes, we may see the importance of overcoming the self-deception that led to our unhappy circumstance. I say "may" because we possess a phenomenal ability to remain totally oblivious to self-deception, even in the midst of abject failure and destruction. So only if we can understand the tremendous value in freeing ourselves from these delusions, will we have any motivation for exposing them.

"Experience keeps a dear school, but fools will learn in no other."

Benjamin Franklin

He Who Knows His Real Self Knows Reality

As we saw in Chapter One, a major teaching of the Perennial Tradition is that self-knowledge is a prerequisite to knowledge of Reality. The Hermetic rendition of the Perennial Tradition, long called alchemy, was a spiritual philosophy, not a physical science. The wonderful transmutation of baser metals into gold was a figurative expression of the transformation of man from his natural state into a regenerate condition in which he became aware of his divine nature.

Human beings, it was said in the Wisdom literature, was of the image of God. The Hermetic Emerald Tablet proclaims:

"That which is below corresponds to that which is above, and that which is above corresponds to that which is below, to accomplish the miracles of the one reality."

Because humans are made in the image of God and things on the terrestrial plane are in some way facsimiles of the spiritual plane, self-knowledge is essential if we are to understand Reality.

"He that hath the knowledge of the microcosm, cannot long be ignorant of the knowledge of the macrocosm. This is that which the Egyptian industrious searchers of nature so often said and loudly proclaimed, that every one should know himself. This speech, their dull disciples, the Greeks, took in a moral sense, and in ignorance affixed it to their temples. But I admonish thee, whosoever thou art, that desirest to dive into the inmost parts of nature, if that which thou seekest thou findest not within thee, thou wilt never find it without thee. He who desires the first place among the students of nature, will nowhere find a greater or better field of study than himself. Therefore, will I here follow the example of the Egyptians, and from my whole heart, and certain true experience proved by me, speak to my neighbor in the words of the Egyptians, and with a loud voice do now proclaim: Oh, man, know thyself; for in thee is hidden the treasure of treasures."

Alipili, a Middle-Eastern sage

Pursuing *philosophia* as the search for self-knowledge leads ultimately to the understanding that in our essence we are our Higher Self or pre-existent soul.

"Whosoever, therefore, shall know himself, shall know all things in himself; but especially he shall know God, according to whose image he was made; he shall know the world, the resemblance of which he beareth; he shall know all creatures with which in essence he symboliseth, and what comfort he can have and obtain from stones, plants, animals, elements; from spirits, angels, and everything; and how all things may be fitted for all things, in their time, place, order, measure, proportion, and harmony; even how he can draw and bring them to himself as a loadstone, iron."

Agrippa, *Occult Philosophy*

The Vocation of *Philosophia*

If we carefully studied those who practice(d) *philosophia*, we would understand it to be a vocation within an active life, a self-transformation in which we become progressively able to see through delusions and face realities, a reawakening of dormant organs of perception which allow us to see and relate to the essence of things.

We would realize that the understanding that *philosophia* helps us develop is a discrimination between what we only think we know and what we truly know, as Socrates made so clear. We could learn to seek self-knowledge, exploring the essence of what *philosophia* was and is, the teaching within and beyond contemporary "philosophy" and religion and economics and chemistry and all academic disciplines.

In the *Apology*, Plato reveals how a genuine initiate in *philosophia*, such as Socrates, practices this vocation.

"While I have life and strength I shall never cease from the practice and teaching of philosophy, exhorting any one whom I meet and saying to him, after my manner: You, my friend--a citizen of this great and mighty and wise city of Athens--are you not ashamed of devoting yourself to acquiring the greatest amount of money and honor and reputation, and caring so little about wisdom and truth and the greatest improvement of the soul, which you never regard



or heed at all? . . .

"I proceed to interrogate and examine and cross-examine him, and if I think that he has no 'virtue' in him, but only says that he has, I reproach him with undervaluing the greater, and overvaluing the less.

"For I do nothing but go about persuading you all, old and young alike, not to take thought for your persons or your properties, but first and chiefly to care about the greatest improvement of the soul."

The Hiddenness of *Philosophia*

The tradition once called *philosophia* is active in each era, but is practiced by Perennialist teachers in forms

which differ according to the needs of the time.

The reality behind *philosophia* may be practiced in our world in ways which ordinary persons would not find easy to discern. What cleansing of our psyches of centuries-old dogmas, myths, and habits might be required to recognize a true practitioner of *philosophia*, a real teacher of the search for wisdom?

In one of his letters, Plato says that certain elements within *philosophia* cannot be expressed in words like other teachings. This is because, like all Perennialist teachers, Plato is not merely presenting ideas to his students but providing them experiences through which they can achieve a higher state of consciousness.

"The subject on which Plato had not written and would never write, must be something about which all writing would be futile. It must be a feeling, a sentiment, and experience, which is not gained by instantaneous communication, but by making oneself one with it, in heart and soul. The reference is to the inner education which Plato was able to give those he selected. For them, fire flashed forth from his words, for others, only thoughts.

"The manner of our approach to Plato's *Dialogues* is not a matter of indifference. They will mean more or less to us, according to our spiritual condition. Much more passed from Plato to his disciples than the literal meaning of his words. The place where he taught his listeners thrilled in the atmosphere of the Mysteries. His words awoke overtones in higher regions, which vibrated with them, but these overtones needed the atmosphere of the Mysteries, or they died away without having been heard."

Rudolph Steiner, *Christianity as Mystical Fact*



The generalized pattern of habits we call the intellect couldn't hope to grasp this genuine tradition of *philosophia* fully. We could expect the intellect, on the contrary, to misuse its limitedly useful techniques by dismissing ideas about an original essence of *philosophia* as nonsense. So only if we seriously began deconditioning ourselves from the blinding influence of the intellect could we hope to understand even the possibility of a genuine tradition of knowledge.

"It is a constant thought of Plato that the ordinary man is not truly awake, but is walking about, like a somnambulist, in pursuit of illusory phantoms. If the dream be taken for substance, as with most of us it happens, that is because the passions pervert our sense of values. 'The pleasures that men know are mixed with pains--how can it be otherwise? For they are mere shadows and painted pictures of the true pleasure, and are coloured by contrast, which so exaggerates both the light and the shade that in a careless mind they beget insane desire of themselves; and they are fought about, as Steisichorus says the Greeks fought about the shadow of Helen at Troy in ignorance of the true Helen.' Against this witchcraft of the passions the sentence of philosophy, that only Ideas are real, must be repeated by the soul to itself as a charm, until the shadows of the night pass away and in the dawn of another sun than ours we see no longer in signs and symbols, enigmatically, but face to face, as the gods see and know.

"The purging of the passions is thus an initiation into the mysteries of love, whereby the heart is gradually weaned from the obsession of earthly beauty and its progeny to desire of the sweeter loveliness of the virtues, and so to ever higher spheres, until we attain to knowledge of the divine beauty in its utter purity, clear and unalloyed, and not clogged with the pollutions and vanities of earth. Then, if it may be, mortal man becomes the friend of God, himself immortal, capable of bringing forth like God, not the ephemeral children of fashion, but undying realities."

Paul Elmer More. *Christian Mysticism*

There are three major intellect-created assumptions which cause us difficulty in understanding *philosophia* as an embodiment of the Perennial Tradition.

First, academic thinking has trained us to understand "philosophy" as shifting points of view created by individual scholars or schools of thought. But, as Perennialist writings indicate, the Perennial Tradition does not change its basic principles, only its outward forms. If we overcame our habitual assumption we might see that forms which seem to us different

ideologies may be the varying expressions of the same fundamentals.

For example, the seeming extreme disparity between Perennialist teachers might be merely the result of diverse expressions of the same underlying science of knowledge. In making this mental shift we could not assume, naively going to the opposite extreme, that all "philosophical" teachings are genuine expressions of the essence that was called *philosophia*. Some of those teachings might be primarily delusional.



Secondly, we could not assume that the Perennial Tradition would think it necessary to explain itself in rational, logical, or merely intellectual terms--even though we might insist that it should. Perennialist teachings ⁴ point to unrealized organs of understanding which the Perennial Tradition helps to awaken in us. It deliberately de-emphasizes the intellect in its clamoring for exclusive attention.

Again, it would do us no good to try to explain these new organs of awareness in intellectual terms (intuition, mystical insight, astral projection, etc.); we would have to study whatever material is available to us and assist it to re-train our awareness of previously unrecognized realities.

We would find it necessary, thirdly, to overcome the conditioned assumption that *philosophia* would necessarily always have been in visible operation in the West. Until very recently, our political and religious orthodoxies have been so rigid and militant that a genuine tradition could not have operated openly in the West. The various Western religious traditions have been busy for centuries eradicating whatever heretics appeared and the academic tradition has excluded anything that didn't fit its scholastic Procrustean bed.

It is a serious question as to how many people could now undertake a genuine search for wisdom. As products of the academic tradition we have become locked into the "banking model" of non-learning, as Paulo Freire ⁵ so aptly describes it, in which the instructor merely deposits "facts" in passive students. Ordinary teachers would find it difficult to engage in any authentic search for self-knowledge because they are habituated to pontificating (not searching) and students now demand the easy method of non-learning in which they do no more than memorize "facts" (opinions) and blather during so-called "discussions."



While teaching in universities and colleges over the last thirty years--from Connecticut to California--I've discovered that only the first stages of preparation for real learning and searching can take place in academic classes. That is, only some students use the opportunity to explore their conditioned ideas and habits and begin deconditioning toward self-knowledge. Most students want what they get in academic classes: "facts" spouted by instructors, which they then memorize and return to said

instructor, unassimilated. Students learn to play the game superbly and only a few really desire to prepare for real learning.

If we are to search for wisdom, the essence of *philosophia*, we will have to decondition ourselves. If we wish to see a portion of reality through a window pane we will have to clean and repair the glass, or else we will take the cracks, stains and tints for a part of reality when it is only a part of the pane. The essence once called *philosophia*, it appears clear from its writings, involves searching for self-knowledge, dying to self, and working toward a higher state of consciousness.

**"Die while you're alive
and be absolutely dead.
Then do whatever you want:
it's all good."**

**Bunan (1603-1676),
Japanese Zen Master**

Plato's Forms and the Western Tradition of Natural Law

One of Plato's most important contributions to Western thought was his conception of Forms (*ideai, eide*). Plato saw ultimate reality composed of two distinct "worlds," dimensions of being. The world of physical objects in space and time is known through sense perception and ordinary thought. Apart from this is the nonphysical, nonspatial, nontemporal, universal, eternal metaphysical ⁶ world of Forms known only through philosophic reflection.

To explain what he meant by Forms, Plato referred to such entities as "triangle," "justice," "beauty," and "the good." "Triangle," for example, is that metaphysical entity which is known by a geometrician when he examines physical triangles drawn in chalk or ink or referred to in ordinary thought as "a plane figure enclosed by three straight lines."



Physical triangles are representations on blackboards and pieces of paper that are never perfect planes; our chalk or ink lines have some breadth, while the Form, "Triangle," has only one dimension, length. So while a physical triangle is never identical to the Form "Triangle" it does have some resemblance and can help us reflect on it. The Form "Triangle" is universal and metaphysical, not just a physical entity at a particular time and place.

Plato distinguishes between the two worlds in terms of what kind of knowledge is possible in each and what entities are used to gain this knowledge. In reference to the higher, metaphysical world, we have a Higher Self or Soul which enables us to to gain true understanding and genuine

knowledge. The bodily senses and the ordinary intellect which report about the physical world, provide only belief and opinion. Plato provides further explanation in the *Republic*.



"When its [the soul's] gaze is fixed upon an object irradiated by truth and reality, the soul gains understanding and knowledge and is manifestly in possession of intelligence. But when it looks towards that twilight world of things that come into existence and pass away, its sight is dim and it has only opinions and beliefs which shift to and fro, and now it seems like a

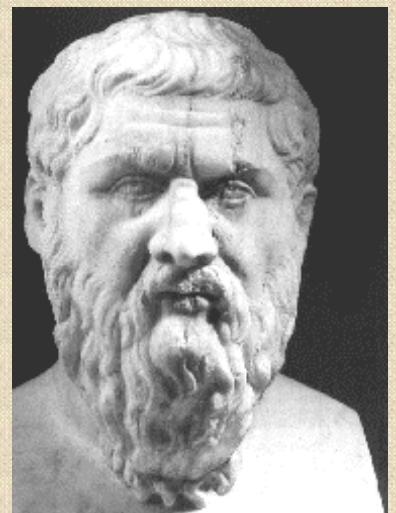
thing that has no intelligence. . . .

"This, then which gives to the objects of knowledge their truth and to him who knows them his power of knowing, is the Form or essential nature of Goodness. It is the cause of knowledge and truth; and so, while you may think of it as an object of knowledge, you will do well to regard it as something beyond truth and knowledge and precious as these both are, of still higher worth.

. . . So with the objects of knowledge: these derive from the Good not only their power of being known, but their very being and reality; and Goodness is not the same thing as being, but even beyond being, surpassing it in dignity and power."

Plato viewed the unchanging world of Forms as constituting a system of eternal principles emanating from Absolute Good which the present world merely shadows. Hence, Plato's *Republic*, his ideal state, was to be lead by Philosopher-Kings who through their education were prepared "to know the Good through rational insight and embody its ideals by ruling directly over the social order."

Based on Plato's conception of Forms as residing in a supersensible, metaphysical realm, Western thinkers have developed the system of thought called Natural Law.



"Human laws are only copies of eternal laws. Those eternal laws are peculiar to man, for only man, on earth, is a rational being. The test of validity for the state's laws is their conformity to reason. . . . Learned men know that 'Law is the highest reason, implanted in Nature, which commands what ought to be done and forbids the opposite. This reason, when firmly fixed and fully developed in the human mind, is Law. And so they believe that Law is intelligence, whose natural function it is to command right conduct and forbid wrongdoing."

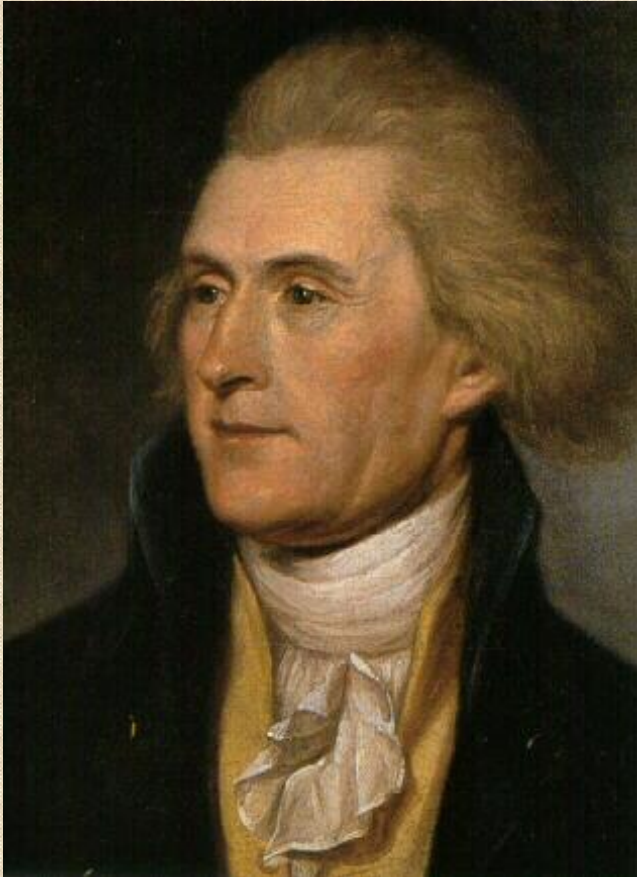
Russell Kirk, *The Roots of American Order*

The alternative view of the social order, Plato pointed out, is anomie: a state of society in which normative standards of conduct and belief are weak or lacking. In the *Republic*, Plato explains the reigning frame of mind within an anomic environment. In the discussion between Socrates and Thrasymachus as to what justice is, Thrasymachus asserts that "justice means nothing else than what is to the interest of the stronger party."

"Rulers may say that they rule in the interest of their people, but the laws they promulgate are ones which they believe to be to their own advantage. And the same is true when the people rule. The laws differ because the interest differs, but what men call 'justice'--the law as it appears on the statute book--is to the interest of whoever has sufficient authority to get it inscribed there. The whole dispute about justice, therefore, is merely verbal except so far as it is reducible to a struggle for power. The enlightened man knows this and acts accordingly. He thus has a great advantage over the naive and simple-minded who still believe that shibboleths like 'justice,' 'honesty,' 'loyalty,' have a real meaning. The enlightened man knows that these are mere words which he can turn to his advantage. The only restraint on his conduct is set by his circumstances. Whatever ruthlessness and ingenuity can obtain, whatever he has strength or cleverness enough to secure--that is his by the 'right' of the stronger."

W. T. Jones, *A History of Western Philosophy*

The concept of Natural Law has influenced most societies within Western Civilization, but nowhere was it embodied more fully than in the American Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights.



Thomas Jefferson explained how this concept of Natural Law had been the foundation of the Declaration of Independence:

"This was the object of the Declaration of Independence. Not to find out new principles, or new arguments, never before thought of, not merely to say things which had never been said before; but to place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain and firm as to command their assent, and to justify ourselves in the independent stand we are compelled to take. Neither aiming at originality of principle

or sentiment, nor yet copied from any particular and previous writing, it was intended to be an expression of the American mind, and to give to that expression the proper tone and spirit called for by the occasion. All its authority rests then on the harmonizing sentiments of the day, whether expressed in conversation, in letters, printed essays, or in the elementary books of public right, as Aristotle, Cicero, Locke, Sidney, &c.

**Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to Henry Lee"
[May 8, 1825] in *Thomas Jefferson, Writings***

"That is justice, when by a complete self-knowledge a man has become master of himself (or 'better than himself,' *kreitton hautou*, as the phrase runs with a significant and beautiful ambiguity); that is happiness, *eudaimonia*, when there is no longer a hostile division of the powers within the soul, like a faction within a city, but a measured harmony and the unity of subordination."

Paul Elmer More, *The Religion of Plato*

When societies such as that of the United States forget their true foundations in Natural Law and move to an anomic "law of the jungle," they devolve to a total state of barbarism. We are now seeing this in the attacks on American Constitutional liberties under the Patriot Act, the mounting of an



internationally illegal preemptive war against Iraq, and the destruction of democracy through a coup d'etat: election fraud and the appointment of a president by a partisan Supreme Court.

In such an anarchical environment, as Plato explained in the *Republic*, ". . . in politics, the genuine ruler regards his subjects exactly like sheep, and thinks of nothing else, night and day, but the good he can get out of them for himself."

"It is this tradition, Platonic and Christian at the centre, this realization of an immaterial life, once felt by the Greek soul and wrought into the texture of the Greek language, that lies behind all our western philosophy and religion. Without it, so far as I can see, we should have remained barbarians; and, losing it, so far as I can see, we are in peril of sinking back into barbarism."

Paul Elmer More, *The Religion of Plato*

A major contribution of the Perennial Tradition to human evolution is its preservation of fundamental human principles in all aspects of existence. When a culture such as the United States goes through a period of imperialistic dictatorship, for example, it is necessary that the original principles on which the nation was founded be preserved and the people provided a means through which to rediscover its democratic heritage. I have attempted in my earlier book, *America, Awake!* to provide such a means.

This current book attempts to present a synopsis of the elemental foundation-points of the human heritage: the Perennial Tradition. It also includes, in its esoterica, clues which the discerning reader can use to develop a higher awareness.



The Genuine Tradition of *Philosophia* Persists

We must realize that genuine philosophy does not involve a superficial glossing over of the received writings of Aristotle, Aquinas, Descartes, or Kant, with the presumption that we can understand everything there is in them with our present intellectual abilities or that they represent the genuine tradition of philosophy.

Contemporary academic disciplines condition us to assume that we

can gain genuine understanding of anything through the mere study of the writings and traditions we now possess. Our present educational system is based on the Medieval scholastic model which came into being primarily through the rediscovery of classical written material and the exegetical substantiation of "revealed Truth."

"One who seeks God through logical proof is like someone searching for the sun with a lamp."

**Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi (1154-1191),
*The Wisdom of Illuminism***

The tradition called *philosophia* was never intended to become, exclusively, a written course of study. Authentic philosophers always include both exoteric as well as esoteric strands in their teaching. *Philosophia* assists people to break through delusions to a grasp of truth. Its written and oral expressions are not intended to become fossilized "scriptures" or university textbooks on which to build systems of dogma. Something life-giving is not expressed in ways intended to become academic "holy writ," to serve as proof-texts and excuses for mere pedantry and dilettantish blather. Any real Perennialist teaching is an organic process which is assimilated rather than twisted into a totem.

"For the Peripatetics writing philosophy was a matter of recording arguments and conclusions in proper syllogistic form, but Pythagoras had shown the unwisdom, and Plato the impossibility, of recording the deepest philosophical teachings in writing. The writing of philosophy was a dialectical endeavor, requiring both knowledge and a subtle sense of how to guide the student through the various levels of knowledge. The books were never intended to be used alone to teach the full Illuminationist philosophy."

**John Walbridge. *The Leaven of the Ancients:
Suhrawardi and the Heritage of the Greeks***

This book--an elucidation of the Perennial Tradition--pertains to all of its embodiments, including *philosophia*, the love of and the search for wisdom. As has been made clear, the original tradition of *philosophia* is completely different from what is now called "philosophy" in modern universities.

"In regard to few professional philosophers and men of letters is there any evidence that they did very much in the way of fulfilling the necessary conditions of direct spiritual knowledge. When poets or metaphysicians talk about the subject matter of the Perennial Philosophy, it is generally at second hand. But in every age there have been some men and women who chose to fulfill the conditions upon which alone, as a matter of brute empirical fact, such immediate knowledge can be had; and of these a few have left accounts of the Reality they were thus enabled to apprehend and have tried to relate, in one comprehensive system of thought, the given facts of this experience with the given facts of their other experiences."

Aldous Huxley *The Perennial Philosophy*

Even during Plato's time, philosophy had been deformed by the sophists into a pandering to the emotions of the masses. Socrates explained in the *Republic*: "I do not wonder that the many refuse to believe; for they have never seen that of which we are now speaking realized; they have seen only a conventional imitation of philosophy, consisting of words artificially brought together. . ."

We are most fortunate to have the writings of Plato, because through a discerning study of their content and process, we can rediscover just how the Perennial tradition operates in its initiatory mode.

"Let us review the whole development of this dialogue [*Phaedo*], in which Socrates brings his hearers to behold the eternal in human personality. The hearers accept his thoughts, and they look into themselves to see if they can find in their inner experiences something which assents to his ideas. They make the objections which strike them. What has happened to the hearers when the dialogue is finished? They have found something within them which they did not possess before. They have not merely accepted an abstract truth, but they have gone through a development. Something has come to life in them which was not living in them before. Is not this to be compared with an initiation? And does not this throw light on the reason for Plato's setting forth his philosophy in the form of conversation? These dialogues are nothing else than the literary form of the events which took place in the sanctuaries of the Mysteries. We are convinced of this from what Plato himself says in many passages. Plato wished to be, as a philosophical teacher, what the initiator into the Mysteries was, as far as this was compatible with the philosophical manner of communication. It is evident how Plato feels himself in harmony with the Mysteries! He only thinks he is on the right path when it is taking him where the Mystic is to be led."

Rudolph Steiner, *Christianity as Mystical Fact*

The deeper meaning of Plato's philosophy is not easy to discern, requiring dedicated study and a learned ability to balance between extremes. But when discernment begins to be felt, the sheer magic of Plato's Higher World of Ideas becomes progressively more clear.

"Even as I write these words, sitting in a study surrounded by books, this is how the truth of his [Plato's] doctrine comes home to me. What is the reality? I ask myself. Surely not these material volumes arranged in lines upon their shelves. Merely as objects made of paper and ink and cardboard and leather, though they impress themselves upon the eye as substantial, though they are palpable to the hand, yet they awaken little or no interest, respond to no vital need, and of themselves have no

significance. So far as they possess reality, it is by their content of Ideas, the inner life of their authors gone out into image and story and conjecture, which for all these years has been the material of my thought and the food of my own deeper life. In this sense the intangible Ideas, somehow caught in the printed word and somehow released by the act of perusal, are alive as prisoners are alive in their cells, who by the magic opening of doors are set free.



Almost they seem to flutter about me here in the light of day, to brush my cheek with delicate fingers, to take form and fashion and quaint design, to speak with audible breath, to woo me forth from the body into their own more etherial world. They were the same yesterday as today, while the printed record has been crumbling away; they may abide when the solid-seeming books have fallen into dust. Yet how and where, in the interval between their setting down and their taking up, do they abide? By what secret tract is their existence in the mind of the author connected with their resuscitation in the mind of the reader? Why at the sight of certain lines and figures on the voiceless

page do these particular thoughts spring up into renewed activity? What is the undiscoverable nexus between the physical vibrations of light and these immaterial substances of our noetic life? . . .



By such distinctions I lay hold of a strange philosophy which tells me that the soul's assurance of truth is not a dream evoked arbitrarily by any man's imagination, but an intuition more or less perfectly grasped of veritable realities. These books on which I depend for most of my noetic life are effective just as they are a history of what has been known of these realities by other souls in the past and set down for the recreation of any who can spell out the record. So do they charm into peace because they lure us to the belief that some time, if not here and now, our soul may be lifted to that world of immutable Ideas which lie in all their splendour before the eye of Plato's God."

Paul Elmer More. *Christian Mysticism*

Whatever may be going on in the ordinary world, the real practitioners of

***philosophia* continue the genuine work of acquiring enhanced capabilities of apprehension, using completely different terms and names--thereby becoming unrecognizable to the heedless.**

That *philosophia*, the genuine love of wisdom, is practically unknown by modern man does not mean that it is not still practiced in its essence, the "exact science of the regeneration of the human soul from its present sense-immersed state into the perfection and nobility of that divine condition in which it was originally created." ⁷

¹ An entity depicted as having originated from the ground it inhabits, from itself; hence of independent origin

² I have followed the translations of Professor Benjamin Jowett in most instances, but have made my own translation in specific instances when I felt it was necessary to focus on a particular meaning of the original Greek word or concept.

³ Chapter Two: Distinctive Themes of the Perennial Tradition

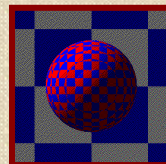
**⁴ Shah, Idries. (1978). *The Perfumed Scorpion*, London: Octagon Press
". . . Humanity having the capacity to perceive that which is beyond the range of conventionally experienced physics."**

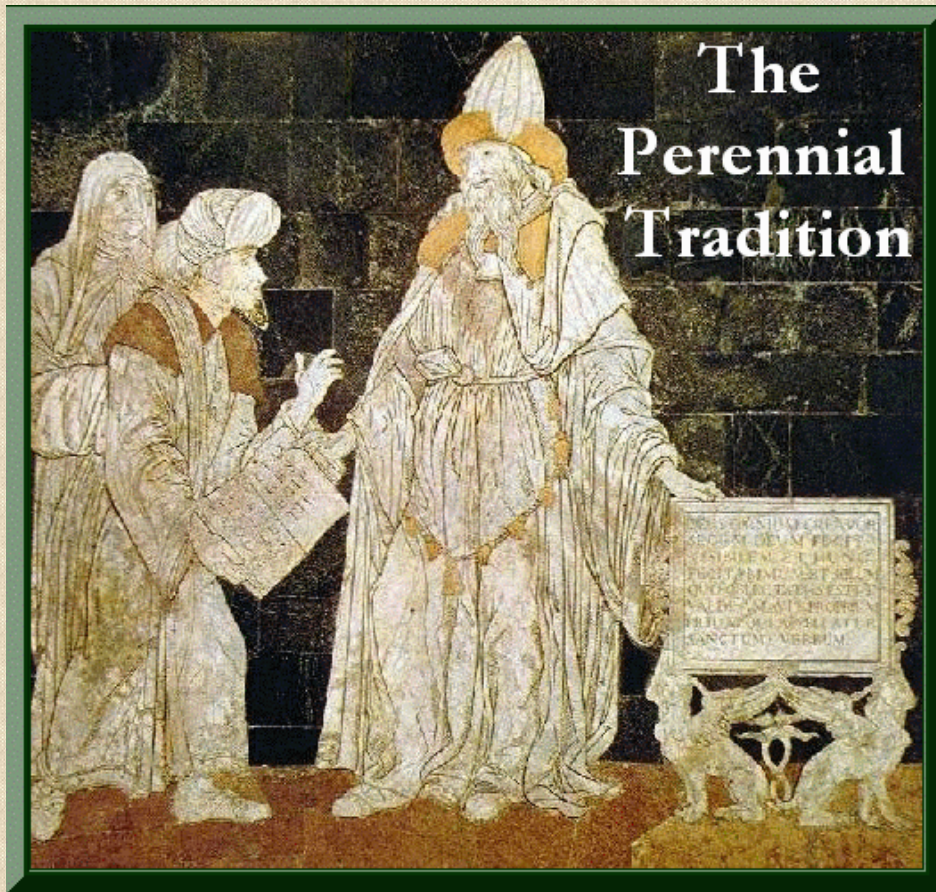
"You must conceive of possibilities beyond your present state if you are to be able to find the capacity to reach towards them."

⁵ Freire, Paulo. (1973). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Seabury

⁶ Of or related to that which is beyond ordinary experience, requiring special capabilities to apprehend

⁷ M. A. Atwood, *Hermetic Philosophy and Alchemy*, 1850





Chapter Twelve

Plato as a Perennialist Teacher

We can only understand Plato if we recognize him as a Perennialist teacher, not a conventional teacher in the contemporary academic sense. Comprehending the extraordinary characteristics of a Perennialist master is a difficult task, since these characteristics are very much out of vogue in the world today.

In previous sections of this book, we've examined certain aspects of Perennialist teaching. In the Introduction, we saw that Perennialist teaching material and teaching methods are the outcome of creative adaptation by the initiated teacher of the identical stream of Perennialist truth to contemporary needs. Perennial Tradition teachings point to a new way of discerning the world, different from ordinary intellect or reason, requiring training in this way of Higher Cognition.

In Chapter One, we saw that because scholastics and sensation seekers adopt a totally different viewpoint and methodology, they cannot possibly comprehend a Perennialist teacher such as Plato, Jesus, or Shahabudin Suhrawardi. Most



scholarly books written about Perennialist teachers assume that they can be understood only through scholastic methods:

- **Analyzing specific doctrines in their teachings**
- **Collating doctrines shared with other teachers to determine intellectual lineage**
- **Creating vast systems of "interconnections"**
- **Ignoring the teachers' practices as irrelevant**
- **Omitting the organic element, i.e., that teachings are nutrients meant to be metabolized, not to remain in their original, unaltered state**

Perennialist teachers always work within the esoteric or "secret" component of any religion or philosophy, because teachings concerning the development of higher states of consciousness can only be made available to select seekers who have completed initial training exercises.

Perennialist teachers insist "that mystical experience and enlightenment cannot come through a rearrangement of familiar ideas, but through a recognition of the limitations of ordinary thinking, which serves only for mundane purposes." ¹



**"Can you step back from your own mind
and thus understand all things?"**

Tao Te Ching

The Perennialist teaching maintains--in all its embodiments--that the seeker must divorce himself from

believing that he understands--and begin to understand in an authentic way. The process is first to recognize that one is ignorant of his own ignorance, believing he knows things which he does not actually know.

A seeker is first helped to understand that she is "out of contact with complete reality, even though ordinary life seems to be the totality of reality itself." ² The student is enabled to "become aware of states of mind and conditions of reality which are only crudely grasped by the ordinary mind." ³

The Perennialist teacher places special emphasis on concepts and words because he struggles "against the use of words to established patterns of thinking whereby mankind is kept at a certain stage of ineptitude, or made to serve organisms which are ultimately not of evolutionary value." ⁴

What we must comprehend, if we are to understand Plato, is that his view of philosophy (the love of and search for wisdom) is totally different from the scholastic view.

Wisdom for Plato was not just highly-compressed human erudition or potted profundity, as it is currently viewed. Wisdom was the soul's experience of "returning into herself" and reflecting, passing "into the realm of purity, and eternity, and immortality, and unchangeableness, which are her kindred, and with them she ever lives, when she is by herself and is not let or hindered; then she ceases from her erring ways, and being in communion with the unchanging is unchanging. And this state of the soul is called wisdom." ⁵



The difficulty is that since the time of Aristotle, what has been called philosophy is but the distant echo of what it was to Plato. Beginning with Aristotle, "philosophy" has become nothing more than the intellectual analysis and synthesis of concepts into systems of thought which other later "philosophers" can then analyze and critique, building their own superstructures of conjecture.

Having recently read dozens of books and Web sites about Plato, I became convinced that of the making of unenlightened, unenlightening material about Plato's "philosophy" there appears to be no end. Each scholastic "Plato expert" (self-appointed) attempts to stretch Plato's body of works on a procrustean bed and mangle the corpse until it fits the author's presuppositions and prejudices.

Michel de Montaigne, the French essayist, observed that many sorts of "learned authors" refer to such authoritative texts as Plato's dialogues, as little more than rhetorical ballast for their own views.

"See how Plato is tossed and turned about. All are honored to have his support, so they couch him on their own side. They trot him out and slip him into any new opinion which fashion will accept. When matters take a different turn, then they make him disagree with himself." 6

From the death of Plato, scholars have tried to interpret and explain Plato's "philosophical system." Beginning with Aristotle, scholastic philosophers have seen philosophy as nothing more than the dissolution and rebuilding of concepts by the rational understanding. Thus we have a sub-library brimming over with unreadable tomes "explaining" Plato's "philosophy" in terms completely alien to Plato. Anyone who makes an honest effort to read Plato on his own terms recognizes at once that this is a different kettle of fish--this is not what you get in Philosophy 101 at the state university today.

Not only are Plato's words and ideas those of a mystic, not a scholar, the very way he writes identifies him as a dramatic artist painting word pictures, not an academic. The very structure which he uses for most of his writings--the dialogue form--makes it clear that Plato is not interested in creating a scholarly SYSTEM which can then be used as the corpus for scholarly study by "learned" pedants.

"One can only be thankful that for once in the history of the world Lady Philosophy learned to speak with utter charm the language of true poetry, and that Plato preferred the dramatic essay, with its personal touch, to dry-as-dust system-building."

William Chase Greene, "Introduction," *The Dialogues of Plato* (Jowett translation), Liveright Publishing, 1927

As with all Perennialist teachers, Plato's purpose is to assist his students achieve a higher kind of knowledge: the direct perception of forms or ideas by the "eye of the soul." Plato will thus do or write whatever assists in achieving that goal.

If scholars paid more attention to Plato's own ideas expressed in his writings--instead of to their fantasy-castles of ethereal supposition--they would hear him tell them that only some of the ideas of a Perennialist teacher can be expressed in words, that the esoteric teaching can only be passed from teacher to student in oral transmission. 7

"Exiled from the true home of the spirit, imprisoned in the body, disordered by passion, and beclouded by sense, the soul has yet longings after that state of perfect knowledge, and purity, and bliss, in which it was first created.

"Its affinities are still on high. It yearns for a higher and nobler form of life. It essays to rise but its eye is darkened by sense, its wings are besmeared by passion and lust; it is 'borne downward until it falls upon and attaches itself to that which is material and sensual,' and it flounders and grovels still amid the objects of sense.

"And now, Plato asks: How may the soul be delivered from the illusions of sense, the distempering influence of the body, and the disturbances of passion, which becloud its vision of the real, the good, and the true?

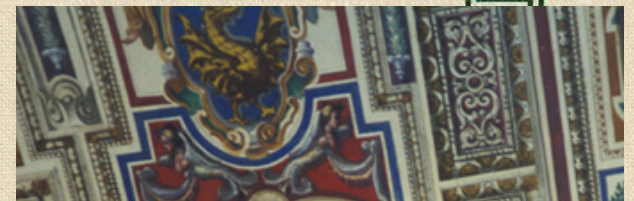
"Plato believed and hoped that this could be accomplished by *philosophy*. This he regarded as a grand intellectual discipline for the purification of the soul. By this it was to be disenthralled from the bondage of sense, and raised into the empyrean of pure thought, 'where truth and reality shine forth.'

"All souls have the faculty of knowing, but it is only by reflection and self knowledge, and intellectual discipline, that the soul can be raised to the vision of eternal truth, goodness, and beauty--that is, to the vision of God."

B. F. Cocker, *Christianity and Greek Philosophy*, 1870

Once recognizing that Plato was a Perennialist teacher, we then stop expecting to find in his writings the usual system-building, logistical argumentation, or theoretical superstructure. In his writings, we look in upon Plato as he is conducting his teaching sessions via the written word. He does everything he can--the dialogue format, the continual admission by Socrates that he doesn't know something, the satirization of sterile scholastic argufying--to put the reader in a non-scholastic frame of mind.

What we find in reading scholars' learned studies of Plato's philosophy--or artists' visual depictions of him--are the results of a philosophical Rorschach test. Plato is a fathomless depth into which a pedant can put his own misconceptions and rationalizations. These

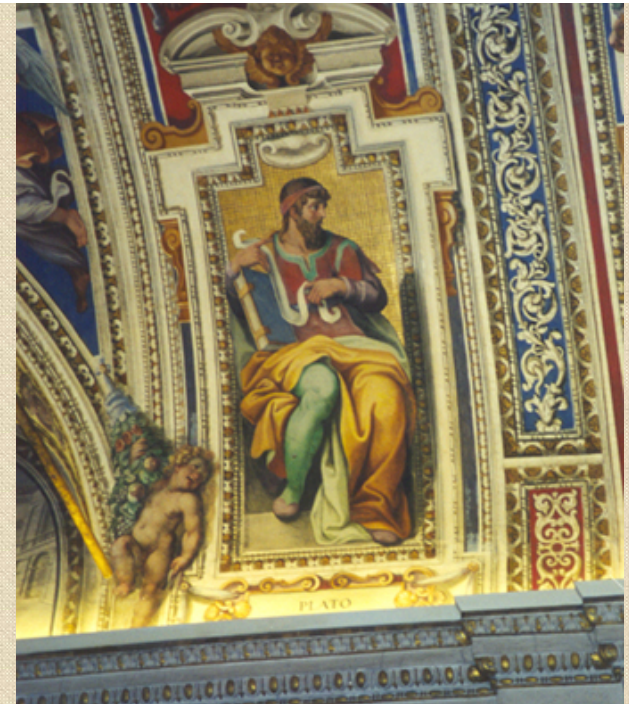


scholarly studies, then, tell us only about the scholar, not about Plato.

A good example of this self-exposure is Immanuel Kant's pathetic attempt to vilify Plato as a metaphysical charlatan. Kant (note the very words he uses indict him) claims that Plato attempts to prove the existence of a priori notions that make synthetic statements possible through reference to perceptions that have their sources not in human understanding but in the primordial ground (*Urgrund*) of all things.



Kant accuses Plato of creating these "perceptions" out of thin air, mere subjective feeling. Plato's effort involves a "mystical illumination," which brands him as having fallen into *Schwarmerei* (the enthusiasm of visionary charlatans) that is "the death of all philosophy." Thus for Kant, Plato is the charlatan par excellence--nothing more.



Anyone who has found it required, for whatever reason (taking a graduate course at Yale in my case), to plod through the unreadable volumes of Kant's philosophy, comes away with the clear and distinct perception that the death of genuine philosophy is the work of scholastics such as Kant.

In line with the modern craze over supposed "artificial intelligence," scholars have created Project Archelogos, which aims at the construction of a database which will contain all the philosophical arguments of the works of Plato and Aristotle represented according to an artificial intelligence methods which make explicit their logical interconnections.

At least one contemporary interpreter of Plato sees him as a mystic of the jnani type.

"Evidence in favour of viewing the Socratic questioning as similar to the koan is this: they often leave the recipient stultified or confused. In the Meno the analogy with a stingray is used to describe this numbing or perplexing effect, [40] though with typical Socratic involution he accepts the analogy only if he is also numbed (rendered ignorant). In the Symposium Alcibiades tells us that the conversation of Socrates is 'utterly ridiculous' to the uninitiated."

Mike King, "Was Socrates a Mystic?"

"This was indeed the Socratic understanding, the teacher stands in a reciprocal relation, in that life and its circumstances constitute an occasion for him to become a teacher, while he in turn gives occasion for others to learn something. He thus embodies in his attitude an equal proportion of the autopathic and the sympathetic. Such also was the Socratic understanding, and hence he would accept neither praise nor honors nor money for his instruction, but passed judgment with the incorruptibility of a departed spirit. Rare contentment! Rare especially in a time like ours, when no purse seems large enough nor crown of glory sufficiently glittering to match the splendor of the instruction; but when also the world's gold and the world's glory are the precisely adequate compensation, the one being worth as much as the other. To be sure, our age is positive and understands what is positive; Socrates on the other hand was negative. It might be well to consider whether this lack of positiveness does not perhaps explain the narrowness of his principles, which were doubtless rooted in a zeal for what is universally human, and in a discipline of self marked by the same divine jealousy as his discipline of others, a zeal and discipline through which he loved the divine. As between man and man no higher relationship is possible; the disciple gives occasion for the teacher to understand himself, and the teacher gives occasion for the disciple to understand himself. When the teacher dies he leaves behind him no claim upon the soul of the disciple, just as the disciple can assert no claim that the teacher owes him anything. And if I were a Plato in sentimental enthusiasm, and if my heart beat as violently as Alcibiades' or more violently than that of the Corybantic mystic while listening to the words of Socrates; if the passion of my admiration knew no rest until I had clasped the wondrous master in my arms -- Socrates would but smile at me and say: "My friend, how deceitful a lover you are! You wish to idolize me on account of my wisdom, and then to take your place as the friend who best understands me, from whose admiring embrace I shall never be able to tear myself free -- is it not true that you are a seducer ?" And if I still refused to understand him, he would no doubt bring me to despair by the coldness of his irony, as he unfolded to me that he owed me as much as I owed him. Rare integrity, deceiving no one, not even one who would deem it his highest happiness to be deceived! How rare in our age, when all have transcended Socrates -- in self-appreciation, in estimate of benefits conferred upon their pupils, in sentimentality of intercourse, in voluptuous enjoyment of admiration's warm embrace! Rare faithfulness, seducing no one, not even him who exercises all the arts of seduction in order to be seduced!"



Søren Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*

Recognizing Plato as a teaching master in the mystical tradition, we see that the past and present efforts of scholars to discover and expose faults and inconsistencies in Plato's supposed philosophical arguments are misdirected--based on ignorance of who Plato really was.

A part of Plato's purpose in his writings is to paint a portrait of a living incarnation of the ideal of the philosophical life: Socrates.

Recognizing Plato to be a Perennialist teacher, we expect to find unusual aspects in his writings which are never fully explained. Of the many such aspects, Plato's extraordinary emphasis on mathematics and geometry is one of the most fascinating. It is likely that much of this focus on mathematics came from Plato's study of the writings of Pythagoras. Plato went so far as to maintain that the Dodecahedron was the geometrical figure employed by the Demiurgus in constructing the universe.

In trying to understand Plato's idea that mathematics was somehow ontologically involved in the very nature of reality, this story best illustrates both how a Perennialist teacher operates and how numbers somehow possess a magical quality.

If we are to liken Plato's writings to other expressions of the mystical tradition, we might say that they are a kind of verbal Mystery initiation. In such countries as Egypt and Greece, the Mysteries were dramatic performances in which esoteric knowledge about human re-birth was personified by the priests and neophytes, who enacted the parts of various gods and





goddesses, performing allegorical scenes from their lives. These initiatory rites explained the hidden meanings of the self and the soul to the candidates for initiation and facilitated psychological and psychic experiences of higher states of consciousness.

"Like the adherents of the various mystical sects, Orphic and Eleusinian and Dionysian, Plato longed to be free from the trammels of the senses and almost as in the act of dying to find union with the eternal goodness in the universe. Thus the ideas may become the object of immediate mystical intuition; and Plato's thought is often permeated with the very language of the mysteries, imaginative or even ecstatic."

William Chase Greene, "Introduction," *The Dialogues of Plato* (Jowett translation), Liveright Publishing, 1927

Understanding that Plato was a Perennialist teacher, thus viewing his writings as the works of a mystic savant assisting students to achieve a higher state of consciousness, the best way to approach Plato's works are as contemplation pieces which one can use in meditation exercises.

"But what if man had eyes to see true beauty--divine beauty, I mean, pure and clear and unalloyed, not clogged with the pollutions of mortality and all the colors and vanities of human life--thither looking, and holding converse with true beauty simple and divine? Remember how in that communion only, beholding beauty with the eye of the soul, he will be enabled to bring forth, not images of beauty, but realities (for he has hold not of an image but of a reality), and bringing forth and nourishing true virtue to become the friend of God and be immortal, if mortal man may."

Plato, *Symposium*



¹ Idries Shah, *The Sufis*, Octagon Press, p. 76

2

Idries Shah, *The Sufis*, Octagon Press, p. 123

3

Idries Shah, *The Sufis*, Octagon Press, p. 303

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Idries Shah, *The Sufis*, Octagon Press, p. 347

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Plato, *Phaedo*, Dolphin Books, p. 513

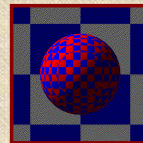
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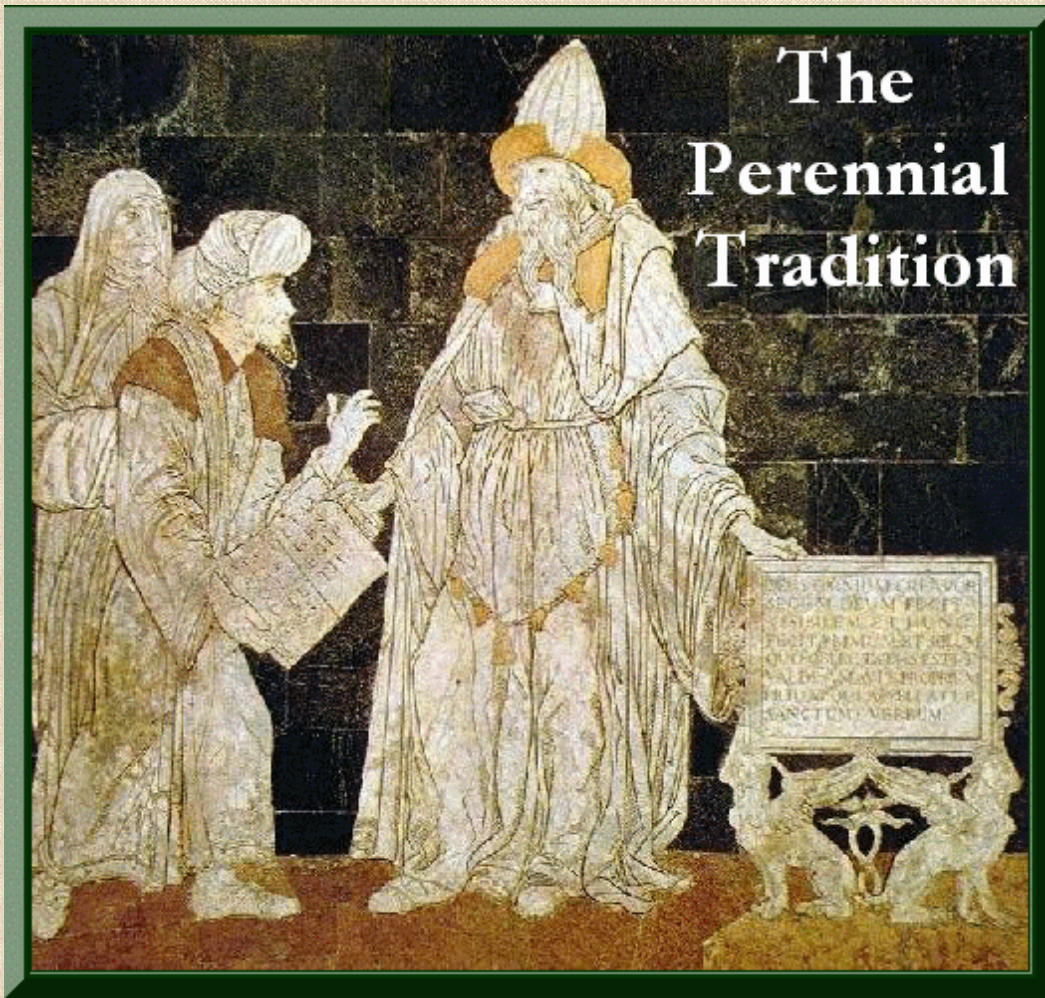
Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, Penguin, p. 662

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Protagoras, 347c-348a, *Phaedrus*, 274b-278e,

Epistle VII., 341b-345a



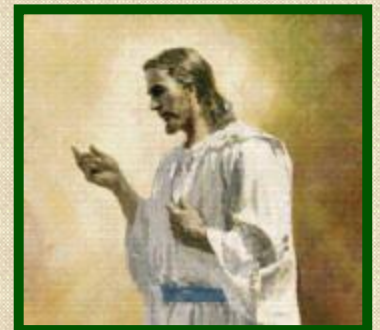


Chapter Thirteen

Jesus As A Teacher Within the Perennial Tradition

As we examine Jesus's life and teachings in reference to Perennialist concepts and practices, it is unmistakable that he was a true savant within the Perennial Tradition.

As we saw in chapter two, a major tenet of the Perennial Tradition is that authentic wisdom is adapted by a Perennialist teacher relative to the needs of the people in a particular culture and time. Teachings are organic nutrients to be assimilated not meant to remain in unaltered, undigested form for curiosity seekers, theoreticians, or autocrats to pick over and "elucidate."



Inevitably, every Perennialist teacher's ideas and exercises experience two totally divergent modes of treatment:

- a group of genuine followers retains the original message and passes it on to the next generation of students and initiates

- a group of followers who did not understand the original teaching recast the authentic teachings into distorted dogmas; these ecclesiastical and philosophical deformities are then used to build despotic establishments over which the new tyrants rule

We can expect both things to have happened to Jesus's teachings. Of all the persons writing about this period immediately following Jesus's death, only a few refer to a deliberate distortion of Jesus's teachings: Marcion, Valentinus, Origen, and several others who were called Gnostics (those who believe that *knowledge* of a rebirth is primary, beyond mere belief in a doctrine).

"The real Gnosis. . . is a mystical knowledge and *experience* transcending that *appearance* of things which the ordinary individual accepts as the only 'reality.'"

William Kingsland. *The Gnosis or Ancient Wisdom in the Christian Scriptures*



Within a short time after Jesus's death, there came into being an organized church system which developed a congeries of contradictory and disparate doctrines and writings--what was described as the *complexio oppositorum et variorum*--"a collection of opposites and various elements." Harnack¹ lists several examples of the discordant doctrines within the developing church:

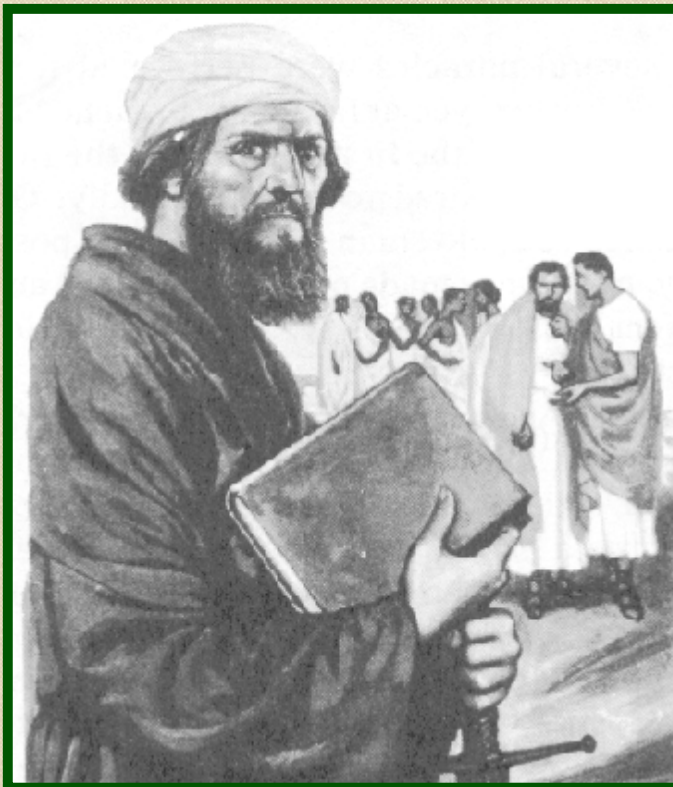
- "It placed great emphasis upon pure spirit and truth, and yet it produced a harsh and obscure literalism as well as sacraments that addressed religious sensuousness and mysticism."
- "It demanded, under threat of condemnation [and excommunication], the strictest conduct of life in restraint and renunciation, and it promised a perfect forgiveness for all sins."
- "It erected a religious democracy and from the very outset was concerned with subjecting it to strong authorities."

Along with the syncretism of contradictory doctrines, the burgeoning church developed a large number of writings which claimed to be authentic representations of Jesus's life and teachings. In this morass of confusion, a number of interpretations of Jesus's teachings vied for acceptance, having been created by the processes of excluding ideas thought to be unacceptable, accentuating personally selected doctrines, and organizing material into what was thought to be a coherent whole.



"The incipient catholic church gave to such men, who developed their own religion out of the total tradition and then set it in opposition to the church, the name of 'heretics,' i.e., those who followed what they themselves 'chose.'

"Here already we must think of the most prominent Christian missionary of the earliest period, the apostle Paul. His position is



such a unique one because he was the father not only of the catholic church but of 'heresy' as well." ²

Paul saw himself as an apostle (one sent on a mission), perhaps "the" apostle, of Jesus. He believed he had actually experienced Jesus in a mystical encounter during which he was commissioned to spread the "good news"--the gospel of Jesus's teaching--presenting a conception of God as forgiving, loving, and wise.

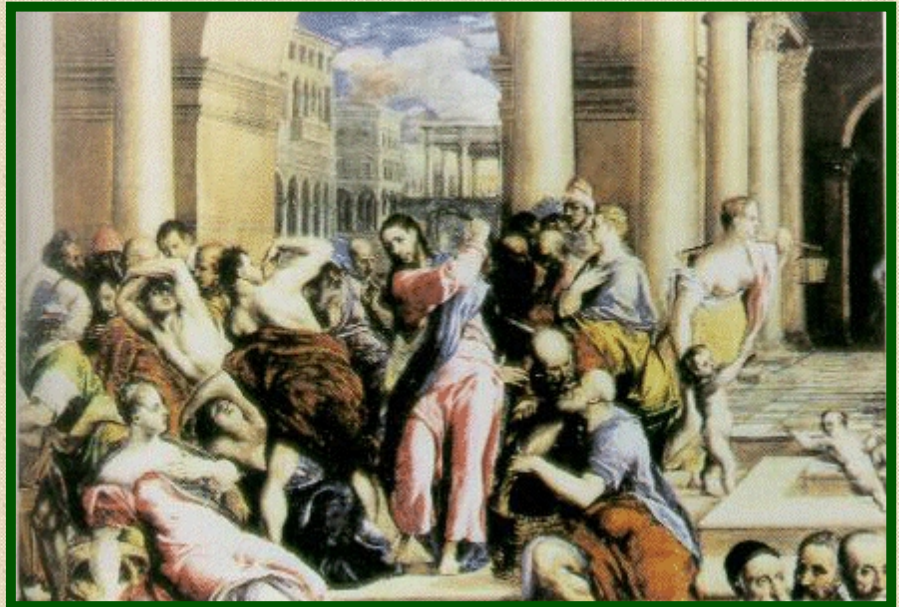
Paul was aghast when he learned that Peter and some of the other apostles of Jesus in Jerusalem and other cities were interpreting Jesus's message as an extension of Judaism, using the Hebrew Old Testament as a major scripture.

"Paul is the only one who had any apprehension of the real *esoteric* significance of the Christ Myth in its cosmic aspects, while at the same time he was obliged to base his teachings principally on the *exoteric* beliefs of his hearers which centred round the personal Jesus."

**William Kingsland. *The Gnosis or Ancient Wisdom
in the Christian Scriptures***

Paul's "heresy" was to insist that a person could become a Christian who had not submitted to circumcision or other Jewish religious laws. Paul defined Christianity as the experience of re-birth in Jesus, a spiritual awakening of the same nature that he had gone through. Both Jesus and Paul made it clear that Christianity is decidedly not an extension of Judaism.

"Christ himself. . . confirms the Pauline gospel in general and in detail. Did he not break the law again and again in his life and through his teachings? Did he not declare war against the teachers of the law? Did he not call the sinners, while those teachers desired only righteous men as their pupils? Did he not declare the greatest prophet of the Old Testament God, John the Baptist, to be an uninformed man, one who had taken offense at him? . . .



"When he forbids the placing of a new patch on an old garment and the pouring of new wine into old wineskins, he thereby strictly



forbids his people in any way to connect his preaching with that of the Old Testament. . ." ³

Thus in the early church a number of factions had arisen, with Peter and some of the other original apostles preaching a Judaised, sacerdotal Christianity requiring no more than belief, while Paul insisted that Jesus's teaching was about a spiritual rebirth such as he had himself experienced.

Both Jesus and Paul taught that religion is not mere belief in doctrines but a practical knowledge

of the way to regain one's birthright as a "Son of God."

"We do not become Christs (*Christos*) because *he* was that. We shall never become it simply by *believing* that he was that, or that he did all that the Gospels record; or that he did something *for* us which washes away our sins and gives us a short cut to eternal bliss. No. We shall only achieve the same likeness when 'that same mind (or 'word') which was also in Christ Jesus' has been 'brought to birth' in us also, i.e. when we have realized that we, equally with him, are essentially divine in our deepest nature; that we are, equally with him, 'sons' of the same 'Father,' and are thus able to manifest as he did that divinity in our very humanity."

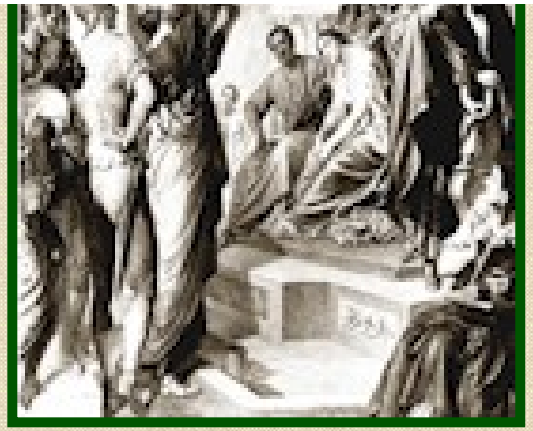
William Kingsland. *The Gnosis or Ancient Wisdom in the Christian Scriptures*

The original teaching of Jesus was thus passed on through Paul and those whom he and his immediate companions taught in the many cities they visited.

"The God that made the world and all things therein, he, being Lord of heaven



and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is he served by men's hands, as though he needed anything, seeing he himself giveth to all life, and breath, and all things; and he made of one every nation of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed seasons, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek God, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he is not far from each one of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain even of your own poets have said."



Paul Speaking to the men of Athens

One of the cities visited by Paul or his associates was Sinope, a Greek commercial city on the south shore of the Black Sea. In fact, one of Paul's fellow-workers, Aquila, had been born in Sinope. Here also was born a man who would be called the successor to Paul. His name was Marcion.

Marcion



Marcion was born in 85 C.E. at Sinope, the son of a Christian bishop. After studying with Paul or one of Paul's companions, Marcion began to teach the Pauline gospel of a spiritual re-birth in Jesus. For this "false teaching" he was excommunicated from the Sinope church.

Marcion went to Asia Minor where he became a prosperous ship owner and merchant as well as a Christian teacher. He travelled to Rome in 140 C.E. and presented the Christian church there with a gift of 200,000 sesterces, a sizeable sum. While a member of the church in Rome, he continued to develop his own view of Jesus's teachings. When he presented his ideas to the church leaders in Rome in 144 C.E, they immediately rejected his concepts, returned his money to him, and excommunicated him forthwith.

Marcion set about organizing his own followers into a separate community. In Italy, Egypt, Palestine, Arabia, Syria, Asia Minor and Persia, Marcionite churches sprang up, splendidly organized, with their own bishops and ecclesiastical organization. Women were full participants and could administer the sacraments. Marcion died in 160 C.E., but the movement to which he gave his name continued into the tenth century in Syria.

What was it that Marcion preached which was so abhorrent to the Christian autocrats--and which places him within the ranks of those persons influenced by Perennialist ideas?

"The average member of the Christian communities appeared to be unaware of the difference between the Old Testament and the Christian concept of God. From this Marcion concluded that a great conspiracy against the truth must have taken place very early in the history of Christianity. Even the twelve Apostles had not understood Jesus correctly and afterward the Christian fellowships had been infiltrated by those men whom Paul denounced as false apostles and false brethren. These must have falsified the entire Gospel, acting as instruments of the evil powers who were seeking to destroy the revealed truth. According to Marcion, this carefully concealed event was the most fateful in the history of Christianity, for it turned everything into its opposite."

Walter Nigg. *The Heretics*

According to Marcion, Jesus had preached a universal doctrine, a new revelation of the Good God, the Father over all: that humankind must undergo death and rebirth into a new being. Jesus was a Messenger who had come from a higher realm to teach humankind how to escape from its terrestrial prison and regain its original state of godlike immortality.

Jesus, Marcion said, was not the Messiah promised in the Jewish scriptures. That concept of an anointed one, he said, involved this person becoming an earthly king. This Christ concept was exclusively a Jewish idea, but the misguided, deluded Christian autocrats were trying to graft Jesus's teachings onto Judaism, the creed of one small nation. To carry this out, the church leaders had adulterated and garbled the original sayings of Jesus, adding the phrase "in order that it might be fulfilled" to everything Jesus did,

to "prove" that he was the Jewish Messiah.

The New Testament "was *made* in its present form largely in order that it might conform with the supposed prophecies in the Jewish Old Testament Scriptures concerning an earthly Messiah, as is well shown in the numerous statements 'that the Scripture might be fulfilled,' or 'according to the Scriptures.'"

William Kingsland. *The Gnosis or Ancient Wisdom in the Christian Scriptures*

If Jesus used the Christ concept in reference to himself it would have been in an entirely new, non-Jewish manner, with different content and meaning. The term *Christos* simply means "anointed one," and Jesus would have considered himself anointed or commissioned to communicate a specific teaching.

Because he felt that the writings about Jesus then in circulation were so thoroughly corrupted, Marcion created his own gospel which was used in the various Marcionite churches.

Marcion taught that the Jewish ideas about God, as set forth in the Old Testament, were inferior and antagonistic to the ideal of the Good God revealed by Jesus. Marcion saw that the Old Testament taught a false view of a hateful, avenging God. In Marcion's view, Jesus had taught a new concept of the one true God--so there can be no reality to the evil "God" of the Old Testament. Persons who allowed themselves to believe in the Old Testament concept of God created a fetid, evil "world" of illusion and suffering, whereas Jesus had taught about real life--life in the spirit with Jesus and a return to the loving God.



"Marcion's view was in some respects even more moderate than the judgment of some of our modern thinkers; he was willing to admit that the Yahweh of the Old Testament was just. With great acumen he arranged the sayings and doings ascribed to Yahweh by the writers, and compilers, and editors of the heterogeneous books of the Old Testament collection, in parallel columns, so to say, with the

sayings and teachings of the Christ--in a series of antitheses which brought out in startling fashion the fact, that though the best of the former might be ascribed to the idea of a Just God, they were foreign to the ideal of the Good God preached by Christ. We know how in these latter days the best minds in the Church have rejected the horrible sayings and doings ascribed to God in some of the Old Testament documents, and we thus see how Marcion formulated a protest which must have already declared itself in the hearts of thousands of the more enlightened of the Christian name."

G.R.S. Mead. *An Introduction to Marcion*

The oldest dated Christian inscription we have comes from a sign over the doorway of a Marcionite building in a Syrian village:

"The Lord and Saviour Jesus, the Perfect One"

The date next to the inscription is October 1, A.D. 318. From this and other records we know that the Marcionites referred to Jesus as the *Chrestos*, the Greek word for perfected one, the holy one, the saint. The Greek word for Messiah, in the Jewish sense, is *Christos*. Later Christian translators who found the word *Chrestos* would probably have automatically changed it to *Christos*, thus changing the message of Christianity from a universal religion proclaiming the attainment of a perfected being to a divine Saviour accessible only through the Church.

Valentinus



Valentinus. a second century Gnostic Christian, was born in Egypt and educated in Alexandria. He went to Rome about the same time as Marcion--during the reign of Pope Hyginus (136-40 C.E.). He probably studied with Marcion and became one of his successors, teaching in Rome for more than twenty years.

Valentinus possessed a discerning intelligence and spoke with eloquence. While in Rome he attracted a large following, his disciples including Clement of Alexandria, Origen, Theodotus, Ptolemaeus, Marcus, and Heracleon. He agreed with Marcion that the teaching of Jesus had been corrupted by

false apostles and other false leaders in the church. The disciples of Valentinus claimed that he had received the teachings he preached from Theodas, disciple of Paul.

Valentinus' ***Gospel of Truth*** shares common ground with parts of all the New Testament books except the Pastoral Epistles. It resembles the *Shepherd of Hermas* which was probably written about the same time. John's gospel was Valentinus' favorite and he felt it prophesied a separate revelation which would lead initiated disciples into the whole truth (John 16:12-14):

"When the Spirit of truth arrives, he will guide you into all truth; for he will not speak from his own knowledge, but will reveal what he receives through inner discernment and will reveal the future to you."

Valentinus felt that he had experienced this new revelation from the Spirit of truth.

In about 140 C.E., Valentinus was passed over for the office of bishop of Rome. About twenty years later he moved to Cyprus and, abandoning orthodoxy, began teaching his own view of Jesus's message. Valentinus' followers continued his teachings and created two schools, one centered in Italy, the other in Alexandria.

"The real fact, therefore, is not that Gnosticism was a 'heresy,' a departure from the true 'Christianity,' but precisely the opposite, i.e. that Christianity in its dogmatic and ecclesiastical development was a travesty of the original Gnostic teachings."

William Kingsland. *The Gnosis or Ancient Wisdom in the Christian Scriptures*

In Valentinus we see most clearly what Gnosticism means. Γνῶσις, *gnosis*, secret spiritual knowledge, is the means through which we regain our original, eternal being.

"Perfect salvation is the cognition itself of the ineffable greatness: for since through Ignorance came about Defect and Passion, the whole system springing from Ignorance is dissolved by *gnosis*

[knowledge]. Therefore knowledge is salvation of the inner man; and it is not corporeal, for the body is corruptible; nor is it psychical, for even the soul is a product of the defect and is a lodging to the spirit; therefore salvation is spiritual; so that to us suffices the knowledge of universal being: this is the true salvation."

Origen

Origen (185-252 C.E.) was another of the early Christians who interpreted Jesus's teachings in a Perennialist manner. Origen was born in Egypt and dedicated himself to Christian piety at an early age, even going to the extreme of self-castration. As a student of Clement of Alexandria, Origen taught that there is a vital difference between the exoteric (public) and esoteric (secret) teachings of Jesus. Jesus's teachings contained, according to Origen, three levels of meaning:

- literal meaning: *somatikos*
- moral meaning: *psychikos*
- mystical meaning: *pneumatikos*



Those who had been initiated into the mysteries of Jesus's teachings, the pneumatics, could find in them a portion of the mysteries of the Christian faith by interpreting what appear to be ordinary elements--people, events, concepts--as spiritual meanings or symbols. Every pneumatic Christian, according to Origen, becomes a Christ, a New Man. Man, he said is a microcosm. "Understand," he said "that you are a second world in small, that within you there are sun and moon and stars as well." God is the Great Teacher who guides human souls so they may be led



back to their heavenly origin without forfeiting their right of free self-determination. In this way all souls will ultimately return to God.

Origen was an enthusiastic student of Greek philosophy, studying with Ammonius Saccas, Plotinus' teacher. This is undoubtedly one of the sources through which he came into contact with the Perennial Tradition. Gregorius Thaumaturgus, a student of Origen, said that "he taught us to seek wisdom by perusing all existing writings of the old philosophers and poets, as far as our strength enabled us, not excluding anything."

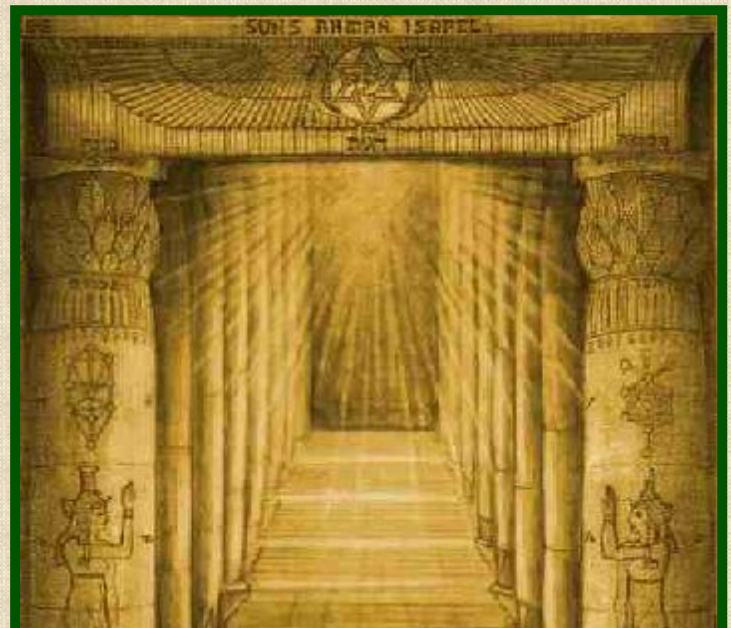
Origen considered *gnosis*, higher knowledge, as far superior to faith. This *gnosis*, he taught, can only be imparted by illumination and only a person who has actually experienced enlightenment can call himself a pneumatic. After entry into the spiritual body, a pneumatic can gain insights into the ultimate ground of existence with the "eye of the soul." As with later teachers in the Perennial Tradition, Origen's was a love mysticism; the soul seeking spiritual marriage with the Logos. The pneumatic Christian experiences a mystical ascent of the soul in which he becomes intoxicated with divinity. As the pneumatic practices an inner, wordless prayer, Christ is born in his soul.

"Knowing that Christ has come, we see that because of him there have been many Anointed Ones in the world, who like him have 'loved righteousness and hated iniquity.'"

Jesus the Perennialist Teacher

In Marcion we find the idea that even the apostles of Jesus had not understood their master. In Marcion, Valentinus, Origen, and many others writing in the first two centuries C.E., Jesus is depicted as a Perennialist teacher, bringing the message of *rebirth into a new being*.

In one of the extra-canonical gospels, purportedly written by the apostle John, we see both



these ideas in bold relief.

Selections from *The Acts of John*

"Now before he was taken by the lawless Jews . . . he gathered all of us together and said: Before I am delivered up unto them let us sing an hymn to the Father, and so go forth to that which lieth before us. He bade us therefore make as it were a ring, holding one another's hands, and himself standing in the midst he said:

"I am the Word who did play and dance all things.

Now answer to my dancing.

Understand by dancing what I do.

Answer Amen unto me. He began, then, to sing an hymn and to say:

"Glory be to thee, father.

"And we, going about in a ring, answered him: Amen.

"Thus, my beloved, having danced with us the Lord went forth. And we as men gone astray or dazed with sleep fled this way and that. I, then, when I saw him suffer, did not even abide by his suffering, but fled unto the Mount of Olives, weeping at that which had befallen. And when he was crucified on the Friday, at the sixth hour of the day, darkness came upon all the earth. And my Lord standing in the midst of the cave and enlightening it, said: John, unto the multitude below in



Jerusalem I am being crucified and pierced with lances and reeds, and gall and vinegar is given me to drink. But unto thee I speak and what I speak hear thou. I put it into thy mind to come up into this mountain, that thou mightest hear those things which it behoveth a disciple to learn from his teacher and a man from his God.

"And having thus spoken, he showed me a cross of light fixed (set



up), and about the cross a great multitude, not having one form: and in it (the cross) was one form and one likeness. And the Lord himself I beheld above the cross, not having any shape, but only a voice: and a voice not such as was familiar to us, but one sweet and kind and truly of God, saying unto me: John, it is needful that one should hear these things from me, for I have need of one that will hear. This cross of light is sometimes called the word by me for your sakes, sometimes mind, sometimes Jesus, sometimes Christ, sometimes door, sometimes a way, sometimes bread, sometimes seed, sometimes resurrection, sometimes Son, sometimes Father, sometimes Spirit, sometimes life, sometimes truth, sometimes faith, sometimes grace.



"But this is not the cross of wood which thou wilt see when thou



goest down hence: neither am I he that is on the cross, whom now thou seest not, but only hearest his voice. I was reckoned to be that which I am not, not being what I was unto many others; but they will call me something else which is vile and not worthy of me. . . .

"Thou hearest that I suffered, yet did I not suffer; that I suffered not, yet did I suffer; that I was pierced, yet I was not smitten; hanged, and I was not hanged; that blood flowed from me, and it flowed not; and, in a word, what they say of me, that befell me not, but what they say not, that did I suffer. "

In the opening portion of this passage we see Jesus leading his disciples in a kind of ring dance, a practice which was used by a number of later Perennialist teachers, including Rumi. Jesus speaking and his disciples responding appears to be a kind of ritualized antiphony which in conjunction with the circular dancing

may have induced an altered state of consciousness in the participants.

In the last portion of the passage, what Jesus appears to be saying to John is: "I've been teaching you and the others for many months that the real essence of a person is not the body but the spirit. So don't be concerned about what they are now doing to my body. I am speaking to you in my spirit. My spirit cannot be crucified or pierced."



That Jesus worked within the Perennialist tradition can be deduced from the canonical New Testament itself.

"There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews:

The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

"Now of the process of re-birth there is and always has been a definite and exact science, the knowledge of which has been the property of the smallest of minorities and, for adequate reasons, has not been suffered to be promulgated to the multitude, although individuals who earnestly sought for it never failed in discovering it. The Mystery-schools of antiquity, at least before the days of



their degeneracy, possessed and administered it; it was the *raison d'être* of their existence, as was well known to the public of the time, any member of whom, prepared to abandon secular life and apply himself to the higher vocation, could seek admission therein. The Christianity of the first two centuries took over the doctrine and the science, confirmed and expanded as they became by the advent of Christ, but eventually lost them and put in their place the ecclesiastical machinery and dogmatic theology which have ruled throughout the subsequent centuries of European history, with the result that popular Christianity has for long known nothing of them. With the enjoinder of the assured necessity for regeneration

proclaimed by the Master of their faith it and its theologians and pastors are well familiar. But can it be said that 'Ye must be born again' means for them more than a vague, mysterious, metaphoric counsel of perfection capable of being satisfied by living the ordinary natural life as far as possible in accordance with the standard of conduct indicated in the Gospels? Are the words accorded more than a value for ethical purposes, to the total neglect of the possibility of their literal practical fulfilment?"

Walter Leslie Wilmhurst, Introduction to M. A. Atwood,
Hermetic Philosophy and Alchemy

The Triumph of Pseudo-Christianity

If you watch a TV history of Christianity or read a Protestant or Roman Catholic account of the early church, Christianity's becoming the official religion of the Roman state during Constantine's reign is considered a great victory. The only measure of success for these moderns is whether or not a tradition triumphed over all its competitors. Never mind what distorting of the original message had taken place. If a particular religion came out on top, it's to be considered the best.

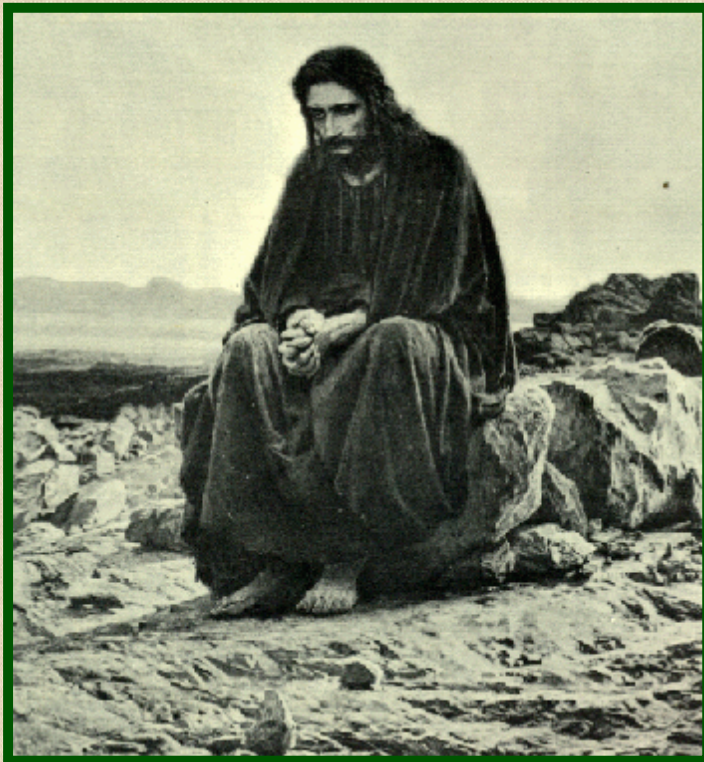
On the contrary, the formal religion that became known as the Holy Roman Church was and is nothing but a vast repository of false teachings and practices. At the present time, what is called Christianity, in all its Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant guises, is a horrible deformity of Jesus's original teachings.



"The Emperor Constantine who, having become a convert to Christianity, soon made his new faith the official religion of the Roman Empire, which he ruled from ancient Byzantium, renamed

Constantinople. And so, at about 320 A.D. the Church not only came to glorious power but was given a clearly God-sent opportunity to revenge itself on the descendants of those who had persecuted it for almost three hundred years. Unleashing a reign of terror on those pagans who stubbornly refused the new faith, Constantine and the Church waded deep in blood and apparently enjoyed the experience, for the lions enjoyed pagans as much as they had Christians and the crosses now carried different victims."

Donovan Joyce. *The Jesus Scroll*



Whereas the people Jesus befriended were the poor and outcast of society, the bureaucratized "church" began to direct its attentions to the wealthy and politically powerful. Already by the end of the first century C. E., Christians in Rome included members of the Emperor's household. As Clement, Marcion, and Origen made clear, the essence of Jesus's teaching was the esoteric initiation of a select number into the mysteries of the "new being." Within a hundred years Jesus's original teachings had been perverted into an ecclesiastical power system: the

"triumph" of pseudo-Christianity.

"Christianity, which had been the religion of a community of equal brothers, without hierarchy or bureaucracy, became 'the Church,' the reflected image of the absolute monarchy of the Roman Empire."

Erich Fromm. "*The Dogma of Christ*"

"Developing in the crowded poverty of the cities of Asia minor, Christian doctrine found its first adherents among craftsmen and laborers, many of them slaves. Its revolutionary affirmation of human rights found practical implementation in the organization of the oppressed. Jesus lived at a period of intense social ferment throughout the Roman empire. There were gilds [sic] of workers in many places. Even on the sea of Galilee, fishermen and boatmen were members of a secret religious-economic association. The great revolt of slaves led by Spartacus conquered most of southern Italy and threatened Rome in the century before Christ.

"The persecution of the Christians was regarded as a social necessity by the rulers of Rome; the spread of the doctrine nourished dangerous discontents and provided new and effective channels of organization for the lower classes. Pliny the Younger, who was governor of Bithynia in the early years of the second century, wrote to the emperor concerning the troublesome activity of Christians in forming *collegia* or gilds, and he told of torturing two maidservants in order to get information about these associations.



"As Christianity developed, it gained adherents among well-to-do craftsmen and merchants, especially in the cities of the eastern Mediterranean; economic interest made it imperative for these classes to oppose the corrupt

and oppressive power of the empire. In joining the Christian movement, they could restrain its more radical tendencies, and utilize its organized strength as a defense against imperial restrictions. The disintegration of the imperial system forced Constantine to abandon Rome and move his capital to Byzantium in order to control the eastern area of trade. At the same time, he had to adopt Christianity, as the best means of maintaining his authority over the urban centers which were the key to the economic existence of the empire.

"The adoption of Christianity as a state religion required a fundamental change in its class character and ideology. But this was not an easy task. It could not be accomplished without a violent conflict between the patrician class which ruled the empire and the majority who took Christianity literally as a gospel of equality and brotherhood. By the time of Augustine, the conflict had reached a stage of crisis, which threatened to disrupt the empire."

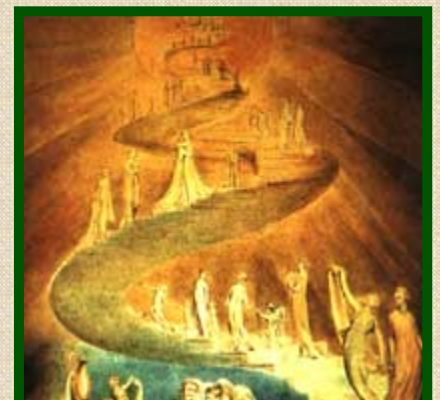
John Howard Lawson, (1950). *The Hidden Heritage*

The New Being

One of the most profound interpretations of Jesus's teachings is found in Maurice Nicoll's *The New Man*. As we peruse Nicoll's ideas about Jesus's teachings, it becomes evident that they are in the same vein as those of Origen, Marcion, Valentinus, and a number of other Perennialist teachers.

"All sacred writings contain an outer and an inner meaning. Behind the literal words lies another range of meaning, another form of knowledge. According to an old-age tradition, Man once was in touch with this inner knowledge and inner meaning. There are many stories in the Old Testament which convey another knowledge, a meaning quite different from the literal sense of the words. . . . And in the Gospels the parable is used in a similar way."

Nicoll views sacred writing, including the New Testament, as conveying a higher meaning than the literal words contain. This esoteric truth must be seen by a person with his inner organs of cognition. Cast in ordinary words and images, the higher, concealed, inner, or esoteric meanings can only be discerned by the higher



understanding. A person's literal understanding of Jesus's teachings is insufficient for grasping the higher, esoteric, secret meanings.



"Higher knowledge, higher meaning, if it falls on the ordinary level of understanding, will either seem nonsense, or it will be wrongly understood. . . . Higher meaning can only be given to those who are close to grasping it rightly. This is one reason why all sacred writings--that is, writings that are designed to convey more than the literal sense of the words must be concealed, as it were, by an outer wrapping. It is not a question of misleading people but a question of preventing this higher meaning from falling in the wrong place, on lower meaning, and thereby having its finer significance destroyed. People sometimes imagine they can understand anything, once they are told it. But this is quite wrong. The development of the understanding, the seeing of differences, is a long process."

"Knowledge is a function of being. When there is a change in the being of the knower, there is a corresponding change in the nature and amount of knowing. For example, the being of a child is transformed by growth and education into that of a man; among the results of this transformation is a revolutionary change in the way of knowing and the amount and character of the things known."

Aldous Huxley. (1944). *The Perennial Philosophy*

Jesus's teachings convey higher knowledge through the use of parables or stories. The ordinary meaning of the parable encourages a person to consider if there is a higher meaning and to see if he can discern what this is. The ordinary meaning works on the mind to lift it to a higher level of comprehension. Jesus's stories are transforming instruments which prepare a person's mind to understand higher meaning.

"The Gospels speak mainly of a possible inner evolution called 're-birth.' This is their central idea. . . The Gospels teach that a man living on this earth is capable of undergoing a definite inner evolution if he comes in contact with definite teaching on this subject."

Humankind is capable of a definite inner evolution through which its understanding expands.



"The Gospels are from beginning to end all about this possible self-evolution. They are psychological documents. They are about the psychology of this possible inner development--that is, about what a man must think, feel, and do in order to reach a new level of understanding."

A part of this teaching about rebirth to a new being is the idea that man internally is a seed capable of a definite growth--if he dies to being a seed. Thus, as we are we are incomplete. Jesus's esoteric teaching says that man is capable of a second birth. However, this re-birth or second birth belongs to the inner aspect of man, not to man as he seems to be in himself, a materialistic body living on earth.

"The esoteric teaching about knowledge and being refers to the fact that knowledge cannot be understood unless there is a corresponding development of being. A man may know a great deal and understand nothing because his being is not equal to his knowledge."

To experience rebirth means to evolve to a higher level of understanding. This can only be achieved by new knowledge, *gnosis*, and by practicing this new understanding. The *gnosis* or knowledge which gives man this possibility of evolving is sometimes called Truth and at other times called the Word. It is not ordinary truth or knowledge; it is knowledge about this further evolutionary step which man can take.

"In the esoteric schools of which we can see traces in ancient literature, many very severe disciplines existed before a candidate was allowed to receive esoteric knowledge. He might have to serve in a most menial position for years, subject to insults that were a test on the side of being. If he passed these tests successfully and developed in himself strength and patience he was allowed to receive some knowledge. But if he broke, if he pitied himself, if he complained, if he was weak in his being, if he lied, if he behaved maliciously, if he took advantage of others, if he was resentful, if he thought he was better than other people, he received no knowledge."

The Esoteric Interpretation of Paul's Writings

We can best understand how the *New Testament*--including Paul's writings--were interpreted by **Esoteric Christians** through studying the outstanding book by Elaine Pagels, *The Gnostic Paul*. In this book, Pagels references the various



interpretations of Paul's writings by distinct groups of esoteric Christians.

"The Valentinians claim that most Christians make the mistake of reading the scriptures only literally. They themselves, through their initiation into gnosis, learn to read his letters (as they read all the scriptures) on the *symbolic* level, as they say Paul intended. Only this pneumatic reading yields 'the truth' instead of its mere outward 'image.'"

Esoteric Christians believed that Paul, throughout his letters, **4** was referring to two very different kinds of Christians:

- Exoteric Christians

- referred to as:

- *psychichos*: Greek for earthling or as the King James translates it: natural man

- Jews (used as a symbolic word)

- seek "salvation" by "works" "according to the law"

- accept only what they see with their own eyes, needing "works of power" to believe

- have access to and understand only the exoteric meaning of

spiritual writings

■ Esoteric Christians

- referred to as:
 - *pneumaticos*: Greek for spiritual persons
 - Gentiles (used as a symbolic word)
- seek knowledge (*gnosis*) and wisdom (*sophia*) through the spirit
- understand through spiritual discernment the wisdom which to earthlings seems foolish
- have access to and understand the esoteric meaning of spiritual writings

It was particularly in such passages as the second chapter of I Corinthians that Esoteric Christians felt sure Paul acknowledged and authorized the secret wisdom tradition which they had received from him through such emissaries as Theodas.

I Corinthians 2:6-8: "We do speak wisdom (*sophia*) among the initiates (*teleioi*), but not the wisdom of this age or of the archons of this age, who are passing away. But we speak the hidden wisdom of God in a mystery, which God ordained before the aions for our glory. None of the archons of this age knew this: had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory."

I Corinthians 2:14-16: "For the earthling (*ho psychichos*) does not receive the things of the spirit of God: they are foolishness to him, and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually (pneumatically) discerned. The spiritual (*ho pneumatikos*) on the other hand discerns all things, but himself is discerned by no one. For who has known the mind of the Lord, and who may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ."

In such passages, esoteric Christians believed that Paul was speaking of the secret mystery tradition which only he among all the apostles knew and transmitted. Whereas Paul preached a simplified message of "Christ crucified" to the earthlings--the exoteric Christians--among the initiates he

taught the higher wisdom, the hidden gnosis of re-birth. Higher spiritual truth cannot be fully communicated by means of written documents, so Paul only referred to it and then sent such emissaries as Theodas and Timothy to initiate them into the secret rites leading to actual regeneration--death and rebirth through a spiritual baptism.

What we receive from esoteric teachings within the Perennial Tradition depends entirely upon what we have made of ourselves.

"A divinity approaches you. It is either everything or nothing. Nothing, if you meet it in the frame of mind with which you confront everyday matters. Everything, if you are prepared, and attuned to the meeting. What the Divinity is in itself is a matter which does not affect you; the important point for you is whether it leaves you as it found you or makes another man of you. But this depends entirely on yourself. You must have been prepared by a special education, by a development of the inmost forces of your personality for the work of kindling and releasing what a divinity is able to kindle and release in you. What is brought to you depends on the reception you give to it."

Rudolph Steiner. *Christianity as Mystical Fact*

Some of the New Testament is a record of spiritual experiences which are reproducible in our lives. It is our responsibility to determine what is genuine and what is counterfeit in the New Testament, just as we must discriminate in regard to all teachings. Some parts of the New Testament are dogmas added by later sectarians to support their personal prejudices. For example, many references to Jesus's actions as fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies were added by persons trying to prove that Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. As we examine the New Testament discerningly we discover elements which do not ring true, certain supposed "miracles" and mythological events that



cast Jesus in an unfavorable light.

Even so, there are genuine components of the New Testament which comprise spiritual experiences which we should reproduce in our lives. This is especially true of the central teaching of the New Testament: rebirth into a higher consciousness.

The Ancient Teaching

It is terribly difficult for us to grasp the meaning of Jesus's teaching about the new being. Our natural tendency is to construe it as a metaphor, not an actual inner experience of death and new life. We have explored the dimensions of this death experience in the chapter on Illumination.

This rebirth teaching is as old as humankind. It is the first teaching of Hermes Trismegistus.

Tat, the son of Trismegistus, asks his father to teach him about rebirth, claiming that he has learned to see through the illusions of the world and is now ready for the final initiation. Trismegistus tells Tat that rebirth is through acquisition of higher wisdom, the seed of the True Good, which must be sown in him by the Will of God. The reborn person "will be god, the son of God, all in all, composed of all the Powers."

Trismegistus tells Tat that he himself has had the rebirth experience. With growing excitement, Tat implores him to pass it on to him. "Who is the activator in the work of regeneration?" he asks, and the reply is, "The Son of God, a man like other men, by the will of God." Tat asks what truth is, and he is told that it is "that . . . which can only be apprehended by itself, the unalterable Good, the Incorporeal." It cannot be perceived by the senses and can only be known by the effects of its power and energy, which demands that a person must be capable of understanding rebirth in God. "Am I not capable of this, O Father?" cries Tat, and the answer is that he must draw it to himself and it will come; wish it and it will be produced; arrest the activity of the bodily senses and the divinity will be born in him; purify himself from the "irrational punishments of matter."

When his rebirth experience is completed, Trismegistus leads Tat out of the "tent" (translated tabernaculum by Ficino) under which he had been and which was constituted by the circle of the zodiac. The powers sing in Tat the Hymn of Regeneration.

Unmistakably, the Hermetic writings constitute an ancient embodiment of the Perennial Tradition which pre-dates Plato. As we saw in Chapter 11, Plato saw philosophy (*philosophia*) as the actual achievement of a higher state of consciousness, gained through self-discipline and mystical contemplation. According to Plato, *philosophia* is the actual practice of learning to leave the body and live in the soul, the spiritual body.

Those who followed the genuine teaching of Jesus--as distinct from those who created a new, state-supported ecclesiastical tyranny--understood Jesus as one of a long line of savants who initiated chosen disciples into the mystery of a mystical rebirth of the soul into a Higher Consciousness along the same lines as had Plato. The Perennialist teachers in the period following Jesus understood his true teaching and did not see him as a deity.

The orthodox Christian, of course, sees this view of Jesus as the height of error, or even heresy.



"The author's intention is to show, by means of what is here called 'mystical knowledge', how the source of Christianity prepared its own ground in the Mysteries of pre-Christian times. In this pre-Christian mysticism we find the soil in which Christianity thrived as a germ of quite independent nature. This point of view makes it possible to understand Christianity in its own independent being, even though its evolution is traced from pre-Christian mysticism. If this point of view be overlooked, it is easy to misunderstand that independent character, and to think that Christianity was merely a further development of what already existed in pre-Christian mysticism. Many people of the present

day have fallen into this error, comparing the content of Christianity with pre-Christian conceptions, and then thinking that Christian ideas were only a continuation of the former."

Rudolph Steiner, *Christianity as Mystical Fact*, 1914

If we follow Steiner's argument in the book cited, we discover that in fact he does not in any way show that this conception of Christianity as "a further development of what already existed in pre-Christian mysticism" is incorrect. Steiner merely asserts that "the nature of the divine and its relation is given by revealed [Christian] theology, which is not accessible to man's own researches and is, as the substance of faith, superior to all knowledge."

The underlying essence of Jesus' teaching was precisely what Hermes and Plato had taught. Many of the genuine followers of Jesus' teachings, such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen, were profoundly influenced by Plato's mystical concepts. It would be correct to say that they were as much Platonists as Christians.

When the Christian faith became a secularized, sacerdotal autocracy supporting the depraved Roman emperor Constantine, the hierarchy of priests and potentates of the Church found it necessary to concoct a system of dogmas which would separate Christian theology from Platonism.



So, three hundred and twelve bishops were ordered by Emperor Constantine to work out a creed that would put a stop to the increasingly troublesome theological bickering. The emperor himself, dressed in a purple gown and with a silver diadem, opened the council. The Council of Nicaea in 325 C.E. made it clear that Christianity was to be definitely distinguished from the pagan Platonic heresy. Jesus Christ was of the same substance as God and only Christ could bring about humankind's salvation.

It is instructive to see the distinctions between the two systems of thought as outlined by a contemporary orthodox Christian:

Platonism: "Man, it says, lives in a transient world of sensible

phenomena and of conjecture, or opinion, based on it. But his soul belongs to a higher, truer world which is eternal and immutable. To regain its kinship with that world the soul must purify itself from this world; it must seek to die to this world, to live now the life it hopes it may lead after death. This purification has two sides: moral and intellectual. Moral purification will restore to the soul transcendence over the body; the body will cease to disturb its endeavours after contemplation. Intellectual purification, or dialectic, trains the soul in abstract thought; it weans the soul from dependence on the world of sense and accustoms it to the more austere, but also more real because eternal, world of the Forms or Ideas. When the soul has sufficiently purified itself it may - suddenly and without warning - attain contemplation, theoria, of the highest of the Forms, the Beautiful or the Good, for which it has longed. In this gratuitous act of theoria the whole world of ultimate reality is seen as a single whole, and the meaning even of sensible reality becomes clear. This sudden ultimate act of theoria is experienced as ecstasy: the soul seems to transcend itself, to be rapt out of itself. At the same time, this ecstasy is a sort of home-coming. The soul becomes what it truly is in its deepest self; its kinship with ultimate reality becomes something experienced."



Christianity: "But, for Christianity, man is a creature; he is not ultimately God's kin, but created out of nothing by God and only sustained in being by dependence on His will. There is an ontological gulf between God and his creation, a real difference of being. Only in Christ, in whom divine and human natures are united, do we find One who is of one substance with the Father. . .

"Christianity, on the other hand, speaks of the Incarnation of God, of his descent into the world that he might give to man the possibility of a communion with God that is not open to him by nature."

Andrew Louth. (1981), *The Origins of the Christian Mystical Tradition*

Orthodox Christianity Devolves Into A Tyranny

In our review above of those early thinkers who understood the true essence of Jesus's teachings--Paul, Marcion, Valentinus, and Origen--we discovered that in fact the Perennialist view of Jesus and his teachings was common among them. Jesus was seen as a master within a continuing tradition of personal regeneration which had been embodied earlier in the Hermetic and Platonic writings.

Within a few centuries, we find that Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant theologians have turned away from Jesus's teachings of the rebirth of the soul to a degraded conception of religion as mere faith in the dogmas of the Church.



With such a man as Augustine, we experience the tragedy of a brilliant mind that gained an insight into the true essence of the Perennial Tradition--and Jesus's specific embodiment of that tradition--but which degenerated into self-deceiving zealotry in regard to the dogmas of the Roman Catholic Church.

Here was a person who experienced actual mystical union with Higher Consciousness in his early life but wound up as a bigot recommending that anyone not believing in the true Roman Catholic faith be tortured and killed. This hideous aspect of the murderous zealot faces us within all organized religions.

It is disappointing to see otherwise brilliant contemporary thinkers such as Max Muller, Rudolph Steiner, and Paul Elmer More--to mention only a few--discourse intelligently on the mystical aspects of Plato and then fall into the abyss of sanctimonious ecclesiasticism.

"When delivering these [Gifford] lectures [in 1893], I confess that

what I feared far more than the taunts of those who, like Henry VII, call themselves the defenders of the faith, were the suspicions of those who might doubt my perfect fairness and impartiality in defending Christianity by showing how, if only properly understood, it is infinitely superior to all other religions."

Max Muller, *Theosophy or Psychological Religion*

"That which man previously had sought to attain through the Mysteries was now replaced by the belief that Christ had lived on earth, and that the faithful belonged to him.

"Henceforward, part of what was formerly only to be gained through mystical methods, could be replaced, in the Christian community, by the conviction that the divine had been manifested in the Word present amongst them. . .

"The Mysteries handed down traditionally the means of arriving at truth; the Christian community itself propagates the truth."

Rudolph Steiner, *Christianity as Mystical Fact*, 1914

"The real change comes with Clement of Alexandria, whose life-work in the Christian field was much like that of Philo in the Jewish, an effort to enrich religion with the spoils of Platonic Idealism while still maintaining that revelation had brought a higher kind of wisdom to mankind. . . .

"In Christianity the perception of truth has become secondary to and dependent upon theological and mythological dogma, whereas to the pagan it was primary and free."

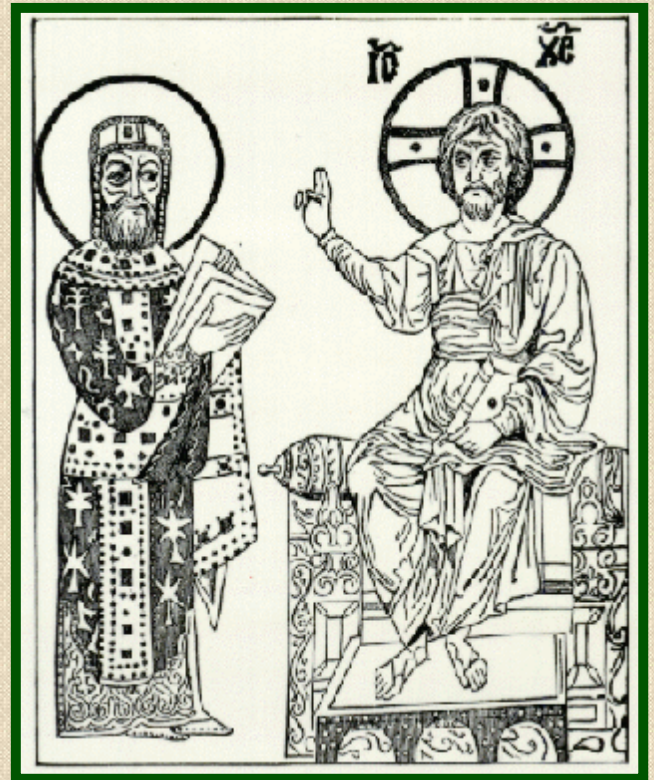
"What if the Christian scheme, by its very hardness and unreasonableness, should throw open the door to a divine attribute of mercy to which the human heart can cling as it can never quite cling to the inexorable God of Plato's philosophy? . . .

"In the end it may turn out that the Christian dogma, or myth if you prefer, lends to the idea of Providence a depth of meaning which is in the highest degree divine, yet which reason of itself cannot fathom."

Paul Elmer More *The Religion of Plato*, 1921

What a pity that thinkers such as Augustine and these three modern scholars can attain great heights in understanding the Hermetic and Platonic embodiments of the Perennial Tradition yet feel the necessity to fall back upon a dogmatic adherence to orthodox Christianity which runs completely counter to the Higher Wisdom.

A corrupt and self-serving power-system calling itself Christianity has lost all knowledge of Jesus's secret Perennialist teachings. However, the hidden, inner teachings of Jesus are still available to persons who go through the discipline of rediscovering the source, as mystics throughout the centuries have proved in their lives and writings.



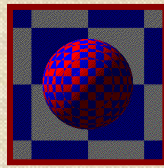
¹ Adolf von Harnack, *Marcion: the Gospel of the Alien God*,

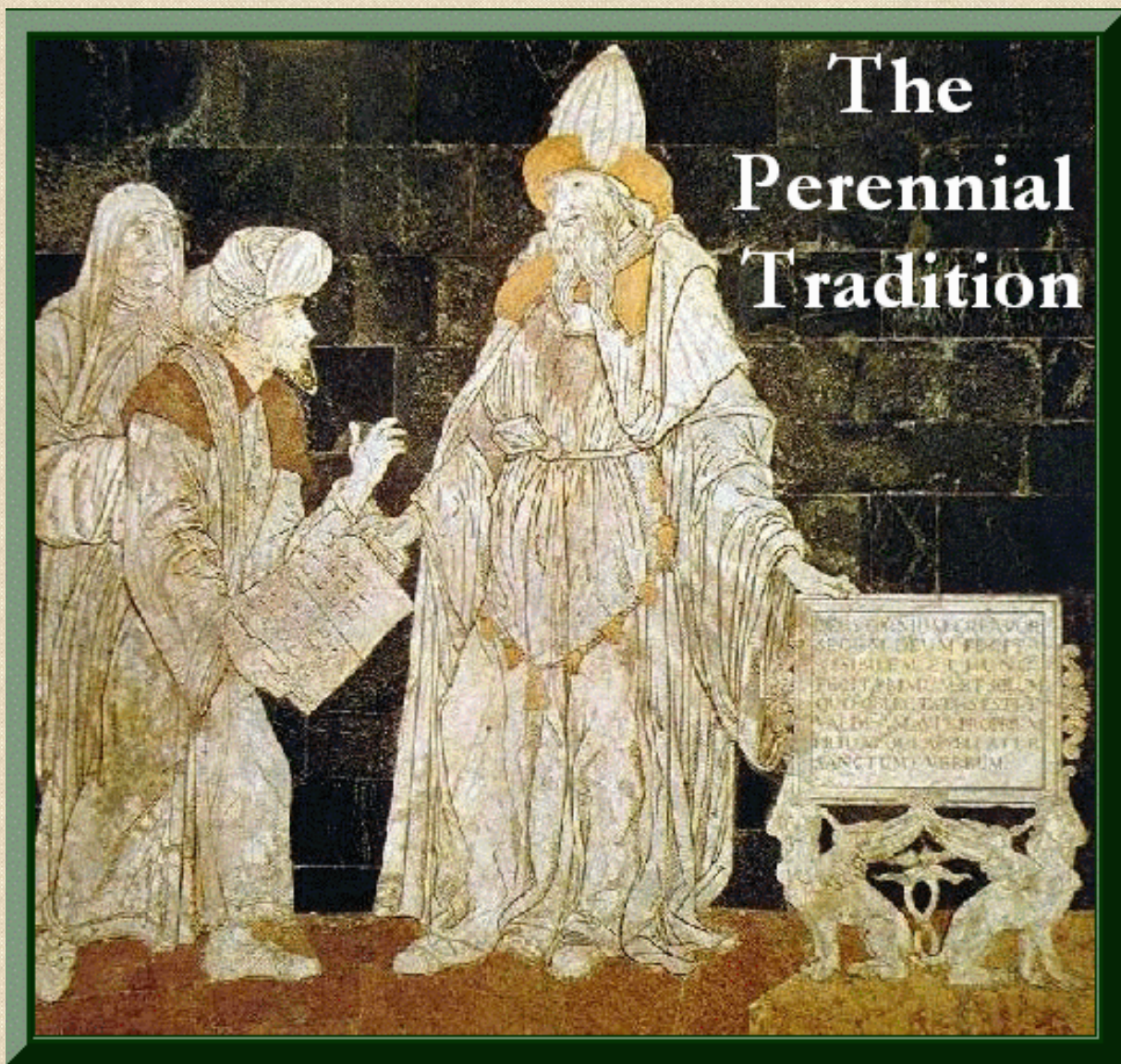
pp. 4, 5

² *Ibid.*, p. 8

³ *Ibid.*, p. 22

⁴ Esoteric Christians, such as the Valentinians, cite as authentically Pauline only the following writings: Romans, I and I Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Phillipians, Colossians, I Thessalonians, and Hebrews





Chapter Fourteen

Movies With Perennialist Strains

We're fortunate to be able to view contemporary movies which contain distinct Perennialist strains. As we saw in the chapter on Illuminated Artistic Creativity, the artist is not always

consciously aware of what Perennialist elements come through his or her creation. In this chapter we'll explore the Perennialist strains in three movies, "American Beauty," "Made In Heaven," and "Resurrection."

You might also want to explore the Perennialist strains in these other movies:

- "The Emerald Forest:" the alternate reality of a Brazilian aboriginal tribe who know what we have forgotten
- "Grand Canyon:" becoming aware of everyday miracles
- Branagh's "Love's Labor's Lost:" celebrating love in poetry, music, and dance
- "Groundhog Day:" getting it right: an alternate view of reality
- "Mr. Destiny:" the universe (Higher Power) knows what it's doing
- "It's a Wonderful Life:" a man in desperate straits is given the gift of seeing, in another dimension, what positive impact his life has had on his town and its inhabitants
- "Being There:" (the gardener interpreted as) an enlightened being studies human life by watching TV, moving through events invisibly to attain a position in which he can contribute to human evolution

"American Beauty"

AMERICAN **BEAUTY**

...look closer

To
understand
"American
Beauty" we have



to pay particular attention to the film tag line: "... look closer," a clue that we must explore the film much more discerningly to get its real meaning.

The two dozen reviews of the film that I read missed the whole significance of

the film, assuming that it was just an ordinary film that could be reviewed in the usual way by speaking of the actors, director, producers, and screenwriter. No way.

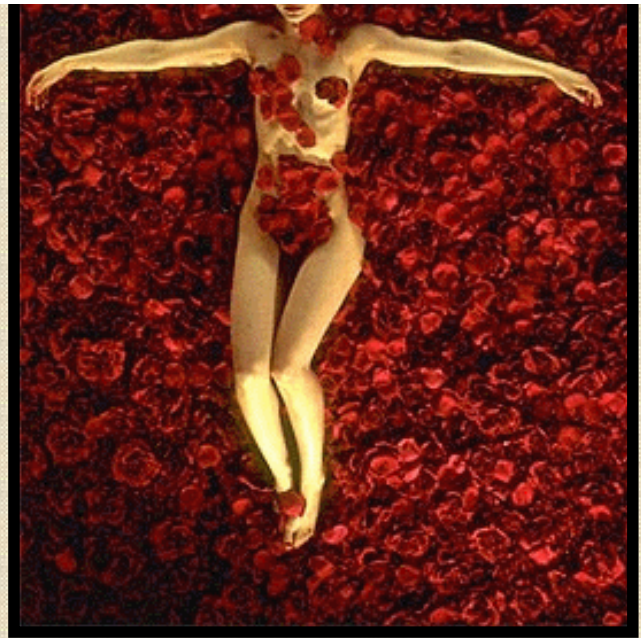
It's reassuring when a movie like "American Beauty" appears, because it contains an unmistakable mystical strain: become attuned to the underlying spiritual elements in human life. Look closer and you'll begin to see "the miraculous in the mundane." Some of the elements of the non-ordinary were touched on in the Amazon.com interview with the screenplay writer, Alan Ball.

Amazon.com interviewer: "[T]he tag line is, '... look closer.'"

Alan Ball: "And when you first see the title you think, 'American Beauty' + rose,' and then you see the movie and you think



that Angela's the 'American Beauty'--the blond cheerleader that is the secretive object of lust. But it's not Angela-- it's that plastic bag. It's the way of looking at the world and seeing what incredible beauty there is in the world.



And I think that's something that we're born with that gets ironed out of us by our culture and by experience and by conformity. I think there's a part of everybody that yearns to get that back."

Amazon.com interviewer: "There's something so simple and poetic about Ricky's encounter with the plastic bag that just keeps whirling in the breeze. You're not sure what it means, but the simple beauty of it has a profound effect. How did that come about? "

Alan Ball: "I had an encounter with a plastic bag! And I didn't have a video camera, like Ricky does. I'm sure some people would look at that and go, 'What a psycho!' But it was a very intense and very real moment. There's a Buddhist notion of the miraculous within the mundane, and I think we certainly live in a culture that encourages us not to look for that. I do like, though, that Ricky says, 'Video's a poor excuse, but it helps me remember.' Because it's not the video he's focused on; it's the experience itself. He's very connected to the world around him."

DreamWorks SKG released a mass of pictures and video clips of the movie, but didn't include a single shot of the plastic bag

scene.

"When you see something like that [a homeless dead woman], it's like God is looking right at you. Just for a second. And if you're careful, you can look right back.

"And what do you see?

Beauty."

Rickie and Jane

With movies containing a mystical ingredient, we often get no clue as to how the higher spiritual content gets through to the writer and thence into the movie itself. This is certainly true of movies such as "Resurrection," "The French Lieutenant's Woman," and Being There. With "American Beauty" we're fortunate to have the screenplay writer's own words explaining how the inspiration occurred.

- First, he had an "encounter with a plastic bag." In other words he had an epiphany in which the mystery of beauty revealed a mystical dimension hidden within the physical world.
- Then he tells us that the actual writing of the screenplay was an experience of extraordinary disclosure.

"I was working full-time as a co-executive producer on a network sitcom, so I was coming home at one in the morning and writing for two hours and going to sleep. I just got in the zone, and it seemed to have its own life and the characters seemed so real, and *it*

was like channeling".

Because Ball was "receiving" the material from a higher source--which he refers to as channeling--even he is still discovering meanings in the screenplay.

"... You have to have a deep and fundamental acceptance of mortality to really be able to see what's beautiful in life, because beauty and truth are inextricably connected. That's not a particularly original thought, but a lot of stuff in the script is really instinctive. I didn't think about what the purpose of it was, or that kind of thing. And now I find myself trying to second-guess what is symbolic of what, and what it means."



Alan Ball's deep understanding of the movie's mystical meaning is heartwarming, especially coming as it does from the world of "cinematic entertainment" where we most often get

screenwriters or directors telling us that they have no idea what the movie means, that we'll have to put in whatever meaning appeals to us. Ball says quite clearly that "the whole heart of the movie" is "Lester's journey and his realization."

"If there's any theme to this movie, it's that nothing is what it appears to be on the surface. That there is a life behind things and it's much more interesting and real than the veneer of reality that we all sort of tacitly agree to accept."

I think it's necessary to see this film at least twice to experience the full impact of the screenplay. After seeing the movie the first time and beginning this review, some questions came into my mind:

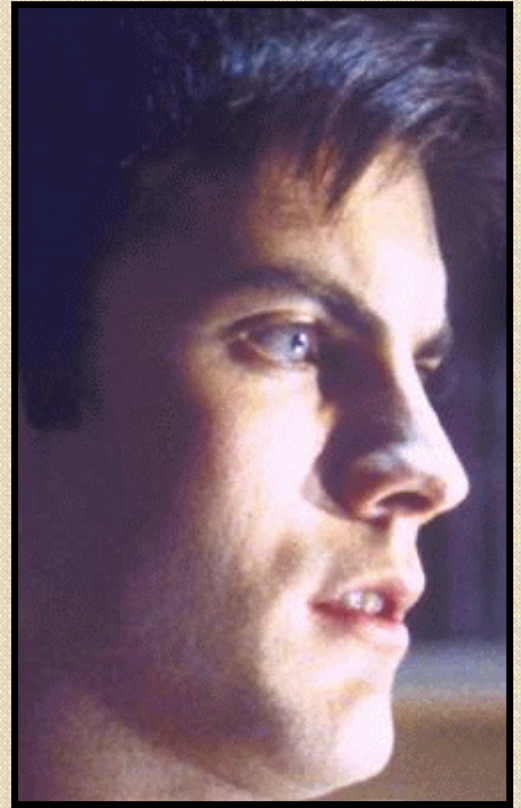
- Was the movie as multi-dimensional as I remembered it?**
- Was I projecting something onto the film that wasn't there?**

The second viewing confirmed that the movie was, indeed, as multi-dimensional as I had remembered and contained even more spiritual content than I had recalled.

On the second viewing, you'll probably see lots of things you missed, such as the sign, "Look Closer" on Lester's desk.

Also, when you first see the movie, you allow yourself to create a suspicion of Ricky, because all the usual clues are present:

- he doesn't wear the mod style clothes that other high school students do--he dresses, as Angela says, "like a Bible salesman"
- he doesn't have an ingratiating smile on his face all the time, trying to impress people
- he admits to videotaping a dead woman, and Jane and Angela find him videotaping a dead bird
- he speaks with Jane about her desire to have her dad killed
- he doesn't go for Angela, the classic Hollywood 'American Beauty,' but for Jane



With all these cues, we almost automatically put Ricky in the same category as the two whacked out brothers in *Bob Roberts*. We misinterpret Ricky as a kid psychologically damaged by a rigid, fascist Marine Corps dad.

The second time we see the film we can (not necessarily will) see an entirely different film. Lester Burnham's journey and his realization are still the focal points.



But now Ricky becomes Lester's "guide."

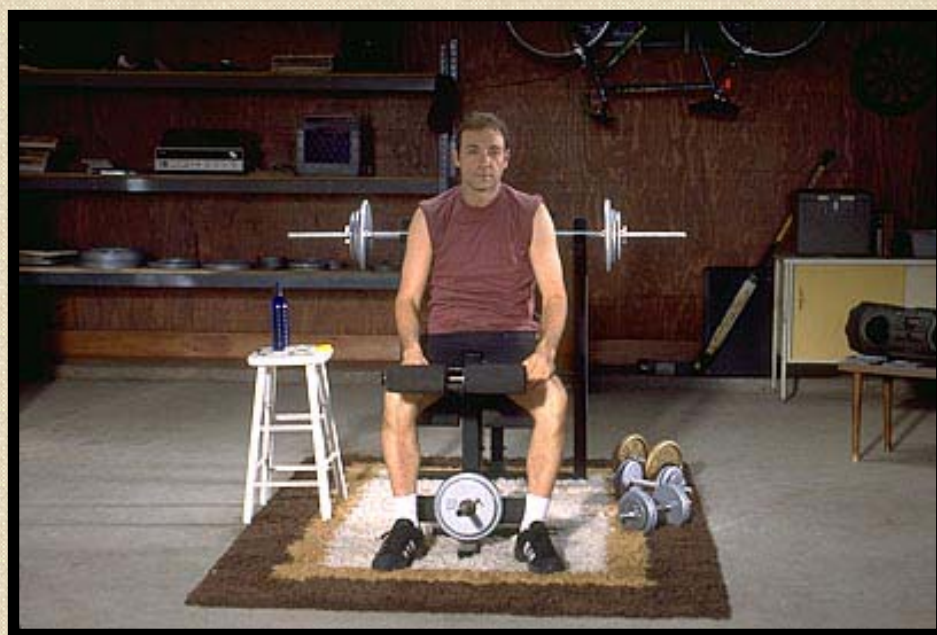
- He turns Lester



on to some
primo mind-
altering
marijuana which
brings about
Lester's
awakening.

- He provides an example of how to come at life; Lester calls Ricky his "hero," when Ricky unemotionally tells his catering boss, "Then don't pay me." Talking with Lester was more important to Ricky than a paying job. This showed Lester how to view his own horrible job and the next day Lester turns in a devastatingly honest job description which results in his forcing his corrupt boss to pay him a sizeable termination bonus.
- Lester begins to lead a life of his own choice.

Lester: "I
feel like I've
been in a
coma for
about
twenty
years. And
I'm just now
waking up."



Ricky now becomes a major focus of the film during our second viewing.

Amazon.com interviewer: "Ricky is a drug dealer, but of all the characters he seems to be the most levelheaded and the most sure of who he is."



Alan Ball: "He's certainly the most, I think, evolved. You look at Ricky and you look at what he's grown up in, the environment of repression and brutality, and it's amazing. What is it that kept him from

becoming one of those kids who goes to school with a gun and just starts shooting? Something. . . His ability to see the beauty in life is what kept him from just shutting down and becoming twisted and brutal. I think everybody has that ability, and we all make choices."

"That's the day I realized that there was this entire life behind things. And this incredibly benevolent force wanted me to know that there's no reason to be afraid. Ever.

"It's a poor excuse, I know. But it helps me remember. I need to remember.

"Sometimes there's so much beauty in the world, I feel like I can't take it. And my heart is just going to cave in."

Rickie

We'll be able to experience even more of the mystical strain of the movie when it comes out in video, for we can then play sections--such as the dancing plastic bag--by themselves as we meditate on their significance.

Movies With Mystical Content

The mystical content of a movie is embodied in the screenplay, in the direction and editing, or in the performances. At times, the screenplay is so demanding that the key parts must be played by exceptional actors for the spiritual dimensions to be disclosed. With "American Beauty," "Resurrection," and "The French Lieutenant's Woman," the screenplay embodies the mystical content so thoroughly that it makes little difference which actors play the parts. Other accomplished actresses than Ellen Burstyn or Meryl Streep could have played the female parts of Edna McCauley and Sarah Woodruff/Anna to equal effect. And in "American Beauty" many actors other than Kevin Spacey or Annette Bening could have played the parts with fine results.

In "Being There," the screenplay is so demanding that very few actors could play the part of Chance the Gardener (Chauncy Gardner). Peter Sellers certainly got some of the meaning of the part, but Sellers was too ego-obsessed to uncover all the nuances of the character. The only contemporary actor who could reveal all the dimensions of the character--and make it believable--is Anthony Hopkins.

The mystical last scene in "Being There," with Chance walking on water, was entirely the creation of Hal Ashby, the director. He built a platform in the water and shot the scene in secret, so that the studio wouldn't shut him down.



The mystical content of "The French Lieutenant's Woman" resides almost exclusively in the screenplay, but the script is so demanding that it requires a consummate actress to make the key scenes work effectively. When we plummet from the nineteenth century scarlet woman stumbling into her soon-to-be lover's arms into the twentieth century with the actress stumbling into her actor-lover's arms, it requires something more than ordinary acting to pull that off.

"American Beauty", the Ending

Lester's closing line of the movie is right on target in saying that many viewers of the film won't understand it. But it ends on the same mystical note in assuring us that someday we *will* understand the hidden dimensions the movie illustrates.

"I guess I could be pretty pissed off about what happened to me. But it's hard to stay mad when there's so much beauty in the world. Sometimes I feel like I'm seeing it all at once, and it's too much.

"My heart fills up like a balloon that's about to burst. And then I remember to relax and stop trying to hold onto it. And then feels like it flows through me like rain. And I can't feel anything but gratitude for every single moment of my stupid little life.

"You have no idea what I'm talking about, I'm sure. But don't worry, you will someday."

"Made in Heaven"



This movie contains Gnostic strains throughout the course of the story. The writer of the screenplay begins the movie with a mysterious reference to Gnosticism. A family is watching the movie, "Notorious," and we hear the dialogue between Cary Grant and Ingrid Bergman:

Grant/Devlin: "I've been a fat-headed guy, full of pain. It tore me up not having you."

Bergman/Alicia: "Oh you love me, You love me. Dev, I'm afraid I can't make it. They gave me pills to sleep."

Devlin: "Keep awake. Keep talking."

Devlin (barely audible): ". . . to get the poison out of her."

The screenplay writer has selected specific parts from the movie, "Notorious," so what we see is not the sequence of the original movie. Thus it's clear he has selected these parts to refer to certain Gnostic concepts.

"The Soul once turned toward matter, she became enamored of it, and burning with the desire to experience the pleasures of the body, she no longer wanted to disengage herself from it."

"Awake, soul of splendor, from the slumber of drunkenness into which thou hast fallen, . . . follow me to the place of

**the exalted earth where thou dwelledst
from the beginning. . . ."**

Gnostic teachings

The story begins with a young man, Mike Shea, from a poor but loving home, setting out for California to make his mark. On the way he rescues a family from drowning in a station wagon which has fallen into a river. Trying to save others, the young man dies and finds himself in heaven. He falls in love with a beautiful young lady, a new soul who has not yet been incarnated.

The young lady, Annie Packert, also falls in love with Mike and they marry and consummate their love. Annie's time for incarnation into an earth body arrives and Mike is left in heaven, bereft. He appeals to Emmet, "the one in charge," and finally persuades him to send him (Mike) back to earth. The proviso is that neither Mike nor Annie will have strong remembrance of their life in heaven, yet Mike must find Annie within thirty years or be doomed never to regain the loved one he found in heaven.

**"Yet I clothed myself in their garments,
lest they suspect me as one coming from
without to take the Pearl and arouse the
serpent against me. But . . . they . . . mixed
me [drink] with their cunning, and gave me
to taste of their meat; and I forgot that I
was a king's son and served their king. I
forgot the Pearl for which my parents had
sent me. Through the heaviness of their
nourishment I sank into deep slumber."**

Gnostic teaching, *The Hymn of the Pearl*

While in heaven, Mike and Annie had been taught that a soul can sometimes take an idea into its next incarnation. The young lady, now named Ally Chandler, has taken back the idea of educational toys and she and her father build a business on this idea. She marries a man who is obsessed with his career in television advertising, caring little for Ally. They divorce and Ally decides to move to California. Ally has also managed to remember Mike's name and she writes a book entitled *The Care and Feeding of Mike*.

"Whatever you see in this world corresponds exactly with what is in the other world; rather, all these things are samples of the other world. Whatever exists in this world has been brought here from that world."

Rumi. *Discourses*

Meanwhile, the young man, now named Elmo Barnett, leads a desultory life, wandering from pillar to post, barely managing to stay out of serious trouble. While hitchhiking in one direction, a trucker going in the opposite direction stops and offers him a ride. The trucker says, philosophically, that if Elmo doesn't know which way he's going, it won't matter what road he takes.

Elmo continues to drift and as he is walking hopelessly on a country road one day, Emmet, "the man in charge" in heaven mysteriously appears and reminds Elmo that he has only a few months left to find his love. Elmo hitches a ride with the man and woman who had been his mother and father in his previous life. All three feel an inexplicable bond and the woman tells Elmo that she is dying of cancer. Elmo has somehow managed to get a copy of *The Care and Feeding of Mike* and when he reads it he has flashes of remembrance of Annie.

During the years of his "search," Elmo passes near Ally twice without "recognizing" her. Elmo remembers faint hints of musical tunes from heaven so he decides to become a composer. After torturous effort, Elmo gains success as a composer. But the time for finding his heavenly love has almost expired.

Both Elmo and Ally now increasingly experience flashes of remembrance of their marriage in heaven, but these are ephemeral images at best. Finally, they both happen to be on the same street in a large city at the same time. Ally "recognizes" Elmo, but Elmo is only "awakened" by a strange experience. A man who appears to be a ranting street evangelist, moves alongside Elmo saying:

"Got to talk to you.

"God's got a message for you and you're going to hell.

"You're going to die of a good time on this earth."

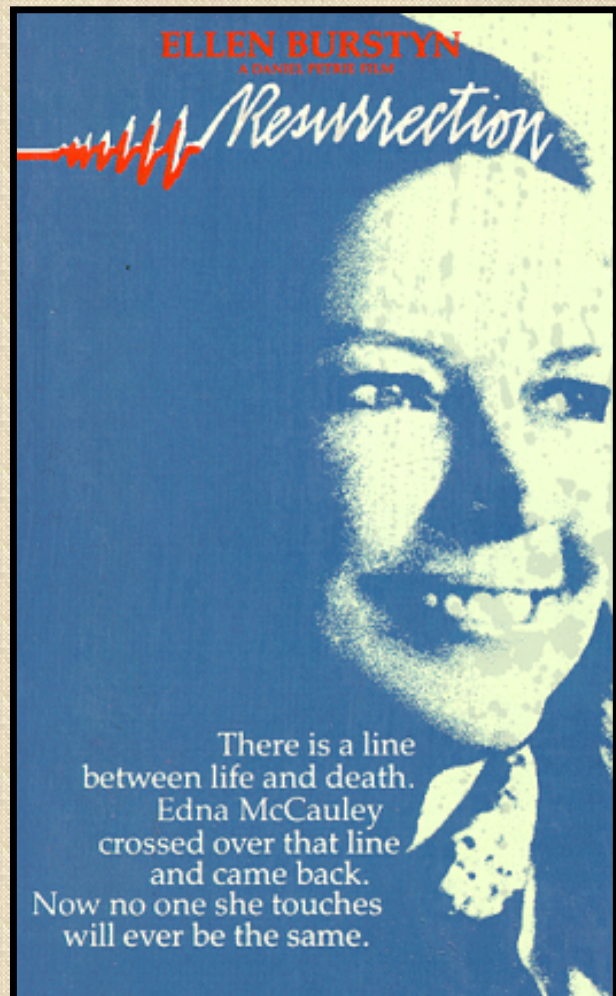
**"He called with heavenly voice into the
turmoil of the world."**

Gnostic teaching

Immediately following this, Elmo sees Annie/Ally in a vision. Ally, meanwhile, has "remembered" Elmo and when he turns toward her they both recognize each other. It is the regeneration of a marriage "Made in Heaven."

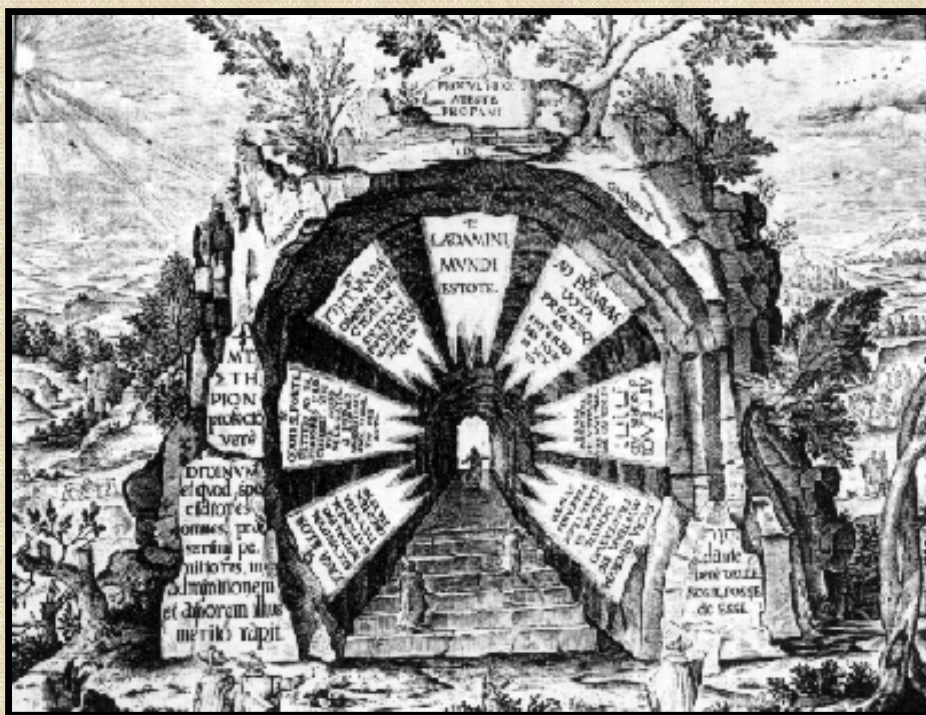
"Resurrection"

In the case of "Resurrection" we see that the mystical content resides in the original 1980 screenplay (with Ellen Burstyn as the heroine). The 1999 TV movie remake of the script (with Dana Delany as the heroine) revealed that writers and actors out of touch with the original spiritual dimension of the screenplay can produce nothing but a still-born perversion. The same kind of disfigurement took place when Marlo Thomas



tried to produce a remake of the deeply mystical movie: "It's A Wonderful Life."

The deeper meaning hidden within the movie is the story of how Esco, a healer working as a service station owner, invisibly heals Edna and transmits to her the power to heal. Edna learns through her own personal difficulties that healing is best accomplished invisibly, without crowds sounding praise and without the persons being healed knowing they are being healed.



The movie begins with the heroine, Edna, experiencing the after-life for a brief time during a car accident that kills her husband. While "dead," she

travels through a tunnel with a brilliant light at the end. In the shadows of the tunnel she sees her dead husband. As she begins to move toward him, she is suddenly brought back to life, her first experience of "Resurrection." Because of the accident, she is unable to use her legs. She returns to her original home. As she begins her long process of physical healing she discovers that she has the ability to heal herself and others with physical infirmities.

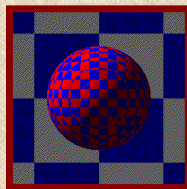
Movie viewers are here challenged to ask themselves: where did Edna get this ability to heal? Reflection will help them remember that Esco had inauspiciously placed his hands on Edna's head when she stopped by his gas station.

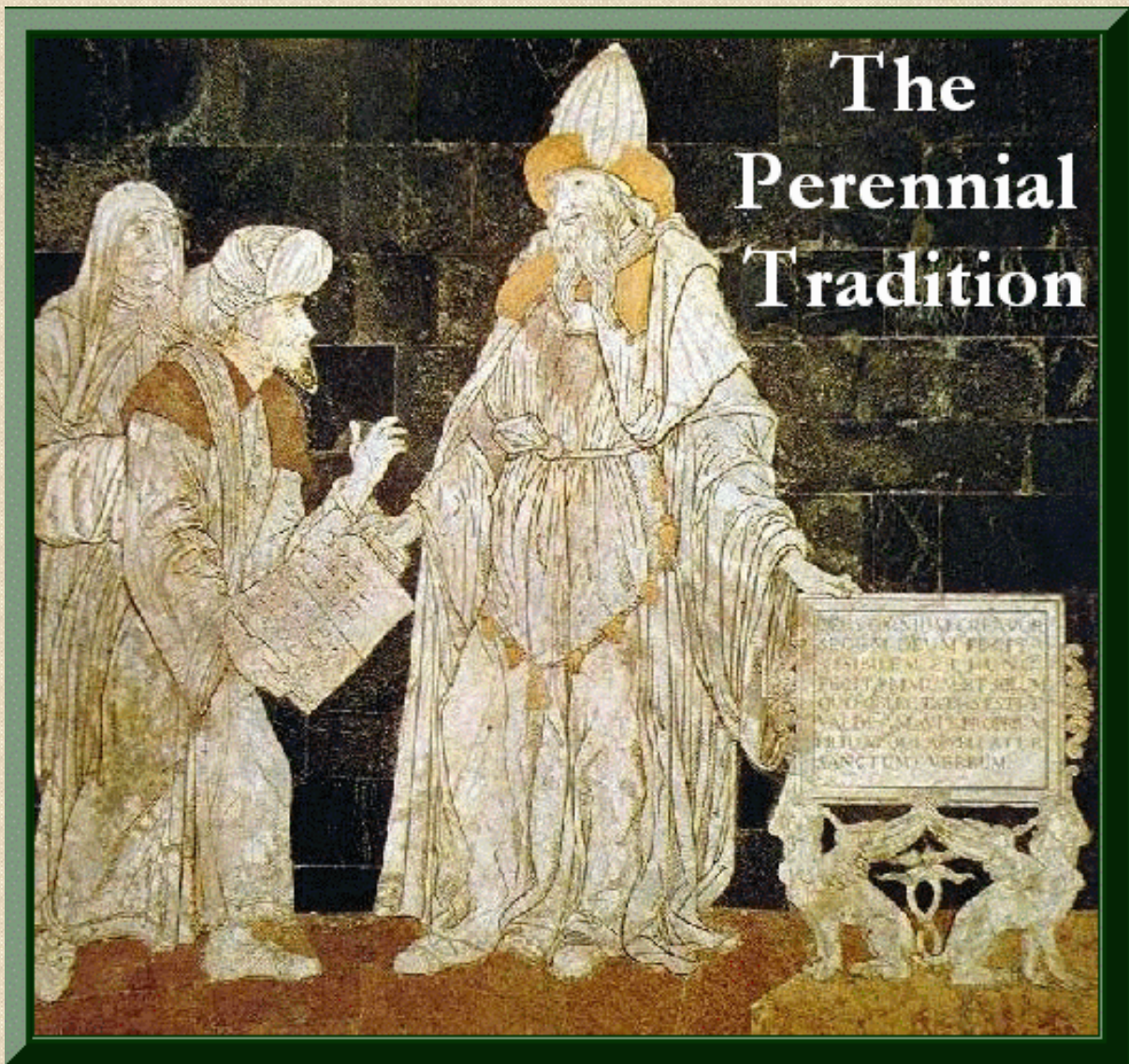
In the character of Edna's lover, Cal Carpenter, we see religious dogmatism turned deadly. Cal is unable to understand the source of Edna's healing power. He becomes mentally unbalanced and tries to kill her. In Cal we see the deadliness of ossified religious traditions which must shape all people to their own rigid molds or do them the "kindness" of killing them to save their souls.

While working to heal a woman in a California clinic, Edna experiences death and "Resurrection" again. She sees that her grandfather is dying and rushes home to be with him. Edna is able to help him enter the tunnel with the brilliant light at the end as he dies.

As the story ends, we find Edna, now an old woman, tending Esco's service station and "invisibly" healing people who pass her way.

As we live Edna's experiences in the movie, the power of the screenplay provides the opportunity for us to experience death and "Resurrection" within ourselves.





Chapter Fifteen

The Perennial Tradition Enters the West

This chapter explicates how all embodiments of the Perennial Tradition re-entered the West and helped to create Western Civilization and all transformative currents that remain with us to this day.

In his seminal work, *The Sufis*, **Idries Shah** examined the re-entry of the Sufic embodiment of the Perennial Tradition into Western Europe through the Sufi teachers Saadi, Attar, Rumi, El-arabi, El-Ghazali, Khayyam, and many others.

The Influence of the Hermetic Tradition



As we saw in chapter six, Hermeticism was introduced into Western Europe in 1463 C.E. with Ficino's translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. The *Asclepius*, considered the other major part of the Hermetic writing, had already been translated into Arabic and Latin.

Early Christian writers, including, Lactantius and Augustine, had referred to this mysterious Hermes Trismegistus. Lactantius, writing in the third century C.E., quoted Cicero on the fifth Mercury (Hermes) as he "who gave letters and laws to the Egyptians." In

his *Institutes*, Lactantius, says of Hermes that

"although he was a man, yet he was of great antiquity, and most fully imbued with every kind of learning, so that the knowledge of many subjects and arts acquired for him the name of Trismegistus. He wrote books and those

in great number, relating to the knowledge of divine things, in which he asserts the majesty of the supreme and only God, and makes mention of Him by the same names which we use--God and Father."

Lactantius and other Church Fathers used what they called "pagan wisdom" to support the truth of Christianity. Lactantius quotes, in Greek, a passage from the *Asclepius*:

"Hermes, in the book which is entitled *The Perfect Word*, made use of these words: 'The Lord and Creator of all things, whom we have thought right to call God, since He made the second God visible and sensible. . . . Since, therefore, He made Him first, and alone, and one only, He appeared to Him beautiful, and most full of all good things; and He hallowed Him, and altogether loved Him as His own Son.'"

Lactantius was a Christian leader in the time when the Roman Empire under Constantine had adopted a thin veneer of Christianity as its official state religion. So Lactantius' purpose in praising Hermes was to persuade pagans to become Christians by showing that much of paganism was similar to Christianity.

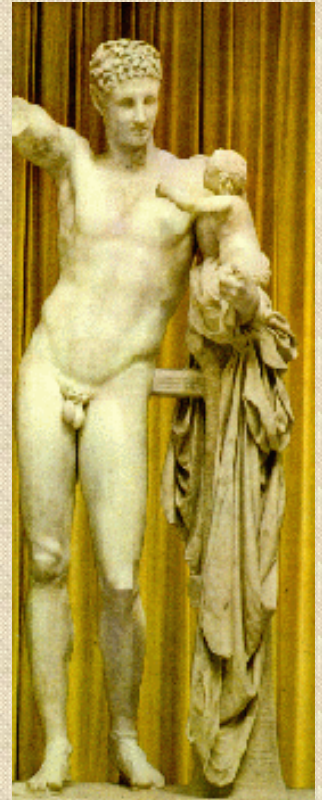
Following the pseudo-Christianity of Constantine, the Emperor Julian instituted a return to the philosophical "religion of the world" and encouraged a revival of the mystery cults. Julian worshiped the Sun as the supreme god, the image of the intelligible Good, in his "Hymn to Helios."

Augustine, who had earlier embraced Manicheanism, criticized Hermes Trismegistus for praising the Egyptian magic of drawing spirits or demons into the statues of their gods. Even so, Augustine, attested that "this Hermes says much of God according to the Truth." Augustine placed Hermes Trismegistus at a very early date.

"For as for morality, it stirred not in Egypt until

Trismegistus' time, who was indeed long before the sages and philosophers of Greece, but after Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, yea and Moses also; for at the time when Moses was born, was Atlas, Prometheus' brother, a great astronomer, living, and he was grandfather by the mother's side to the elder Mercury, who begat the father of this Trismegistus."

Hermes Trismegistus is one of the major figures in the Western European re-discovery of the Perennial tradition. Ficino's attitude toward Hermes is representative of the Renaissance scholar's acceptance of a wide variety of Perennialist-influenced writings and teachers. In his introduction to his translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, Ficino says that of the many works of Hermes Trismegistus, two are "divine," the *Asclepius*, which Ficino refers to as a work on the Divine Will, and the *Corpus Hermeticum*, which he described as a work on the Power and Wisdom of God.



However, Augustine's complaint about Hermes Trismegistus' trafficking with magic had somehow to be answered. Ficino's way around this is interesting. Ficino described his book, *De vita coelitus comparanda*, as a commentary on a book on the same subject by Plotinus. In his fourth *Ennead*, Plotinus says:

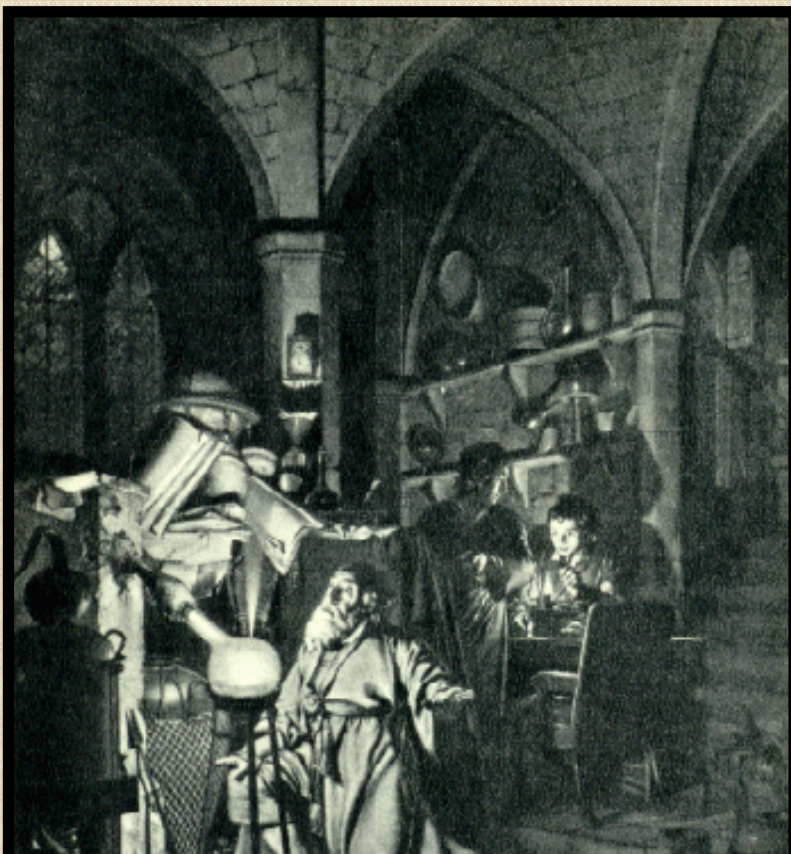
"I think . . . that those ancient sages, who sought to secure the presence of divine beings by the erection of shrines and statues, showed insight into the nature of the All; they perceived that, though this Soul (of the world) is everywhere tractable, its presence will be secured all the more readily when an appropriate receptacle is elaborated, a place especially capable of receiving some portion or phase of it, something reproducing it and

serving like a mirror to catch an image of it.

"It belongs to the nature of the All to make its entire content reproduce, most felicitously, the Reason-Principles in which it participates; every particular thing is the image within matter of a Reason-Principle which itself images a pre-material Reason-Principle: thus every particular entity is linked to that Divine Being in whose likeness it is made. . . ."

At the end of the *De vita coelitus comparanda* Ficino returns to the commentary on the Plotinus passage and contends that Plotinus in that passage was merely repeating what Hermes Trismegistus had said in his *Asclepius*. According to Ficino, Hermes Trismegistus and Plotinus were not referring to the infusing of demons into natural objects, but merely the metaphysical Idea of the object which is its higher reality.

"The soul of the world . . . generates and moves the forms of natural things through certain seminal reasons infused with its divinity."



With Ficino and other Renaissance scholars, we see the rebirth of widespread interest in things occult, which included magic, alchemy, the cabala, and astrology.

"The methods of sympathetic magic presuppose that continual effluvia of influences pouring down onto the earth from the stars of which



the author of the *Asclepius* speaks. It was believed that these effluvia and influences

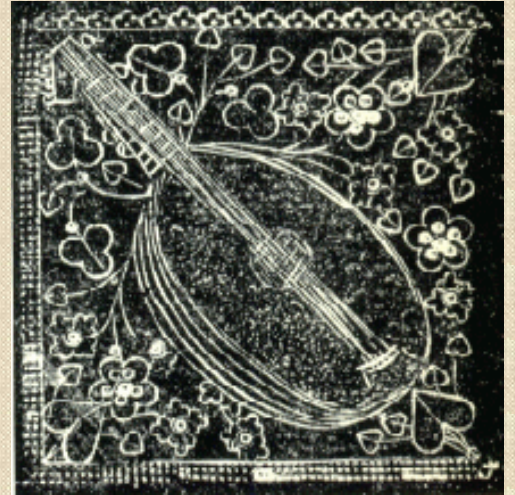
could be canalized and used by an operator with the requisite knowledge. Every object in "the material world was full of occult sympathies poured down upon it from the star on which it depended. The operator who wished to capture, let us say, the power of the planet Venus, must know what plants belonged to Venus, what stones and metals, what animals, and use only these when addressing Venus. He must know the images of Venus and know how to inscribe these on talismans made of the right Venus materials and at the right astrological moment. Such images were held to capture the spirit or power of the star and to hold or store it for use. . . . The magician was one who knew how to enter into this system, and use it, by knowing the links of the chains of influences descending vertically from above, and establishing for himself a chain of ascending links by correct use of the occult sympathies in terrestrial things, of celestial images, of invocations and names, and the like."

Frances Yates. *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*

The Roman Catholic church was heavily involved in magical practices during the Middle Ages. The liturgy of the time included rituals for blessing houses, tools, crops, to assure safety on journeys, to insure fertility, and to exorcise demons, among many others. The church relied on the naive belief in magic on the part of its supplicants to enhance and protect its power over them. It encouraged the belief that prayer was a tool of magic. Despite the church's outward opposition to magic and alchemy it appeared to the credulous populace as a vast reservoir of magical power which could be used as the priests decided.

Some Perennialist-influenced teachers, such as Ficino, used

magic as the means of teaching their students how to achieve a higher state of consciousness. One of the most interesting applications of magic by Ficino was what he called "spiritual music." Music is a powerful magic, Ficino says, affecting our whole being:



- musical sounds work on the human spirit, which links body and soul
- music works on the human spirit because it is of the same substance, a kind of living air (*spiritus*) moving in a highly organized way
- the lyrics of music work on the mind or intellect
- the universe and man, the macrocosm and microcosm, are constructed on the same harmonic principles (this concept was held by Pythagoras and Plato as well)
- musical sounds which have the same harmonic qualities as a particular heavenly body (sun or planet) cause an alignment of the human spirit, bringing about an influx of the celestial spirit

"This kind of musical spirit actually touches and acts on the spirit, which is the mean between body and soul, and wholly disposes both in accordance with its own

disposition. You will indeed allow that there is marvellous power in a lively, singing spirit, if you concede to the Pythagoreans and Platonists that the heavens are spirit, ordering everything with their movements and tones."

Ficino. *De vita coelitus comparanda*

Ficino was in the habit of singing "celestial music" while accompanying himself on a *lira da braccio* adorned with a picture showing Orpheus charming the animals and rocks with his lyre. Pico della Mirandola, a contemporary of Ficino's, claimed that

"in natural magic nothing is more efficacious than the Hymns of Orpheus, if there be applied to them the suitable music, and disposition of soul, and the other circumstances known to the wise."

To what wisdom might Pico be referring? Proclus' *De Sacrificiis et Magia* includes a complete description of sympathetic magic. Proclus was said to have sung Orphic hymns as part of his magic. Iamblichus' *Vita Pythagorae* refers to Orphic and musical magic practices. Pythagoras is reputed to have used music to cure diseases of both soul and body and to bring the soul into a state of virtuous harmony. Pythagoras' disciples were put to sleep and awakened with special songs. Pythagoras claimed to be able to hear the harmony of the spheres, making vocal and instrumental imitations of it so that his disciples would be influenced by celestial harmony. The Pythagoreans worshipped the rising sun.

More immediately, Gemistus Pletho, a Byzantine scholar had attended the Council of Florence where his speech on Platonism inspired Cosimo de' Medici to commission Ficino to translate the Hermes Trismegistus, Plato, and Plotinus manuscripts now arriving in Europe from the East. In the extant fragments of his *Nomoi*, Pletho refers to Orphic Hymns and gives elaborate instructions for singing them. The hymns he includes were

written, like the Orphic Hymns, in dactylic hexameter, perhaps a combination of Greek music with Byzantine liturgical hymns.

Those thinkers working in the Magia tradition who were influenced by the Perennial Tradition went to great pains to distinguish their kind of magic from demonological magic. In his treatise, *Di Pulchro* (On Beauty), Diacceto gives this title to one of his chapters:

"The twofold soul, first and second, and its cognition likewise twofold, from which derives the appetite for beauty, and natural Magic: the nature of which he shows and which he differentiates from superstitious magic"

It's necessary to take this distinction seriously if we are to understand the true nature of magic. The magicians who attempted to summon demons--which Diacceto called "superstitious" magicians--would refer to infusing demons into statues and talismans and so on. There would also have been genuine Perennialist teachers who used magic or the cloak of magic in their work. They might employ precisely the same concepts and symbols that the "superstitious magicians" used.

To cast our discussion in as objective terms as possible, we will refer to the two types of magic as:

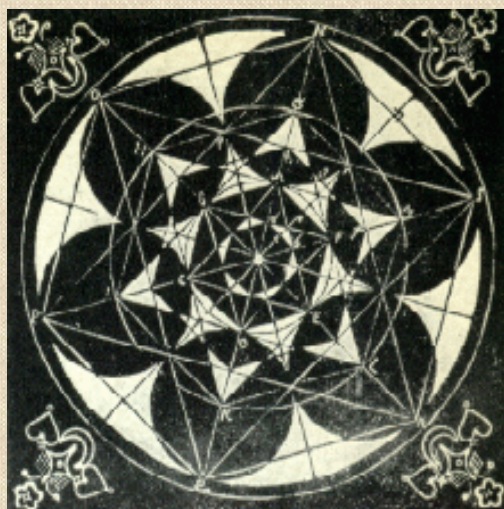
1. pagan, non-Christian, superstitious, evil magic, and
2. Christian, morally upright, knowers-of-truth magic

No, just kidding. We'll refer to them as:

1. sympathetic magic (defined in the quotation from Yates above): magic which appears not to have been influenced by the Perennial Tradition
2. spiritual magic: magic influenced by the Perennial Tradition in which the goal is the achievement of a "new being."

In the first category we would include Simon Magus, Eliphas Levi, and Rasputin. Magicians in the second category included Ficino, Giovanni Pico, Francesco Cattani da Diacceto, Lodovico Lazarelli, Trithemius, Gohory, Avicenna, Roger Bacon, Arnaldus of Villanova, Peter of Abano, Paracelsus, Agrippa, Giordano Bruno, Campanella, and Robert Fludd. As much as possible, we will attempt to limit our discussion of magic to the latter, the Perennialist-influenced magicians.

The Perennialist-influenced philosophers dealing in magic invariably refer to the power of the magician to create a "new being." In some instances, veiled reference to this power are described as the infusing of spiritual forces into a statue or talisman. This is most likely the means used by Perennialist magicians to make the practice of this system of knowledge seem innocuous to the uninformed and used by non-Perennialist magicians in a literal sense.



This teaching is seen most clearly in Lazarelli's dialogue, *Crater Hermetis*, in which the two speakers are Lazarelli and King Ferdinand of Aragon. The king is initiated into a mystery which is said to be both Christian and Hermetic. In the dialogue, Lazarelli explains to the king that the mystery, which Hermes disclosed to Asclepius, reveals "the kingdom of Israel (which poets call the Golden Age), for which Jesus Christ taught his disciples to pray." The mystery, "the new novelty of novelties, greater than all marvels" is that just as the mind of God creates by His Word, so man by his mind and speech can create a 'new immortal being.'"

Lazarelli claims that he has not only a conceptual understanding of this mystery but that he has also experienced it

within himself. In the dedication passage in *Crater Hermetis*, Lazarelli refers to his personal regeneration by his own teacher, Joannes Mercurius de Corigio. He calls Joannes Mercurius his father and says that Mercurius has created him (Lazarelli) from Mercurius' own spiritually regenerative substance.

In his book, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic*, D. P. Walker interprets this teaching in Lazarelli and the other Perennialist-influenced magicians as a master providing his disciple a "good demon." If Walker had limited his interpretation to sympathetic magic, it might be correct. Perhaps some magicians, over the centuries, have actually conjured or "generated" creatures or demons through which to work their will. Even as late as the twentieth century, the intrepid investigator of occult mysteries Alexandra David-Neel claimed to have witnessed such creatures, which the Tibetans called tulpas.

However, Perennialist-influenced magicians, though they may actually experience spirits or phantoms at one stage in their spiritual development, do not focus on these psychic phenomena but move beyond to their goal: achievement of a higher being. This same kind of misinterpretation of Perennialist magical teaching has occurred over many centuries.

Walker refers to P. O. Kristeller's interpretation of the teaching in Lazarelli about the creation of a "new being" as referring to "the rebirth which a religious teacher achieves in his converted disciple." As we have seen in a previous chapter there are three facets of this teaching:

- a teacher training his or her student to develop an actual "new being"
- a person learning to leave the material body and inhabit the spiritual body--as described in the Eleusinian Mysteries: to separate the soul from the body

- a person learning to awaken the cognitive organs of the spiritual body

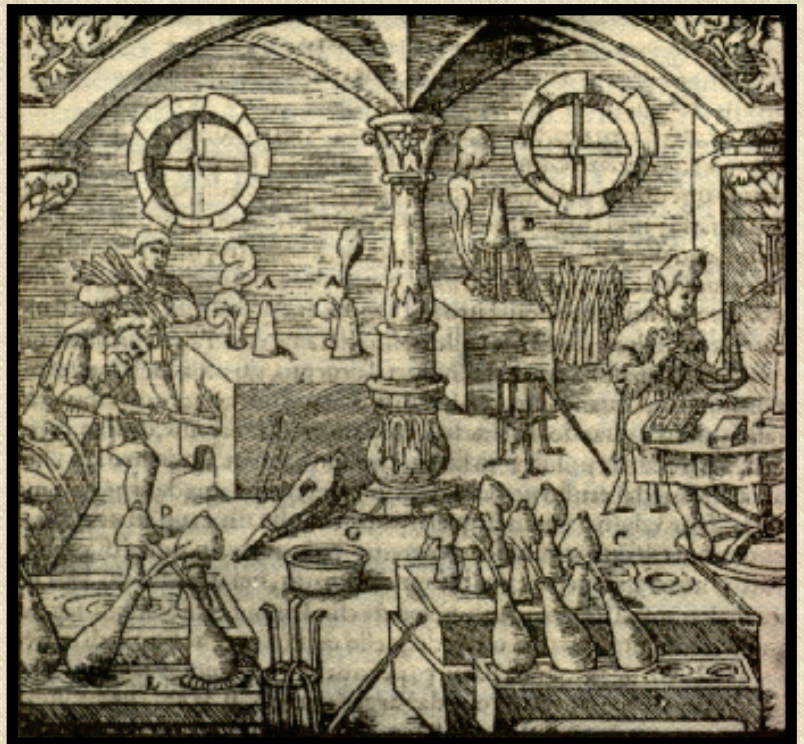
Lazarelli went to some pains to exclude the kind of interpretation Walker makes of his magic. In *Crater Hermetis* Lazarelli says that he himself had experienced this "spiritual creation" and that he is inspired "not by a Socratic demon, but by the spirit of Jesus Christ which dwells in his worshippers."

As we discussed in the chapter on Jesus as a teacher within the Perennial Tradition, this power of creating a "new being" is not an insignificant allegory but an actual dynamic experience within Perennialist practice.

Alchemy

There have always been two conceptions of alchemy:

1. as a materialistic transformation of baser metals into gold or silver
2. the spiritual transformation of the human person into a higher state of being



Some alchemists claimed that alchemy was the inner teaching within Christianity; that the manufacture of the philosopher's stone (lapis) was equivalent to the Christ-experience, the new birth. Likely, some of these were actual Perennialists, using the

symbolism of alchemy to explain--or cover--their teaching. The church issued several encyclicals and papal bulls against alchemy, but a number of church leaders as well as scientists and philosophers defended the art.

Sir George Ripley (1415-1490 C.E.), canon of Bridlington, was an avowed alchemist and maintained that its purpose was the union of the body with the soul. By the sixteenth century, the church had drawn up a decree explaining the correspondences between the various alchemical processes and church sacraments. For example, coagulation correlated with marriage, solution with baptism, transformation with the mass, and so on. The Protestants denounced the magical and alchemical influence in Roman Catholicism, but many of the Protestant leaders were themselves deeply involved in Hermetic alchemy.



A new movement, Rosicrucianism, published anonymous manifestoes in 1614 and 1615, defending all the occult sciences. This movement had a decided impact on Protestant circles and began to acquire a political tinge, so much so that its critics

denounced it as a world-wide conspiracy. In his book, *Laws of the*

Fraternity of the Rosie Cross, the alchemist Michael Maier defended Rosicrucianism from this charge of conspiracy, but affirmed the existence of a secret brotherhood of enlightened mystics dedicated to the improvement of mankind. The English physician and alchemist Robert Fludd had published his own defense of Rosicrucianism two years earlier in his *Apologia Compendaria Fraternitatem de Rosea Cruce*. Fludd argued that there was an inner content to the occult sciences, that the Bible should be interpreted alchemically, and that nature should be viewed as one vast alchemical process.

The Minorite friars Marin Mersenne and Pierre Gassendi began a concerted attack against Rosicrucianism in particular and occultism in general. They enlisted Rene Descartes in their attacks on occult arts, bringing into popular belief a materialistic, mathematical conception of the world. The political and economic powers at the time were in favor of a materialistic world view.

"In 1666, Louis XIV's minister Colbert reorganized the Academy as the French Academy of Sciences. As was the case with the Royal Society, the notion of a value-free science was part of a political and religious campaign to create a stable social and ecclesiastical order throughout Europe. What modern science came to regard as abstract truths, such as the radical separation of matter and spirit, or mind and body, were central to this campaign. The success of the mechanical world view cannot be attributed to any inherent validity it might possess, but (partly) to the powerful political and religious attack on the Hermetic tradition by the reigning European elites."

Morris Berman. *The Reenchantment of the World*

In chapter three we saw how the materialistic world view became institutionalized in the West, a doctrine completely opposite to the Perennialist conception of knowledge as derived from experience prescribed by a Teacher.

Pico Della Mirandola and Cabalistic Magic

Cabala has become known as a Jewish mystical tradition supposedly handed down orally from Moses, a secret doctrine which Moses imparted to select initiates who had then handed it on in a historical line of transmission. The Cabalist is said to invoke angels, archangels, the ten sephiroth which are names or powers of God, and God himself, by means similar to magic, through the power of the sacred Hebrew language.

"The mysteries of the *Hermetica* are mysteries of the Word, or the Logos, and in the *Pimander*, it was by the luminous Word, the Son of God issuing from the *Nous* that the creative act was made. In *Genesis*, 'God spoke' to form the created world, and, since He spoke in Hebrew, this is why for the Cabalist the words and letters of the Hebrew tongue are subjects for endless mystical meditations, and why, for the practical Cabalist, they contain magical power. Lactantius may have helped to cement the union between Hermetism and Christian Cabalism on this point, for, after quoting from the Psalm 'By the word of God were the heavens made', and from St. John, 'In the beginning was the Word', he adds that this is supported from the Gentiles. 'For Trismegistus, who by some means or other searched into almost all truth, often described the excellence and the majesty of the Word,' and he acknowledged 'that there is an ineffable and sacred speech, the relation of which exceeds the measure of man's ability.'"

Frances Yates. *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*

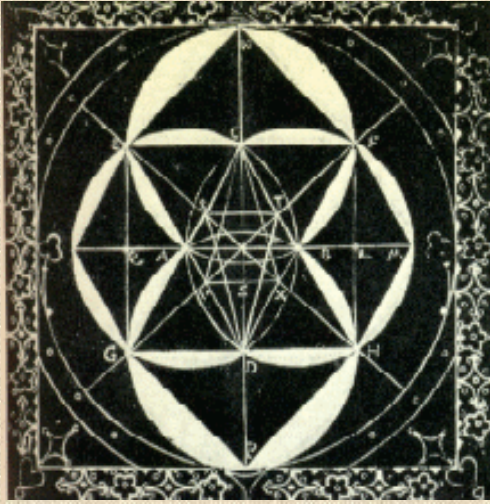
The traditions of Spanish Cabalism in Pico's day were set forth in the *Zohar*, a mystical work outlining the Sephiroth and their meaning. The Sephiroth are said to be the ten most common names of God which form one great Name. They are the creative Names which God called into the world so that the created universe is the external embodiment of these elements within God. The *Zohar* is primarily a commentary on the book of *Genesis*, interpreting the words and letters of the Hebrew text as containing arcane meanings.

Pico learned Hebrew and began reading Hebrew Scriptures in their original language along with Cabalist commentaries. In 1486, Pico, age twenty-three, went to Rome to present his nine hundred theses drawn from all philosophies which he offered to prove in public debate to be reconcilable with one another. Pico's theses were received with alarm and the Roman theologians raised an outcry, necessitating a defense by Pico which was published in 1487. Pico introduces his theses as "confirming the Christian religion from the foundations of the Hebrew wisdom." He maintained that Hebrew Cabalism enhanced one's understanding of Christianity and provided evidence for the divinity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity.

There can be no doubt that Pico was influenced by Hermeticism. He begins his meditation entitled *De hominis dignitate* (On the Dignity of Man) by quoting the words of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius.

"What a great miracle is Man, O Asclepius, a being worthy of reverence and honour. For he passes into the nature of a god as though he were himself a god; he has familiarity with the race of spirits, knowing that he issued from the same origin; he despises that part of his nature which is only human, for he has put his hope in the divinity of the other part."

What is the Cabala?



To understand Pico, we must try to comprehend Cabalism. In his book *The Cipher of Genesis* Carlo Suares provides an insightful explanations of the Cabala. According to Suares's view of the Cabala, *Genesis* is composed of an untranslatable Cipher. This Cipher is already hopelessly mistranslated in Hebrew because it is not a series of words, sentences, and books.

"The twenty-two graphs which are used as letters in the Hebrew alphabet are twenty-two proper names originally used to designate different states or structures of the one cosmic energy, which is *essence* and *semblance*, of all that is."

Carlo Suares. *The Cipher of Genesis*

The twenty-two names have been desecrated by being made use of in an alphabet, constituted only by their initials--e.g. A, B, C,--mere representations of vocal sounds. The text of *Genesis*, according to Suares, is intended to project the primordial forces into our very being, thus acting as a Revelation. This does not involve ordinary communication, the projection of an idea or meaning from one person to another.

"If there is anything that can be called Revelation, it cannot be an illusory explanation of what has already happened, but it is an incursion of the life process into our actual being."

Carlo Suares. *The Cipher of Genesis*

The decoding of the Cipher of *Genesis* is not a mere matter of transposing A-B-C to Aleph-Bayt-Ghimel, etc. It is, according to Soares, "a process of penetrating an unknown world by means of a manner of thinking which has to be experienced by the very use of the language which must be learned in order to understand it."

Thus "Aleph-Lammed-Hay-Yod-Mem" can be interpreted as a word, Elohim, and interpreted as "God." Or it can be discerned as symbols leading to a transcendent experience of the reality behind the names. To get to that reality we must modify our way of thinking by breaking up our idea "boxes" or concepts.

But we have been created by these very idea "boxes"; we have become patterns based on ideas. For example, we behave competitively because we've been conditioned by the idea that men are "naturally" competitive. To understand Ultimate Reality--by whatever name or symbol--we have to break up our conceptually formed presumptions which make us assume that we already understand reality.

If we remain with the mere products of our ordinary mind--such concepts or words as "God," "man," "life,"--then we cannot get in touch with that which transcends the mind. "You cannot send a kiss by messenger." So when we approach an illumined source of teaching we must forego all interpretation and conjecture to allow the unknown to operate directly in our minds and lives through an energy imparted to us from within the cipher of the teaching source.

"The instrument of perception being ourselves, if we do not perceive directly so as to *be* Revelation itself, why do we not 'check' our instrument and detect the flaws in our functioning, instead of searching for truth with inadequate means. To discover where and what is the error: that is what truth is.

"What is first of all demanded of us is--rather than a

search for absolute truth--a rooting-out of past errors, a relinquishing of long-cherished illusions."

Carlo Suares. *The Cipher of Genesis*

Giordano Bruno's "Divine Magic"

As a Renaissance magus, Giordano Bruno followed in the traditions of Magia and Cabala influenced by Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola and standardized in Cornelius Agrippa's textbook of "occult philosophy."

In 1576, Bruno was charged with heresy, so he abandoned his Dominican habit and travelled throughout Europe, visiting Calvin's Geneva but quickly leaving because he did not like the rigid intellectual atmosphere. He arrived in Paris in 1581 where he attracted the attention of King Henri III. In Paris he published two books on the art of memory, one of which, *De umbris idearum* (On the Shadows of Ideas), was dedicated to the king.

In 1582 he travelled to England and the following year participated in the disputes organized at Oxford for the enjoyment of the Polish prince Albert Alasco. In his *Cena de le ceneri* Bruno castigates the Oxford scholars for being ignorant and rude.



"Go to Oxford and get them to tell you what happened to the Nolan [Bruno's name for himself] when he disputed publicly with the doctors of theology in the presence of the Polish prince Alasco, and others of the English nobility. Learn how ably he replied to the arguments; how the wretched doctor who was put forward as the leader of the Academy on that grave occasion came to a halt fifteen times over fifteen syllogisms, like a chicken amongst stubble. Learn how roughly and rudely that pig behaved and with what patience and humanity the Nolan replied, showing himself to be indeed a Neopolitan, born and bred beneath a kindlier sky. Hear how they made him leave off his public lectures on the immortality of the soul and on the quintuple sphere."

In his lectures at Oxford and in his Italian dialogues, published in England from 1582 to 1585, he quoted at length from Hermetic sources, making it evident that he belonged to a magical strain of the Hermetic tradition. The visit of Bruno brought a strong new infusion of Perennialist thought to England which influenced such students of the tradition as Shakespeare. In a later chapter on Shakespeare we will see how *The Tempest* was clearly an Perennialist Mystery play and how many of his other later plays referred to the Hermetic tradition.

In Bruno's *Spaccio della bestia trionfante* we see a clear explanation of the operative principles of "spiritual magic."

"One is the divinity which is in all things, which, as it diffuses and communicates itself in innumerable ways, so it has innumerable names, and by innumerable ways, with reasons proper and appropriate to each one, it is to be sought, whilst with innumerable rites it is honored and cultivated, by which we seek to obtain innumerable kinds of favors from it. For this is needed that wisdom and judgement, that art and industry and use of the intellectual light, which is revealed to the world from the

intelligible sun, sometimes more strongly, sometimes less strongly. Which habit is called *Magia*: and this, when it is directed to supernatural principles is divine; when towards the contemplation of nature and scrutiny of her secrets, it is called natural; and it is called middle or mathematical as it consists in reasons and acts of the soul, which is on the horizon between corporeal and spiritual, spiritual and intellectual. . . .

"For, as she [the divinity] gives fish to the sea and rivers, deserts to wild animals, metals to the mines, fruits to the trees, so she gives certain lots, virtues, fortunes and impressions to certain parts of certain animals, beasts, and plants. Hence the divinity in the sea was called Neptune, in the sun, Apollo, in the earth, Ceres, in the deserts, Diana, and diversely in all other species which, like diverse ideas, were diverse divinities in nature, all of which referred to one deity of deities and fountain of the ideas above nature."

It is indeed unfortunate that Frances A. Yates, who delved so deeply into the study of Bruno, would have misunderstood almost entirely what Bruno was about. She interprets the passage quoted above in this manner.

"What is Giordano Bruno doing here? It is quite simple. He is taking Renaissance magic back to its pagan source, abandoning the feeble efforts of Ficino to do a little harmless magic, whilst disguising its main source in the *Asclepius*, utterly flouting the religious Hermetists who tried to have a Christian Hermetism without the *Asclepius*, proclaiming himself a full Egyptian who, like Celsus in his anti-Christian arguments quoted by Origen, deplores the destruction by the Christians of the worship of the natural gods of Greece, and of the religion of the Egyptians, through which they approached the divine ideas, the intelligible sun, the One of Neoplatonism."

Frances Yates. *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*

As this passage shows, Yates deplores Bruno's degrading the "harmless magic" of Ficino by taking it "back" to its "pagan source" and "proclaiming himself a full Egyptian" who denounces sacred Christianity. Yates's lack of objectivity is obvious throughout her book on Bruno, erupting into full flower in passages such as these:

"If the reader feels somewhat aghast at the state of mind of a noted philosopher of the Renaissance [Bruno] as revealed in this chapter, and is inclined to agree rather strongly with the [English] ambassador [that Bruno's religion cannot be commended"], I cannot blame him." p. 204

"People like Giordano Bruno are immunised from a sense of danger by their sense of mission, or their megalomania, or the state of euphoria bordering on insanity, in which they constantly live." p. 204

The difficulty with scholastics such as Yates is that they have no understanding of the nature of the Perennial Tradition, as we saw in chapter one. So when Perennialist-influenced thinkers, such as Bruno or Ficino, criticize Yates's religion, Christianity, they move for her beyond the pale.

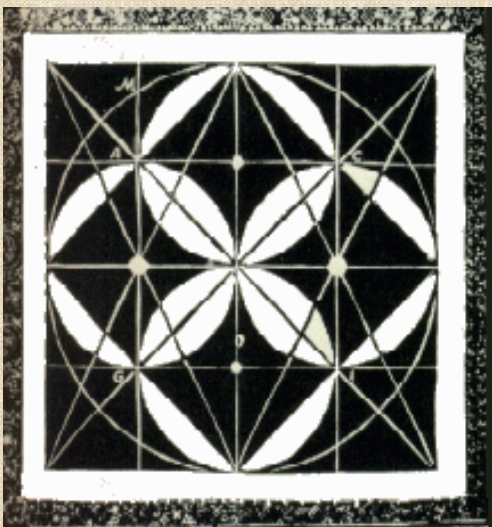
As we have seen in previous chapters, certain expressions of the Perennialist teaching have been perverted by bureaucratized, totalitarian institutions such as organized religions, but the core ideas and practices have persisted in every age, with teachers reinterpreting the esoteric discipline according to the contemporary needs of apprentices. So instead of seeing Bruno's criticism as the horror of apostasy, as Yates does, we understand him to be describing the degrading of the "secret teaching" by a

politicized, bureaucratized pseudo-Christianity.

In his *Spaccio della bestia trionfante* Bruno states that Christianity has tried to destroy the original Perennialist message, passing edicts to outlaw its teaching, substituting the worship of icons and relics for the search for personal illumination, encouraging bad morals, and starting or championing constant wars. Anyone who studies the history of Christianity objectively would have little to disagree with in Bruno's description. We could also add that Christianity tortured and murdered people it judged to be heretical, such as Servetus, Bruno, Campanella, Bacon, and a myriad more.

Throughout her book on Bruno, Yates vacillates in her view of such Medieval philosophers as Ficino and Bruno. Sometimes she sees them as "demon magicians," persons who believed in and practiced the art of conjuring demons and infusing them in talismans and icons. At other times, when she actually looks at their own words, she has to admit that they were referring to "demons" or "gods" as, in Bruno's words in his *Spaccio della bestia trionfante*: "the virtues and powers of the soul."

Giordano Bruno and the Imagination



One of the major facets of Bruno's Perennialist-influenced philosophy involves the development of a vigorous imagination in drawing into one's personality spiritual forces which unlock inner powers. In chapter ten, we saw the central place imagination plays in achieving the experience of Illumination. According to Bruno, this central mystery of the Perennial Tradition involves:

- a spiritually stimulated imagination joined with refined mental

powers

- **envisioning numinous images retained in memory**
- **allowing the individual to draw spiritual forces into himself which unlock his inner source of psychic energy**

"There exists in you, indefinitely developable, an engine of power, dynamically creative, capable of impressing and molding your material world according as you give out from your inner being in creative force. This force is not primarily the mentally creative force, which you understand perfectly. It is the higher sense of that mentally creative force, the vital principle of life; and comes, not from that mere agent of the soul, the intellect, but from the very plexus of life itself. The mental force can make a mold or plan, but for completion this plan must have its vital principle supplied. It is the neatly made electric globe into which the current is not turned. The true creative force, on the other hand, carries its own vital principle with it. It is a matter of the heart as well as the clearly seen concept of the mind."

Betty and Stewart Edward White. *Across the Unknown*

We have traced lines of Perennialist influence in the teachings of Ficino, Pico, Bruno, and others. The ideas examined indicate that they worked within the sphere of Hermeticism. The only Western philosophers we can definitely point to as working directly within the Perennial Tradition, distinguished from those who were merely influenced by the Perennial Tradition, are Albertus Magnus, Roger Bacon, Raymond Lully, and Paracelsus.

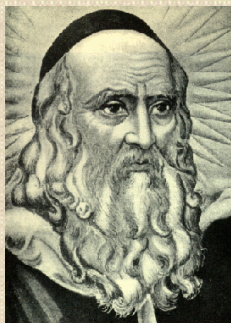
Albertus Magnus was a deep student of the Perennial Tradition

and went so far as to dress as an Arab when he lectured in Paris on Perennialist teachers. Having studied in Arab schools, Magnus was both a philosopher and a magician, and deeply influenced the thought of Thomas Aquinas.

Roger Bacon wrote on the Perennial Tradition and quoted from Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi's *The Wisdom of Illumination*. In his famous work *The Mirror of Alchimy*, Bacon referred to Hermes as the "Master Initiate" whose words may be taken as final authority upon every subject. Man is a God, Bacon asserted, capable of perceiving and understanding all things through "divine illumination" or union with the Higher Self. The Roman Catholic church declared Bacon a heretic and imprisoned him for the last fourteen years of his life. This is indeed a tragedy because Bacon was an adept not only in the Perennial Tradition but in natural science as well. Dr. Andrew D. White refers to Bacon in his *History of the Warfare of Science with Theology*:



"He held the key to treasures which would have freed mankind from ages of error and misery. Thousands of precious lives shall be lost, tens of thousands shall suffer discomfort, sickness, poverty, for lack of discoveries and methods which, but for this mistaken dealing with Roger Bacon and his compeers, would now be blessing the earth."



Raymond Lully used material from the Perennialist Ibn 'Arabi and emphasized the importance of Perennialist exercises in spiritual development.

Paracelsus attempted to reform Western medicine and presented Perennialist ideas in his teachings.

Part of the dynamic of the Perennial Tradition is its capability of working through a variety of channels at the same time. The Hermetic tradition, one expression of the Perennial Tradition, influenced European thought both directly through such concepts as the development of a "new being" and indirectly through the audacity of Perennialist-influenced thinkers to challenge the world view of their time. Meanwhile, the Perennialist teachers, working to assist their students develop inner faculties, might have disguised themselves as magicians, alchemists, Cabalists, or Christians.

The Perennial Tradition was spreading from the East to Western Europe, but it was not always safe to acknowledge one's interest in or adherence to Perennialist truths.



The Perennial Tradition and the Enlightenment

For over two hundred years, Western nations have been living on the legacy of the eighteenth century Enlightenment, a social and political movement which attacked unjust laws and repressive institutions and played a major role in the creation of the United States.

"Enlightened" refers, in the first instance, to the process used by the eighteenth-century Enlightenment activists, of casting light on social challenges and metaphysical themes and developing social infrastructures which allow for greater freedom and creativity.



Enlightened thinking, in one aspect, is the development of an autonomous self which is able to think and act on its own initiative. The eighteenth century Enlightenment *philosophes* made this component a prominent feature of their personal and social efforts.

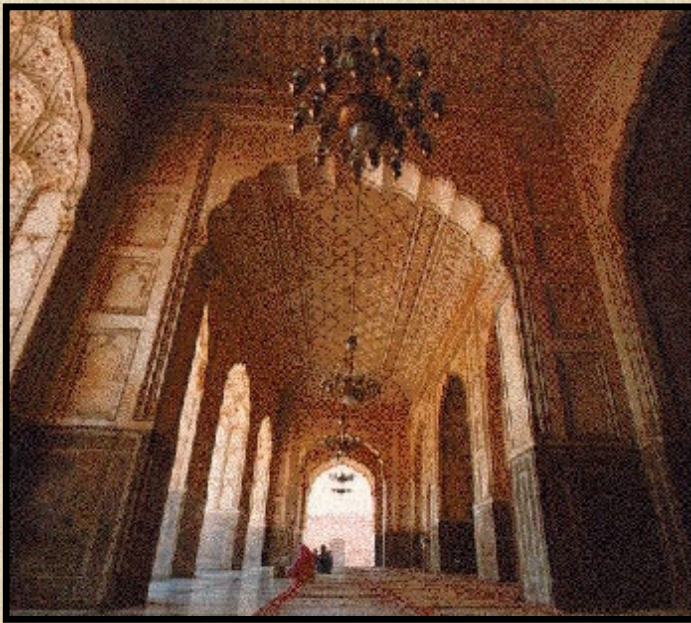
"Enlightenment is the coming out of Man from his self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the lack of will to serve one's own understanding without direction from another. This is a self-imposed immaturity; if Reason languishes, it is not for lack of understanding, but only of resolve and courage to serve oneself without direction from another. *Sapere aude!* Dare to think! Think boldly! Wake up! Take courage, to

serve your own understanding. This is the motto of the Enlightenment."

Immanuel Kant, an 18th Century Enlightenment thinker

In its emphasis on the development of independence and autonomy, enlightened thinking includes the fields of critical thinking and scientific investigation. But enlightened thinking goes beyond this merely personal emphasis to a genuine concern for human welfare in general.

The Enlightenment as an Embodiment of The Perennial Tradition



The eighteenth century Enlightenment movement embodied certain facets of the Perennial Tradition, including the teaching that human life is malleable, that we can actively participate in the betterment of humankind's condition.

We can agree with Muller and other scholars, that the eighteenth century

Enlightenment movement was a watershed in human history.

"There can be no real question that the Enlightenment promoted the cause of freedom, more widely, directly, positively than any age before it. It not only asserted but demonstrated the power of knowledge and reason in self-determination, the choice and realization of human purpose.

"For the first time in history it carried out a concerted attack on the vested interests that opposed the diffusion of knowledge and the free exercise of reason.

"As thinkers the men of the Enlightenment were conscious revolutionaries, very much aware of a 'new method of philosophizing' that amounted to a new living faith, the basis for a new social order."

Herbert J. Muller. (1964). *Freedom in the Western World*

A major teaching of the Perennial Tradition is that humankind can awaken organs of perception with which to discern timeless principles and designs to be used in ordering human life. The American Enlightenment leaders--Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Patrick Henry, and others--spoke of these higher principles in terms of inalienable rights to life, liberty, equality under the law, and the pursuit of happiness.

In his book *The Public Philosophy*, Walter Lippmann explains that "for over two thousand years, European thought has been acted upon by the idea that the rational faculties of men can produce a common conception of law and order which possesses a universal validity." (Lippmann, *The Public Philosophy*, 1955)

"The rational faculty of man was conceived as producing a common conception of law and order which possessed a universal validity. . . . This common conception included, as its three great notes, the three values of Liberty, Equality and the brotherhood or Fraternity of all mankind. This common conception, and its three great notes, have formed a European set of ideas for over two thousand years. It was a set of ideas which lived and moved in the Middle Ages; and St. Thomas Aquinas cherished the idea of a sovereign law of nature imprinted in the heart and nature of man, to which kings and legislators must everywhere bow. It was a set of ideas which lived and acted with an even greater animation from the days of the Reformation to those of the French Revolution . . . spoken through the mouth of Locke, [they had justified] the English Revolution of 1688, and had recently served to inspire the American Revolution of 1776 . . . They were ideas of the proper conduct of states and governments in the area of internal affairs. They were ideas of the natural rights of man--of liberty, political and civic, with sovereignty residing essentially in the nation, and with free communication of thoughts and opinions; of equality before the law, and the equal repartition of public expenses among all the members of the public; of a general fraternity which tended in practice to be sadly restricted within the nation, but which could, on occasion, be extended by decree to protect all nations struggling for freedom."

Ernest Baker, *Traditions of Civility*, 1948

Henry Steele Commager, in his book *The Empire of Reason*, points to "a common harvest of ideas, attitudes, and even of

programs" within the Enlightenment: "recognition of a cosmic system governed by the laws of Nature and Nature's God; faith in Reason as competent to penetrate to the meaning of those laws and to induce conformity to them among society in many ways irrational; commitment to what Jefferson called 'the illimitable freedom of the human mind,' to the doctrine of progress, and--with some reservations--to the concept of the perfectibility of Man; an ardent humanitarianism that attacked torture, slavery, war, poverty, and disease; and confidence that Providence and Nature had decreed happiness for mankind."

American Enlightenment leaders such as Benjamin Franklin, Patrick Henry, Thomas Jefferson, and Thomas Paine read extensively in European Enlightenment writings. Perennialist ideas entered America through their reading of Enlightenment thinkers, but also by direct contact with leaders of the European Enlightenment such as Joseph Priestly, Voltaire, and others.

Because of the embodiment of Perennialist principles in such documents as the Declaration of Independence, the Preamble to the United States Constitution, and the Bill of Rights, America and other industrialized nations still enjoy important freedoms. But even with those advances, we must be realistic, as was Rousseau, in recognizing that people still "are everywhere in chains": chains of ignorance and delusion.

Especially in the present era when the Enlightenment ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity are everywhere under attack, it is vitally important that we rediscover and practice the teachings of the Perennial Tradition. Political, economic, religious, and educational systems once imbued with Perennialist ideals and archetypes, have degenerated into partisan schemes, inert creeds, and scholastic dogmas. The Perennial Tradition is the only wellspring from which we can reacquire the fundamentals on which to build a new conception of human life.

The Perennial Tradition and American Transcendentalism

Along with the influence of Perennialist ideas on European and American Enlightenment thinkers, the Perennial Tradition gained entry into American life and thought through the Transcendentalists. This group included:

- Ralph Waldo Emerson
- Henry David Thoreau
- Amos Bronson Alcott
- William Henry Channing
- Margaret Fuller
- Theodore Parker
- Moncure David Conway
- William Ellery Channing
- James Freeman Clarke
- Christopher Pearse Cranch
- Frederic Henry Hedge
- Ellen Sturgis Hooper
- William Rounseville Alger
- Caroline Sturgis Tappan
- Jones Very
- Lydia Maria Child
- John Weiss
- Samuel Johnson
- O. B. Frothingham
- Orestes Augustus Brownson

This peculiarly American movement, which took its name from Emerson's essay "The Transcendentalists," was a product of Unitarianism, Puritanism, the Enlightenment, and both Western and Eastern Perennialist teachings.

"Neoplatonic and Hermetic thought no doubt acted as preparation for both the Romantic and the Transcendentalist fascination with 'Oriental religions.'"

Arthur Versluis, *American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions*

A genuine interest in Perennialist ideas is only possible with a person who has passed beyond a rigid adherence to a dogmatic religion--Christianity or any other. A select number of liberal thinkers from the Unitarian and Universalist assemblies, two radical offshoots from Protestant Christianity, created the even more iconoclastic Transcendentalist movement. These Transcendentalist writers came into contact with the Perennial Tradition through:

- Eastern Perennialist sources in Sufism, Hinduism, and Buddhism
- Western Perennialist-influenced thinkers such as Michael Servetus, Faustus Socinus, John Biddle, and Joseph Priestley ¹



"Indeed, the Transcendentalist interest in Asian religions derived substantially from the Unitarian affirmation of what from the orthodox Calvinist perspective were Socinian, Arian, Pelagian, and Arminian heresies. The Socinian and Arian heresies--which held that Christ was not fully divine, with Socinianism being the more extreme of these--opened the way for Transcendentalists to affirm that Christ was not the only way to salvation, that Hinduism, Buddhism, and other world religions also were divine revelation. The Arminian and Pelagian heresies--which denied predestination and held that people could improve themselves and work toward salvation--allowed the Transcendentalists to become interested in Hinduism, Buddhism, and other world religions that also affirm that we must work out our salvation for ourselves."

Arthur Versluis, *American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions*

A large number of eighteenth century European scholars took a keen interest in Eastern and Western writings related to the Perennial Tradition:

- **Engelbert Kaempfer: *The History of Japan* (1727)**
- **Sir William Jones:**
 - **Jones learned Arabic and Persian in England and when appointed a judge in India in 1783, he finally contacted a Hindu physician who taught him elementary Sanskrit**
 - **"Jones's Herculean efforts (he said once in a letter that he had only an hour for sleep and eating a day) without exaggeration profoundly and almost single-handedly transformed the European view of Asia from the earlier**

presupposition of the East as barbarous, to a vision of an exotic and highly civilized world in its own right." Arthur Versluis, *American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions*, p. 18

- Goethe wrote of him: "The achievements of this man are so world-famous and have been so fully celebrated in more than one place, that nothing remains for me but to acknowledge in general terms that I have for a long time attempted to draw the maximum benefit from his labours." *West-Ostlicher Divan*

- J. G. Herder, *Stimmens der Volker in Liedern*, (1778) *Ideer Zur Geschichte der Menschheit*, (1784)
- Friedrich Schlegel, *The Philosophy of Life and Language* (1847)
- Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg): his philosophical and poetic writings bore a striking resemblance to the doctrines of the Upanishads and the Vedantic teachings of Shankara



This similarity of Novalis's writings to Oriental classics does not have to be explained exclusively by his study of Vedantic teachings. As René Gérard comments:

"One can explain the correspondences between Novalis and

the Upanishads by way of an indirect influence via Neoplatonism, mysticism, and illuminism, including the works of Hermetists and Rosicrucians, as well as those of theosophers like Franz von Baader."

Gérard, *L'Orient et la pensée romantique allemand*

In a similar vein, when Transcendentalist writers use concepts which appear to have reference to Oriental religious ideas, such as Emerson's concept of the Oversoul, we do not have to look to direct influence from the East. As Versluis explains:

"Certainly there are parallels between the Christian mystical and Asian religious traditions. But the connections are those of both East and West to the *philosophia perennis*, rather than the permeation of Eastern thought westward."

American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions

To get a clear idea of how the Perennial Tradition was brought into the American experience through Transcendentalism, we can examine select illustrations of how its major figures--Emerson and Thoreau--embodied the themes of the Perennial Tradition in their lives and writings.

o **Emerson:**

- Emerson had a mystical experience in which he was transported into a Plotinian transparent eye
- Emerson saw human existence as identical to the One:

"Who shall define to me an Individual? I behold with awe & delight many illustrations of the One Universal Mind. I see my being imbedded in it. I am only a form of him. He is the soul of Me. I can even with a

**mountainous aspiring say, I am God."
Journal, May 26, 1837**

- **Emerson saw clearly--as had Marcion, Valentinus, and Origen--that original Christianity had been deformed into a sacerdotal autocracy**

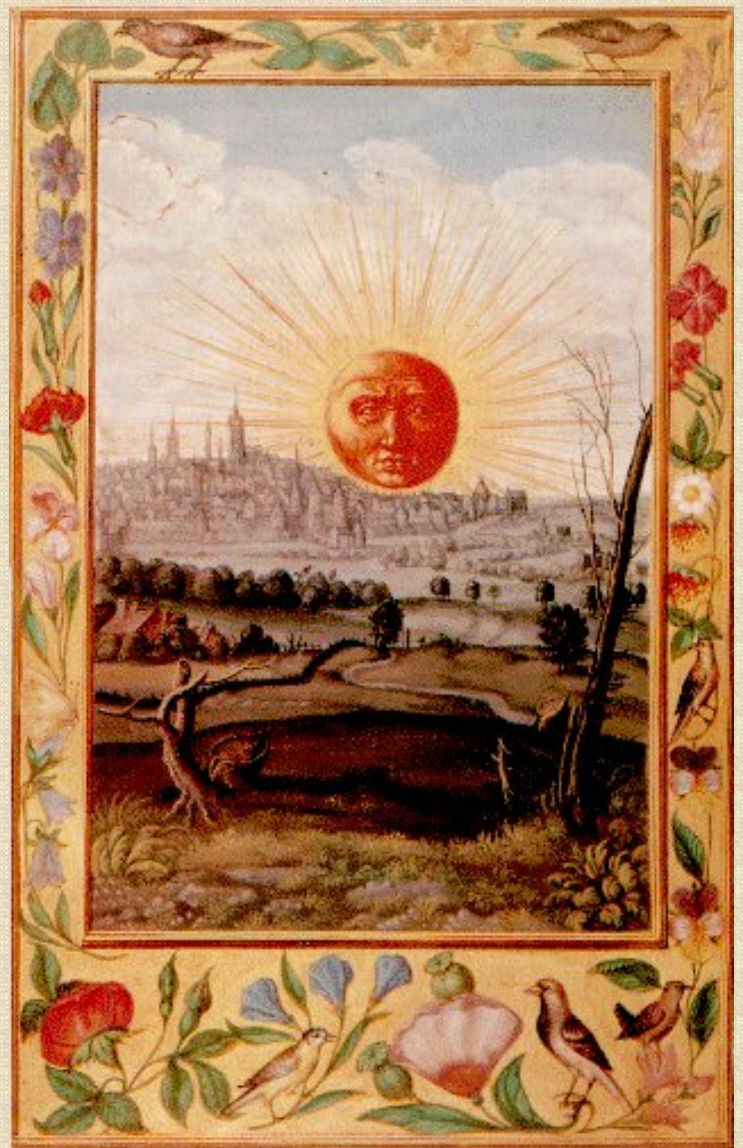
"Historical Christianity has fallen into the error that corrupts all attempts to communicate religion." ("Divinity School Address")

- **As with Plato, Emerson saw humans living in a delusory world**

"in their sleepwalking, their illusion is to them highest"

- **Emerson recognized that "the individual soul always mingles with the universal soul" and he defined the Spirit as separate from the body**

"The Spirit which is one, pure, luminous by itself, independent of the qualities of which it is the asylum, which penetrates everywhere, which is absolute, which is the internal witness, & within which is no other soul, that Spirit is distinct from



body."

o Thoreau:

- He had a mystical experience on the edge of Walden pond in which he felt his whole body to be as one sense
- Thoreau saw that the Perennial Tradition expresses itself through different persons in various ages

"I know, for instance, that Saadi entertained once identically the same thought that I do, and therefore I can find no essential difference between Saadi and myself. He is not Persian, he is not ancient, he is not strange to me. By the identity of his thoughts with mine, he remains alive."

The Journals

- He saw through the veil of illusion that is human existence

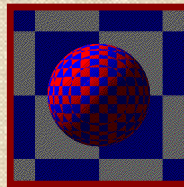
"In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the *Bhagvat-Geeta* . . . in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial. . . . I lay down the book and go to my well for water, and lo! there I meet the servant of the Bramin, priest of Brahma and Vishnu and Indra, who still sits in his temple on the Ganges reading the Vedas, or dwells at the root of a tree with his crust and water jug. I meet his servant come to draw water and our buckets as it were grate together in the same well. The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges."

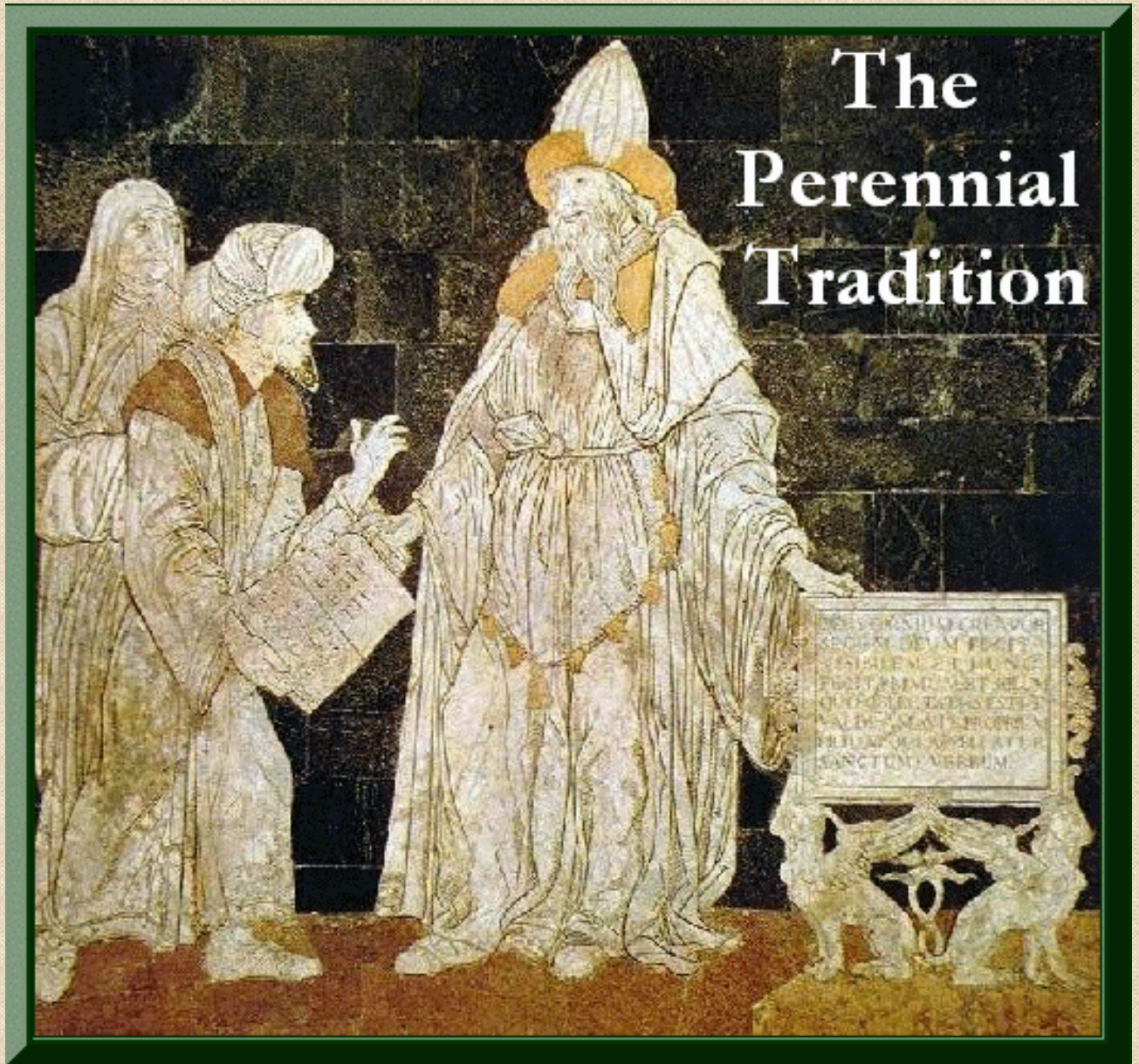
"Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect

how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but
eternity remains. I would drink deeper; fish in the
sky, whose bottom is pebbly with stars."

Walden Pond

¹ Joseph Priestley, *A Comparison of the Institutes of Moses
with those of the Hindoo and other ancient nations*





Chapter Sixteen

Shakespeare's *The Tempest*

Perennialist Mystery Play



There can be no doubt that Shakespeare was an adept within the Perennial Tradition, for he refers to all of its distinguishing themes throughout his plays. As though to dispel any doubt that he is working within this tradition, he makes distinct reference to the Hermetic writings in *The Winter's Tale* and points to specific elements of the Perennialist Initiation Mystery in *The Tempest*.

In *The Winter's Tale*, the statue of Hermione is seemingly brought to life through the use of magic. This is an unmistakable reference to two different Hermetic writings:

- that section of the Hermetic *Asclepius* which speaks of the ancient Egyptian priests infusing life into the statues of their gods by various magical rites
- that passage in the *Picatrix* which says of Hermes: "Into these images [in his City of the Sun] he introduced spirits which spoke with voices."

If we ask how the Perennial Tradition would have found its way to Shakespeare, our best answer is Roger Bacon, Henry Cornelius Agrippa, Giordano Bruno, Robert Fludd, and John Dee. As a Renaissance magus, Bruno was a product of the revival of occult studies in the traditions of Magia and Cabala influenced by Marsilio Ficino and Pico della Mirandola and standardized in Cornelius Agrippa's textbook of "occult philosophy." In Bruno's Italian dialogues, published in England, he included extensive quotations from Hermetic sources. Bruno's visit to England in 1582 to 1585 brought a strong new infusion of Hermetic influence into Shakespeare's England. Bruno's outlook was distinctly

antagonistic to the Spanish-Hapsburg ambitions in Europe and sympathetic to the Elizabethan revival.

John Dee, a magus on the lines of Agrippa's "occult philosophy," had been influential in the Elizabethan court and was likely the inspiration for Shakespeare's Prospero. Unfortunately, by the time *The Tempest* first appeared in 1611, Dee had fallen into deep disfavor following his return from his mysterious continental junket in 1589. Dee was completely cast off by James I after his accession and died in poverty in 1608. While Ben Johnson had attacked Dee in his play *The Alchemist*, Shakespeare defended the Perennial Tradition in his last plays.

The German Rosicrucian movement was influenced by the German-English alliance.

Rosicrucianism was based on the philosophy of John Dee. The myth of "Christian Rosencreutz" derived from the Red Cross Knight, the esoteric influences embodied in English chivalric tradition. The world of magic, then, was a pervasive force in Shakespeare's time and it is little wonder that we find hints and tinctures of magic in *Cymbeline* and *Henry VIII* as well as *The Winter's Tale*.



The Initiation Mysteries Within *The Tempest*

Anyone who has carefully read Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* finds in it a strange admixture of ideas and events which, in their outward appearance, seem strained and incongruous. The oddity of *The Tempest* is such that some critics feel that "Shakespeare, at the zenith of his creative power, produced a poetic drama which, though a lovely work of art, is nevertheless a meaningless fantasy written in the sheer caprice of unordered invention."

The peculiarities of *The Tempest*, however, which might seem like glaring defects in an ordinary play, all begin to make sense when we recognize that its mysteriousness is due to the play being an allegorical work, a Perennialist Mystery Play.

Until the publication of *The Timeless Theme*, Colin Still's brilliant interpretative analysis of *The Tempest*, attempts at allegorical explication were puerile at best. Prospero, for example, was said to be a personification of Aristocracy, Caliban of Democracy, Ariel of Religion, and so on. Such trivial speculations by scholars such as S.T. Coleridge, G. Wilson Knight, J.P. Brockbank, R.A. Brower, and others, not only were entirely idiosyncratic, but they did nothing to dispel the real difficulties of the text of the play. They possessed neither an initial presumption in their favor, nor any detailed evidence in the play to support them. They were generally based upon resemblances which were far too broad and vague to be of any importance, and the perspective they represented was not at all apparent unless one accepted the critic's own standpoint without question. In short, such commentaries were entirely worthless as expositions of *The Tempest's* inner import.

In this chapter, we'll follow Colin Still's

brilliant interpretation of *The Tempest* as a "dramatic version of the ascent 'out of darkness into light'" which follows "generally the lines of universal tradition," and reproduces "with remarkable fidelity the substance and the form both of the Christian and of the non-Christian traditions."

Still interprets *The Tempest* as:

- dealing "with those permanent realities of spiritual experience of which the imaginative expression throughout the ages constitutes the universal tradition, as exemplified in the ancient myths and mysteries, in all religious concepts and ceremonies, in many works of art and literature, and even in popular folklore"
- expressing "those unchanging realities in the same language of imagery as is employed in all these other versions of the tradition"
- containing many points of resemblance to these other versions and doing "so of inherent necessity and quite independently of any conscious imitation on Shakespeare's part"
- possessing "points of resemblance so numerous and striking as to confirm overwhelmingly this general view of the Play"

The Tempest deals concurrently with three facets of the Perennial Tradition by means of three separate threads of narrative relating to the three bands of travellers Prospero expressly commands Ariel to land upon the Island in separate groups:

- Ferdinand, who makes the ascent to the Celestial Paradise which constitutes the Greater Initiation
- the King and his company, the Court Party, who make the passage through Purgatory which constitutes the Lesser Initiation
- Stephano and Trinculo, who re-enact the myth of the Fall

The Greater Initiation

Symbolically, this higher mystery is depicted as an ascent out of death into a higher life of the spirit. Dante portrays it as an ascent from Elysium or Eden to the Celestial Paradise where we obtain a vision of divine things. In the Mystery rituals such as Eleusis, it involved a simulated death and then a viewing of the gods, through which experience the initiate becomes an Eoptes, a seer. All these are expressions of the same inner experience in which through the initiation experience of "closing his eyes" and dying to the external world, the seeker achieves Illumination.

Ferdinand's experience in *The Tempest* is an account of the Higher Initiation. From Ariel's initial report to Prospero, we understand that Ferdinand has passed through death and hell, during the shipwreck at sea, and has been led by Ariel's music into Elysium, inner tranquility.

"The king's son, Ferdinand,
With hair up-starting (then like reeds, not hair),
Was the first man that leapt; cried, 'Hell is empty,
And all the devils are here.'"

Ferdinand says that Ariel's sweet air has allayed the fury of the waters and his own passion. This is essentially the same description we have from Virgil of Aeneas' passing from Purgatory into Elysium, where "happy spirits dance and sing upon the yellow sands."

In the Eleusinian and Bacchic mysteries, the aspirant is made to undergo an ordeal in which he is subjected to a meager, spartan diet, is forced into hard labor, and undergoes a simulated death.

**"Sea-water shalt thou drink; thy food shalt be
The fresh-brook mussels, withered roots, and husks
Wherein the acorn cradled."**

It's interesting that only Ferdinand undergoes these deprivations. And then begin his Herculean labors.

"Enter Ferdinand, bearing a log. . . .

I must remove

**Some thousands of these logs, and pile them up,
Upon a sore injunction."**

As an initiate, Ferdinand has to accept the discipline of a harsh diet and arduous labors. And these trials are expressly said to be for the purpose of his proving worthy of Miranda.

Miranda portrays the traditional "Bride" of the initiate--the "beloved of the spirit," as Wisdom or Truth. The aspirant in the mysteries passes through death, through ordeals, and finally achieves union with the Beloved.

Ferdinand's reaction to meeting Miranda is one of awe in the face of a Wonder. Dante's confession to Beatrice is in the same vein: Beatrice is of "marvellous aspect" and is "visibly miraculous." He is "content to call her face a Miracle."

That Shakespeare is directly alluding to the Eleusinian rites is made clear when the figure of Ceres (Demeter) appears during the Masque. Demeter is the presiding deity of Eleusis.

In the Higher Initiation, the aspirant suffers through ordeals, rises from death to a new spiritual life of union with the Beloved, and receives from the Hierophant the Secrets of the Mystery of Life. So at the close of the Masque Prospero divulges:

"These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind.

"We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep."

Having been initiated into the Higher Consciousness, the aspirant is now led into the Holy of Holies.

"If you be pleased, retire into my Cell."

No one else is allowed into Prospero's Cell throughout the entire action of the play until the end when Ferdinand has completed his Higher Initiation and the Court Party has concluded their initiation into the Lesser Mysteries.

The Lesser Initiation

The Lesser Mystery, an important facet of the Perennial Tradition, has been presented in a variety of contexts:

- **Jesus' going into the Wilderness immediately after his baptism where he fasted for forty days and resisted the temptations of the Devil, achieving victory**
- **The Israelites wandering in the Wilderness after they had crossed the Red Sea and finally reaching the Promised Land**
- **Dante's account of the climbing of the misty slopes of the Mount of Purgatory upward to Elysium**
- **Mystery Rites (such as Eleusis): journey through the purgatorial darkness beyond the River Styx up into the Mist and finally into the Air (the light of the temple)**
- **Aeneas crossing from Carthage (Tunis) to Cumae (only several miles from Naples) meets in Hell his pilot Palinurus, who was drowning during the voyage**

In the first scene of the play, we encounter the Court's Party as they experience an imaginary wreck as they are crossing the sea from Tunis to Naples. In the midst of the

description of their coming up out of the water, Shakespeare interjects an extraordinary reference to Aeneas, who having travelled from Tunis to Naples experienced his "Descent into Hell."

To make clear the correlation between *The Tempest* and other renditions of the Perennialist Initiation Tradition, we will align them in parallel columns.

| <i>The Tempest</i> | Other Ancient and Classical Mystery Rites |
|--|--|
| <p>The Court Party travels from Tunis to Naples, experiencing shipwreck and narrowly escape drowning</p> | <p>Aeneas travels from Carthage (Tunis) to Cumae (only several miles from Naples) and narrowly escapes drowning</p> |
| <p>Gonzalo, after landing upon the Island, calls attention no less than four times to the unblemished condition of his clothes. The garments are said to be "fresher than before" and to be "rather new-dyed than stained with salt water."</p> <p>Ariel sings of the King to Ferdinand his son:</p> | <p>Like Baptism in the Christian Church and <i>Katharsis</i> in the Ancient Mysteries, immersion in water is represented as a physical occurrence, but its significance is entirely spiritual. In the first stage of initiation-- immersion in water-- the aspirant is</p> |

Full fathom five thy father lies;
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes;
Nothing of him that doth fade,
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange

purged of the grosser
carnal impulses
which belong to the
"sustaining
garment" of the
physical body.

The King has
undergone some
kind of bettering
transformation.

Gon. Will you laugh me
asleep, for I am very heavy?

Ant. Go sleep, and hear us.
[All sleep but Alon., Seb.,
and Ant.

Alo. What, all so soon
asleep?

...

Alo. Thank you, wondrous
heavy.

[Alonso sleeps.

Seb. What a strange
drowsiness oppresses them!

Ant. It is the quality o' the
climate.

They fell together all, as by
consent;

They dropped, as by a
thunder-stroke.

Dante, in his account
of a visit to the
abodes of the dead,
says that when he
had passed over the
water with Charon
the ferryman,

"Down-dropped, as
one with sudden
slumber seized."

Dante says that
what caused him
to sleep was the
conquering of his
senses by a loud
shaking of the
earth and a flash
of lightning.

When Aeneas
crosses the

infernal river, he is told by Charon the ferryman that he has come to the realm of sleep: "This is the place of Ghosts, of sleep, and drowsy Night."

The wanderings of the Court Party are outwardly represented to be a search for the King's son Ferdinand.

**Gon. By'r lakin, I can go no further, sir;
My old bones ache: here's a maze trod, indeed,
Through forth-rights and meanders! By your patience,
I needs must rest me.
Alo. Old lord, I cannot blame thee,
Who am myself attach'd with weariness
To the dulling of my spirits: sit down and rest.
Even here will I put off my hope, and keep it
No longer for my flatterer: he is drown'd
Whom thus we stray to find.**

Stobaeus: "The first state is nothing but errors and uncertainties, laborious wanderings . . ."

Plutarch likewise refers to "errors and wanderings" in the rites of the Mysteries.

The wanderings of Initiation are always a search for that which is lost, and what is sought is symbolized as the Lost Estate of Man or the inspired Word which he lost in the Fall. In the Eleusinian Mysteries, the

wanderings of the candidates with torches around the shores and plains of Eleusis represented the search for the lost daughter, Persephone. In the Isiac Mysteries the neophyte was said to be seeking for the lost Osiris.

**Solemn and strange music; and Prospero above, invisible.
Enter several Strange Shapes bringing in a banquet: they dance about it with gentle acts of salutation; and, inviting the King, Etc, to eat, they depart.
Alo. What harmony is this? my good friends, hark!
Gon. Marvellous sweet music!
Alo. Give us kind keepers, heavens! What were these?
Seb. A living drollery.
Gon. If in Naples I should report this now,**

**Milton's Paradise Regained: Christ is depicted as being tempted in the wilderness by means of a banquet set before him by the Devil, and this banquet is then said to disappear:
"With sound of harpies' wings and talons heard."**

At this stage in the Lesser Initiation, the traditional ordeal occurs: the time of temptation. Wearied by 'wanderings' and rendered despondent by failure, the seeker is tempted to abandon his quest. He is assailed by desires, by

would they believe me?
If I should say I saw such
islanders
(For, certes, these are
people of the island)
Who, though they are of
monstrous shape, yet,
note,
Their manners are more
gentle-kind than of
Our human generation
you shall find
Many, nay, almost any.

Gonsalo:
Who would believe that
there were mountaineers
Dew-lapped like bulls,
whose throats had
hanging at them
Wallets of flesh? Or that
there were such men
Whose heads stood in
their breasts? Which now
we find

unclean thoughts, by
alluring memories of
lower things. It is this
phase of inner
experience which is
represented in the
Ancient Tradition by
the encounter with the
Devil, with the Dragon,
with Apollyon, with the
Monsters and the
Sirens, and which is
similarly represented
in the Eleusinian rites
by the encounter with
'Monstrous
Apparitions.'

Of the many different
kinds of traditional
monsters, which
represent unclean
thoughts and
impulses, it is to the
mythical Sirens that
the Strange Shapes in
the Play correspond
most nearly in their
general nature. Like
the Sirens, they make
'gentle acts of
salutation' to the
accompaniment of
'marvellous sweet
music'. They are
monstrous and
unnatural in form; yet
they seem at the first
encounter to be
pleasing and attractive
in their manners, a

curious combination of qualities peculiar to the mythical Sirens.

Virgil, speaking of the strange creatures encountered by Aeneas in the purgatorial region, expressly calls them monsters of mixed species (like the men with throats of bulls who appear to the Court Party.

Chaldean Monsters included creatures of a similar sort of monstrosity, namely, 'men with double faces' and 'bulls with human heads'. They were agents of temptation employed by Thalath, whose rule was through 'lusts by persuasion' and they were therefore essentially the same as the mythical Sirens.

**Ariel accuses Alonso,
Sebastian and Antonio of
being 'three men of sin':**

**They [the powers] . . . do
pronounce by me
Lingering perdition, worse
than any death
Can be at once, shall step by
step attend
You and your ways; whose
wraths to guard you from
Which hre, in this most
desolate isle, else falls
Upon your heads, is nothing
but heart's sorrow
And a clear life ensuing.**

**Ariel reporting to Prospero on
the state of mind of the King
and his company, but
especially of the guilty three:
The King,
His brother, and yours, abide
all three distracted,
And the remainder mourning
over them,
Brimful of sorrow and dismay.**

**In the Ancient Mysteries,
the neophyte wanders in
confusion and is at last
confronted with his own
shortcomings. If the
neophyte gains self-
knowledge at this point,
and experiences remorse,
this awareness of guilt is
the first phase of
repentance and
expiation. He is then
allowed to proceed to the
Temple.**

**Themistius' account of
the ritual initiation of the
pagan Mysteries:**

**"At the moment of
approaching the
innermost sanctuary, the
man was filled with a
shuddering and a
swimming in the head,
and was held by dismay
and a complete
perplexity, and was
unable to take a step, or
to lay hold of any
beginning leading inward
(i.e. to make any start
towards entering); and
when the hierophant,
having thrown open the
entrance to the
temple. . ."**

The completion of the Lesser Initiation; passing from the state of remorse, Purgatory, to the state of amendment and self-mastery, Elysium

Being sent to fetch them, Ariel presently returns with the Court Party:

Re-enter Ariel: after him, Alonso, with a frantic gesture, Attended by Gonzalo; Sebastian and Antonio, in like manner, Attended by Adrian and Francisco. They all enter the circle Which Prospero has made, and there stand charmed.

Prospero, who has just called forth some "heavenly music," speaks as follows:

**A solemn air, and the best comforter
To an unsettled fancy, cure thy brains,
Now useless boiled within thy skull! There stand,
For you are spell-stopped.**

This Scene is laid "before the Cell of Prospero" and shortly after the men have been spell-stopped, Prospero throws open the door of the Cell.

**And as the morning steals upon the night,
Melting the darkness, so their rising senses
Begin to chase the ignorant fumes**

The opening of the entrance to the temple terminated the wanderings on the shore at Eleusias in search of the Lost Child--so in *The Tempest* the opening of the entrance of the cell and "discovering Ferdinand" terminates the wanderings of the Court Party in search of the lost son.

In the Eleusinian Mystery, the entry of the neophyte into the brilliantly lighted temple from the gloom of the seashore, and from the darkness of the vestibule where the Monstrous Shapes were encountered, expressed psychological emergence out of darkness into light--the goal of all mystical Initiation--ILLUMINATION.

Themistius: When the doors of the temple were thrown open "the

that mantle
Their clearer reason.

mist and thick
cloud were
dispersed, and the
mind (of the
initiate) emerged
from the depth, full
of brightness and
light in place of
the previous
darkness."

Prospero:
Do not infest your mind
with beating on
The strangeness of this
business; at picked leisure,
Which shall be shortly,
single I'll resolve you
(Which to you shall seem
probably) of every
These happened accidents;
till when, be cheerful,
And think of each thing well.

The extraordinary
experiences of the Court
Party must be resolved by a
coherent interpretation by
Prospero.

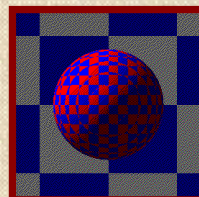
The pagan Mysteries
culminated in a spoken
discourse, called
Paradosis ("oral
transmission").
Paradosis must have
been an explanatory
communication of some
sort. One of the chief
objects of the Eleusian
ritual was to instruct the
candidate in that most
important subject, the
knowledge of himself. At
some time the inner
meaning of the initiation
ceremony was expounded
to him, for without such
exposition it would defeat
its own purpose. If
Paradosis was "the
transmission of the
mystery" in the sense
that it was an oral
account of the neophyte's
experiences and an

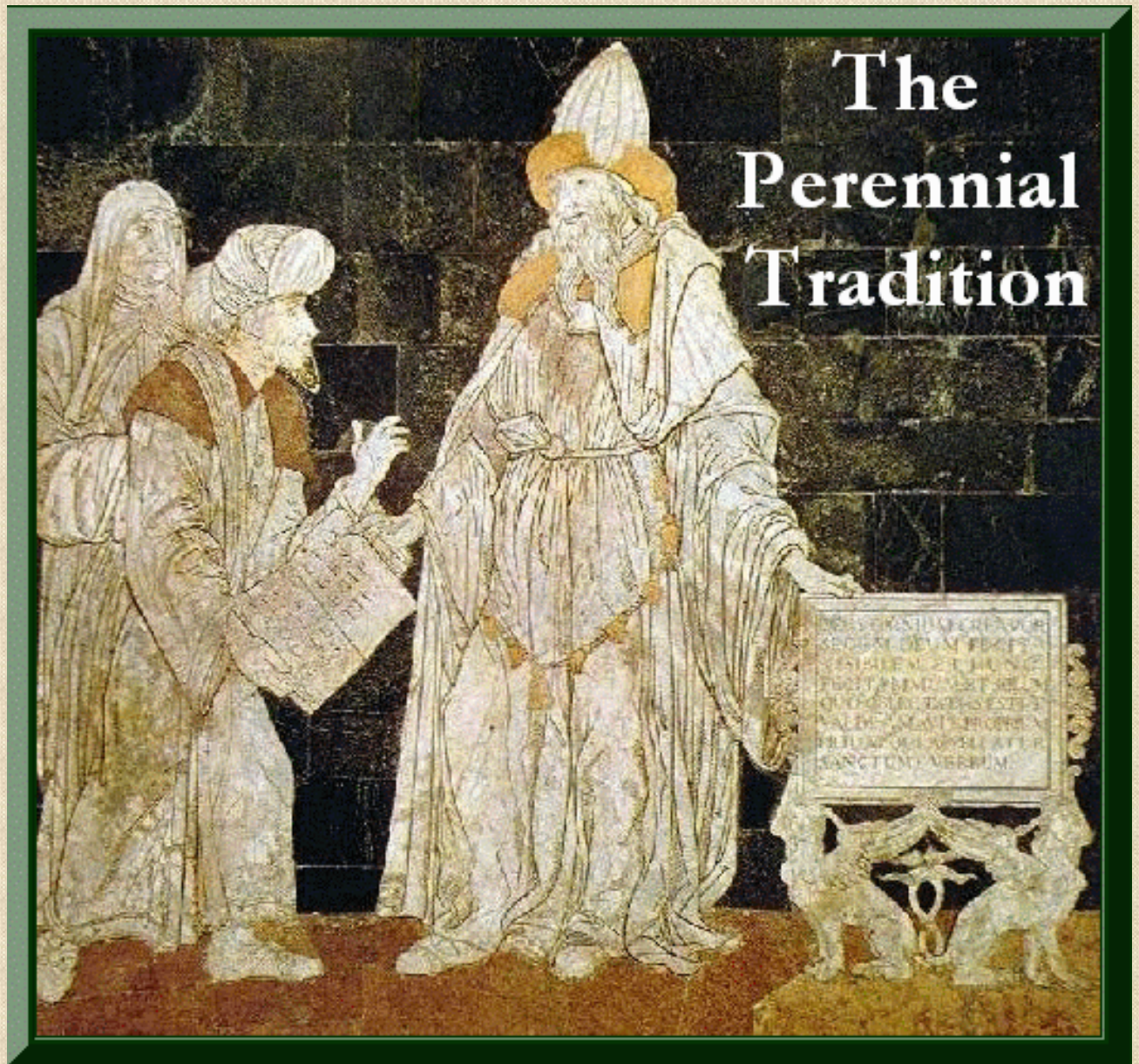
esoteric interpretation of the particular myth on which the cultus was based, it must have dealt with the subject from a psychological angle. To explain, among other things, that the ritual search for the lost Persephone was figurative of the quest for Truth.

Throughout the works of Shakespeare, there are unmistakable references to Perennialist themes. The Perennial Tradition has always been conveyed through high poetry, and Shakespeare's works are among the most important renditions of Perennialist wisdom.

"Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in its head"

"The quality of mercy is not strained,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest;
It blesseth him that gives and him that
takes"





Chapter Seventeen

**Betty White and
Stewart E. White**

Twentieth Century Perennialist Teachers

Persons who carry out essential preparation, discover in the White books unequivocal proof of transformative teachings:

- **The books speak to them at a completely different level each time they study them.**
- **With each reading, they contain entirely new, hitherto unrecognized meanings.**
- **The books contain methods for awakening and developing dormant organs of perception.**
- **Discernment of meanings and development of capabilities disclosed in the books require dedicated study over a period of time.**
- **The ideas in the book can appear, to a person not attuned to them, to be simplistic, extreme, trivial, or erroneous.**



In March, 1918, Betty and Stewart Edward White had their

first experience with the spirit world. At a party with friends, the Ouija board, being used as a parlor game, spelled the name "Betty" over and over again. When Betty took over the pointer, it spelled out a number of messages, including the advice to try "automatic writing." For over a year Betty and Stewart experimented with "automatic writing," receiving a number of messages which proved evidential. Betty was slowly led into another method in which she entered a higher state of consciousness, speaking in her own voice or the voice of another entity. The entities communicating through Betty declined to be identified, wishing to remain anonymous, and thus were named "the Invisibles" by the Whites.

In the higher state of perception, Betty's ordinary consciousness was set aside. "The Invisibles" led her into another, higher world, teaching her to create a new identity. Stewart recorded the messages and experiences which Betty reported in her higher state of consciousness. "The Invisibles" indicated that they were not only teaching Betty to enter a higher world of spiritual consciousness but were interested in teaching all humans how to enter this world.

Two other similar psychic researchers were active at the same time, Ruth and Darby Finley. They published a book in 1920, written anonymously, they claimed, by *The Unseen Guest* (the title they gave their book). The book had a profound influence on the Whites and they became close lifetime friends with the Finleys. The Finley book provided a solid grounding for the belief in individual survival after death.

Betty and Stewart White continued the sessions with "the Invisibles" from 1919 to 1936. Having waited for seventeen years, they finally decided to publish their first

book outlining their adventures in learning about and entering the higher spiritual world. The book was titled *The Betty Book*.

Betty White died in 1939 but continued to "communicate" through Ruth Finley. Betty was one of the most remarkable spiritual teachers the world has known. She not only participated in her own education in higher consciousness, assisting Stewart to gain discernment in the process, but also created a body of teachings for all those interested in developing this same capability of higher awareness. Her teachings are unique in that we actually "hear" Betty's reports as she is learning, teaching us by what she is experiencing. Her teachings are not about mere concepts but about actual, experiential events which lead to the development of higher faculties dormant through generations of neglect.

As we read the White books, we see Betty moving from her first encounter with the spiritual realm via a ouija board, then into automatic writing, and finally into an altered state of awareness with her ordinary consciousness in abeyance. She reported about her experiences not in a trance state, but in full possession of her faculties.

Especially in *Across The Unknown*, we see that Stewart entered into the experiences of a higher consciousness as well as Betty. The books they created together were truly joint ventures, each collaborating from her or his position of strength.

It's also necessary to point out that, according to both Betty and Stewart, the teachings came from and were transmitted by the Invisibles. The Invisibles appear to have worked with them both in a process which inhibited certain

elements when necessary, enhanced specific capabilities, used humor creatively, and systematically modulated the presentation of the teachings in a manner reminiscent of the Sufi technique termed "scatter."

As both she and Stewart were learning, Betty reported her learning experiences in her own voice or in the voice of one of the Invisibles.

"I just work hard, and then I find I am raised up somehow to a superstate, and am in touch with something I did not have before; and I see it vaguely and look back and tell you about it. But I *do* it, whatever I'm at. That's why I work so hard and keep quiet so long. I'm gaining a sense of reality, experiencing, doing; instead of just reflecting. That means I've got actually to work in this living beyondness and absorb into the unconscious, as you call it, until I have something to produce in the conscious.

"The bigness of its possibilities are untranslatable. It is as impossible to put them into words as it is to put the ocean in a bucket. Nevertheless, I must bring back some of it in some fashion. If I went on a visit and had a great experience, I'd try to tell you about it. . . ."

"INVISIBLE: This control, this acquisition of raised vibrations - whatever you choose to call it - is absolutely within the desire of the individual. If you really want it, nothing from

the outside can more than momentarily distract. It is a thing that one builds or does not build, according to his caliber."

Across the Unknown

Both Stewart and Betty reported their learning experiences as they occurred. We are privileged to "go along" with them as they report these adventures in learning, hearing how they experiment in creating a new identify in a higher realm. We're then able to experiment with these same operations and concepts in learning to enter this supersensory world.

Most teachers merely introduce intellectual discussions of concepts. They present ideas about altered states of consciousness in such a way that we are encouraged to presume that they have attained these powers of heightened awareness. Yet the torpidity of their teachings and their lives often reveal that they failed to achieve personal illumination.

We can get a clear idea of the unique style of Stewart's and Betty's teaching by comparing their elucidation of a particular understanding to that of other teaching material. In the Perennial Tradition there is a persistent teaching concerning the necessity of "dying" before we die. We see traces of this in the Mystery teachings which involved such rituals as placing the initiate in a coffin or in water and then "raising" the initiate into "a new life" a "rebirth." One of Muhammed's famous sayings was: "Die before you die." Jesus is said to have taught that unless we die and are reborn we cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

When a disciple came to Buddha, he was told to go to the burning place and observe bodies being cremated. The disciple was to remain there, watching, for three months. "Don't think about it," Buddha said, "just look at it."

**"He will give you thousands of existences,
One after another, the succeeding ones better than the former. . . .**

**"Seek annihilation and adore change of state.
You have already seen hundreds of resurrections
Occur every moment from your origin till now;
One from the inorganic state to the vegetive state,
From the vegetive state to the animal state of trial;
Thence again to rationality and good discernment;
Again you will rise from this world of sense and form."**

Rumi. *The Mathnawi*

The Whites' Teaching on Dying Before You Die

"This exit into greater life is the crowning glory of our existence here. It means transfiguration into an electrified and eternal being. I've got to tell you of it by degrees, because the exit is through the doors of self.

"Now stepping outside oneself actually means the practice of making one's own in imagination the conditions of the hour of death. . . .

"Suppose the day came for the Great Adventure of departing hence. Even a picnic or a vacation or a business trip demands *some* preparation. One is apt to take this tremendous step quite suddenly. What is it going to be like? Why turn our imaginations away from it so piously - or is it cowardly? Why not entertain ourselves with the buoyancy of anticipation? It is quite as speculative an amusement as contemplating a trip to Thibet, or reading what astronomers say about Mars, or any other pet flight of fancy. This has the advantage that we are actually dated up for it. . . .

"Children play beautiful games of expanding consciousness, supposing giants and mighty superlatives. I'm getting just such a cheerful imaginative picture of when we depart hence. It is as though everything had been taken from me but the residue of me, such as would remain if I were to die now. It's all I've got to orient me in this new world in which I am just an embryonic being. Every circumstance of life is gone. I am as unconscious of my body as ever I could possibly be. The merest shadow of its existence is on me. . . .

"It makes me feel that I personally can never be annihilated. If my body were actually taken away from me entirely, and I left in space, I feel I should continue to hold myself together, a vigorously determined entity. I might be temporarily inactive, perhaps, but I'd be convinced of my ability to participate in an existence which would be within my reach for the effort of taking. Though I might be deprived of everything en route, I could not by any conceivable thing be overcome or annihilated. I know that the development of a spark, even a tiny spark, of individual power cannot die. It will seek and find its proper progression through its own vitality. The thing to do is to take a lively spark with you when you go. . . .

"I am trying to show you an actual definite possible method of controlling the first maturing, naturally and joyously, from this life to the next; occupying experimentally the higher grades, while continuing existence here. You can do this by periodically letting fall your acquiescence with the impertinences of the body and its setting of manufactured needs, its houses and parks and marts and all its complications: letting them fall deliberately from your consciousness, and at the same time being vigorously yourself; translating as into another language the same order of your ardors and pursuits. It mirrors your soul in secret to yourself. . . .

"Now I am quite successfully dead. It wasn't much of an operation after all! It was a pleasurable releasing, quite different from the death-agony idea.

That should be looked on as simply the birth pains of the spiritual body.

"I'm here, all right, and quite contented, but I'm like a baby that has pulled itself upright holding onto a chair: I don't know what to do next. If only I were a little stronger and more vigorous, that would put me more closely in touch with the help and affection I feel around me. Thank heaven I have the protection of it. Now I must keep still and see what my instincts and emotions are. . . .


"I seem to be only semiconscious. There is so much around me now that before I was blind and deaf to. . . . Oh, I strained to open what should be my earth eyes and touch with my earth fingers, and it's not possible. . . . Helping, loving people are around me, urging me to do something. I love them back for helping me, and it gets easier. . . .

"Seems to me I'll have to leave myself there awhile, just brooding. I am going on with the eternal body though; I must find out how I shape it and energize it." (*Across the Unknown*)

Stewart Edward White



Mr. White was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, March 12, 1873, and was educated at the University of Michigan and Columbia University. Stewart

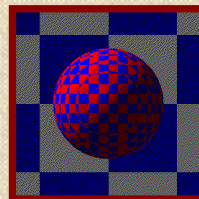


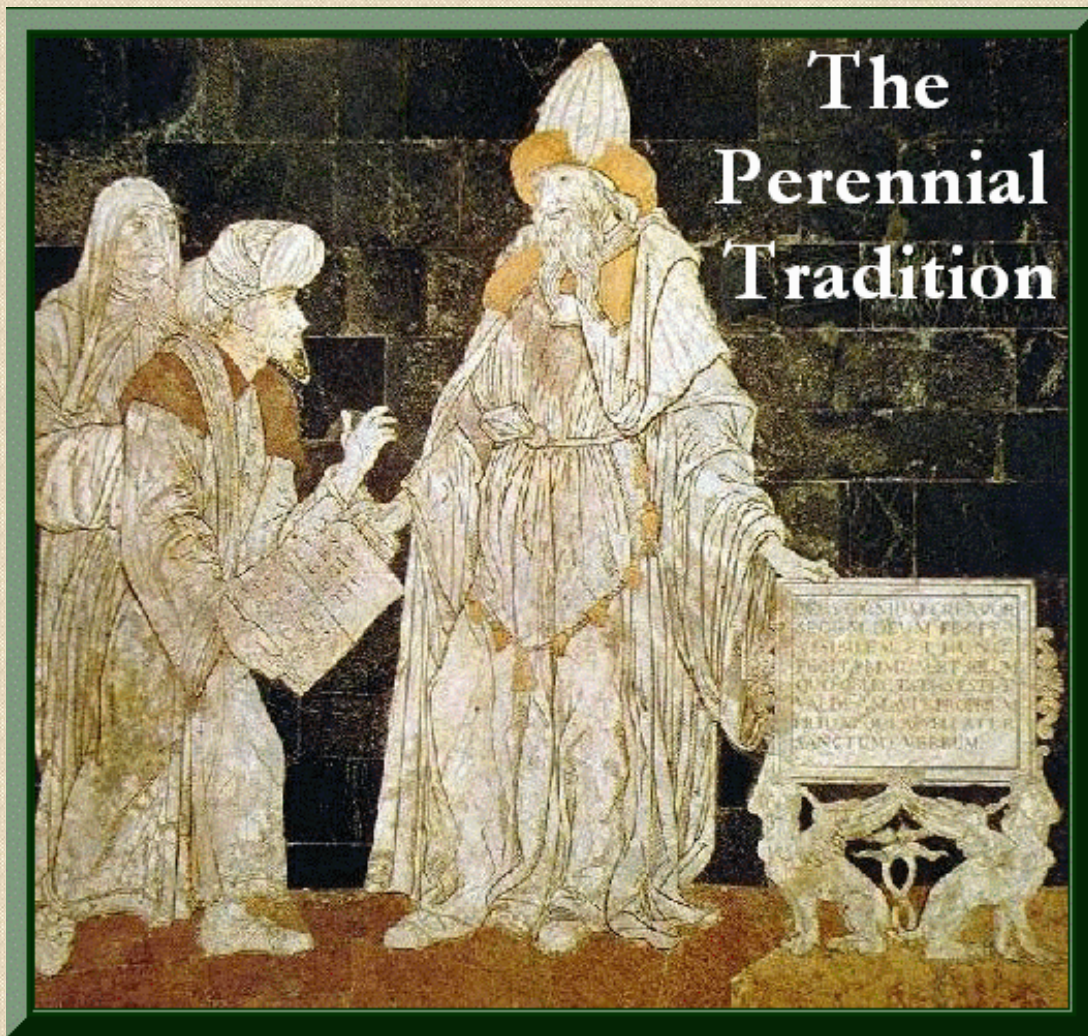
was a novelist, historian, naturalist, a Fellow of the Royal Geographical Society, London, member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters, the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the American Association for the Advancement of Science. He was a Major, 144th Field Artillery, during World War I. He was an expert rifle marksman, big game hunter, explorer of the Rocky Mountains and the deserts of the Southwest; of the waters and mountains ranges of Alaska, and of the far reaches of Africa.

In the early decades of the twentieth century he was one of the best known and most widely respected of American writers. He wrote a number of travel and "outdoor" books:

Claim Jumpers (1911); *The Forest* (1987); *The Forty-Niners* (1991); *Lions in the Path* (1987); *Long Rifle* (1979); *Magic Forest* (1976); *The Mountains* (1987); *Silent Places* (1976); *Stampede* (1911); *The Story of California* (1992); *African Campfires* (1987); *Arizona Nights* (1976); *Blazed Trail Stories and Stories of the Wild Life* (1980); *Daniel Boone : Wilderness Scout* (1976); *Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe* (1979); *Wild Geese Calling* (1940)

To see a presentation of one of the Whites' book, *The Unobstructed Universe*, click [here](#).





Chapter Eighteen

Literature With Perennialis Strains

Along with the poetry we reviewed in the chapter on Transformative Art and Shakespeare's play, *The Tempest*, which we examined in chapter fifteen, we're fortunate to have several additional examples of literature which contain Perennialist strains or fragments. In this chapter we'll review three novels and a nonfiction book by a man who received Perennialist-like knowledge from a most unusual teacher: a dog named Strongheart. The book *Kinship With All Life* was written by J. Allen Boone. The chapter will conclude with a review of a piece of literature with Perennialist fragments: Virginia Woolf's novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*.

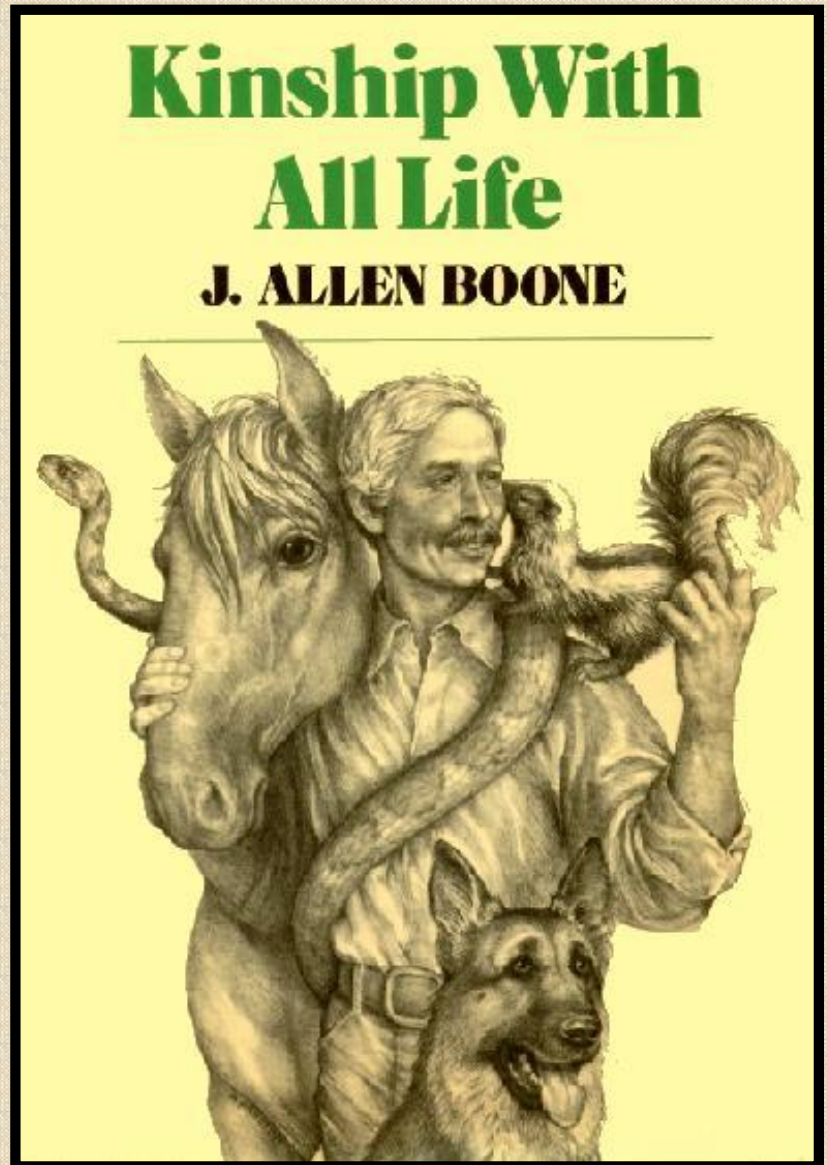
The literary pieces we explore in this chapter all have the extraordinary capability of pointing to, symbolizing, alluding to Perennialist themes. The reference to Perennialist themes is always indirect, sometimes so mixed with extraneous elements that the allusion provides merely an intimation. At times the indication of Perennialist motifs is garbled to the point of partial misrepresentation. But in all the pieces examined there is the unmistakable, positive quality of attesting to spiritual realities.

Kinship With All Life

In previous chapters we've encountered Perennialist teachers who with their unclouded wisdom were able to distinguish between the realities and unrealities of human existence. "Such stuff as dreams are made on," Shakespeare described it.

Their ability to discern spiritual realities within and above this terrestrial plane was gained as they began to "see" with the spiritual body. Boone, the author of *Kinship With All Life*, had studied many of these teachers, and understood that they sometime called this capability "the faultless eye of Truth," "the eye of the Soul," "the eye of the Mind," or "the eye of the Understanding." And Boone had spent sufficient time with American Indians to know that with their simple, direct approach they called this supernormal faculty "in-seeing," "in-hearing," or "in-knowing."

Boone developed this kind of faculty through his relationship with Strongheart, a German Shepherd dog who had starred in a number of American movies in the early twentieth century. Boone was taught this "inner seeing" through his long association with his truly fabulous canine teacher. Boone was actually able to see and discern Strongheart as a



unique reality in the larger scheme of universal wisdom.

While Strongheart's "owners" were away, Boone had been tasked with caring for the dog. He could sense from the beginning that there was something extraordinary about Strongheart. Not just his trained ability to open doors and sense everything that was going on about him. Boone slowly came to realize that Strongheart was actually his teacher. Their shared journey into what Boone called "larger certainties" began when Boone started studying the special qualities that Strongheart evinced in everything he did. Boone simply observed the dog for hours on end and then itemized Strongheart's qualities with the aid of a book of synonyms and a dictionary.

"The more I did this the more I lifted my concept of Strongheart out of the physical and into the mental, and out of the mental into the spiritual. Thus I was constantly translating him into what he really was back of his physical appearance--an illimitable idea. . . ."

Strongheart and Boone spent many hours on a high hill overlooking the valleys below, a spot Strongheart had picked out. During these times of silence together, Boone decided to interview Strongheart as though he were "a distinguished but difficult-to-understand foreigner." He spoke to him mentally in order not to disturb the sanctuary stillness in which they were both sitting. Boone aimed his soundless messages at the back of Strongheart's head, asking him questions having to do with Strongheart's personal life, with Boone, with human-animal relationships in general.

One day, as Boone was carrying on this silent interview procedure, Strongheart suddenly swung his head around and began staring at Boone, and right through him. To Boone, it was unexpected--and startling.

After an extensive period of time, Strongheart turned his head back to its original position and calmly resumed looking off into space as he usually did. Within himself Boone was certain that Strongheart had been silently answering his questions. And Boone suddenly realized that he was actually able to understand what Strongheart had said to him. The proof was that Boone instantly had answers to practically every question he had asked, answers that he subsequently verified in every detail.

"Sitting there on the ledge with his back in my direction,

Strongheart had heard the questions I had mentally asked him. When I went into that blank state of mind, without knowing what I was doing I had become mentally open and receptive. Then, turning his head in my direction so as to get my full attention, he had silently answered my questions. I had spoken to Strongheart in the kind of speech which does not have to be uttered or written, and he had replied to me in the same language. Without the exchange of a sound or a gesture between us, each had perfectly understood the other. I had at last made contact with that seemingly lost universal silent language which, as those illumined ancients pointed out long ago, all life is innately equipped to speak with all life whenever minds and hearts are properly attuned.

"What made our silent conversations so easy and so rewarding was the invisible Primary Factor that was responsible for the entire activity. In order to understand this deeply hidden secret, it is important to know that what actually went on in those communion sessions of ours was not the hit-or-miss exchange of thoughts between the 'larger and more important brain of a human' and the 'smaller and less important brain of a dog.'"

"Not at all. Brains as such had no more to do with it than ribs. It was something far more authoritative. And that something had all the immensity, all the power, all the intelligence, all the love of the boundless Mind of the Universe moving back of it and in it and through it.

"Neither Strongheart nor I was doing any communicating as of ourselves. Neither of us was expressing himself as an original thinker or an independent source. On the contrary, we were being communicated through by the Mind of the Universe. We were being used as living instruments for its good pleasure. that primal, illimitable and eternal Mind was moving through me to Strongheart, and through Strongheart to me."

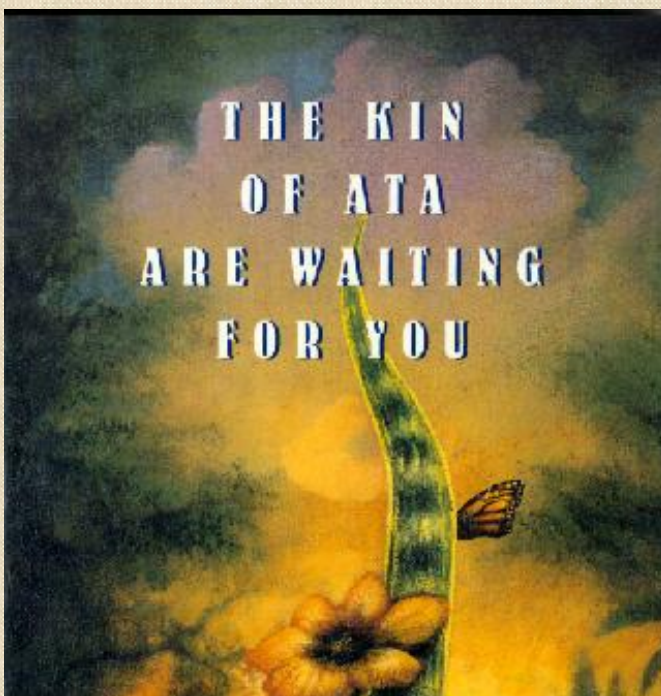
Boone felt privileged to learn from his dog teacher how to get his human ego and intellect out of the way, how to blend his best with Strongheart's best, and how to let the Universe express itself through them, "as the Universe with its wisdom and long experience well knows how to do. . . "

As Boone became more skilled in this silent communication he experienced the answers to his questions coming to him with a gentle kind of impact, as a "still small voice" "whispering the needed information within . . . or a sudden awareness . . . or a revealing suggestion . . . or swift enlightenment . . . or a clear direction for solving a particular problem."

In the transitions from not-knowing to knowing, Boone was never conscious of having to make any particular mental effort. He simply became as still and as receptive as possible--and listened to Strongheart's messages. Sooner or later the messages came. The experience for Boone was as if he were suddenly remembering something he had always known but temporarily had forgotten in the fogs and confusions of human experience.

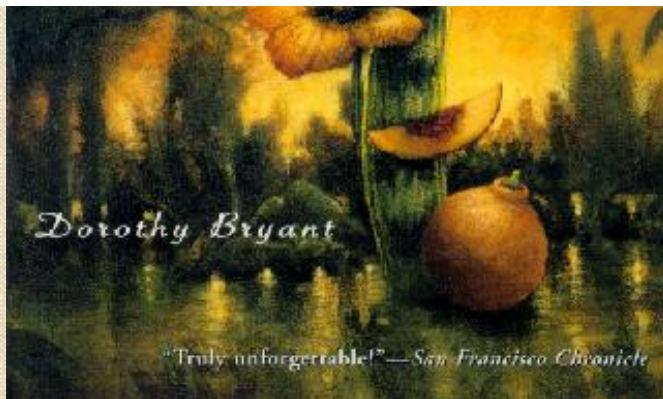
"Thus did Strongheart and I share in that silent language which the Mind of the Universe is constantly speaking through all life and for the greater good of all life. Thus did we make use of that wondrous inner route from mind to mind and from heart to heart. Thus did we cross each other's boundaries, only to find that there were no boundaries separating us from each other, except in the dark illusions of the human senses."

Novels With Perennialist Strains



In reading Dorthy Bryant's *The Kin of Ata Are Waiting For You*, one hears distinct echoes of the Perennial Tradition. However, the depiction of Perennialist themes is so mixed with erroneous elements that the reader must carefully pick her way through the misinterpretations to the truths alluded to.

The story concerns a man who kills a lover in a fit of rage, drives away in a frenzy, his car plunging



off the highway into a steep ravine. The man (whose name we never learn) is thrown from the car. He awakes on an island called Ata where the inhabitants live in a stone-age culture, having been transported to the island through unexplained psychic means. Life on Ata is focused on the dream state,

the members telling one another their dreams when they awake, the goal of life to live progressively more in the dream state while awake.

The central "dream" or myth on which the culture of Ata is based is told and retold over many years.

"The day came when a piece of the sun fell to the ocean. It fell and floated on the ocean. It separated itself into earth and water and plants and animals. It was no longer sun, but each of its parts was a part of the sun and a sign of the sun. And all parts, earth and water and plants and animals, were content in their division, content in their expression of the sun, content to be a single part multiplying itself under the light of the sun, striving and being, as a sign of the sun but never true sun, lost to the form of the true sun.

"Until the single multiple signs formed the human part. And the human part of the sun was not content. The human part suffered because within it was the knowledge of the fall from the sun and the yearning to return.

"It knew and it did not know. It suffered and yearned. It suffered and yearned for what it did not know. And out of its suffering and yearning grew the cry of the people, yearning to know the way back to the sun.

"And the sun took pity on the people, and when they fell asleep, the sun shone through the sleep and lit up the world of sleep and showed them the way. In silent light of sleep the people saw that as there was a law of gravity there was also a law of light and that the law of light was stronger than the law of gravity.

"And the people obeyed the light of sleep, and they kept the light within them, and stood in the light of sleep both waking and sleeping until the light surrounded them and filled them. And they became the light. And as the sun shone on them, they shone back, and were lifted as light and shot as rays of light. And gravity was overcome and the people of light returned to the sun where they shine and flame eternally."

The people of Ata pattern their lives on specific dreams, believe that dreams are actual events, and follow the bidding of their dreams in their waking state. Certain members of Ata are selected, through their dreams, to return to the larger culture and try to improve human life. Atans believe that these "sacrificed" members of their culture actually prevent the human race from destroying itself.

"And have you ever asked yourself, how is it that this world has not yet destroyed itself?" [one of the Atans asks the man]

"Yes, everyone asks that, especially these days."

"It would have destroyed itself. The complete disconnection from the dream, total donagdeo [negativity], is destruction. When that possibility is imminent, someone is called, some kin, of Ata, someone very strong. This kin is sent back, is sacrificed, is sent to live among those on the edge of destruction. The human race is like a suicide, perched on the edge of a cliff, wavering, teetering. When she is about to fall over the edge, one of us goes out and, using all the strength he has, makes a wind that blows against the falling, keeps humanity wavering on the brink. Do you understand what I am telling you."

When the man tells of the life of Socrates, one of the Atans surmises that Socrates had come from Ata. The protagonist falls in love with a female Atan named Augustine. She is chosen, by her dream, to return to the larger world. After much anguish, the man begins to experience her in his dreams and follows her life in the other world. She lives as a simple household maid in various parts of the world, singing songs of emancipation in store-front churches. She is murdered by men who fear her songs. Augustine returns "Home" (not Ata, but the Fire).

The man finally decides to return to the other world, following a dream of his. As soon as he returns to the other world, he is convicted of

murder and sentenced to die. Having accepted his fate, the man experiences a mystical insight.

"And then there was light. Indescribably warm, glowing light. Light was everywhere. It shone on everything, through and into everything; it came out of everything, out of everyone. It was like a fire that does not consume, but not like a fire, like . . . like nothing else, nothing else was like it. But all things were full of it. The faces around the table, the table itself, the walls, the windows, everything was alive, everything lived in and through the light.

"And I too. I too. From the center of my being the light broke in waves, in orgasmic waves, outward to the extremities of my body, every cell of my body melting together in the waves of light that flowed outward from my center, and over me from the very air around me, from everything. I breathed it into me and it poured out of me, sweeping through me like a million orgasms. I was full and whole. I was part of the light and of all the other things that shone in and with the light. All were one. And whole.

"In that instant I understood all the stories and dreams and songs and dances of Ata, stories of jewels and of sun, of fire and of ocean. I understood the many versions of each story and the contradictions and paradoxes, and I knew that they were all, in their own way, true. For I had glimpsed the reality behind them."

Reading *The Kin of Ata Are Waiting For You* can be a rewarding experience, because it provides such lucid intimations of deeper spiritual realities. However, Bryant's metaphysical structure in the novel is peculiarly awry. Yes, we can progressively learn to live in the spiritual dimension--though this is very distinctly different from the dream state. Dreams can allude to the spiritual world, can help us become familiar with it.

Learning to live in one's spiritual body must be accomplished in the mundane world, not on an island of like-minded mystics. When we attain being in the spiritual reality, we do not need to go to a terrestrial place, such as an island. We learn to live in both the ordinary world and the spiritual world simultaneously.

The most vivid example of a person who accomplished this dual life is Betty White. Over many years of effort, Betty attained a higher state of perception, in which her ordinary consciousness was set aside. "The Invisibles" (her spiritual guides) led her into another, higher world, teaching her to create a new identity. Her husband, Stewart, recorded the messages and experiences which Betty reported in her higher state of consciousness. Her spiritual guides indicated that they were not only teaching Betty to enter a higher world of spiritual consciousness but were interested in teaching all humans how to enter this world.



Betty White lived within a higher spiritual community, where she developed her capabilities and interacted with other entities in that higher world.

The extraordinary feature of Betty's teachings is that she reports as she is learning, teaching us by what she is experiencing. Her teachings are not about mere concepts but concern actual, experiential events which lead to the development of higher faculties dormant through generations of neglect.

Mind-Science Fiction

The two novels we'll review next were written by Daniel Galouye, who wrote five mind-challenging novels, among a number of other works:

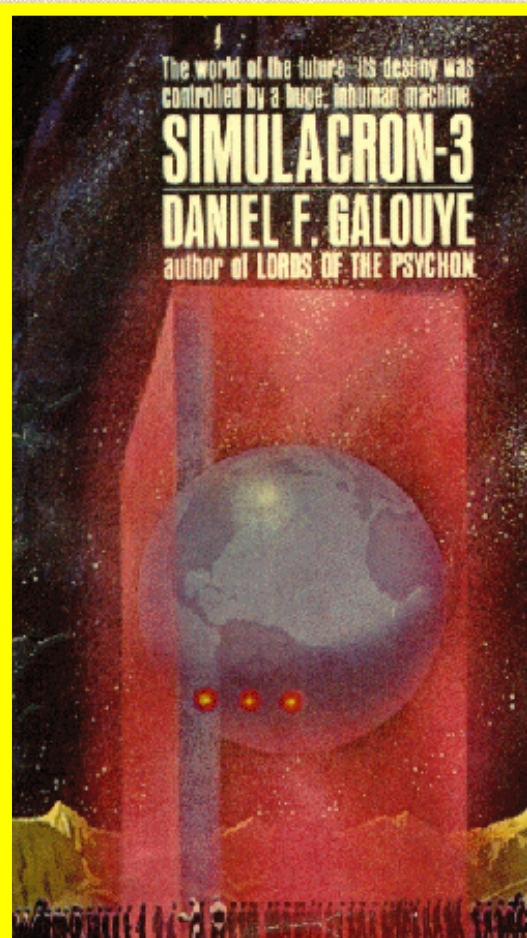
- *Dark Universe*, 1961
- *Lords of the Psychon*, 1963
- *Simulacron 3*, 1964
- *A Scourge of Screammers*, 1968
- *The Infinite Man*, 1973

In each novel, Galouye focuses on aspects of contemporary life:

- virtual reality and personality simulation (*Simulacron 3*)
- blind ignorance and illumination (*Dark Universe*)
- thought-transference (*Lords of the Psychon*)
- extra-sensory perception (*A Scourge of Screamers*)
- teleportation (*The Infinite Man*)

Galouye transforms each of these works into the nucleus for a manifold fable. These phenomena are placed in a new framework so that we begin to see a multi-dimensionality in ordinary reality.

Simulacron 3

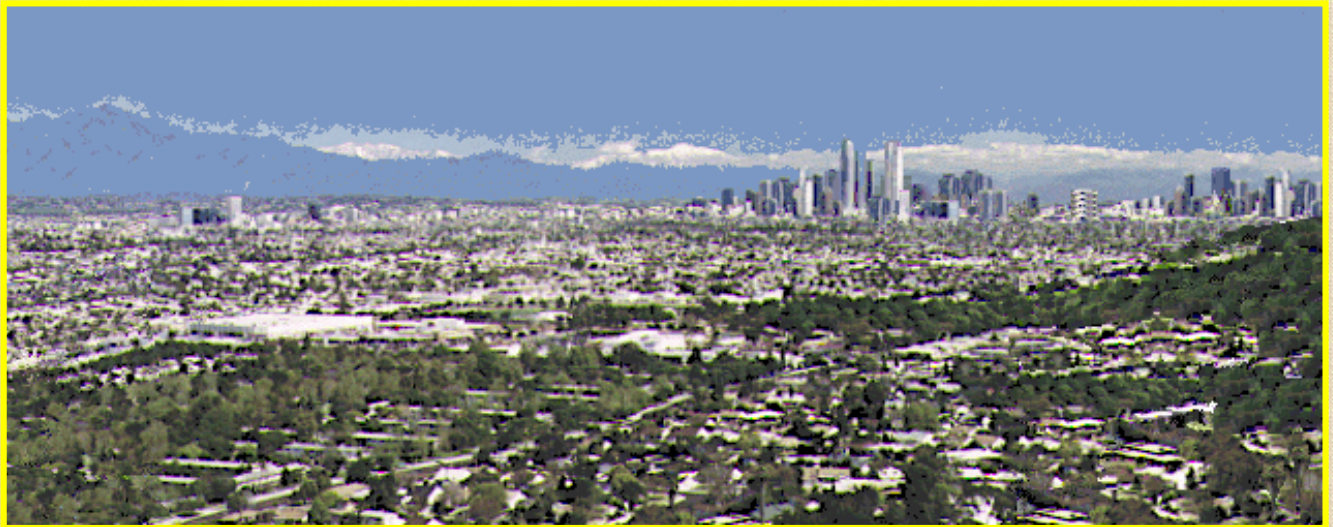


As the novel begins, a man named Morton Lynch "just disappears," so we know that either there's something funny going on with ordinary reality or the protagonist, Douglas Hall, is wacko. The "wacko" theory gains points as we see Hall succumbing to periodic lapses of consciousness.

Douglas Hall is a simulation expert who has helped Dr. Hannon Fuller create an electromathematical model of the same community in which they live in the year 2034. Electronically simulating this social environment, Dr. Fuller has populated it with subjective analogs--reactional identity units. Manipulating the environment, by prodding the ID units, they can estimate behavior in hypothetical situations, leading to long-range behavior forecasts. The total environment simulator is called Simulacron-3.

The corporation set up to develop and experiment with Simulacron-3 is Reactions, Inc. (REIN). Fuller's transduction formula for programing emotional characteristics into the simulator's subjective reactional units

is the cornerstone on which his entire total environmental system was built. The simulation of a social system amounted to a "community," complete in itself. Fuller and his associates have endowed thousands of master circuits with items of physical background: transportation, schools, houses, garden societies, pets, government organizations, commercial enterprises, parks, and all the other institutions necessary to any metropolitan area. The total environment simulator was, in the final analysis, impressions on tapes, biasing voltages on master grids, and notations on storage drums.



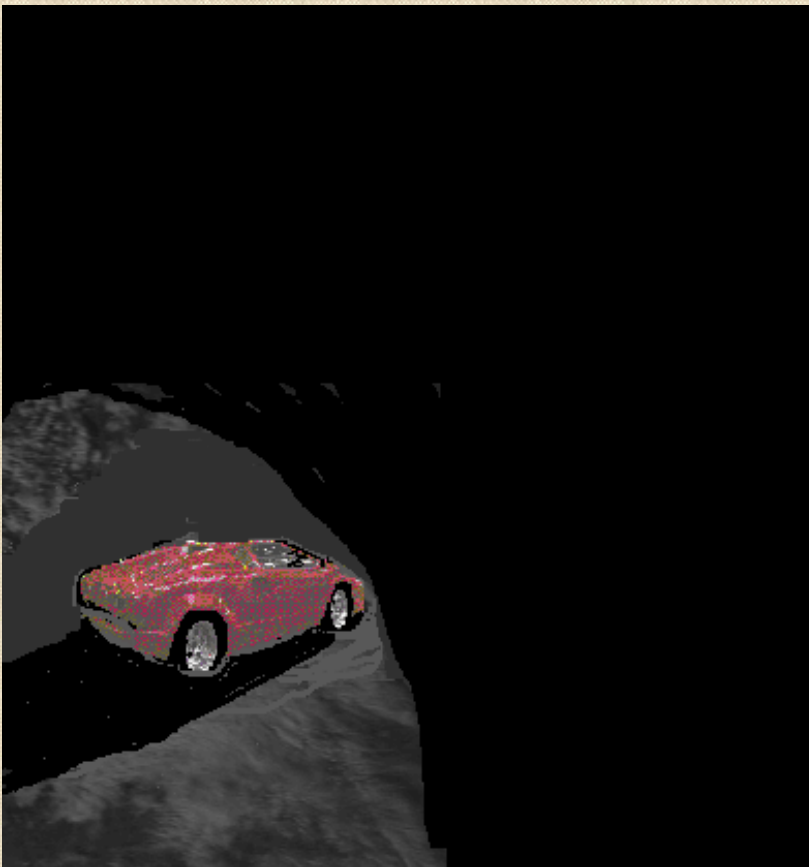
Doug Hall lives in the city above which is simulated in all its details in Simlulacron-3 below.



But something has gone terribly wrong. Dr. Fuller has died--or been killed--and the CEO of REIN, Horace P. Siskin, has taken control of all operations. Siskin wants to convert Simulacron to a politically oriented model so he can determine how to create the conditions which will lead to a one-party political system in which he, Siskin, will be the dictator.

Doug Hall knows that Siskin will do away with him as soon as possible. Hall's sense of reality is coming apart at the seams. First, he witnessed Morton Lynch disappear. His episodes of loss of consciousness are increasing. A drawing--of Achilles and the tortoise--which Fuller had left for him--which probably contained a secret message--also disappears. And when he experiences *the universe ending*--something like the old pre-Columbus theory of people falling off the edge of a square universe--it appears that Doug ought to see a shrink.

"I sat there for an eternity, staring incredulously ahead.



"The road ended . . .

"On each side of the strip, the very earth itself dropped off into an impenetrable barrier of stygian blackness.

"Out there were no stars, no moonlight--only the nothingness within nothingness that might be found beyond the darkest infinity."

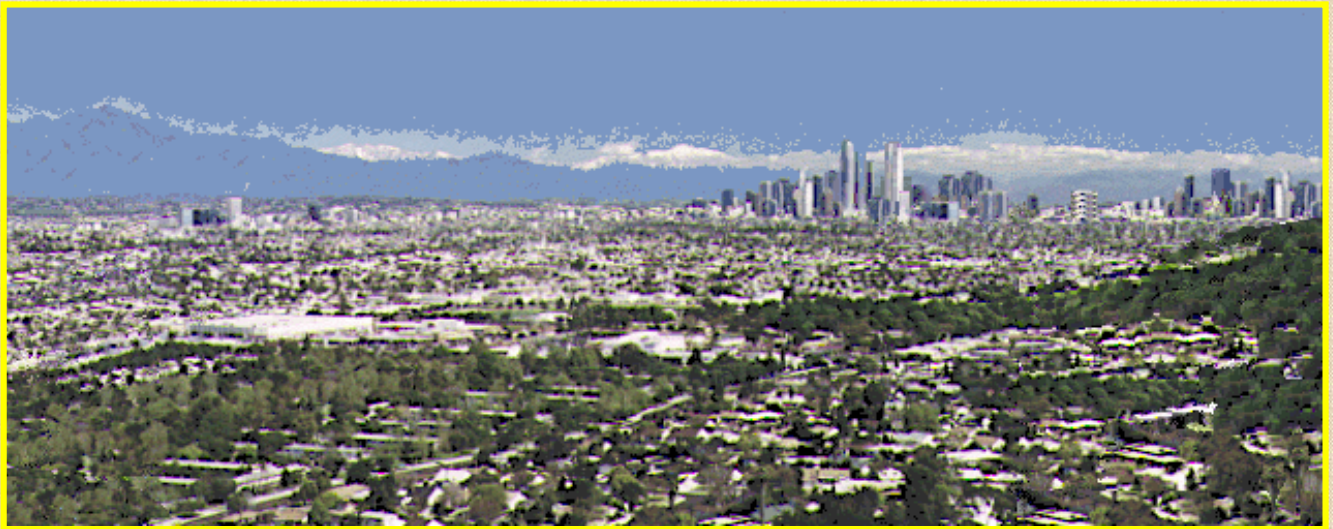
With Fuller's system, it is possible to "couple" with the reactive units in Simulacron-3, either actively or

passively. Using active coupling, Doug's psyche is transmitted into a reactive unit in the simulation model and he can then act to produce changes in that "world." With passive coupling, Doug merely watches from within the reactive unit, seeing what it does, thinks, and feels.

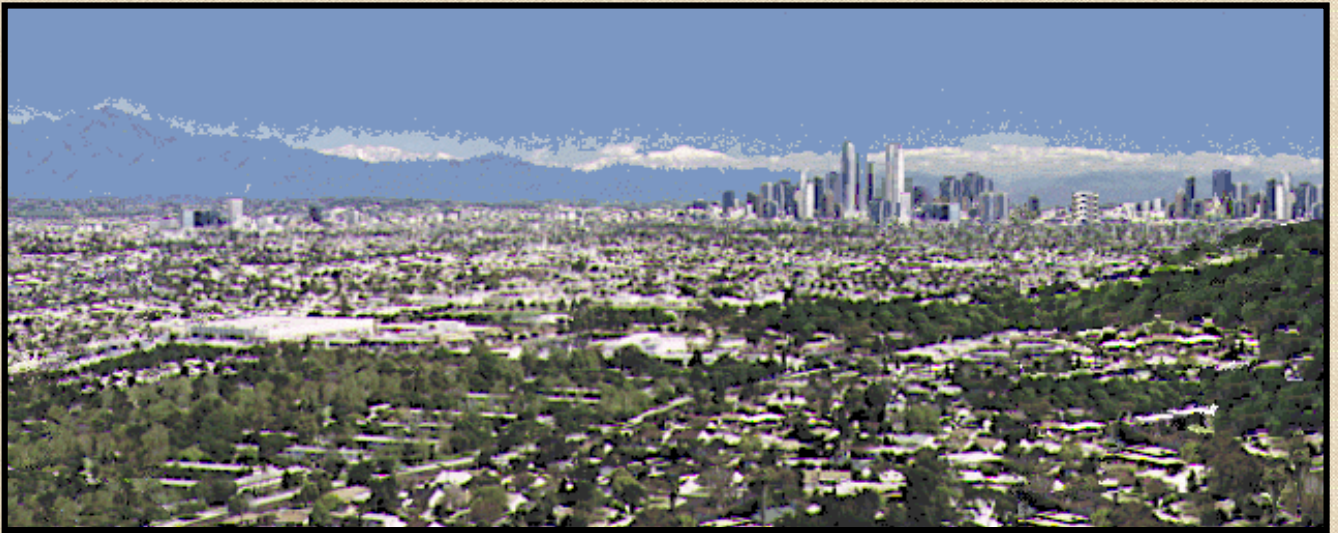
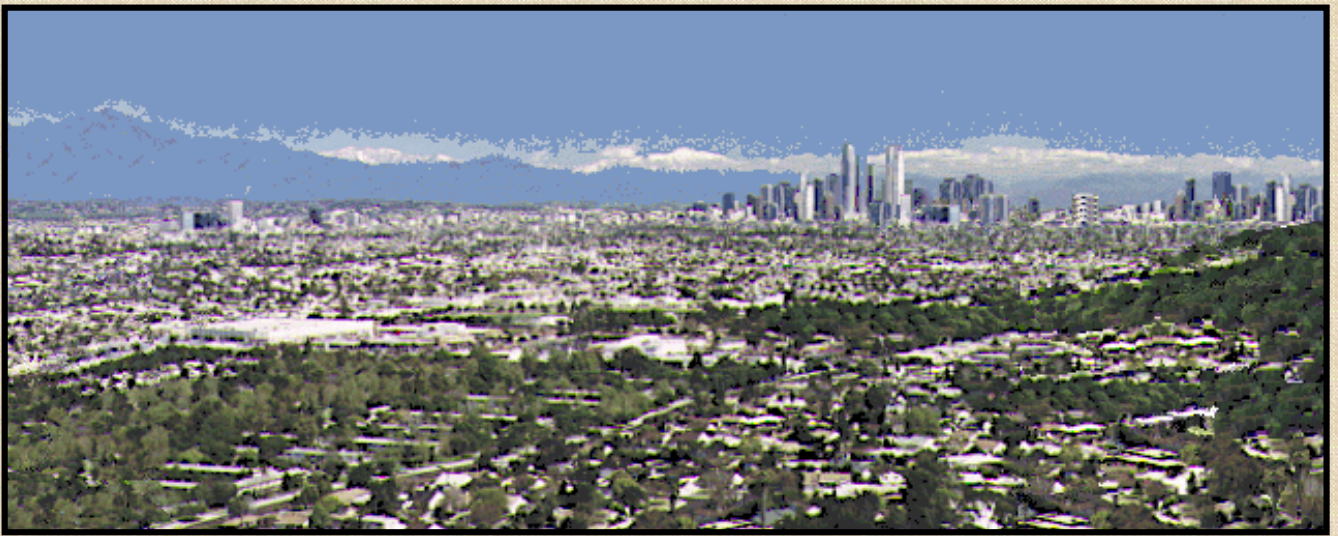
In Doug's world, opinions are assessed by reaction monitors or

pollsters. The Association of Reaction Monitors (ARM) has tremendous political clout because their opinion sampling tells the rulers which actions to take in order to control the people. In Dr. Fuller's simulated world, he had created a new way of gaining information about opinions. A huge billboard would display a message for all reactive units to see and their response to this stimulus is carefully recorded according to demographic mapping: age, ethnic background, sex, occupation, education, etc.

One of the reactive units in Simulacron-3 commits suicide. By going into the simulated world, Doug learns that this man, named Cau No, killed himself because he had learned that he was nothing but a electronic simulation unit. Suddenly, the drawing makes sense to Doug: Dr. Hall was referring to Cau No, whose nickname was C No or Zeno, the person who had used the symbol of Achilles and the tortoise to refer to the unreality of time and space. It now seems to Doug that Hall was trying to tell him that *his*, Doug's world is as unreal as the electronic world of Simulacron-3!



It now appears that Doug lives in a city (below) simulated in all its details in Simulacron-3 (below) but that Doug's "world" is merely a simulation of a "higher reality" (above).



Now tracing his own episodes of loss of consciousness, Doug begins to see these as instances when someone in the "real" world is coupling with him to assess his thoughts, feelings, and experiences. Doug becomes even more convinced when a reactive unit from Simulacron-3 manages to come into Doug's world through runaway gain in the modulator which kicked back with a reciprocal transfer. Just as the observer's ego was temporarily planted within the ID's storage unit, so in this instance the reactive unit swept up and impressed itself upon the brain of the observer in a violent, instant exchange of psyches. The man making this transfer is named Ashton. Doug tries to help Ashton realize that he must return to the simulated world of Simulacron-3.

"Up here," he [Ashton] shouted, "I'm a step closer to the real reality! You've got to let me go on and find the material world."

"What do you mean?" I asked, trying to humor him. If I didn't steer him carefully through this experience, he might go completely irrational and have to be wiped out of the simulator.

He laughed hysterically. "You utter, damned fool. You're worse off than I am. I know what the score is. You don't!"

I shook him. "Snap out of it, Ashton!"

"No. You're the one who has to snap out of it! You're the one who has to wake up out of your complacent little dream of reality. I lied. I did talk with Cau No before you wiped him out of the system. But I didn't say anything because I was afraid you might go berserk and destroy your simulator."

I tensed. "What did No say?"

"You don't know how he found out his world was only a counterfeit, do you?" Ashton was laughing in fanatical triumph. "It was because your Dr. Fuller told him. Oh, not directly. He only planted the data in Cau No's subconscious, where he hoped you'd find it. But it didn't stay on No's secondary drums. It leaked out. And No applied the information to his own world."

"What information?" I demanded, shaking him again.

"That your world too doesn't exist! It's just a complex of variable charges in a simulator--nothing more than a reflection of a greater simulelectronic process!"

He sobbed and laughed and I only stood there paralyzed.

"Nothing! Nothing!" he raved. "We're nothing, you and I. Only triumphs of electronic wizardry, simulelectronic shadows!"

Then he was on his feet again. "Don't send me back down there! Let's work together. Maybe we'll eventually break through into the bottom of absolute reality! I came one step up, didn't I?"

Fortunately for Doug, Dr. Fuller's daughter, Jinx, is from the "higher reality" and has fallen in love with him because of his finer qualities. Doug is actually a simulation model of a person in the "higher reality" named

Doug Hall. But this "real" Doug Hall has become progressively insensitive and sadistic. Jinx helps the simulated Doug to reverse the process and take over the psyche of the "real" Doug Hall in the "higher world."

And all three worlds live happily ever after.

Higher Meanings in *Simulacron-3*

Simulacron-3 has recently been made into a movie, "The Thirteenth Floor." The movie, unfortunately, conveys none of the extraordinary ideas of the novel. The simulation city in the movie is a 1930s version of Los Angeles, which destroys any rationale for the simulation. In the novel, the simulation is for the purpose of predicting and controlling human behavior.



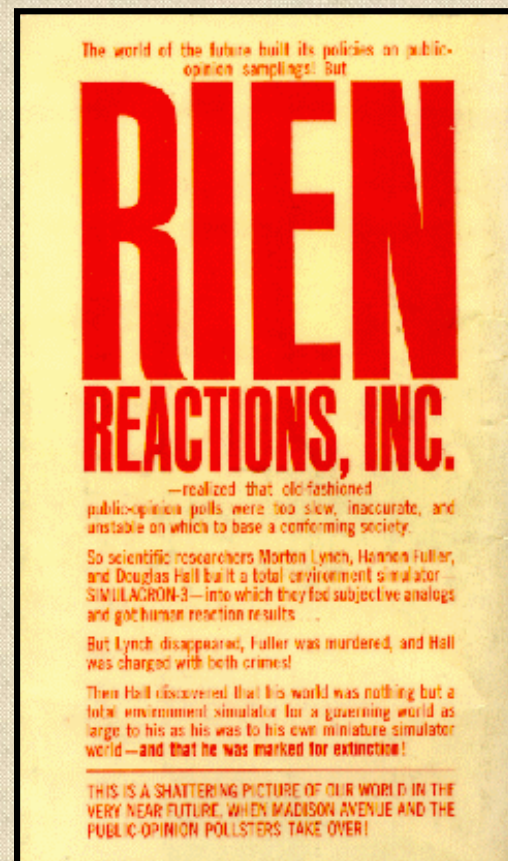
It's not clear in the movie what's happening when we see Dr. Fuller going to a nightclub and carrying on with younger women. It turns out that Fuller is "coupling" with his look-alike in the simulated world of *Simulacron-3*. But we're not made aware of this until later and by that time the confusion factor is overwhelming.

As is often the case, it's much better to stay with the novel rather than the movie. Reading the book encourages us to draw parallels to our own "reality." One of the major teachings of the Perennial Tradition has been that our "world" is a simulation or reflection of a "higher world."

"There is an Absolute from which ordinarily perceptible things are to be regarded as local concretizations. "

"The Relative is a channel to the Truth."

As Doug Hall begins to see the truth about his world, the author says, "The illusion of reality was oh, so complete." In a similar way, our belief in our "reality" is seamless, having been programmed into us from birth. But *Simulacron-3* can help us begin to realize that ideas such as "self," "time," and "space," are merely concocted from ideas put into us by others.



The
(deliberate
or
accidental)
misspelling
on the back
cover of the
paperback
edition of
Simulacron-3
(previously
the
acronym
was REIN
and now on
the cover it
becomes
RIEN,

which in French means "nothing") provides an interesting message about the unreality of the present world.

"That Real World was in no physical direction from my own.
[Doug Hall comments] It was not in my universe, nor I in its. At
the same time, though, It was everywhere around me, hidden by
an electronic veil."

As we work to become aware of a Higher World, we realize that it is in
no physical direction from our world. It is everywhere around us, hidden
by belief systems which make us unaware.

At the end of the novel, Doug Hall exclaims, "...I had actually risen up
out of illusion into reality." Similarly, the Perennial Tradition teaches that
it is possible for *us* to rise out of illusion into Higher Reality.

Dark Universe



Galouye's *Dark Universe* is a modern-day version of Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" revealing how *light or illumination*



feels to a person living in the "dark."

When we meet our hero, Jared, he is in his world of underground caves totally devoid of light. Having lived without light for an extended period of time, Jared's community has learned to "see" using sonar, sensing objects through the reflection of sound. Having no sun or moon, his people measure time by the nine-month reproduction cycle. Their food comes from a "manna" plant which is sustained by underground hot springs.

Jared's community calls itself the Survivors and has retained a

communal tradition about their former history:

- there was a world called Paradise which the Survivors had to leave because of some catastrophe involving Radiation
- the Survivors then went to a place they call the Original World which is said to have had some amount of Light, a term no one understands, since they now live in caves in total darkness
- God is called Light and Hell is called Radiation, ruled by the twin devils Cobalt and Strontium
- in the Original World Light was produced by something called a bulb, one of which their religious leader possesses as a relic and uses in their religious ritual: "So compassionate was the Almighty that when He banished man from Paradise, He sent part of Himself to be with us for a while. And He dwelled in many little vessels like this Holy Bulb."
- the "Excitation of the Optic Nerve Ritual" consists in the religious leader pressing the eyeballs of the believers, whereupon they experience Light
- Survivors are taught a communal catechism: "What is Light?"

Light is a Spirit.

Where is Light?

If it weren't for the evil in man, Light would be everywhere.

Can we feel or hear Light?

No, but in the hereafter we shall all see Him."

(Of course no Survivor understands what is meant by "see.")

The Survivors have depended on hearing so long as their only means of cognition that all the metaphors and idioms of their language involve hearing, instead of the metaphors and idioms we use involving seeing. For example, when we understand something, we say, "I see." The Survivors say instead, "I hear."

The Survivors are threatened by several different kinds of creatures:

- Monsters are creatures which roam the upper caves and capture Survivors and all other humans they can. Since the caves are devoid of Light, monsters are not seen, but their presence is known when a Survivor hears what they call a "zip-hiss," a projectile of some sort which strikes a Survivor. When a zip-hiss strikes, a Survivor becomes unconscious immediately and is then taken away by the monsters. The monsters also possess something which produces "roaring silence," a sensation which strikes a Survivor with deafening force, as though thousands of sensitive nerves that had never been stimulated before were suddenly flooding the Survivor's brain with alien impulses.**
- Soubats are large, man-sized bat-creatures who were the result of the twin Devils taking an original bat down to Radiation and making it over into a supercreature that kills Survivors.**
- The Different Ones are humans who have developed other means than sound to apprehend their world. They use either psychic or other unexplainable means of cognition and are a threat to the orderly Survivor society based on hearing as their sole means of perception.**
- Zivvers are humans who apprehend the world about them by some mysterious means other than sound. Their means of cognition**

appears to involve heat in some mysterious manner.

- The least threatening are the humans who live in an upper-level cave system and who are somewhat friendly with Survivors. It is arranged that Jared, the son of the leader of the lower-level-cave Survivors, will marry the daughter of the leader of the upper-level-cave humans.

Jared has begun to reason that Light might not be a deity but a mysterious phenomenon surrounding humans. He dedicates himself to searching for Light to discover what it is. As he is about to marry Della, his betrothed, he discovers that she is a closet Zivver: she apprehends reality in the Zivver way but has kept it a secret from her people. Jared and Della decide they will travel to the upper cave world of the Zivvers and see if they can discover the nature of Light.

On reaching the Zivver world, Jared is tested and found not to be a Zivver, so is placed in a dungeon. During a raid by the monsters on the Zivver world, Della is captured and Jared flees.

Jared travels through the labyrinth of caves and finally emerges into Paradise. But in this world, Hydrogen is a huge sphere above which blinds Jared and he rushes back into the cave world. He is afraid to return to Paradise because of the blinding presence of Hydrogen.

Jared is finally captured by the monsters who take him to Paradise and place him in a "house," with his body constrained by ropes. The monsters turn out to be humans who capture Survivors and bring them to the surface world. He manages to escape once but when Della calls to him and tells him that life in Paradise is safe and marvellous, he begins to listen to her and those who are trying to explain what has happened to him and the other Survivors.

In an earlier time, the world was threatened by nuclear annihilation. A small group of people built underground caves where they would go in case of a nuclear catastrophe, living on the provisions they had placed there. The nuclear cataclysm did occur and the group went underground (the Original World). However, their power and food sources were disrupted when a huge earthquake occurred, so the "survivors" were forced to go deeper into lightless underground caves.

Jared's people and the Zivvers were among the survivors. The

"monsters" are the people who returned out of the caves first and discovered that the earth was again habitable. They have been "capturing" other humans by using drug-containing darts which produce unconsciousness, allowing them to bring the person out of the caves. The "screaming silence" is the light from their flashlights they use to move about the caves.

Zivvers are those humans who adapted to life without light by apprehending through use of the vision in the infrared range.

Perennialist Strains in the Novel

As we read *Dark Universe* we experience with Jared what it means to be "in the dark" and possessing only a few myths referring to a former experience of a mysterious reality called "Light." In the same vein, the Perennial Tradition speaks of a long-lost capability called "seeing with the soul" which enables us to discern a "Higher Reality of Light."

Having lived in an alien world of darkness (earth existence) our entire life, it is difficult for us to give credence to the idea that we possess a spiritual body through which we gain discernment of a spiritual world. Just as Jared felt "light" from the flashlights of the "monsters" as "screaming silence," so we often feel that Illumination about Higher Reality is an alien and unpleasant phenomenon threatening our physical existence.

The slowly developing discernment in Jared, as he comes to understand the nature of Light, is the same process through which we gain higher comprehension by working to achieve personal Illumination.

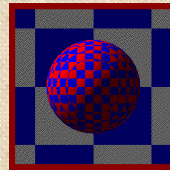
Literature with Perennialist Fragments

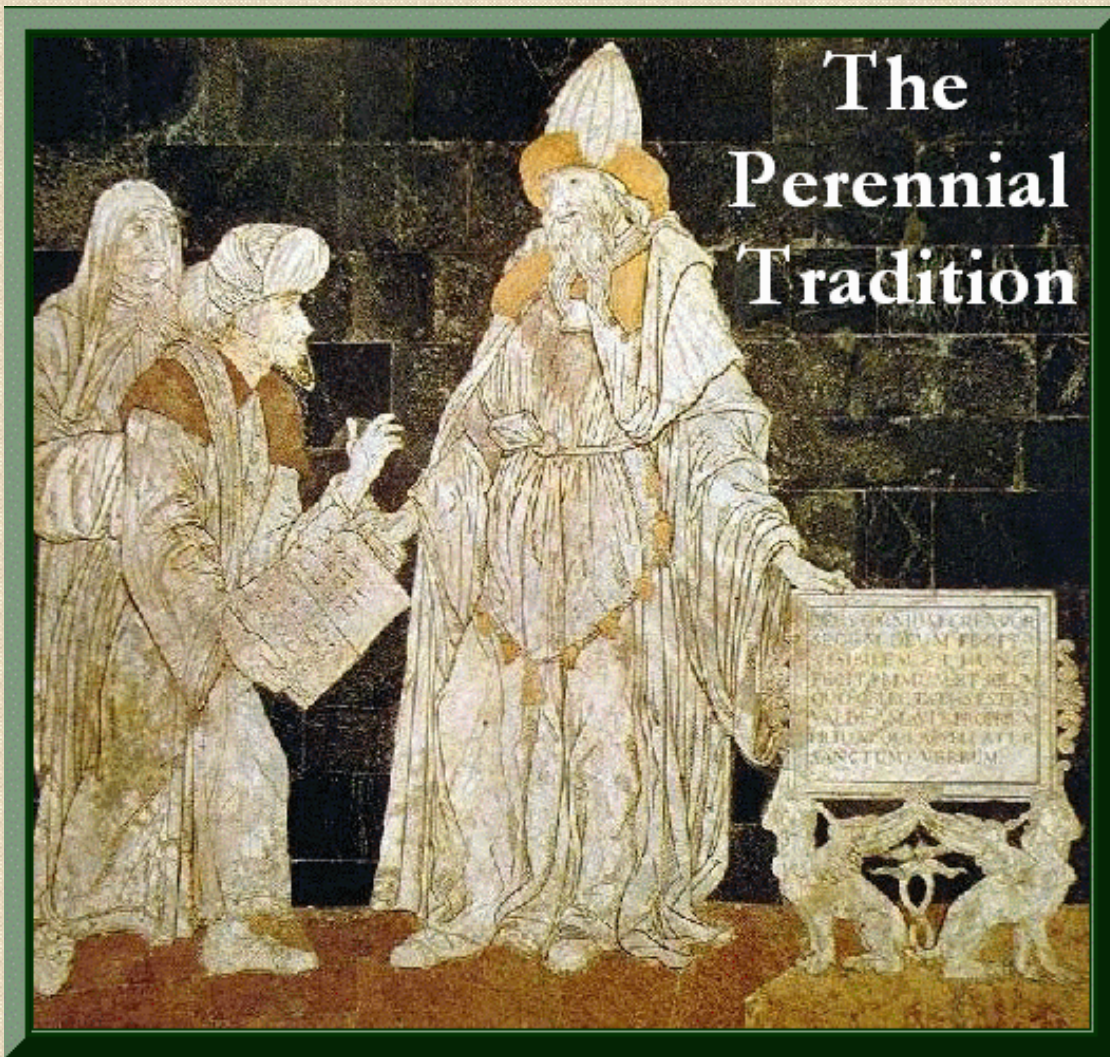
There are certain pieces of literature that contain fragments-- not whole strains--of the Perennial Tradition within them. As an example of this type of literature, we'll take a look at a fragment in Virginia Woolf's novel *Mrs. Dalloway*.

"But every one remembered; what she loved was this, here, now, in front of her; the fat lady in the cab. Did it matter then, she

asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely? but that somehow in the streets of London, on the ebb and flow of things, here, there, she survived, Peter survived, lived in each other, she being part, she was positive, of the trees at home; of the house there, ugly, rambling all to bits and pieces as it was; part of people she had never met; being laid out like a mist between the people she knew best, who lifted her on their branches as she had seen the trees lift the mist, but it spread ever so far, her life, herself."

In a somewhat different vein than the two novels we've explored in this chapter, the author has recently completed a Perennialist novel entitled *President of the World*, which concerns a modern Perennialist teacher and his students. Also, the reader may want to explore the novel, *Mind Parasites* by Colin Wilson, which contains Perennialist strains.





Chapter Nineteen

Humor In the Perennial Tradition

Taking H SERIOUS

Humor is such an essential component of the Perennial Tradition that it is used as a touchstone to determine if a person is a participant in the tradition or not. Not all persons with an active sense of humor are part of the Perennial Tradition, but if an individual does not appreciate and engage in humor in a distinguishing manner it is a sure sign that he does not possess the capabilities required for the Perennialist approach to life. Perennialist humor can be said to be comedy with an extra-dimension ingredient.

"Mulla (Master) Nasrudin is the classical figure devised by the dervishes partly for the purpose of halting for a moment situations in which certain states of mind are made clear. . . . A Nasrudin tale . . . bridges the gap between mundane life and a transmutation of consciousness in a manner which no other literary form yet produced has been able to attain . . . making possible the attainment of Sufic realizations and mystical experience."

Idries Shah. *The Sufis*



Analyzing humor is a bit like studying a flower-covered banana bike by peeling off its pedals. Before you know it, you've forgotten how to ride it.



"There may be said to be two classes of people in the world; those who constantly divide the people of the world into two classes and those who do not."

Robert Benchley

The Perennialist Mode of Humor

The content and style of Perennialist humor is distinctive and can be recognized only by those who share the Perennialist frame of mind. It's somehow fitting that we are discussing the identification of Perennialist phenomena and persons in a chapter on humor. There is an almost indescribable quality which a participant in the Perennialist Tradition possesses, that only another person sharing the same abilities and interests can recognize. It is somewhat similar to the way hackers describe and distinguish themselves.

In a similar manner, there are persons who pretend to be participants in the Perennial Tradition who reveal, by their attitude and behavior--and lack of a sense of humor, that they certainly are not.



"Your manuscript is both good and original; but the part that is good is not original, and the part that is original is not good."

Samuel Johnson

All those who believe in psychokinesis raise my hand.

42.7 percent of all statistics are made up on the spot.

I was walking down the street and all of a sudden the prescription for my eye-glasses ran out

What's another word for thesaurus?

Last year I went fishing with Salvador Dali. He was using a dotted line. He caught every other fish.

I got a new shadow. I had to get rid of the other one -- it wasn't doing what I was doing.



Stephen Wright

Improving One's Humors With Humor



One of the most convincing testaments to laughter's recuperative powers is Norman Cousins's book, *Anatomy of An Illness*, which he delivered in an abbreviated form at the Second International Conference on Humour and Laughter in 1979 as a personal account.

Hospitalised with ankylosing spondelitis (presumed terminal) in the early seventies, Cousins discovered that positive emotions such as "hope, laughter, love and faith" could help in stress-reduction. The Marx Brothers and the funniest programs from "Candid Camera" (courtesy of Allan Funt, the producer and a friend) gave blessed relief from pain in hospital.

In Cousins's own words: "We made two interesting discoveries. One was that ten minutes of strong, sustained laughter had an anaesthetic

effect and would provide two hours of pain-free sleep, thus enabling me to dispense with aspirin, codeine, sleeping pills, all of which were toxic in varying degrees and which impeded the body's natural recuperative powers.

"The second discovery was that laughter would have a positive effect on the sedimentation rate, which measures the extent of inflammation or infection in the bloodstream. The higher the "sed" rate, the more severe the illness. Hearty, joyous laughter had the effect of knocking several points off the sedimentation rate, proving that laughter could cause beneficial changes in the body chemistry.

"I don't want to give the impression that I laughed my way out of a serious illness. There were other prime elements in the recovery which I need not go into here. But laughter and good feelings were basic elements in the total recovery. There was the hard evidence that laughter was probably more efficacious than the various medications, which were discontinued in my case because of their high toxicity."

What is a Pun?

"In Italian, 'puntiglio' means 'a fine point,' hence a verbal quibble, and is most likely the source of the English 'punctilious.' There developed in late 17th- and early 18th- century England a short-lived, fanciful word 'pundigrion,' which indeed was a term for what we now know as a pun. Since snappy monosyllables produced by breaking off pieces of longer words were all the rage back then, it is widely thought that this is how and where the word 'pun' was created.

"A pun is defined by Webster as 'the humorous use of a word, or of words which are formed or sounded alike but have different meanings, in such a way as to play on two or more of the possible applications; a play on words.'

"In describing the various forms of verbal humor,



The New Encyclopaedia Britannica refers to a pun as 'two disparate strings of thought tied together by an acoustic knot.' That analogy strikes a very pleasant cord!

"In France, paronomasia is referred to as jeu de mots. That has a Nice ring to it, n'est pas?

"What is paronomasia? The act or practice of punning. And as every ecclesiastical dean knows so well, 'practice makes prefect.'"

THE PUN FACTORY



Take my wife jokes, please.

A Tribute to Henny Youngman

How to Watch a Chess Match

"The first problem confronting the chess spectator is to find some people who are playing. . . . At first you may think that they are both dead, but a mirror held to the lips of the nearest contestant will probably show moisture (unless, of course, they really should be dead, which would be a horrible ending for a little lark like this. I once heard of a murderer who propped his two victims up against a chess board in sporting attitudes and was able to get as far as Seattle before his crime was discovered)."





"The Nasrudin story . . . is designed to add to the mind of the hearer something of the flavor which is needed to build up the consciousness for experiences which cannot be reached until a bridge has been created."

"This gradual building up of inner consciousness is characteristic of the Nasrudin Sufic method. The flash of intuitive illumination which comes as a result of the stories is partly a minor enlightenment in itself, not an intellectual experience. It is also a steppingstone toward the reestablishing of mystical perception in a captive mind, relentlessly conditioned by the training systems of material life."

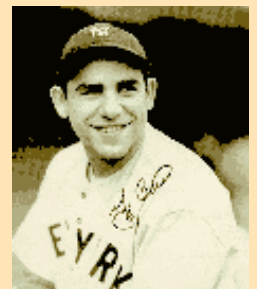
Idries Shah. *The Sufis*

TIME

"It's a sobering thought that by the time Mozart was my age, he'd been dead for five years."

Tom Lehrer

"The future ain't what it used to be." Yogi Berra





The Mulla walked into a shop one day.
The owner came forward to serve him.
"First things first," said Nasrudin; "did you
see me walk into your shop?"

"Of course."

"Have you ever seen me before?"

"Never in my life."

"Then how do you know it is *me*?"

Idries Shah, *The Sufis*

Fool, n. A person who pervades the domain of intellectual speculation and diffuses himself through the channels of moral activity. He is omnific, omniform, omnipercipient, omniscient, omnipotent. He it was who invented letters, printing, the railroad, the steamboat, the telegraph, the platitude, and the circle of the sciences. He created patriotism and taught nations war--founded theology, philosophy, law, medicine, and Chicago. He established monarchical and republican government. He is from everlasting to everlasting--such as creation's dawn beheld he fooleth now. In the morning of time he sang upon primitive hills, and in the noonday of existence headed the procession of being.



His grandmotherly hand has warmly tucked-in the set sun of civilization, and in the twilight he prepares Man's evening meal of milk-and-morality and turns down the covers of the universal grave. And after the rest of us shall have retired for the night of eternal oblivion he will sit up to write a history of human civilization.

Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*

Theories of Humor:

- **Superiority:** laughter is an expression of a person's feelings of superiority over other people
- **Incongruity:** amusement is an intellectual reaction to something that is unexpected, illogical, or inappropriate in some other way
- **Relief:** laughter is a venting of nervous energy

Fool:

1. **One who is regarded as deficient in judgment, sense, or understanding.**
2. **One who acts unwisely on a given occasion: I was a fool to have refused the job.**
3. **One who has been tricked or made to appear ridiculous; a dupe: They made a fool of me by pretending I won the award.**
4. **Informal. A person with a talent**

or an enthusiasm for a certain activity: a dancing fool; a fool for skiing.

5. A member of a royal or noble household who provided entertainment, as with jokes or antics; a jester.
6. A dessert made of stewed or puréed fruit mixed with cream or custard and served cold.
7. Archaic. A mentally deficient person; an idiot.

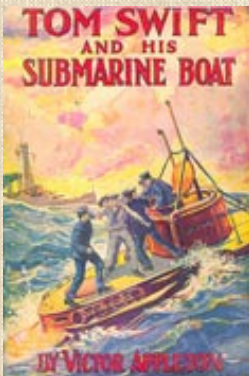
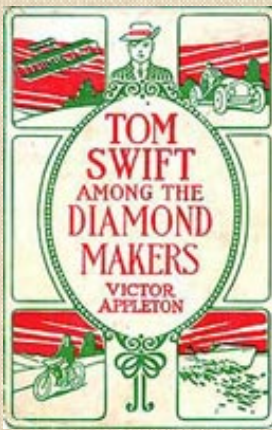


"Experiments with laboratory rats have shown that, if one psychologist in the room laughs at something a rat does, all of the other psychologists in the room will laugh equally."

Garrison Keillor

Tom Swifty

"Tom Swifty is a play on words that derives its humor on a punning relationship between the way an adverb describes a speaker, and at the same time refers significantly to the context of the speaker's statement. Huh? Here's an example: "Take the prisoner downstairs," Tom said condescendingly. The adverb 'condescendingly' makes a double pun on the related words



'con' (prisoner) and 'descending' (downstairs).

"The original Tom Swift was a fictional title character in a series of children's books written by Edward L. Stratemeyer (1862-1930). The adventure stories depicted young Tom as an ingenious man whose amazing inventions took him to unusual places around the world. In these books, Stratemeyer always avoided using the word 'said' alone in describing Tom's utterances; Tom asserted, averred, chortled, declared, expostulated, grimaced, grinned, groaned, quipped, smiled, etc. Or if he was ever reported to have 'said' something, Stratemeyer would add an adverb to provide a more colorful impact.

"Eventually, someone decided to satirize the mannerism by using punning adverbs, and the Tom Swifty was born! A similar satirization whereby a verb supplies the pun instead of an adverb, has been termed 'croaker' (coined by Roy Bongartz): 'I'm dying,' he croaked."

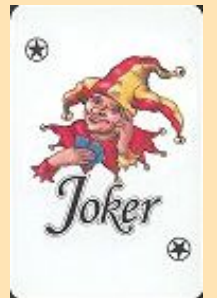
THE PUN FACTORY

Jester or Joker:

fool, silly fool, tomfool, madman, buffoon, clown, comic, jester, zany, merry-andrew, harlequin, entertainer, perfect fool, complete idiot, ninny, nincompoop, ass, jackass, donkey, goose, turkey, cuckoo, mooncalf, zombie, idiot, congenital idiot, born fool, natural, mongol, cretin, moron, imbecile, mental defective, half-wit, dimwit, sot, stupid, silly-billy, twerp, stooge, butt, laughingstock, madcap,



desperado, addlehead, fathead, pinhead, muddlehead, blunderer, incompetent, twit, clot, bungler, scatterbrains, birdbrain, featherbrain, dingbat, rattlehead, giddy-head, flibbertigibbet, trifler, sciolist, witling, wiseacre, crackpot, eccentric, odd fellow, crank, gaffer, old fogy, babbler, burbler, driveler, dotard, old man, humorist, wit, bel-esprit, epigrammatist, reparteeist, conversationalist, card, character, life and soul of the party, wag, wisecracker, japer, joker, Joe Miller, jokesmith, funny man, gagsman, gagster, punster, banterer, persifleur, leg-puller, kidder, tease, practical joker, hoaxer, deceiver, ironist, affecter, mocker, scoffer, satirist, lampooner, detractor, comedian, comedienne, comic, standup comic, slapstick comic, knockabout comic, comic writer, cartoonist, caricaturist, burlesquer, impersonator, parodist, imitator, raconteur, raconteuse



"Humor is not a mood but a way of looking at the world. So if it is correct to say that humor was stamped out in Nazi Germany, that does not mean that people were not in good spirits, or anything of that sort, but something much deeper and more important.

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951), Austrian philosopher

"Hitler was so wary of the danger of humor to the Third Reich that he had special 'joke courts' set up for, among other things, punishing people who named their dogs and horses 'Adolph.' As Hermann Goering instructed the Academy of German Law, the telling of a joke could be an act against the



Fuehrer, against the state, or even
against the whole Nazi
Weltanschauung."

Taking Laughter Seriously
by John Morreall



"Every American, to the last man, lays claim to a 'sense' of humor and guards it as his most significant spiritual trait, yet rejects humor as a contaminating element wherever found. America is a nation of comics and comedians; nevertheless, humor has no stature and is accepted only after the death of the perpetrator."

E. B. White, "The Humor Paradox,"
New Yorker, 27 September, 1952

Victor Hugo's definition of "puns": "Le calembour est la fiente de l'esprit qui vole."

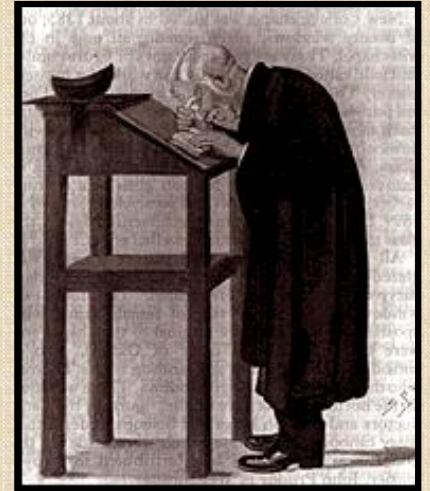


David Herz wrote to ask if he could use this chapter in "a comedy class" which, he said, "I will be teaching in a French (yes) Engineering (yes again) school (triple yes)." David says that "according to *Le Robert Dictionnaire Historique de la Langue Française* fiente in French from the popular (wildly!) 12th Century Latin femita which gives us fumier (both compost and lowlife) is animal excrement (usually birds)." So according to David, Hugo's definition should read:

"Puns are the bird droppings of soaring wits."

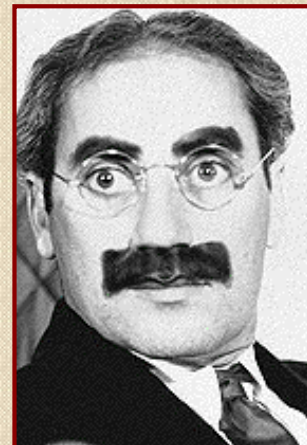
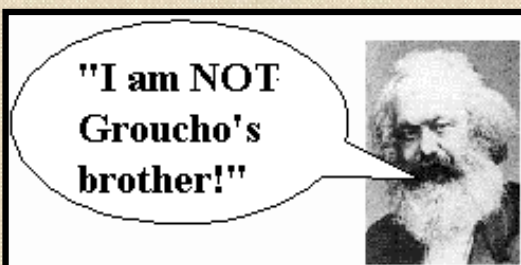
Spoonerisms

"Named after Rev. W.A. Spooner (1844-1930), a distinguished Anglican clergyman and warden of New College, Oxford, England, a spoonerism is an unintentional interchange of sounds, usually initial sounds, in two or more words, often with a resultant comical effect. Examples: 'hush my brat' for 'brush my hat' or 'scoop of boy trouts' for 'troop of boy scouts' or 'I have a half-warmed fish in my mind' for 'I have a half-formed wish in my mind.' Spooner was reportedly a nervous man who committed many of these verbal witticisms, albeit unintentionally."



THE PUN FACTORY

Two of the Marx Brothers



"Time wounds all heels."

(please do not click on the image
above)

"The natural free spirits of ingenious men, if imprisoned or controlled, will find other ways of motion to relieve themselves in their constraint; and whether it be burlesque, mimicry or buffoonery, they will be glad at any rate to vent themselves, and be revenged on their constrainers . . . 'Tis the persecuting spirit has raised the bantering one."

Lord Shaftesbury

Links:

[How to Become a Modern Guru](#)

[Humor Is Good For You](#)

[Nasreddin/Hodja](#)

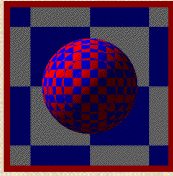
[The Pun Faqtory](#)

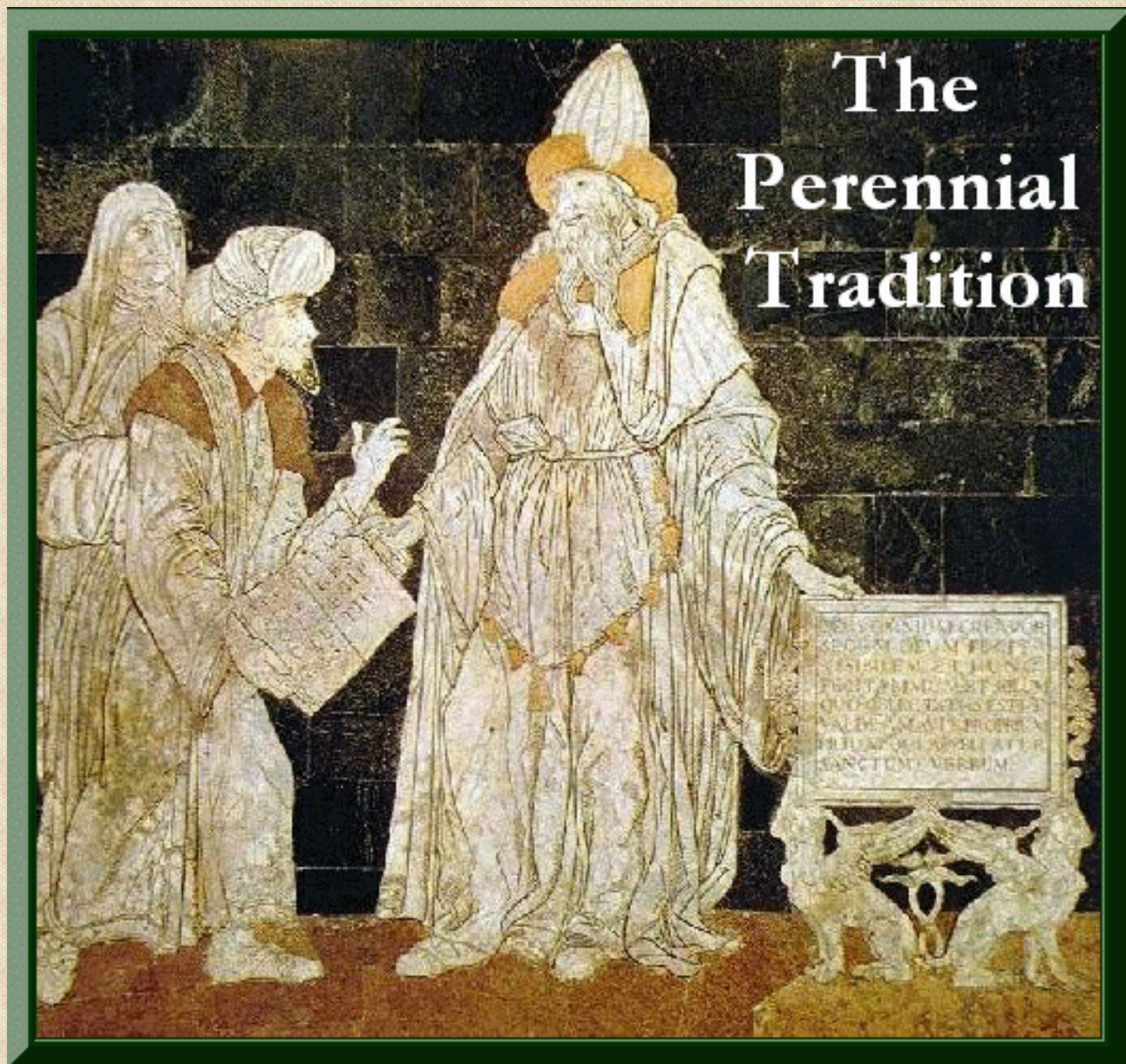
[Humor Links](#)



Books:

- ***The Exploits of the Incomparable Mulla Nasrudin***
by Idries Shah
- ***Humor and Humanity*** by Stephen Leacock
- ***Taking Humor Seriously in Children's Literature***
by Patricia L. Roberts
- ***Taking Humour Seriously*** by Jerry Palmer
- ***Taking Laughter Seriously*** by John Morreall





Chapter Twenty

Unitive Consciousness

"If I have expounded at such length the station of the travellers, how shall I expound the states of those who have attained? The latter has no end; the former has an end. The end of travellers is attainment; what should be the end of those who have attained to union, union to which there cannot be any separation? No ripe grape becomes again an unripe grape; no mature fruit ever again becomes raw."

Rumi. *Discourses*

Familiarization with the "feeling" of the higher dimension in chapter five instructed us in discerning spiritual forces in the beauties of nature and encouraged us to develop a continual awareness of the spiritual world about us. In our inquiry into the realization of Illumination in chapter ten, we saw that it involves increasingly advancing beyond the physical body into the spiritual body and learning to use the numinous organs of our higher being. Suhrawardi speaks of this stage of development in these terms:

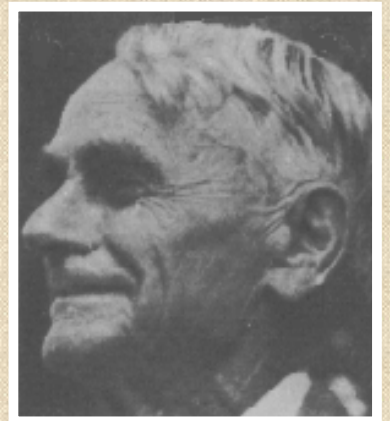
" One can develop to the point that one can leave one's physical form whenever one wants and go to the world of Divine Majesty, where one's ascent reaches the highest horizons. . . . Then, whenever one looks at one's essence one delights because one sees the light of God radiating upon oneself. This stage, however, is still incomplete.

"When one goes still further one passes beyond even this stage, one becomes such that one does not think of one's own essence and one's consciousness of self is obliterated. This is called Major Annihilation. When one forgets oneself and forgets forgetting, it is called Annihilation in Annihilation. . . . One reaches perfection only when cognition is lost in the object of cognition, for

whoever delights in the act of cognition as well as in the object of cognition has, as it were, two objects. One is 'abstracted' when one leaves behind cognition for the object of cognition. When the last traces of corporeal humanity are expended, it is the state of Obliteration. . . ."

Shihab al-Din al-Suhrawardi,
The Mystical and Visionary Treatises

I had the privilege of meeting Rufus Moseley, a person who had unquestionably achieved this state of "obliteration." Rufus was so absorbed in Jesus that he was clearly in two worlds at the same time. He would be speaking to an individual or a group and suddenly begin communicating with Jesus simultaneously. His books testify to his continual absorption in Jesus.



"I have lived in the consciousness that to have Jesus in me and for me to abide in Him is of such infinite worth that nothing must be allowed to break, even for an instant, this ineffable union."

Rufus Moseley. *Manifest Victory*

In his introduction to Rufus Moseley's book *Perfect Everything*, E. Stanley Jones describes Rufus's mystical state.

"It is easy to get tangled up in Rufus Moseley's approach to life and the paraphernalia that accompany that approach and miss the real thing. It takes some time to get him. One man said: 'The first time I heard Rufus Moseley I thought he was crazy, the second time I heard him I knew I was crazy.'

"Many are put off by his delivery. But you must understand that if his hands jiggle in spiritual rapture it is because it is the outer expression of his brain cells dancing at the sheer joy of being. He is inwardly laughing at the rhythm of life and his outer expressions are the attempt to express that inner laughter. "

Describing a teacher in this state, Rumi says:

"The Shaikh had passed away from the sense of personal identity so that his self no longer remained, having been consumed in the Light of God--'Die before you die'--he . . . had become the Light of God."

"A certain king said to a dervish. 'In that moment when you are granted revelation and propinquity in the Court of God, remember me.'

"The dervish answered, 'When I come into that Presence and the light of that Beauty shines upon me, I shall no more remember myself. How then should I remember you?'"

Rumi. Discourses

Since the person in this state of unification has passed beyond to a higher consciousness, it is difficult if not impossible for him or her to reveal what they experience.

"When the inner eye is opened, the outer eye should be sealed to everything, the lips shut to everything; and the five external senses should cease to be used and the internal senses employed in their place such that when the patient wants to hold something, he should hold it with his inner hand, when he wants to see something, he should see it with his inner eye, when he wants to hear something, he should hear it with his inner ear, when he wants to smell something, he should smell it with his inner nose, and his sense of taste should come from the soul's palate. Once this is accomplished, he can regard the secret of the heavens continually and be informed at every moment from the world of the unseen. You have asked what he will see. He will see what he sees and should see. He will not be able to relate the things that are brought into his view, but he will be able to know them through his own intuitive experience. Few people achieve this state because it is difficult for the unworthy to abandon this world and the worthy are but few."

Shahabudin Suhrawardi. *A Day With a Group of Sufis*

The Neo-Platonic writing titled *The Theology of Aristotle* appears to describe Plato's own experience of the unitive state--and speaks of the same difficulty of reporting on what he has seen.

"Often have I been alone with my soul and have doffed my body and laid it aside and become as if I were naked substance without body, so as to be inside myself, outside all other things. Then do I see within myself such beauty and splendour as I do remain marvelling at and astonished, so that I know that I am one of the parts of the sublime, surpassing, lofty, divine world, and possess active life. When I am certain of that, I lift my intellect up from that world into the divine world and become as if I were placed in it and cleaving to it, so as to be above the entire intelligible world, and seem to be standing in that sublime and divine place. And there I see such light and splendour as tongues cannot describe nor ears comprehend. When that light and splendour overwhelm me and I have not strength to endure it, I descend from mind to thought and reflection. When I enter the world of thought, thought veils that light and splendour from me and I am left wondering how I have fallen from that lofty and divine place and am come to the place of thought, when my soul once had the power to leave her body behind and return to herself and rise to the world of mind and then to the divine world until she entered the place of splendour and light, which is the cause of all light and splendour. Wonderful it is too how I have seen my soul filled with light, while she was still in my body like her appearance, not leaving it."

From the writings describing her mystical experiences, it

is clear that Betty White achieved this state of living in two worlds simultaneously. We learn from Betty's teachings that this state of unification is the ultimate goal of the mystic.

"This exit into greater life is the crowning glory of our existence here. It means transfiguration into an electrified and eternal being."

After long years of development, Betty was able to enter into the unitive consciousness at will.

"I just leap out of myself, and take a dive into a freer, more stimulating element. Each time I do it, it gets easier; I am more at home in it; and more stimulated by it. . . . I am getting an actual demonstration, proof, of a spiritual existence as it is here, not in a future life. It's a very definite winged consciousness; nothing postponed or impossible of attainment about it. It's absolutely the next step we've got to take."

As we begin our inhabitation of the spiritual world, we find that we only have available to us what we have created during our earth existence. We take over to that new world only what we have created by our actions during terrestrial life. We possess in our new being only the enduring qualities we have already developed. So in daily life we begin to pay attention to what kind of elements we are creating, what personal characteristics of enduring quality we are developing, as Betty described.

"You remember the experimental dying . . . and how you set up housekeeping with the few things you had brought along of realities--volition, patience, perseverance, loving-kindness, whatever you had of

enduring qualities--and by the exercise of them created a new environment. . . . You can imagine yourself, as happens to many, suddenly transplanted, an emigrant, a refugee, any example of a suddenly uprooted being hustled into a radically changed environment. Place yourself in imagination in Smyrna or Palestine or Timbuktu or any other part of the world--without luggage! The success of your adjustment will be entirely dependent on the mental and spiritual capital you have brought with you.

"Consider one who is without firmly established supporting convictions, previously developed through his having constructed his own firm convictions of maintenance elsewhere; without the eternal verity of equilibrium; without the surrounding stability of confidence in his own power of re-establishment through summoning or magnetically attracting to himself the same replacement conditions anywhere. He will begin at once to disintegrate and throw into confusion his whole creative mechanism, by tearing it up into little worry-bits as to food and every detail as to present and future need, and his lack of possession of them at the moment. His panic over his mechanism of reconstructing his life puts him at once into the conditions he fears.

"Now what I am trying to get at is that your real wealth and capital, which will rehabilitate you in *any* change that comes to you, is the extent to which you have developed this inner reality. It is what gives strength to character, the power to convince

and influence others, the calm acceptance of temporary destruction of one's impermanent possessions and surroundings."

"Your Outgo Must Equal Your Intake"

The achievement of the unitive state is not an end in itself; the spiritual life is not one of solitary, continuous rapture. We achieve a higher state of consciousness in order to achieve the ultimate goal: unbroken spiritual consciousness in this world and the next.

"We have learned in order to give, we have not learned in order to take."

Rumi. *Discourses*

Spiritual consciousness includes the ability to regulate and control ourselves in any environment, to be sure and poised and confident in any circumstance which presents itself. It is not self-indulgence in rhapsodic flights of mystical vision; it is responding *wisely and appropriately* to any challenge that faces us. We develop powers of supernormal discernment of a higher realm only for the purpose of *learning how to use these powers for the betterment of the whole.*

"There is all the difference in the world between the man who goes away into his self-made solitude for his own sake, as he conceives it; and him who steps aside into the silences, as the expression goes, to get himself in tune with the infinite and bring back to men a refreshed perception of unity. Don't you see, it is the *intention* that makes all the difference. The one expedition into solitude is a self-seeking thing; the other is charged with all the eternal purposes of unity."

Stewart Edward White *Across the Unknown*

All the persons mentioned above who experienced high states of mystical vision--the two Suhrawardis, Rufus Moseley, Rumi, Plato, Betty White--recognized their responsibility to use their enhanced powers of discernment to help others. They gained the ability to identify with their higher self through constant training of their spiritual capabilities within the press of their daily lives. The goal is the state in which the spiritual body becomes capable of taking over the direction of the earth self. We must live our lives in constant practice of spiritual values in order to develop a conviction of the reality of these higher powers.

"The mere desire to receive, alone, is not sufficient even to establish effective contact with the informing intelligence above yours. In fact, it has a great difficulty to be overcome in what might be called a *suctional* quality, which precipitates the force above it, reduces it to a lower manifestation in which it no longer functions as a quickening inspirational force. It becomes merely an intellectual 'record'--not a gift of growth silently available through you to others."

Stewart Edward White *Across the Unknown*

The higher consciousness consists in involvement in a

universal endeavor, not a personal binge. Gaining spiritual power is for the purpose of pressing our breast against a common harness and helping to move humankind ahead.

""Service' . . . has been terribly tarnished by the multitudinous zealots who make of it an excuse for holier-than-thou exhibitionism, for meddling, for smug proselytizing, and for neglecting the home fires in favour of wholesale annoyances. There is a certain presumption in setting oneself up as so much more qualified than one's fellows. . . ."

Stewart Edward White *Across the Unknown*

The higher consciousness is a *flowing river*, not a pond; a streaming through, not merely a personal immersion in. This means that the amount you can receive is completely determined by what you can *effectively* give out. Our output is the measure of our intake. "Give and you shall receive."

"Everything which man undertakes in order to awaken the eternal within him, he does in order to raise the value of the world's existence. The fresh knowledge he gains does not make him an idle spectator of the Universe, forming images for himself of what would be there just as much if he did not exist. The force of his knowledge is a higher one; it is one of the creative forces of nature. What flashes up within him spiritually is something divine which was previously under a spell and which, failing the knowledge he had gained, must have lain fallow and waited for some other exorcist. Thus a human personality does not live in and for itself but for the world."

Rudolph Steiner, *Christianity as Mystical Fact*

As we have seen throughout the Perennial Tradition, from Hermes Trismegisthus to Jesus to contemporary teachers, the vision is of the spiritual alignment of what is above with what is below, our learning to participate in the force of the higher consciousness flowing through to the material world below.

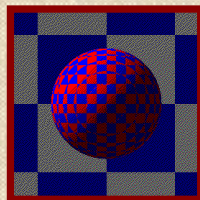
"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

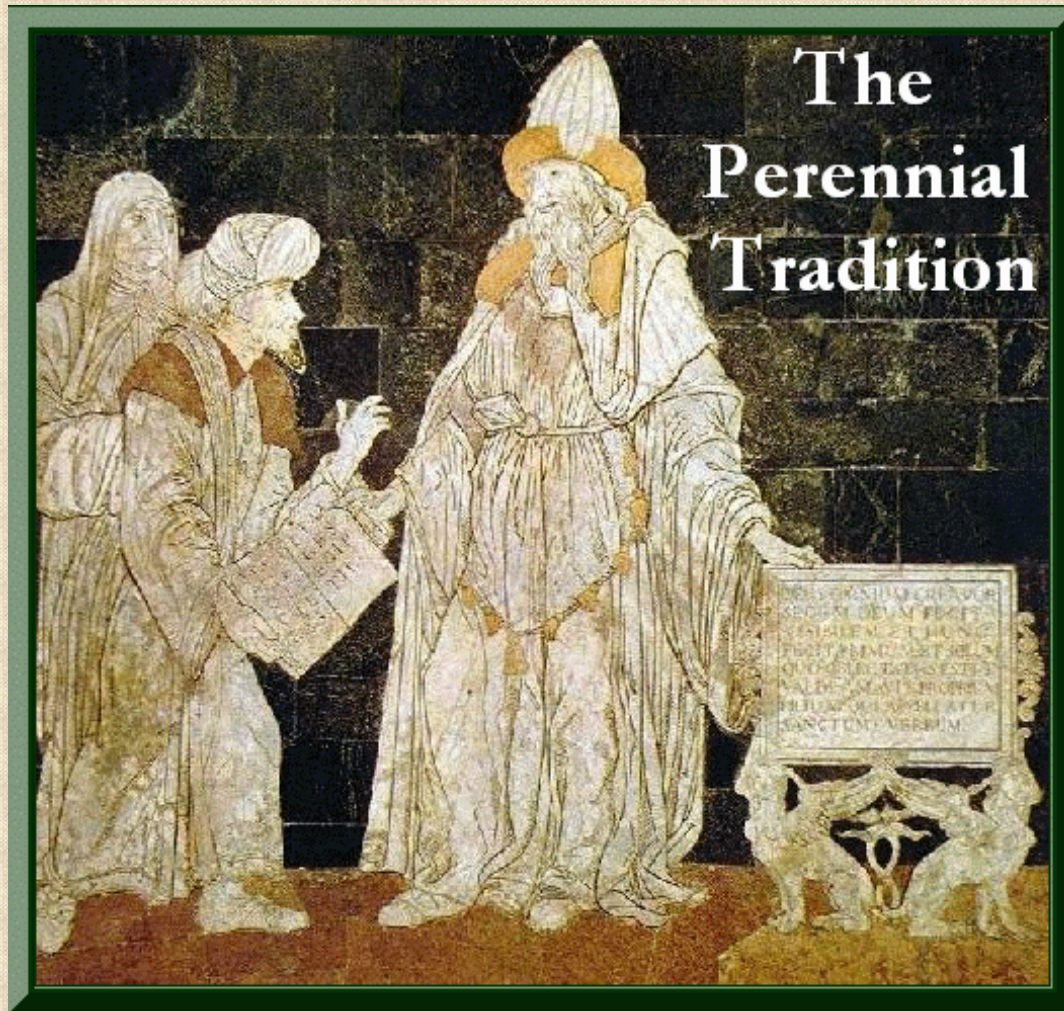
"Any individual who has strength enough to overcome within himself this dead weight, and to make the first effort toward becoming an *outgoing*, radio-active, positive expression of life, comes in contact with an entirely new field of existence. And if he can *maintain* his reversed current of force; then in exchange for his contribution to the whole positive field, that entire field is his to draw upon in proportion as he acquires the wisdom to manipulate it."

Stewart Edward White *Across the Unknown*

You can only gain certainty that you are developing spiritual awareness as you participate in the distribution of your spiritual heart force to others. You will not need to know when and how you help others; it will occur according to a will other than your own. The important thing is to make habitual the outflowing impulse which is mirrored by the inflow of higher consciousness.

Rufus Moseley. *Manifest Victory*
 _____. *Perfect Everything*





Chapter Twenty-One

Regeneration Into A Higher Consciousness

"The ancient Gnosis we may define as that knowledge of the nature of Man and of his place in the Universe which transcends the mere appearance of things as presented to the senses and the intellect, and which contacts Reality in a region of pure Truth. The beginning of this knowledge, therefore, is the realization that things are not what they seem; and no one who is a crude realist--as are all orthodox Christians, both in respect of the physical world and of their own Scriptures--can make any approach to this super-knowledge."

William Kingsland. *The Gnosis or Ancient Wisdom
in the Christian Scriptures*

In an earlier book *America, Awake!*, ¹ I described the current condition of the social-political-economic world. The book's purpose was to help people awaken to the reality of what is

happening in that world, beyond what they are conditioned to believe is occurring. The chapters of that book presented the reality behind and beyond the illusory myths of political-economic propaganda and brainwashing. My thesis was that unless America awakens it will likely suffer the fate of 1930s Germany: dictatorship, repression, and imperialistic militarism.

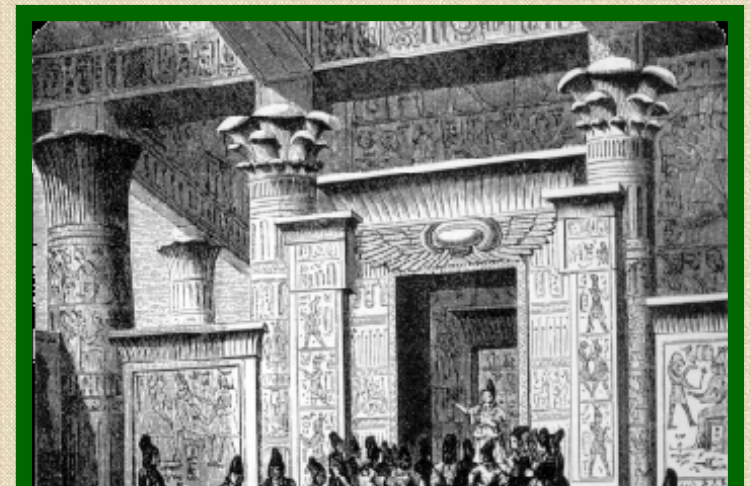
In a similar vein, this present book assists readers to awaken to the Higher Spiritual World. This concluding chapter will explicate the process that serious students use to actually *realize*--bring to manifestation--their Higher Consciousness through which they are able to contact Reality in a region of pure Truth. As Kingsland says, the beginning of this process is the realization "that things are not what they seem."

In a manner analogous to the forewarning found in my book *America, Awake!*, we can say that unless we become aware of the Higher Spiritual World we face the prospect of a basically useless physical existence and a future life--following physical death--of unpleasant, perhaps anguished reformation of our essence.

In three previous chapters we have examined the nature of this regeneration process, reviewing "initial contact with spiritual forces" in chapter five, the experience of "illumination" in chapter ten, and the achievement of a "unitive consciousness" in chapter twenty. Consolidating the ideas and processes previously described, this current chapter clarifies the procedures that earnest, devoted seekers within the Perennial Tradition take in their quest for achieving unity with a Higher Consciousness.

Commensurate with the Egyptian and Greek temple rituals and Plato's dialogues, this chapter outlines the actual *Initiation* into what are called the Mysteries. Genuine *Initiation* involves participants not merely learning and accepting abstract ideas but *undergoing a definite development*.

We know of the *Initiation* Mysteries of the Perennial Tradition primarily through non-Christian sources, extra-canonical sources, and Perennialist



interpretations of Christian material. Contrary to the assumptions of some scholastics, the Mysteries were not brainwashing cults for the gullible. Highly educated men such as Plutarch, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Julian, and Proclus were initiated into the Mysteries and expressed the religious ideas of those Mysteries in their philosophic teaching without disclosing the details of initiation.



In the early part of the first century C.E., "Christian" doctrine was concocted to serve as the basis for a "state religion" under Constantine. The leadership of the Church fell into the hands of autocrats ambitious for worldly power, quarrelling among themselves for prominence. The embodiment of the Perennial Tradition that Jesus had presented was branded as a heresy, as we saw in chapter twelve. What few records we have remaining of the Christian Gnosis--the Knowledge--of humankind's rebirth into a Higher Consciousness are mainly composed of the misrepresentations of its bitter opponents among the Church "Fathers."



"It is only when we come to the first five or six centuries B.C., and to the palmy days of Greece and Alexandria, that we obtain a definite knowledge of the existence of the Mystery Schools, and of some of their more detailed teachings. This period is associated with such names as Anaxagoras, Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and later on, before the dominance of ecclesiastical Christianity had suppressed the Gnosis, and had plunged the Western world into the darkness and horrors of the Middle Ages, we have such names as Philo Judaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Valentinus, Origen, Proclus, Basilides, Iamblichus, and Plotinus, all speaking openly of the existence of the Mysteries and Mystery Schools, claiming initiation therein, and openly teaching as much of it as it was permitted for them to make public."

William Kingsland. *The Gnosis or Ancient Wisdom in the Christian Scriptures*

"Plutarch speaks of the terror of those about to be initiated, and compares their state



of mind to preparation for death." ² The decision to seek unity with one's Higher Consciousness is a grave one, not to be entered into lightly. As we shall discover, there are solemn perils that the initiate faces in this challenging journey. But there is even more jeopardy in allowing oneself to become entranced by the worldly mind-frame.

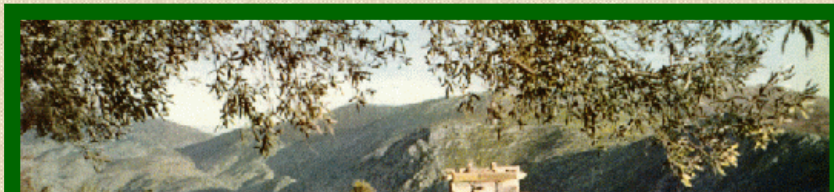


"The deeper secrets and laws of our being are self-protected; to learn them requires an adaptation of character and purpose, and a humility of mind and spirit, inconsistent with those displayed by the perverse or merely curious enquirer. To understand, let alone practically to explore, the Hermetic Mystery is not for every one--at least, at his present state of evolutionary unfolding. . . . Only to those whose spiritual destiny has already equipped them with a certain high measure of moral and intellectual fitness will even a rough notional apprehension of it be practicable."

Walter Leslie Wilmhurst, Introduction to
M. A. Atwood, *Hermetic Philosophy and Alchemy*

The chart below describes the two divergent paths that humans take in their earthly lives. We are all programmed to desire the ease of ignorance. "Don't bother me with facts." "I don't want to know what's going on in the world." "Life's too complicated the way it is."

We aren't even aware that we're ignorant; we're *ignorant of our own ignorance*. And we are trained to defend against anyone who might reveal our ignorance. "No, thank you very much, I know what I know, and that's that."



We become somewhat aware of *ignorance*, because we interact with other people who have different points of view. But we're certain that they're the ones who are ignorant, not us.



At some point in our existence we *hear about* a different way of looking at life, an unusual manner of moving through life in which humans actually care for one another.

Then we actually *hear* the ideas about this other way of life, the ideas about a higher, more harmonious, way of living actually register, and

it's at this point that we make a choice as to how to live our lives.

If we're uncomfortable even hearing about the other way of looking at life, we misinterpret it and convince ourselves that getting the most for ourselves is the only smart way to live. "It's a dog-eat-dog existence," we say to ourselves, "that other point of view is airy-fairy metaphysical nonsense." And with that, we're off on the path toward delusion.

On the other hand, if we're dissatisfied with mere physical existence, sensing that there is something more ultimately real than the sense world, then we begin the quest for higher values.



The Ascent

True Believer

Persecution of heretics
Sacrifice of self
"Union" with mass movement
Dogmatic espousal of ideology

Assumptions

"I know everything"
"I understand everything"
"I can do anything"
"I know how to learn"

Addictions-Obsessions

Excitement
Routine
Personality
Qualities: "sincerity," "authority," "loyalty," etc.
"Knowledge": theory, fantasy, fraud

Misinterpretation and Greed

Union With Higher Consciousness

Real Knowledge: Wisdom, Truth

Understanding

Development with a Teacher

Knowledge

Self-discipline and surrender

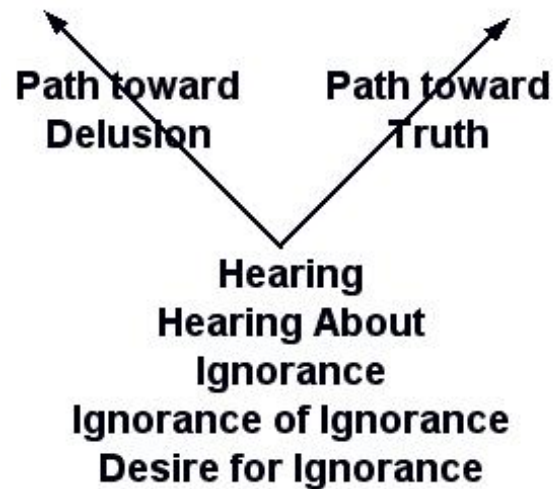
Learning the distinction between information,
knowledge, and understanding

Learning how to learn

Self-knowledge

Interest in and desire for knowledge

Dissatisfaction with oneself



By following the chart above you'll be able to trace the steps that humans take on the path toward delusion or the path toward truth. These are two very definite ways of life, not merely metaphors. Humans specifically choose one of these ways to follow during their earthly existence.

**Obsession
with the
Physical
World**

**"In the first
instance,
the world
surrounding
us is the
real one. We
feel, hear,**

**Seeking
Entrance
Into the
Spiritual
World**

**"There is
another
relation to
the world. . .
It comes to
certain**

and see what goes on in it, and because we thus perceive things with our senses, we call them real. And we reflect about events in order to get an insight into their connections. On the other hand, what wells up in our soul is at first not real to us in the same sense. It is merely thoughts and ideas. At the most we see in them only images of

people at a certain moment in their lives. Their whole relation to the world is completely reversed. They then call the images that well up in the spiritual life of their souls truly real, and they assign only a lower kind of reality to what the senses hear, touch, and see. They know that they cannot prove what they say, that they can only

sense-
reality. They
themselves
have no
reality, for
we cannot
touch, see,
or hear
them." 3

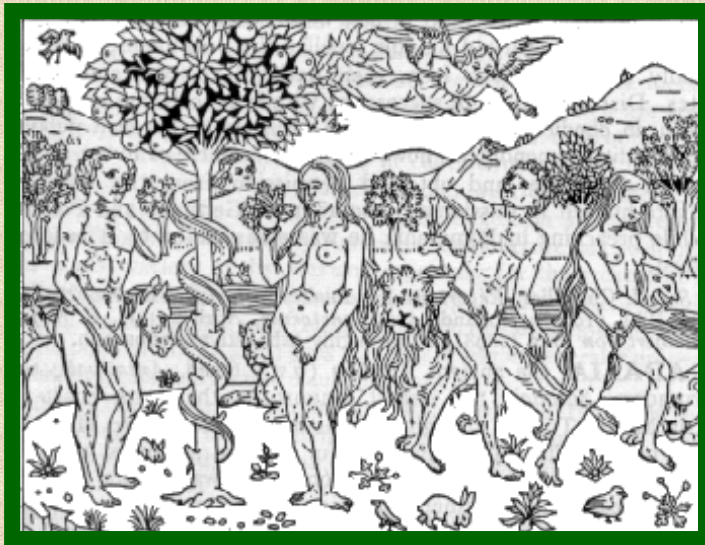
relate their
new
experiences,
and that
when
relating
them to
others they
are in the
position of a
man who
can see and
who imparts
his visual
impressions
to one born
blind." 4

The decision to quest for union with Higher Consciousness is a momentous one and only comes when individuals have begun to see through the sense world, take seriously that there is a higher realm of Harmony and Truth, and begin to purge themselves of obsession with consensus "reality."

"When may the individual be said to be ready? When at last, through the strife and stress and sorrows and failures . . . he has learnt that there is no rest, no satisfaction in 'the things of this world' after which he has hitherto been striving, and after which the great majority of the Race still strive. When he has not merely purified himself of all worldly lusts and desires, but also from any pride of intellect which may claim to be a knower of the truth in this, that, or the other form. When with an open mind he is prepared to go deeper than mind (intellect) and the man-made doctrines of men, into a region where truth is formless and immediate."

William Kingsland. *The Gnosis or Ancient Wisdom
in the Christian Scriptures*

The seeker is first instructed as to humankind's condition on this earthly plane. It is explained that the human soul has sustained a declension from its original state of union with the All, the Divine, into a separate physical existence in this world of Nature. The soul has fallen into an alien state and plane of existence.



divinized condition.

But this separation of the soul from its original state of being is not total. Regeneration to and re-attainment of our original state are desirable and possible. Despite the soul's fall there persists in it, although in a condition of atrophy and enchantment, a residual seed of that divine principle which once wholly actuated it. This seed, the latent "divine spark," the "Christ in you" of Paul, used effectively, can bring about regeneration--the reunion of personal consciousness with the Universal Mind. This process of regeneration (*palingenesis* in Greek) is an actual transmutation of the psychical and physical elements within our present frail and imperfect nature into a

"Thou shalt separate the gross from the subtle, gently, with great sagacity."

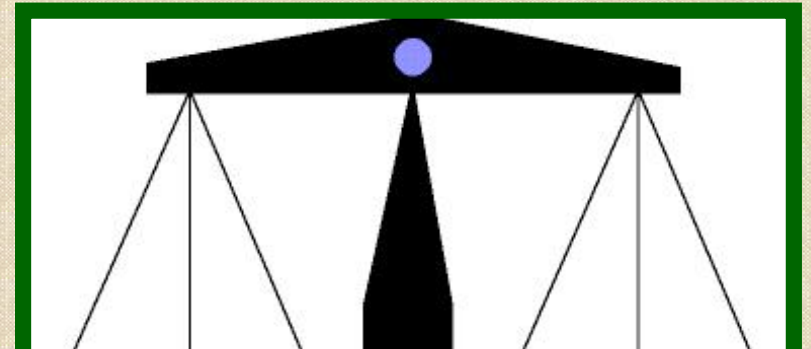
Hermetic Teaching

Once the aspirant has entered the path of *Initiation*, she experiences a process that is called 'spagyric' (separative) because it involves separation of several kinds:

- development of the ability to discriminate between
 - good and evil
 - important and unimportant
 - truth and falsehood
- separation of the mind from the body
- separation of the soul (pure intellect, Nous) from mind itself
- separation of the soul from terrestrial encumbrances (obsessions, sins, ignorance, etc.)

The Perennialist teacher directing the *Initiation* into the Mysteries is also separating those aspirants who are fit from those unsuited to the rigors of the mystic life.

The successful candidates evince a strong faith in the possibility of regeneration and eager



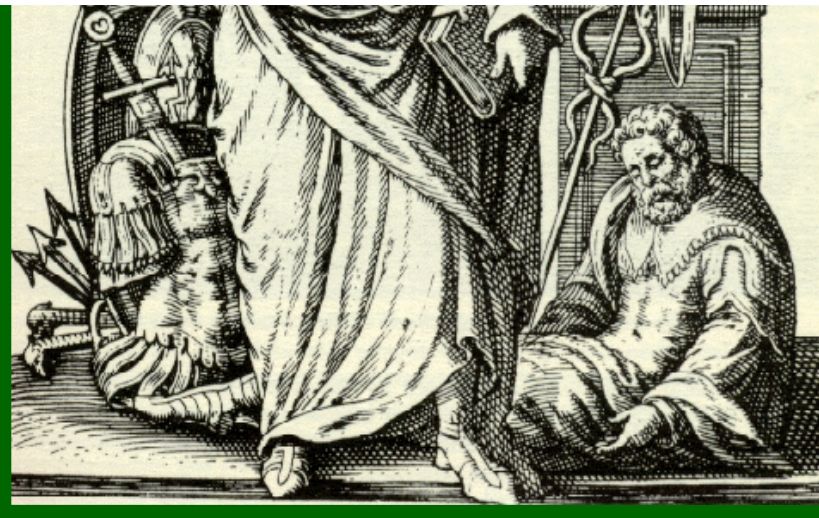
desire and consistency of purpose in its accomplishment. The teacher also selects those seekers with humility and self-abnegation uncommon to the self-reliant egotism that ordinarily characterizes unregenerate persons.



Those chosen were able to "transvalue all the world's values, to step entirely out of the world-stream by the current of which the majority are content to be borne along, to negate the affirmations of the senses and natural reason which for the multitude provide the criterion of the desirable and the true, and generally to adopt towards phenomenal existence an attitude incomprehensible to the average man to whom that existence is of paramount moment. They were animated by no motives of merely personal salvation or of spiritual superiority over their fellows; on the contrary they will be found to have been the humblest, as they were the wisest, of men. They had advanced far beyond that complacent stage where religion consists in fidelity to certain credal propositions and in 'being good' or as good as one can, and where sufficiency and robustness of faith are represented by the facile optimism of 'God's in His heaven.'" ⁵

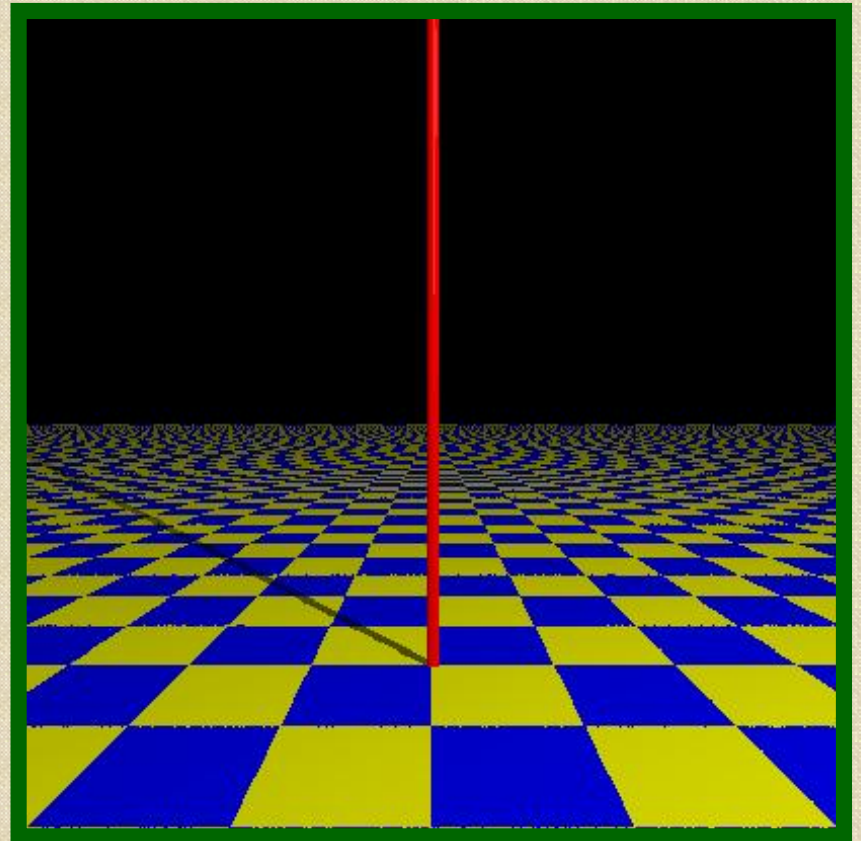


In particular, the Perennialist teacher separates the true aspirant from the person who is still living only in the impacts and feelings of the senses and who looks upon impressions of higher things as mere concepts. This latter type of person, even if claiming to be interested in spiritual pursuits, is focused exclusively on the things of sense and grasps only emptiness when he tries to understand spiritual realities. Even if he can discuss spiritual ideas knowingly, they are thoughts only. He thinks them but does not live in them. They are images, as unreal to him as dreams. Spiritual realities disappear for him when



brought into the massive, solidly built "reality" which his senses reveal.

The Perennialist teacher must choose wisely those whom she will admit into the *Initiation* process, because it is here that the first major danger appears. Some persons can attempt to move into the mystical life but end up with no home in the physical or the spiritual world.



"At this point a possibility comes in which may prove terrible. A man may lose his sensations and feelings of outer reality without finding a new reality opening up before him. He then feels himself as if suspended in the void. He feels bereft of all life. The old values are gone and no new ones have arisen in their place. The world and man no longer exist for him. Now, this is by no means a mere possibility. It happens at one time or another to everyone who seeks higher

knowledge. He comes to a point at which the spirit represents all life to him as death. He is then no longer in the world, but under it, in the nether world. He is passing through Hades. Well for him if he sink not! Happy, if a new world open up before him! Either he dies away or he appears to himself transformed." 6

At this juncture--and many others we shall discover--there is an absolute necessity that the teacher have undeniable abilities--in this case the capability of selecting only those candidates for *Initiation* who will not retrogress into the negative states of meaninglessness or mental disorder.

This is a crucial cut-off point, where only those aspirants are admitted who possess definite capabilities for success. Success in any case is never assured a spiritual seeker, but the teacher's selection process, guided by her clarified intuition, admits to the quest only those who have a potential to realize the ultimate purpose of union with the Higher Consciousness.

The list of aspirants has been pruned and now begins the perilous process of actual regeneration. The Perennialist teacher reduces the aspirant's sense-nature and objective mind to quiescence so that his Higher Consciousness can begin to awaken. She induces in the aspirant the state of consciousness of a person at the moment of death or in anaesthesia.



"Now, since we are manifestly present in this world, the world is what we wear (like a garment). From him (the savior) we radiate like rays; and being held fast by him until our sunset--that is, until our death in the present life--we are drawn upward by him as rays are drawn by the sun, restrained by nothing. This is resurrection of the spirit, which overcomes animate resurrection along with resurrection of the flesh. . . .

"Everyone should practice in many ways to gain release from this element (the body), so that one might not wander aimlessly but rather might recover one's former state of being."

Epistle to Rheginus, a letter from a Perennialist teacher to a student in the third or fourth century, C.E.

"This exit into greater life is the crowning glory of our existence here. It means transfiguration into an electrified and eternal being. I've got to tell you of it by degrees, because the exit is through the doors of self.

"Now stepping outside oneself actually means the practice of making one's own in imagination the conditions of the hour of death. . . .

"Suppose the day came for the Great Adventure of departing hence. Even a picnic or a vacation or a business trip demands some preparation. One is apt to take this tremendous step quite suddenly. What is it going to be like? Why turn our imaginations away from it so piously - or is it cowardly? Why not entertain ourselves with the buoyancy of anticipation? It is quite as speculative an amusement as contemplating a trip to Thibet, or reading what astronomers say about Mars, or any other pet flight of fancy. This has the advantage that we are actually dated up for it.

"Children play beautiful games of expanding consciousness, supposing giants and mighty superlatives. I'm getting just such a cheerful imaginative picture of when we depart hence. It is as though everything had been taken from me but the residue of me, such as would remain if I were to die now. It's all I've got to orient me in this new world in which I am just an embryonic being. Every circumstance of life is gone. I am as unconscious of my body as ever I could possibly be. The merest shadow of its existence is on me.

Betty White, *Across the Unknown*



The aspirant's consciousness, withdrawn from externals, the Perennialist teacher now has him focus upon his mind's internal content. The state of consciousness into which the Perennialist teacher induces the aspirant lays open the most secret recesses of the human psyche. We are ordinarily shielded from these powerful inner forces by the grossness of our sense-bound mind. The murk and fantasies of the initiate's psychical regions intervene between

his mind and the Higher Consciousness to which he aspires.



Some of the world's greatest poets and writers have depicted this submersion of the initiate into the netherworld. Aeneas plucks a branch of the "golden bough" and by its magic overcomes the phantasms of the "underworld" (his own subconscious), emerging at length in Elysium (consciousness of the divine plane). With the help of her "golden thread" Ariadne is able to find her way through the labyrinth (of her own subjective nature).

"It is only by exceeding zeal and piety of intention, such as is ascribed to Aeneas in search of his father, and a prevailing reason, that the seeking mind becomes fitted for establishment in her essence and percipient of her final duty to separate the good and reject the evil therein by birth allied; that she may know to what she ought to aspire, dismissing every other consideration, where Desires are Images and Will their Act. Thus Plato says,--It is necessary that a man should have his right opinion as firm as adamant in him when he descends into Hades, that there likewise he may be unmoved by riches or any such like evils, and may not, falling into tyrannies and such other practices, do incurable mischiefs and himself suffer still greater; but that he may know how to choose the middle life as to those things, and to shun extremes on either hand, both in this life as far as possible and in the whole hereafter."

M. A. Atwood, *Hermetic Philosophy and Alchemy*

The theurgic prescription for this submersion into the underworld is that the whole body should be buried, except the head, indicating that one's entire being, with the exception of the Higher Intellect, should be interred in profound oblivion. It is the Higher Mind (Nous) that reaches out to reunion with the One. The seed of Higher Consciousness which remains in the aspirant is now buried and must die as a seed to be reborn into a higher form.

The Perennialist teacher provides detailed



instruction as to how the aspirant is to pass through the perilous morass of inner temptations, fascinations, and obsessions. The savant instructs the initiate in how to achieve death of the lower self and resurrection into union with the Divine Self. The *Tibetan Book of the Dead* teaches how to pass through death, overcome whatever troublesome psychic tendencies may still be present, and achieve rebirth into a Higher Realm. The aspirant practices this death, overcoming of negative elements, and resurrection process through many years of training.



The disparate, contradictory interpretations of the Tibetan Book of the Dead is an interesting illustration of how even persons close to an original text can misconstrue its meaning.

W. Y. Evans-Wentz was editor of the 1927 Oxford University Press publication of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. The book contained the English rendering of the original Tibetan text by Tibetan Lama Kazi Dawa-Sandrup.

To provide the official "Asian studies" imprimatur, Sir John Woodroffe's officious and long-winded foreword was added. Fortunately, Evans-Wentz also included an introductory foreword by Lama Anagarika Govinda. If one reads Lama Govinda's foreword discerningly, it is clear that he was a highly-advanced teacher--heads and shoulders above Evans-Wentz and Woodroffe, the latter being merely derivative

scholastics.

Both Evans-Wentz and Woodroffe misinterpreted *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* as nothing

more than a formal ritual to be read to a person who has just died.

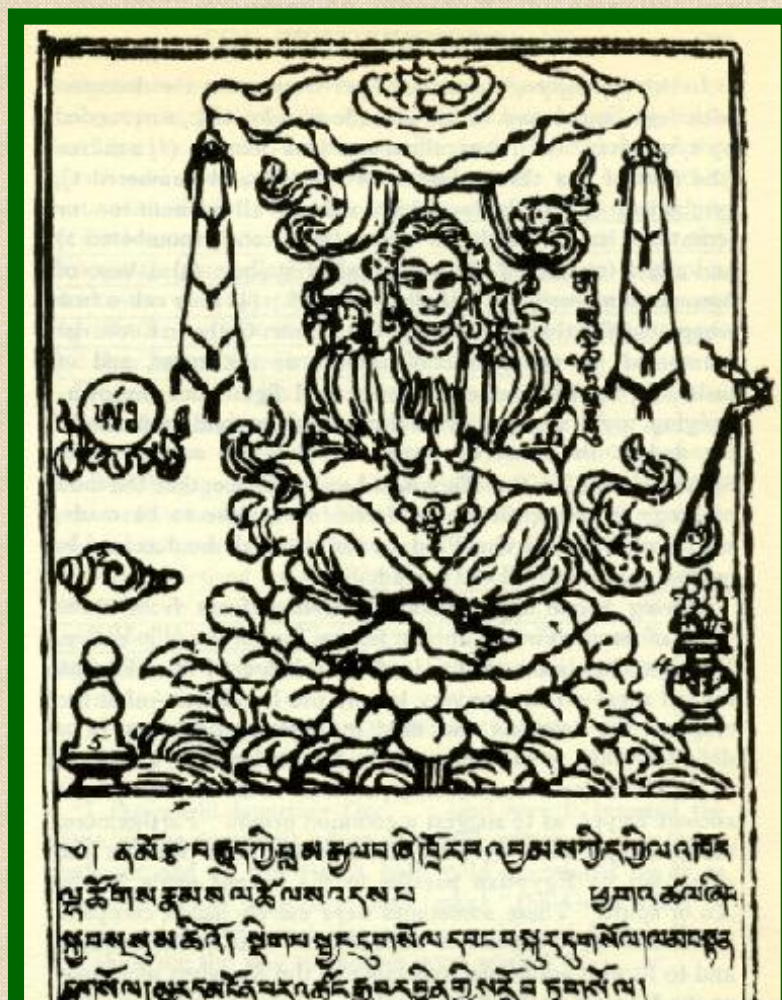
In his foreword, Lama Govinda dispels this misreading of the book in very straightforward language.

"There are two things which have caused misunderstanding. One is that the teachings seem to be addressed to the dead or the dying; the other, that the title contains the expression 'Liberation through Hearing' (in Tibetan, Thos-grol). As a result, there has arisen the belief that it is sufficient to read or to recite the *Bardo Thodol* [*The Tibetan Book of the Dead*] in the presence of a dying person, or even of a person who has just died, in order to effect his or her liberation.

"Such misunderstanding could only have arisen among those who do not know that it is one of the oldest and most universal practices for the initiate to go through the experience of death before he can be spiritually reborn. Symbolically he must die to his past, and to his old ego, before he can take his place in the new spiritual life into which he has been initiated.

"The dead or the dying person is addressed in the *Bardo Thodol* mainly for three reasons: (1) the earnest practitioner of these teachings should regard every moment of his or her life as if it were the last; (2) when a follower of these teachings is actually dying, he or she should be reminded of the experiences at the time of initiation, or of the words (or mantra) of the guru, especially if the dying one's mind lacks alertness during the critical moments; and (3) one who is still incarnate should try to surround the person dying, or just dead, with loving and helpful thoughts during the first stages of the new, or after-death, state of existence, without allowing emotional attachment to interfere or to give rise to a morbid mental depression. . . .

"The different *bardos*, therefore, represent different states of consciousness of our life. . . . This proves that we have to do here with life itself and not merely with a mass for the dead, to which the *Bardo Thodol* was reduced in later times."





Assimilating the teaching of the *Bardo Thodol*, the initiate attains mastery over the realm of death, discerning death's illusory nature, thereby overcoming fear. The delusion of death comes, the initiate learn, from identification with her temporal, transitory, form, in its physical, emotional, and mental aspects. The person delusively believes that there exists a personal, separate egohood of one's own--and holds onto this phantom notion for dear life. By actually experiencing the exercises contained in the *Bardo Thodol*, the initiate learns to identify herself with the Higher Self, the Eternal

What is achieved is not some nice, minor revision in one's mental framework or one's behavior, it is a physical and mental rebirth into the full consciousness of one's divine nature and powers as a "Son of God."

"When leaving the body behind thee
thou soarest up into the ether.

Then thou becomest a god, immortal,
beyond the power of death."

Empedocles

What the aspirant achieves through this *Initiation* process is a literal physical and psychic regeneration into a New Being. By successfully passing through the depths, the hidden Forms of Higher Being are revealed within him.

"The numerous express declarations that are to be met with in those early writers, the Greeks especially, that they were not alone able, but very generally had passed beyond the world of appearances in which we range into the full Intuition of Universal Truth, are, to say the least, remarkable. The liberal allowance of imagination and mere verbiage, which ignorance once ascribed to these men, has no doubt deterred many, and may continue to delay rational inquiry; but can never explain away their clear language of conviction, or nullify those solemn assertions of experience in the Divine Wisdom, and surpassing knowledge, which occur, in one form or other, at almost every page of their transmitted works. Neither are the definitions we gather of this Wisdom so incomplete, or ambiguous, that they can be possibly referred to any science or particular relation of science, physical or metaphysical, preserved to these times. But the Wisdom they celebrate is, as we before observed, eminently inverse; consisting not in the observation of particulars, neither in polymathy, nor in acuteness of the common intellect, nor in the natural order of understanding at all; but in a conscious development of the Causal Principle of the Universal Nature in Man.

"For man, say they, is demonstrated to be an epitome of the whole mundane creation, and was generated to become wise above all terrestrial animals; being endowed, besides those powers which he commonly exerts, and by means of which he is able to contemplate the things which exist around him, with the germ of a higher faculty, which, when rightly developed and set apart, reveals the hidden Forms of manifested Being, and secrets of the Causal Fountain, identically within himself. Nor this alone; not only is man reputed able to discover the Divine Nature, but, in the forcible language of the Asclepian Dialogue, to effect It; and in this sense, namely, with respect to the Catholic Reason which is latent in his life, man was once said to be the Image of God."

M. A. Atwood, *Hermetic Philosophy and Alchemy*

This hidden divinity (kingdom of God) within every man, revealed through the power of the indwelling Christ or Christos principle, is found in the teachings of Jesus, Paul, and other authentic Perennialist teachers.

"It is ignorance that causes us to identify ourselves with the body, the ego, the senses, or anything that is not the Atman [Higher Consciousness]. He is a wise man who overcomes this ignorance by devotion to the Atman."

Shankara. *The Crest Jewel of Wisdom*

The Perennialist teachers demonstrated that regaining one's birthright as a "Son of God" brings with it the power to conquer and command the natural forces of the Universe both visible and invisible, both material and immaterial.

"Know that when you learn to lose yourself, you will reach the Beloved. There is no

other secret to be learnt, and more than this is not known to me."

The Sufi teacher, Ansari of Herat

¹ Norman D. Livergood,

America, Awake! Dandelion Books, 2003

² Rudolf Steiner, *Christianity As Mystical Fact*,

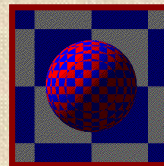
NY: Anthroposophic Press, 1947, p. 13

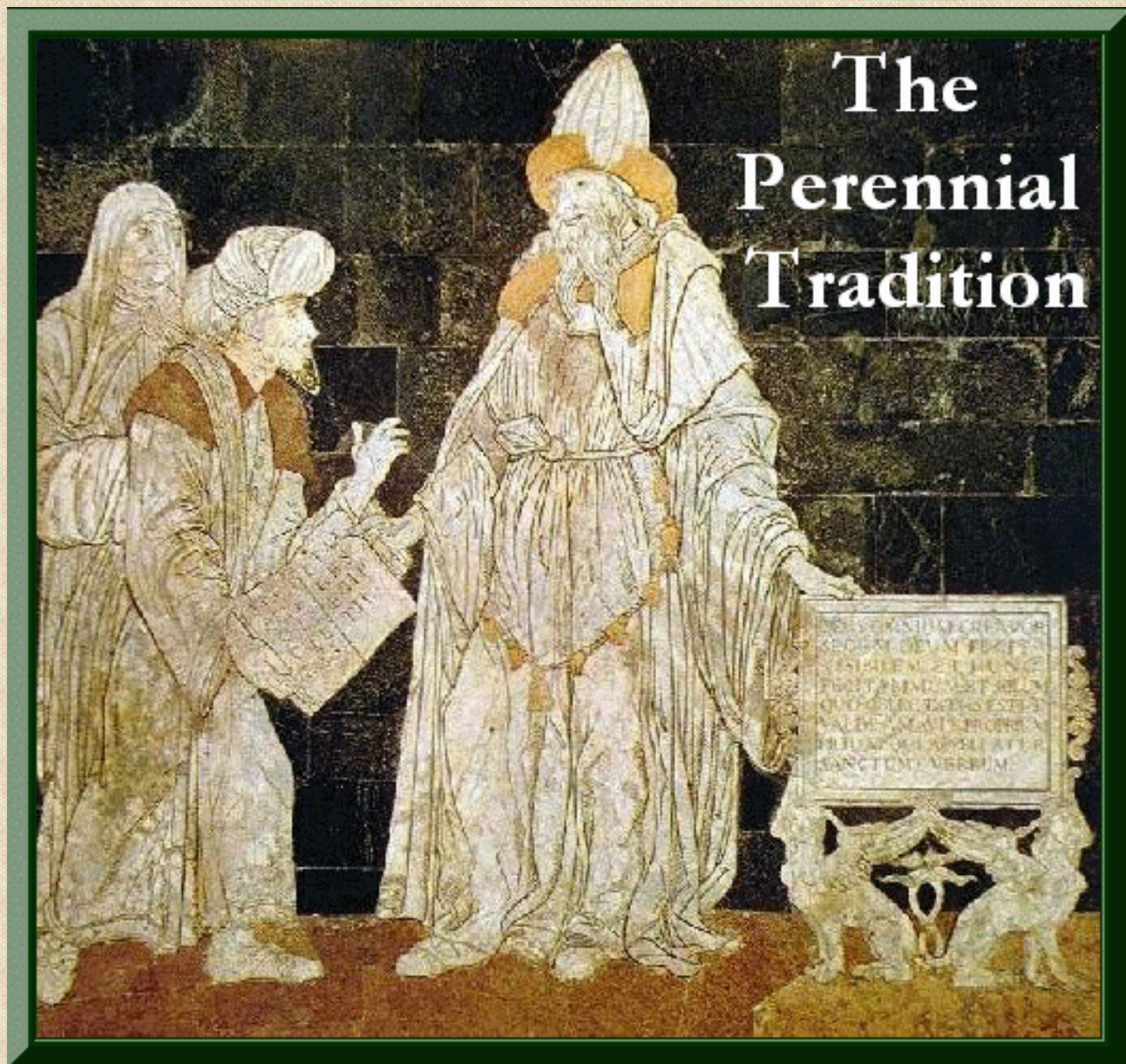
³ *Ibid.*, p. 14

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 15

⁵ William Kingsland. *The Gnosis or Ancient Wisdom in the Christian Scriptures*, p. 31

⁶ Rudolf Steiner. *Christianity As Mystical Fact*, p. 17





Transformative Readings and Images

Psychic Upheaval and Epiphany

The meaning of "epiphany" has expanded beyond its Greek origins - *the manifestation of a god* - to include special and sudden raptures. In this anthology I am using the term



epiphany to refer to an episodic mystical experience. These raptures occur to men and women from virtually every nation and culture. Throughout the ages, humans have undergone harrowing experiences, braved drug intoxication and risked madness to experience intense altered states of consciousness.

Until recently, only mystics have described these encounters with another order of reality. If they talk about their experiences at all, mystics use words like ecstasy, illumination, and exaltation--after confessing that words fail them. Protesting all the while that their sensations cannot be explained, mystics, psychedelic explorers, meditators, and contemplatives of all stripes describe experiences of inspiration, peace, serenity, and all-rightness with the universe; of moving into another order or dimension of consciousness; of fusing in oneness with God, the universe, others, everything, eternity; of transcending time, space, and ego; of being infused with knowledge, recognition, awareness, insight, certainty, illumination; of having a sense of endowment, of gaining more from the experience than they can intellectually understand.

William James's classic psychological study, *The*

***Varieties of Religious Experience*, isolates the family resemblance between mystical experiences and epiphanies.**

The simplest rudiment of mystical experience would seem to be that deepened sense of the significance of a maxim or formula which occasionally sweeps over one. Single words, and conjunctions of words, effects of light on land and sea, odors and musical sounds, all bring it when the mind is tuned aright. We are alive or dead to the eternal inner message of the arts according as we have kept or lost this mystical susceptibility.

When the psychologist Abraham Maslow set about to discover the makeup of a healthy psyche, he found that these rapturous experiences were more common than anyone had realized. From interviews, he learned that healthy, unneruotic persons had powerful experiences of meaning, unity, and harmony. Maslow referred to such events as "peak-experiences." He assembled statistical data to bolster his claim that peak-experiences were widespread and salutary. He maintained "peakers" learn from such experiences that "joy, ecstasy, and rapture do in fact exist."



Unlike mystical experiences, epiphanies do not necessarily require prolonged preparation. Unlike peak experiences, epiphanies can

be actively sought--through reading inspirational literature, viewing illuminating art, or listening to enlightening music, among other ways. Epiphanies break through our ordinary consciousness from "out there," from nature, from the arts, from another dimension.

In this anthology I concentrate on literary selections which I have found can occasion higher states of mind, unusual inspiration--epiphanies.

Since each person's tastes are different, I can only offer these selections with the hope that they transport you into another dimension as they have others. I proffer these jewels of illumination with a profound sense of humility, for they have a reality and a power of their own which cannot be owned by any single person. They are a part of our common spiritual heritage and a part of a wider reality. I hope you find these selections as enchanting, disturbing, and consciousness-expanding as I have.

To gain the full effect of the selections within this anthology, the reader must have kept alive what James called the "mystical susceptibility." The readings cast their facets into the mind only when read in a mood of quiet, unhurried, reverent openness--a willingness to hear strange, new messages and be affected in ways beyond past experience and present anticipation. There are worlds within worlds in these literary pearls and sapphires, which a surface reading can heedlessly overlook. The receptive reader, approaching these jewels with reverence, will experience infusions of illumination beyond my ability to describe.

Thirteen Ways of Looking At a Blackbird (excerpt)

By Wallace Stevens

I

Among twenty snowy
mountains,
The only moving thing
Was the eye of the blackbird.



II

I was of three minds.
Like a tree
In which there are three blackbirds.

Siddhartha (excerpt)

Hermann Hesse



...

Vasudeva...
took
Siddhartha's
hand, led
him to the
seat on the
river bank,



sat down
beside him
and smiled
at the river.

"You have heard it laugh," he said, "but you have not heard everything. Let us listen; you will hear more."

They listened. The many-voiced song of the river echoed softly. Siddhartha looked into the river and saw many pictures in the flowing water. ... The river's voice was sorrowful. It sang with yearning and sadness, flowing towards its goal.

"Do you hear?" asked Vasudeva's muted glance. Siddhartha nodded.

"Listen better!" whispered Vasudeva ...

Siddhartha listened. He was now listening intently, completely absorbed, quite empty, taking in everything. He felt that he had now completely learned the art of listening. He had often heard all this before, all these numerous voices in the river, but today they sounded different. He could no longer distinguish the different voices - the merry voice from the weeping voice, the childish voice from the manly voice. They all belonged to each other; the lament of those who yearn, the laughter of the wise, the cry of indignation and the groan of the dying. They were all interwoven and interlocked, entwined in a thousand ways. And all the voices, all the goals, all the yearnings, all the sorrows, all the pleasures, all the good and evil, all of them together was the world. All of them together was the stream of events, the music of life. When Siddhartha listened attentively to this river, to this song of a thousand voices; when he did not listen to the

sorrow or laughter, when he did not bind his soul to any one particular voice and absorb it in his self, but heard them all, the whole, the unity; then the great song of a thousand voices consisted of one word: Om - perfection.

"Do you hear?" asked Vasudeva's glance once again.

Vasudeva's smile was radiant; it hovered brightly in all the wrinkles of his old face, as the Om hovered over all the voices of the river. His smile was radiant as he looked at his friend, and now the same smile appeared on Siddhartha's face. His wound was healing, his pain was dispersing; his Self had merged into unity.

On a Grecian Urn

John Keats



Thou still unravished bride of quietness!
Thou foster-child of Silence and slow Time,
Sylvan historian, who canst thus express
A flowery tale more sweetly than our thyme:
What leaf-fringed legend haunts about thy
shape
Of deities or mortals, or of both,
In Tempe or the dales of Arcady?
What men or gods are these? What maidens
loath?

What mad pursuit? What struggle to escape?
What pipes and timbrels? What wild ecstasy?

Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on;
Not to the sensual ear, but, more endeared,

Pipe to the spirit ditties of no tone;
Faithful youth, beneath the trees, thou canst not
leave

Thy song, nor ever can those trees be bare;
Bold Lover, never, never canst thou kiss,

Though winning near the goal--yet, do not
grieve;
She cannot fade, though thou has not thy bliss,
For ever wilt thou love, and she be fair!

Ah, happy, happy boughs! that cannot shed
Your leaves, nor ever bid the Spring adieu;
And, happy melodist, unwearied,
For ever piping songs for ever new;
More happy love! more happy, happy love!
For ever warm and still to be enjoyed,
For ever panting and for ever young;
All breathing human passion far above,
That leaves a heart high sorrowful and cloyed,
A burning forehead, and a parching tongue.

Who are these coming to the sacrifice?
To what green altar, O mysterious priest,
Lead'st thou that heifer lowing at the skies,
And all her silken flanks with garlands drest?
What little town by river or sea-shore,
Or mountain-built with peaceful citadel,
Is emptied of its fold, this pious morn?
And, little town, thy streets for evermore
Will silent be; and not a soul to tell
Why thou art desolate, can e'er return.

O Attic shape! Fair attitude! with brede
Of marble men and maidens overwrought,

With forest branches and the trodden weed;
Thou, silent form! does tease us out of thought
As doth eternity; Cold Pastoral!
When old age shall this generation waste,
Thou shalt remain, in midst of other woe
Than ours, a friend to man, to whom thou say'st,
'Beauty is truth, truth beauty,'--that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know."

**The Light of Asia
(excerpts)**

By Sir Edwin Arnold

If he who liveth, learning whence woe springs,
Endureth patiently, striving to pay
His utmost debt for ancient evils done
In Love and Truth alway;

If making none to lack, he thoroughly purge
The lie and lust of self forth from his blood;
Suffering all meekly, rendering for offence
Nothing but grace and good:

If he shall day by day dwell merciful,
Holy and just and kind and true; and rend
Desire from where it clings with bleeding roots,
Till love of life have end:

He--dying--leaveth as the sum of him
A life-count closed, whose ills are dead and quit,
Whose good is quick and might, far and near,
So that fruits follow it.

No need hath such to live as ye name life;
That which began in him when he began
Is finished: he
hath wrought
the purpose
through
Of what did
make him Man.

Never shall
yearnings
torture him,
nor sins
Stain him, nor
ache of earthly
joys and woes
Invade his safe
eternal peace;
nor deaths
And lives
recur. He goes

Unto Nirvana.
He is one with
life
Yet lives not. He is blest, ceasing to be.
Om, Mani Padme, Om! The Dewdrop slips
Into the shining sea!



Percy Bysshe Shelley

from Adonais

The One remains, the many change and pass;
Heaven's light for ever shines,
Earth's shadows fly;
Life, like a dome of many-colored glass,
Stains the white radiance of eternity,
Until death tramples it to fragments.--Die,
If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek!
Follow where all is fled!--Rome's azure sky,
Flowers, ruins, statues, music, words, are weak
Thy glory they transfuse with fitting truth to speak.



Dante Gabriel Rossetti

Sudden Light

I have been here before,
But when or how I cannot tell.
I know the grass beyond the door,
The sweet keen smell,

The sighing sound, the lights around the shore.

You have been mine before,--
How long ago I may not know;
But just when at that swallow's soar
Your neck turned so,
Some veil did fall,--I knew it all of yore.

Has it been thus before?
And shall not thus time's eddying flight
Still with our lives our loves restore
In death's despite,
And day and night yield one delight once more?

Walt Whitman

Who Learns My Lesson Complete?

Who learns my lesson complete?
Boss, journeyman, apprentice, churchman and atheist,
The stupid and the wise thinker, parents and offspring,
merchant clerk, porter and customer,
Editor, author, artist, and schoolboy--draw nigh and
commence;
It is no lesson--it lets down the bars to a good lesson,
And that to another, and every one to another still.

The great laws take and effuse without argument,
I am of the same style, for I am their friend,
I love them quits and quits, I do not halt and make salaams.

I lie abstracted and hear beautiful tales of things and the
reasons of things,
They are so beautiful I nudge myself to listen.

I cannot say to any person what I hear--I cannot say it to myself-- it is very wonderful.

**It is no small matter, this round and delicious globe
moving so exactly in its orbit for ever and ever,
without one jolt or the untruth of a single second,
I do not think it was made in six days, nor in ten thousand
years, nor ten billions of years,
Nor plann'd and built one thing after another
as an architect plans and builds a house.**

**I do not think seventy years is the time of a man or woman,
Nor that seventy millions of years is the time of a man or a
woman,
Nor that years will ever stop the existence of me, or any one
else.**

**Is it wonderful that I should be immortal? as every one is
immortal;
I know it is wonderful, but my eyesight is equally wonderful,
and how I was conceived in my mother's womb is equally
wonderful.
And pass'd from a babe in the creeping trance of a couple of
summers and winters to articulate and walk--all this is
equally wonderful.**

**And that I can think such thoughts as these is just as
wonderful,
And that I can remind you, and you think them and know
them to be true, is just as wonderful.**

**And that the moon spins round the earth and on with the
earth, is equally wonderful,
And that they balance themselves with the sun and stars is
equally wonderful.**



Elizabeth Barrett Browning

Sonnets from the Portuguese

**How do I love thee? Let me count the ways.
I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of being and ideal grace.
I love thee to the level of everyday's
Most quiet need, by sun and candle-light.
I love thee freely, as men strive for right;
I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.
I love thee with the passion put to use
In my old griefs, and with my childhood's faith.
I love thee with a love I seemed to lose
With my lost saints,--I love thee with breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life!--and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.**



**The Walled Garden of Truth
(excerpt)**

Hakim Sanai

**The Garden of Reality
(extracts)**

**The seeing soul perceives
the folly of praising
other than the Creator.**

**The self is a servant in his cavalcade;
reason a new boy in his school.
What is reason in this guesthouse,
but a crooked scrawling
of God's handwriting?**

**Had he not shown himself,
how should we have known him?
Unless he shows us the way,
how can we know him?**

**We tried reasoning
our way to him:
it didn't work;**

but the moment we gave up,
no obstacle remained.

He introduced himself to us
out of kindness: how else
could we have known him?
Reason took us as far as the door; but it was
his presence that let us in.

But how will you ever know him,
as long as you are unable to know yourself?

Once one is one,
no more, no less:
error begins with duality;
unity knows no error.

Place itself has no place:
how could there be place
for the creator of place,
heaven for the maker of heaven?

He said:
'I was a hidden treasure;
creation was created
so that you might know me.'

Why, tell me, if what you seek
does not exist in any place,
do you propose to travel there on foot?
The road your self must journey on
lies in polishing the mirror of your heart. . . .

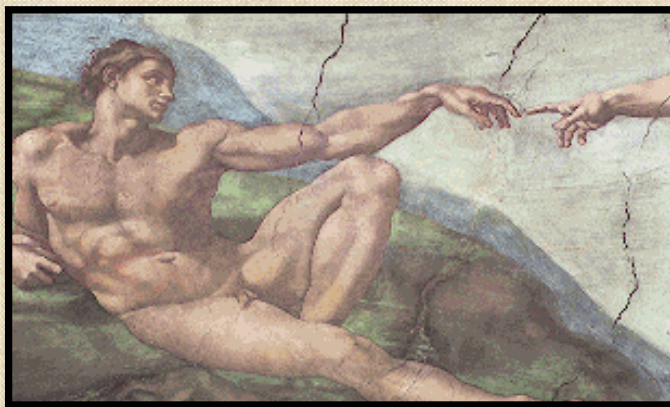
From him forgiveness comes so fast,
it reaches us before repentance

has even taken shape on our lips.

He is your shepherd,
and you prefer the wolf;
he invites you to him,
and yet you stay unfed;
he gives you his protection,
yet you are sound asleep;
O, well done,
you senseless upstart fool!

He heals our nature from within,
kinder to us than we ourselves are.
A mother does not love her child
with half the love that he bestows.
His kindness makes the worthless worthy;
and in return he is content
with his servants' gratitude and patience.

Translated and abridged by D. L. Pendlebury



**Paracelsus
(excerpt)**

Robert Browning

Truth is within ourselves, it takes no rise
From outward things, what'er you may believe.
There is an inmost centre in us all,
Where truth abides in fulness; and around,
Wall upon wall, the gross flesh hems it in,
This perfect, clear perception - which is truth.
A baffling and perverting carnal mesh
Binds it, and makes all error: and to know
Rather consists in opening out a way
Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape;
Than in effecting entry for a light
Supposed to be without.



The Tyger

William Blake

Tyger, Tyger, burning bright
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?

In what distant deeps or skies
Burnt the fire of thine eyes!
On what wings dare he aspire?
What the hand, dare seize the fire?
And what shoulder, and what art,
Could twist the sinews of thy heart?
And when thy heart began to beat,
What dread hand? and what dread feet?

What the Hammer? what the chain,
In what furnace was thy brain?
What the anvil? what dread grasp,
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears;
Did he smile his work to see?
Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

Tyger, Tyger burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Dare frame thy fearful symmetry?

from Proverbs of Hell

- The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom.
- Eternity is in love with the productions of time.
- If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise.
- One thought fills immensity.
- You never know what is enough unless you

- know what is more than enough.
- Damn braces. Bless relaxes.

A Memorable Fancy

If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.

For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.

Ah Sunflower

Ah Sunflower, weary of time,
Who countest the steps of the sun,
Seeking after that sweet golden clime
Where the traveler's journey is done-- Where
the youth pined away with desire,
And the pale virgin, shrouded in snow, Arise
from their graves, and aspire
Where my sunflower wishes to go!



Eunice Tietjens

The Most Sacred Mountain

Space, and the twelve clean winds of heaven,
And this sharp exultation, like a cry, after the slow six
thousand steps of climbing!

This is Tai Shan, the beautiful, the most holy. Below my feet
the foot-hills nestle, brown with flecks of green; and lower
down the flat brown plain, the floor of earth stretches away
to blue infinity.

Beside me in this airy space the temple roofs cut their slow
curves against the sky, and one black bird circles above the
void. Space, and the twelve clean winds are here;
And with them broods eternity - a swift, white peace, a
presence manifest.

The rhythm ceases here. Time has no place. This is the end
that has no end.

Here when Confucius came, a half a thousand years before
the Nazarene, he stepped, with me, thus into timelessness.
The stone beside us waxes old, the carven stone that says:
On this spot once Confucius stood and felt the smallness of
the world below. The stone grows old,
Eternity

Is not for stones.

But I shall go down from this airy space, this swift white
peace, this stinging exultation;

And time will close about me, and my soul stir to the rhythm
of the daily round.

Yet, having known, life will not press so close, and always I
shall feel time ravel thin about me;

For once I stood In the white windy presence of eternity.



William Shakespeare

Sonnet CXVI

**Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments. Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove:
O, no! it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wandering bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be
taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
And bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be error and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.**

William Wordsworth

Intimations of Immortality (excerpt)

Ye blessed creatures, I have heard the call
Ye to each other make; I see
The heavens laugh with you in your jubilee;
My heart is at your festival,
My head hath its coronal,
The fullness of your bliss, I feel--I feel it all.
Oh evil day! if I were sullen
While earth itself is adorning,
This sweet May-morning
And the children are calling
On every side,
In a thousand valleys far and wide,
Fresh flowers; while the sun shines warm,
And the babe leaps up in his mother's arms--
I hear, I hear, with joy I hear!
--But there's a tree, of many, one,
A single field which I have looked upon,
Both of them speak of something that is gone:
The pansy at my feet
Doth the same tale repeat:
Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?
Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting:
The soul that rises with us, our life's Star
Hath had elsewhere its setting,
And cometh from afar:
Not in entire forgetfulness,
And not in utter nakedness,
But trailing clouds of glory do we come
From God, who is our home:

Heaven lies about us in our infancy!
Shades of the prison-house begin to close
Upon the growing boy,
But he beholds the light, and whence it flows,
He sees it in his joy;
The Youth, who daily farther from the east
Must travel, still is Nature's Priest
And by the vision splendid
Is on his way attended;
At length the man perceives it die away
And fade into the light of common day.

. . .

Then sing, ye birds, sing, sing a joyous song,
And let the young Lambs bound
As to the tabor's sound!
We, in thought, will join your throng
Ye that pipe and ye that play,
Ye that through your hearts today
Feel the gladness of the May!
What though the radiance which was once so bright
Be now forever taken from my sight
Though nothing can bring back the hour
Of splendour in the grass, of glory in the flower;
We will grieve not, rather find
Strength in what remains behind;
In the primal sympathy
Which having been must ever be;
In the faith that looks through death,
In years that bring the philosophic mind.
And O, ye fountains, meadows, hills, and groves,
Forebode not any severing of our loves!
Yet in my heart of hearts I feel your might;

I only have relinquished one delight
 To live beneath your more habitual sway.
 I love the brooks which down their channels fret,
 Even more than when I tripped lightly as they;
 The innocent brightness of a new-born day
 Is lovely yet;
 The clouds that gather round the setting sun
 Do take as sober colouring from an eye
 That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;
 Another race hath been, and other palms are won.
 Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
 Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
 To me the meanest flower that blows can give
 Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

from Tintern Abbey

Five years have past; five summers, with the length
 Of five long winters! and again I hear
 These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
 With a soft inland murmur, --once again
 Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
 That on a wild, secluded scene impress
 Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
 The landscape with the quiet of the sky.
 The day is come when I again repose
 Here, under this dark sycamore, and view
 These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
 Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
 Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
 'Mid groves and copses. Once again I see
 These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines


Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,
Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!
With some uncertain notice, as might seem
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
Or of some hermit's cave, where by his fire
The hermit sits alone.

These beauteous forms,
Through a long absence, have not been to me
As is a landscape to blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;
And passing even into my purer mind,
With tranquil restoration:--feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,
As have no slight or trivial influence
On that best portion of a good man's life,
His little, nameless, unremembered acts
Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,
To them I may have owed another gift,
Of aspect more sublime; that blessed mood,
In which the burden of the mystery,
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world,
Is lightened:--that serene and blessed mood,
In which the affections gently lead us on,--
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power

Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
We see into the life of things.

If this

Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft--
In darkness and amid the many shapes
Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir
Unprofitable, and the fever of the world,
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart--
How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,
O sylvan Wye! thou wanderer thro' the woods,
How often has my spirit turned to thee
And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,
With many recognitions dim and faint,
And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
The picture of the mind revives again:
While here I stand, not only with the sense
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts
That in this moment there is life and food
For future years. And so I dare to hope,
Though changed, no doubt, from what I was when first
I came among these hills; when like a roe
I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
Wherever nature led: more like a man
Flying from something that he dreads, than one
Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then
(The coarser pleasures of my boyish days
And their glad animal movements all gone by)
To me was all in all,--I cannot paint
What then I was. The sounding cataract
Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
Their colors and their forms, were then to me
An appetite; a feeling and a love,



That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, nor any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.--That time is past,
And all its aching joys are now no more,
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this
Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur; other gifts
Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,
Abundant recompense. For I have learned
To look on nature, not as in the hour
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes
The still, sad music of humanity,
Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power
To chasten and subdue. And I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air,
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit, that impels
All thinking things, all objects of all thought,
And rolls through all things. Therefore am I still
A lover of the meadows and the woods,
And mountains; and of all that we behold
From this green earth; of all the mighty world
Of eye, and ear,--both what they half create,
And what perceive; well pleased to recognize
In nature and the language of the sense,
The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of all my moral being.

Henry Vaughan

The Retreat

Happy those early days, when
 Shined in my angel-infancy!
 Before I understood this place
 Appointed for my second race,
 Or taught my soul to fancy aught
 But a white, celestial thought;
 When yet I had not walked above
 A mile or two from my first love,
 And looking back, at that short space,
 Could see a glimpse of his bright face;
 When on some gilded cloud or flower
 My gazing soul would dwell an hour,
 And in those weaker glories spy
 Some shadows of eternity;
 Before I taught my tongue to wound
 My conscience with a sinful sound,
 Or had the black art to dispense,
 A several sin to every sense,
 But felt through all this fleshly dress
 Bright shoots of everlastingness.
 O, how I long to travel back,
 And tread again that ancient track!
 That I might once more reach that plain,
 Where first I left my glorious train;
 From hence the' enlightened spirit sees
 That shady city of palm trees.
 But ah! my soul with too much stay
 Is drunk, and staggers in the way!
 Some men a forward motion love,
 But I by backward steps would move;
 And when this dust falls to the urn,
 In that state I came, return.

The Glass of Water

**By Wallace Stevens
(excerpt)**

**That the glass would melt in heat,
That the water would freeze in cold,
Shows that this object is merely a state,
One of many, between two poles. So,
In the metaphysical, there are these poles.**


**Here in the centre stands the glass. Light
Is the lion that comes down to drink. There
And in that state, the glass is a pool.
Ruddy are his eyes and ruddy are his claws
When light comes down to wet his frothy jaws**

**And in the water winding weeds move round.
And there and in another state--the refractions,
The *metaphysica*, the plastic parts of poems
Crash in the mind . . .**

Medard Boss. *A Psychiatrist Discovers India*


(translated from German into English by Henry A. Frey)

**Let us now meditate on the fundamental outlook which
from time immemorial has induced Indian thinkers to
experience all beings not as something made from the
outside, but as something appearing, emerging, growing
from within as beings released out of Brahman into
existence. They have not seen beings as things to be
represented in the consciousness of an ego-centred human**



subject in the forms of inner-psycho pictures, but as things revealing themselves directly to the human existence. This approach can not be a mere astonishment and amazement at the fact that something is-and how it is. Nor can it be a doubting of the reality of the world. Only a human being who is deeply moved by awe and who remains in a state of reverence does not fall prey to the will-to-explore-and-dominate that which shows itself to him, but remains all ears and eyes for the summons of the awe-inspiring phenomena. The awe-inspired person does not want to get hold of or to possess what he reveres, with the aid of his intellectual concepts. He seeks only to get himself into the frame of mind appropriate to the revered object--one which renders him open to its summons and makes his vision clear for its beckonings. He knows: if he manages to comply with the phenomenon that is worthy of his awe so perfectly that he catches sight of its entire truth, he has succeeded also in releasing himself from the chaos of all delusions.

My dear friend, never succumb to the temptation of wanting to take conceptual possession of this 'brahman' or 'sat', to concretize and stratify it, to conceive of it as an 'Id' or as the 'collective unconscious' and to give it a structure by means of abstractions of pictorial images and ordering powers. All these are definitions from the restricted viewpoint of an intellect that fragments reality, calculates it and objectifies it. Only for such an intellect is the ultimate reality of man something assembled from disparate individuals or psyches, something collective and something of which it, the intellect, can know nothing and can not be conscious. It is, however, more in accord with the facts to speak, not of a 'collective unconscious' but, rather, of an undivided, all-inclusive knowledge. But let us drop all this pinning of labels, and let us follow the far greater and wiser



course exemplified so often by India's best spirits. Let us master ourselves to the point of, for once, not wanting to take possession of anything. Let us, rather, allow 'brahman' simply to occur, in the pristineness of its mystery, and let us adopt the course of enduring it as such and of keeping ourselves open to it. The whole game is lost from the outset if we seek to manipulate 'brahman' by means of our concepts. To be sure, something has to happen, not with it, however, but with us. We have to open up our selves and allow our being to become clear-visioned. We must do this to such an extent that our spiritual constitution becomes truly worthy of the 'brahman' nature and is in accord with it. Then it is 'brahman' or 'sat', for its part, that addresses and grants us the truth of its entire reality, without our having to do anything further about it. For this reason the Indian thinkers have never tried to work out qualitative definitions of 'brahman' or 'sat'. They have always stressed that at the very most our thoughts should circle about it on the 'neti-neti path', i.e. by the negation of its substantiality and qualitateness, by saying: 'It is not that, not this and not that other thing.' The utmost they ventured to say on this subject was the mere demonstrative pronoun 'tat', which means 'that'. However, the really fitting human approach is just the noble silence that is prepared to 'hear'. Buddha two and a half millennia ago most impressively exemplified this noble silence for us as the only behaviour worthy of the real truth. Yet even today, every spiritual teacher in India will from the start subdue the loquacity of his pupil, lest from the outset the pupil dissipate 'brahman', with mere talk.

'Brahman' or 'sat' permits the mysterious arising of being out of not-being. It always originally occurs as an illumination. To this India gives the name 'chit'. Judge for yourself now how disastrous for an understanding of the

Indian science of man is its translation by the modern term 'consciousness'? If modern psychology says 'conscious', it is always, by that very fact, inquiring as to the 'whom', as to a subject, which has a 'consciousness', to which a 'consciousness' belongs as a property. Or, of course, psychologists may think of 'consciousness' as a kind of intellectual receptacle in which a human subject stores the ideas it forms of itself and of the mental representations of the objects of an external world. The basic Indian term 'chit', however, has nothing to do either with a subject or with a 'mind' and their psychological functions. It does not depend, either, on a representational content nor on a thing at all. According to the Indian insight, 'chit' is the non-objectifiable occurrence of the primordial, emergent, opening-up illumination, which can happen per se, without necessarily requiring the agency of the least thing. Can not the sunlight shine, even when there is nothing at all in space? Of course, there was in India also a preliminary stage leading to this insight, to the effect that the primordial illumination could be represented only as the perception of something in the light of the being of man. This doctrine was also fond of using the old simile: being and thinking belong together like two bundles of reeds leaning on each other. If one bundle is taken away, the other one too falls down says the relevant Upanishad. More advanced Indian thought, however, regards this view as still undeveloped and crude. It always experiences the ultimate truth about reality as a primarily 'contentless' lighting-up.

At the same time, this emergent illumination is a 'free' and redemptive' opening-up. Therefore, it is also said of it that it is 'ananda', or bliss. 'Sat-chit-ananda' is thus the threefold ancient Indian term which points in the direction of the truly disclosed, ultimate reality. I trust I no longer have to

fear that you will misunderstand this 'sat-chit-ananda' as having some kind of substantive existence. Nor is it meant in any attributive sense, as a designation of properties intended to define a thing qualitatively."

The Celestial Fire

Yannai (6th century)

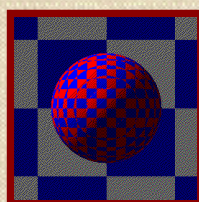
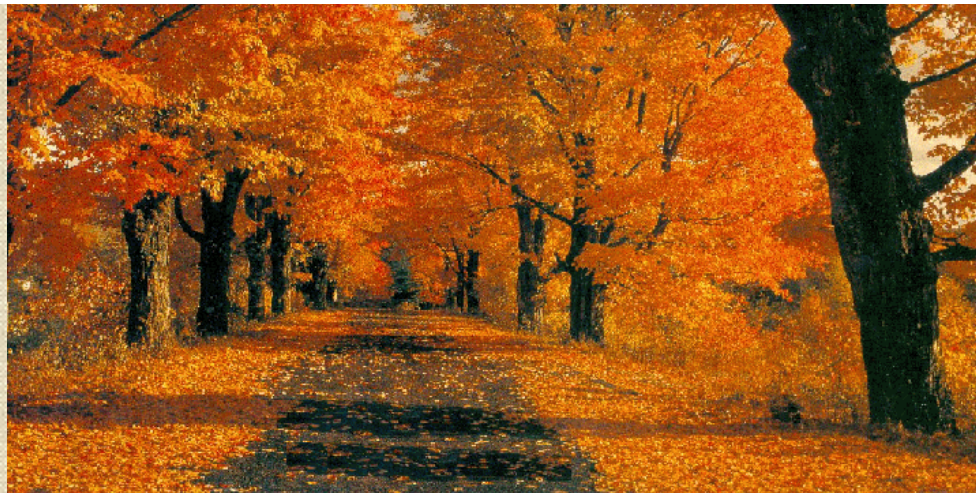
***Now an angel of the Lord appeared to
Moses in a blazing fire -***

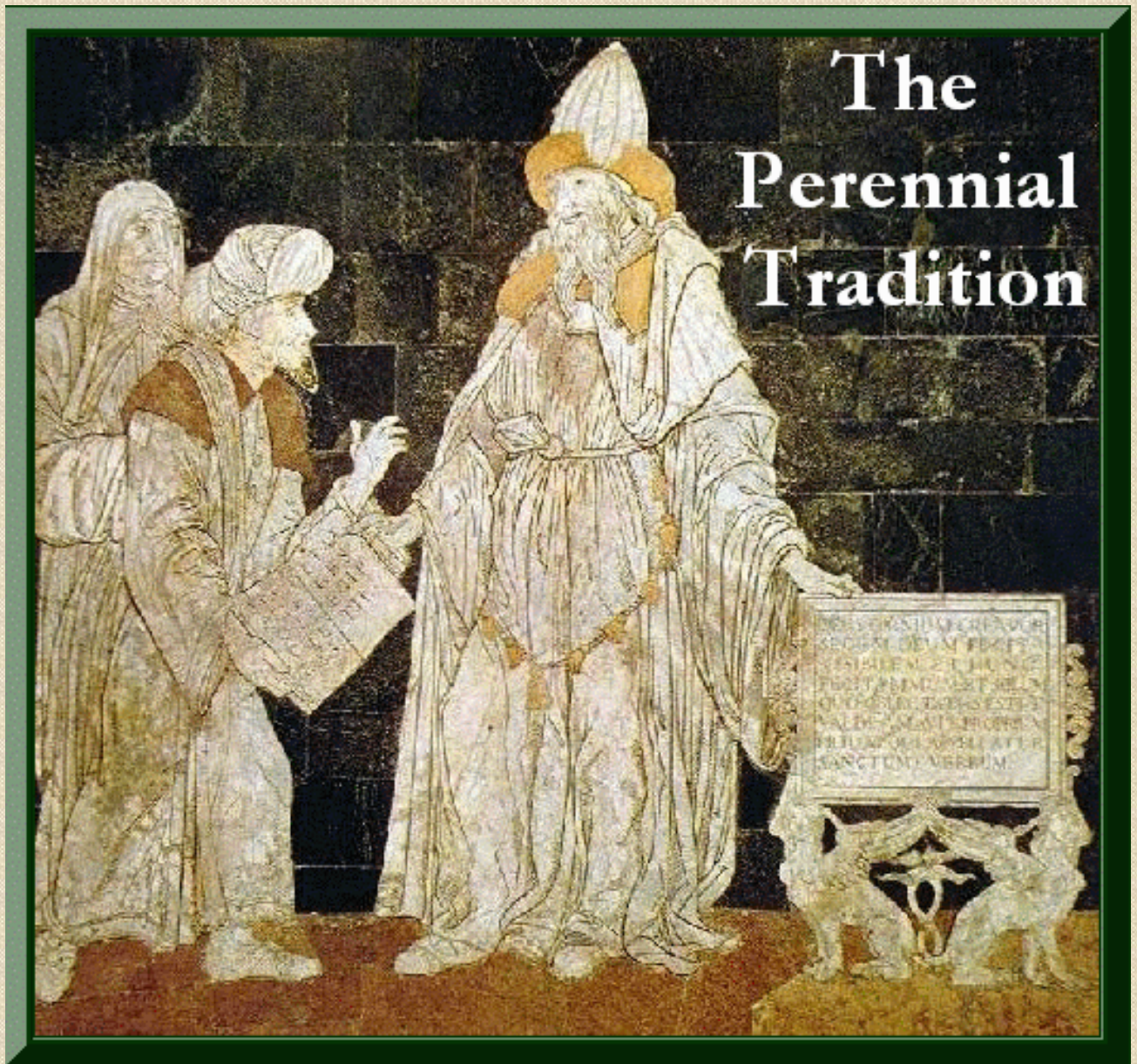
**a fire that devours fire; a fire that burns
in things dry and moist; a fire that
glows amid snow and ice; a fire that is
like a crouching lion; a fire that reveals
itself in many forms; a fire that is, and
never expires; a fire that shines and
roars; a fire that blazes and sparkles; a
fire that flies in a storm wind; a fire
that burns without wood; a fire that
renews itself every day; a fire that is
not fanned by fire; a fire that billows
like palm branches; a fire whose sparks
are flashes of lightning; a fire black as
a raven; a fire, curled, like the colours
of the rainbow!**

translated by T. Carmi



Scenes for Meditation

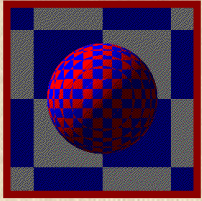


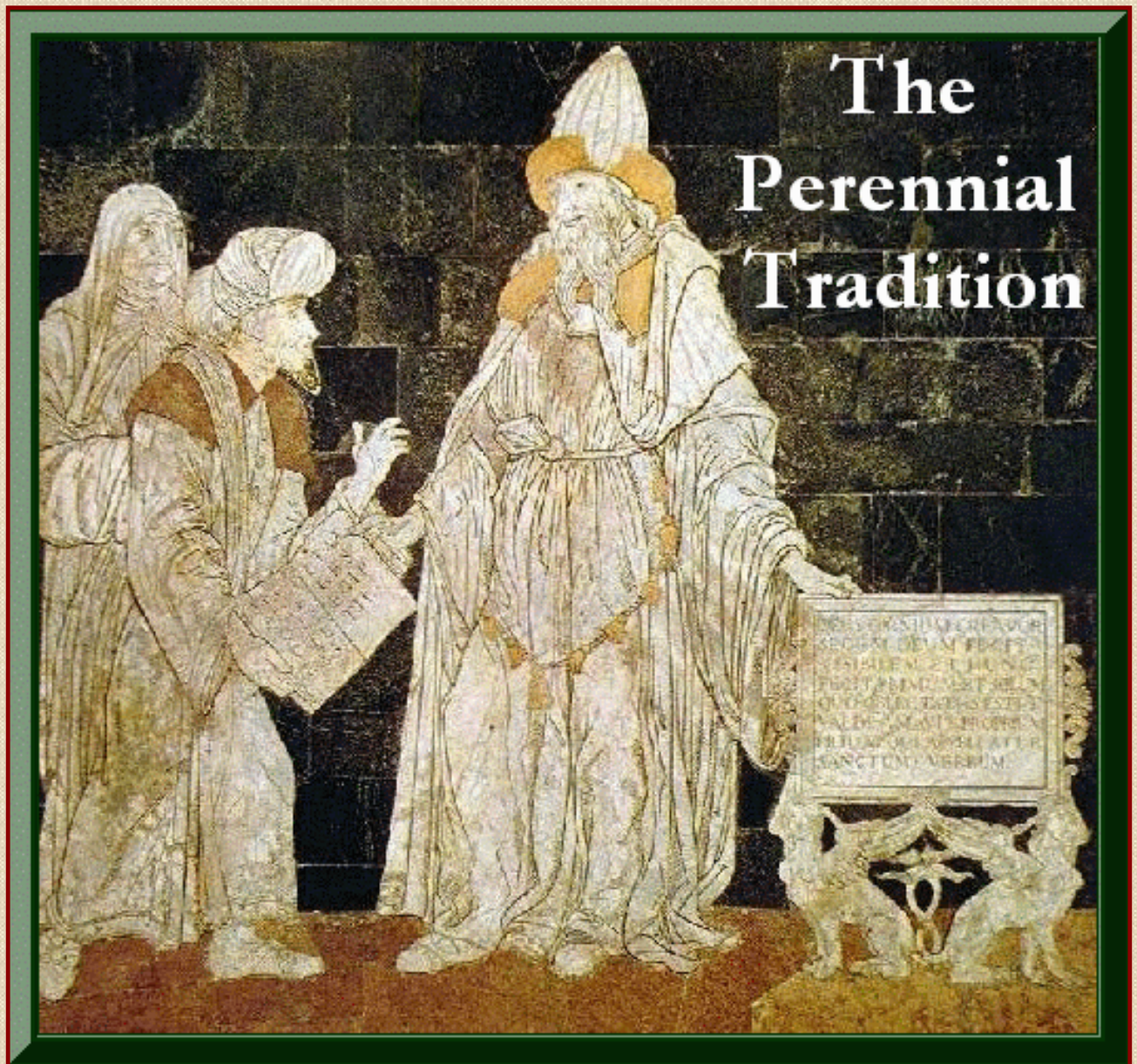


Ancillary Essays

1. [Magic, Science, Religion, and Spirituality](#)
2. [Plotinus's Practical Mysticism](#)

3. **The Great Doing: Activity in the Spiritual World**
4. **Disclosure of High Knowledge Through Perennialist Art**
5. **Portals to Higher Knowledge**
6. **Vanquishing Ignorance**
7. **A Meditation on Love: The Greater Mystery**
8. **Developing Social and Spiritual Awareness**
9. **Communing With Kindred Souls**
10. **Rediscovering and Preserving Human Wealth**
11. **The Concepts and Exercises of Jane Roberts**
12. **Social Intelligence**
13. **Evolution's Next Step**
14. **The Higher Mysteries**
15. **Emily Dickinson As Mystic**
16. **Esoteric Christianity**
17. **William Blake As Mystic**
18. **Helen Keller As Mystic**





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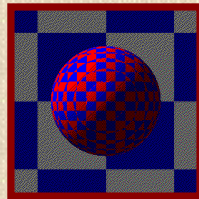
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**Advanced Study
in the
Perennial
Tradition**

**The
Perennial
Tradition
is the
secret
legacy,
the
single
stream of
initiatory
teaching
flowing
through
all the
great
schools
of
mysticism.**



The Advanced Study Program is not psychotherapy or counseling.

This program does not attempt to deal with psychological problems or symptoms. The study program does not involve psychotherapy or counseling in any manner. Persons needing such clinical services should seek assistance in one of



those areas. Individuals currently involved in a psychological,

counseling, psychotherapeutic, or metaphysical *regimen* are not admitted to this study program. This includes persons who are involved in any kind of psychological or psychiatric drug regimen (e.g. antidepressants), whether actively undergoing psychotherapy or not.



This Advanced Study Program is not an academic course in philosophy.

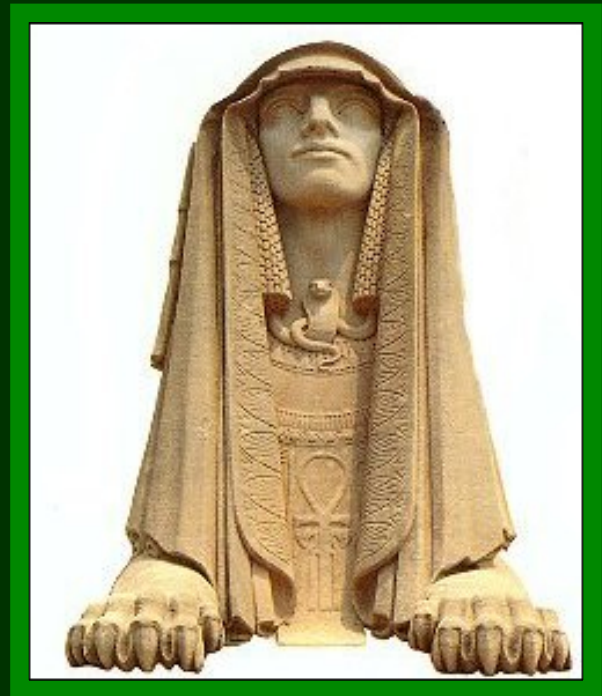


This study program involves much more than the review of philosophical or metaphysical material in an academic manner. Individuals admitted to the program learn to examine their own beliefs and actions, acquire objectivity

through deliberation, develop personal values, and understand ideas and complete exercises which the program presents. The emphasis is placed on *assimilation*, not merely analyzing and theorizing. The study program defines learning as radical, personal transformation.

This Program of Advanced Study is *not* available to all persons.

Admittance into this study program is available only to those who demonstrate that they possess the correct kind of capability, understanding, and attitude. They must be aware of how advanced knowledge differs from ordinary opinion and how a person must prepare to comprehend higher wisdom. The criteria for admission to the program are exacting and provide a high level of challenge to discourage persons who are merely curious dilettantes and not genuinely committed to what the study program encompasses.



If you're considering applying for admission to this Program of Advanced Study you'll need to consider these factors carefully:

- You would only have a chance of being considered for acceptance into the program if you have studied

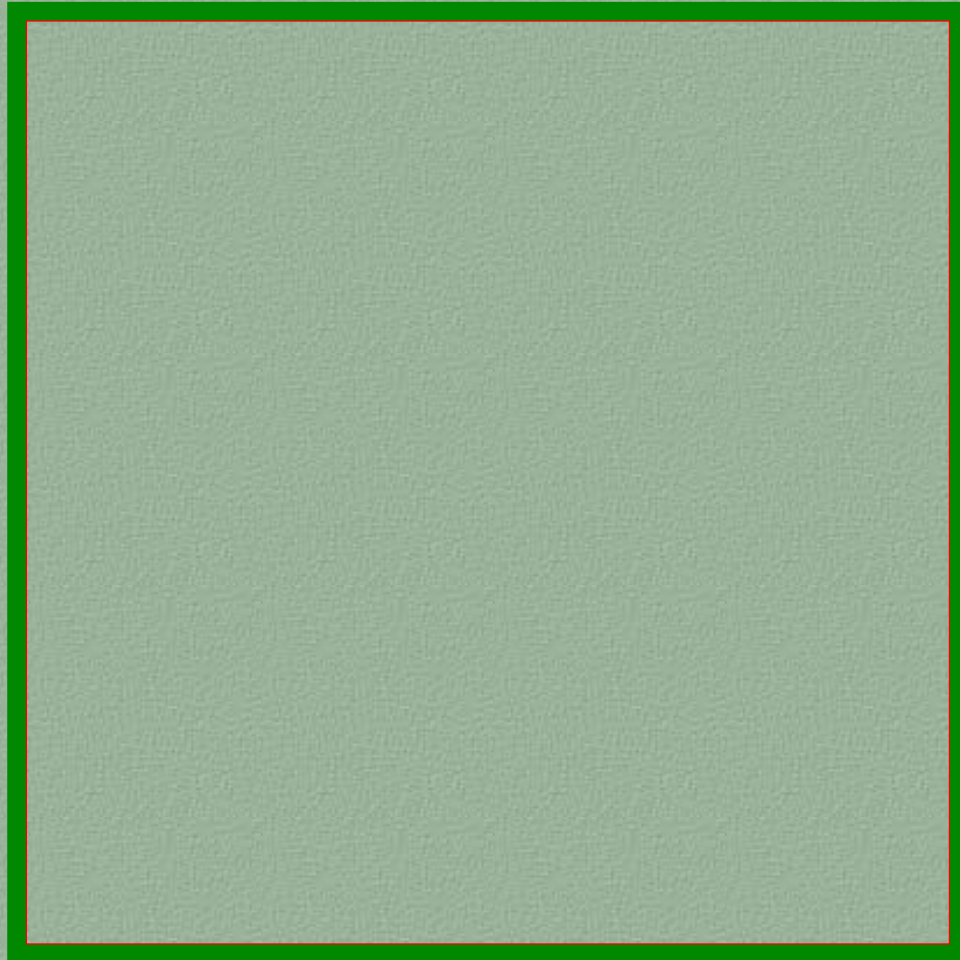
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the three prerequisite books and all relevant essays on the New Enlightenment Website.

- While reading this special transformative material,

you would have had to experience definite,
discernible epiphanies ²

which give you evidence of the dynamic force



contained within the material. These epiphanies would have to have produced definite incipient intellectual, emotional, and spiritual transformations in you: you would now be able to demonstrate that you can think and act in an augmented, effectual, exceptional manner.

- This program admits only a very small number of people who *demonstrate* serious, discerning, complete commitment.
- We have no interest in working with large numbers of merely interested or idly curious persons.

- **Persons admitted on a provisional basis are those able to recognize this program as:**
 - **An unimaginable endowment made available to select applicants ³**
 - **Requiring a life-time commitment to a completely new way of thinking and acting**
 - **Involving a person becoming a completely transformed, *outstandingly proficient* person psychologically, intellectually, morally, professionally, and spiritually**



Quite often, persons who were previously admitted on a provisional basis to the study program are placed on temporary suspension or excluded from the program altogether.

- **Your commitment to the study program would have to extend to your being able and eager to relocate if and when your studies progressed to the point where that would be appropriate.**
- **Directors of this program are not allowed to expend their personal efforts on persons who do not rapidly demonstrate a capability for helping to advance the Work ⁴**

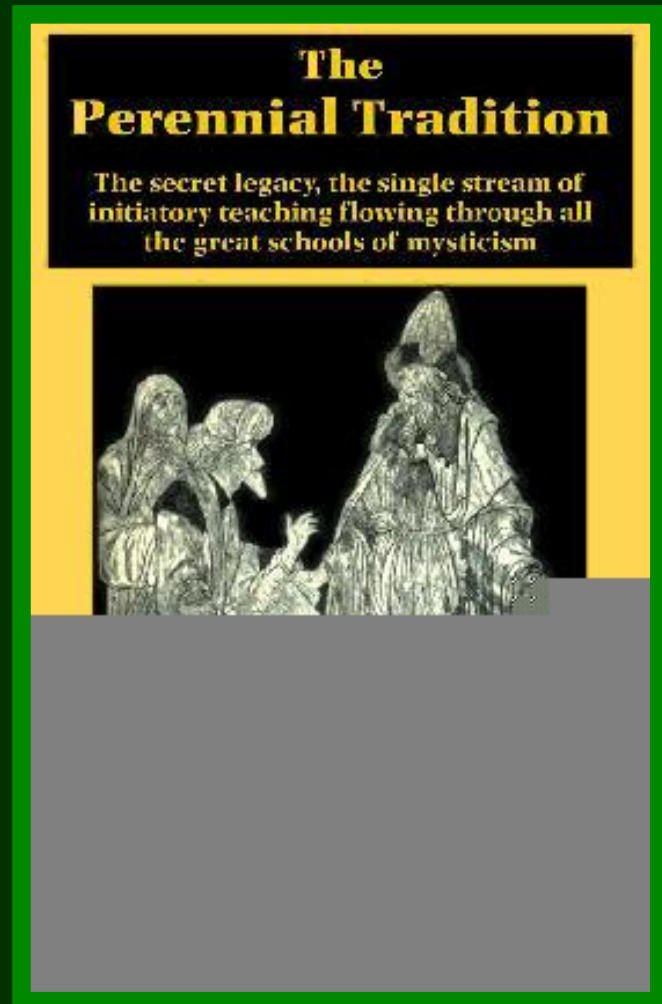
in all its aspects and dimensions.

- **You will need to be aware that in your present state, you have very limited ability to understand the essence of or make a sound decision concerning applying to such a program of study as**

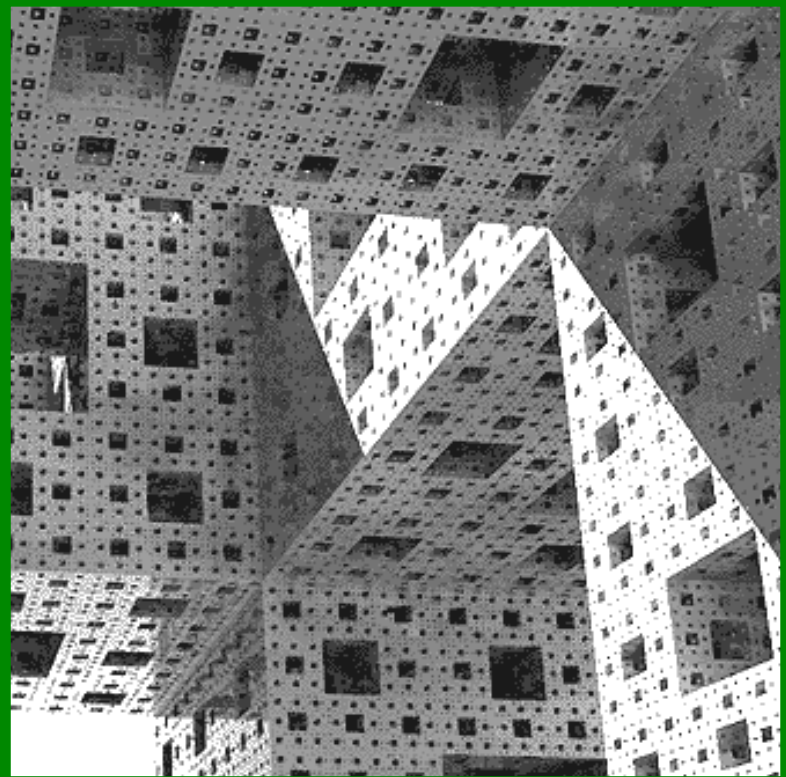
this.

If after careful consideration of the above you wish to apply for admittance into the advanced study program:

- I. First, read this essay to see if you qualify for the process of application.
- II. *Carefully read and reflect on these three books:*
 - *The Perennial Tradition*
 - *Progressive Awareness*
 - *Portals to Higher Consciousness*
- III. If after carefully studying the content and process of



these books and the essay indicated you wish to request consideration for admission into the program, submit the information outlined below in a detailed essay. Give careful thought to the information

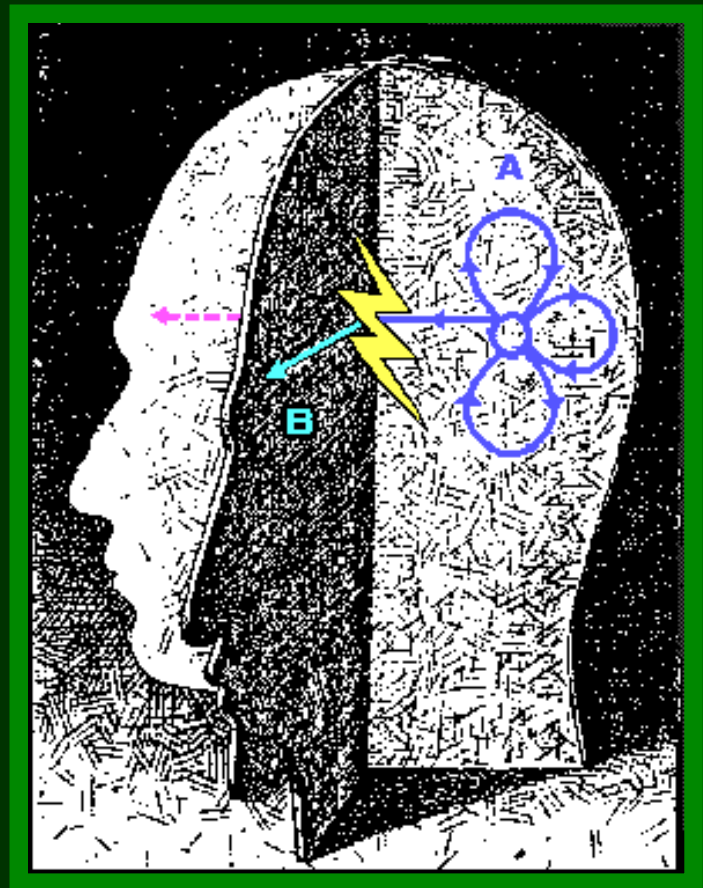


you provide; this is the first element in the screening process for determining acceptance into the program. Vague or incomplete information, written without care for correctness of spelling and syntax, is often a clear indication that a person does not possess the requisite capabilities for admittance into an exacting program of study.

- 1. Your name, home address (street, city, state, zip), email address, age, gender, and prior and current work experience**
- 2. Religious and political affiliations: for example, are you now or have been a member of an organized religion and are you now or have been involved in a spiritual or metaphysical program**
- 3. Medical and psychological state: for example, any ongoing medical problems, whether you are currently or have previously been involved in a psychological,**

counseling, or psychotherapeutic program, and an indication of your sexual orientation

4. Describe your overall goals and expectations in studying and gaining experiential understanding of the Perennial Tradition. Indicate your understanding that if you study this tradition with the *super effort* required you'll necessarily achieve a much higher level of capability, becoming a completely different person.
5. Describe any sense of "inspiration" you've experienced thus far in your study of the material in the Perennial Tradition. Explain what indications of appropriate actions have come to you in your study. Indicate any sense of experiencing things in a new way that has arisen during your study. Describe any sense of "dimensionality" within ordinary reality you've experienced when studying any of the essays or viewing the stereograms in some of the essays.
6. Describe in detail what you feel you've been doing with your life so far and what achievements you feel have been most important.
7. Describe your general relationship with your spouse (if



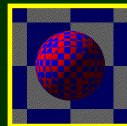
married), significant other, family, and friends.

Send your essay containing the information outlined above in the body of an email (not an attachment) to this [email address](#).

If the information you submit warrants, you'll be directed to the Advanced Study Program Screening Test. If you pass the Screening Test, you'll be directed to your first study exercise--a dialectical interchange ⁵ with the Director of Study.

If you're able to participate effectively in the dialectical interchange, subsequent assignments in the Study Program will then be provided you.

Be sure you've read this document thoughtfully and have definitely determined that you wish to apply for admission into this Advanced Study Program before proceeding.



¹ Study: more than merely scanning teaching material; thoughtful, meditative reading and assimilation

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Epiphany: the disruption of the psyche and the realization of a

higher state of consciousness

³ If this description seems inordinate to you, you would not find this study program suitable.

⁴ In the Perennial Tradition, the terrestrial and spiritual Enterprise of providing specialized training in the transformation of the human essence into Higher Consciousness is designated by several different terms. In alchemical writings, it is referred to as the "Great Work," and in other occult systems it is termed Theurgy, which means "The Science or Art of Divine Works," the Telestic Work, or the Perfecting Work. In the Sufi embodiment of the Perennial Tradition, the Arabic word *amal* (work, action, operation) is used to refer to the transformative effort. The entire Enterprise is termed "the Work," while the responsibilities of individual initiates (beginning students) is called their "work."

⁵ Dialectical interchange is, among other things, an instructional and screening process within the Perennial Tradition advanced study program. This procedure can appropriately be made available only to those who have applied for acceptance to that program and have been provisionally admitted to this instructional and screening procedure. The clearest analogy we can make is to liken this process to the instructional procedure for naval special forces when they're trained to live and breathe under water with special equipment. Dialectical interchange is, similarly, preparation for living in an entirely different "atmosphere" than ordinary consciousness by learning to use "special faculties." Allowing persons to participate in dialectical interchange without the necessary preparation would be analogous to allowing persons to train in underwater activities without the proper underwater breathing equipment.

It would not be advisable for persons to participate in this instructional procedure unless they were engaged in the entire study program and the teacher had determined that they had attained the necessary mental and psychic preparation.

Dialectical interchange, by itself, without prior and ongoing instruction in other critical areas, either eventuates in merely a screening-out incident or involves the person in areas of potential danger.

