**The Cosmology of Esotericism**

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The following is taken from the author’s forthcoming book *How To Run A Planet*: *Global Governance for an Inclusive and Sustainable World*. It is presented here as a contribution to the Galileo Commission debate on expanding the scope of science beyond a narrow materialism and naturalism.

Our Place in the Universe

We find ourselves in existence – in that we have no choice but otherwise we have free will says esotericism, and in the conventional scientific view the Earth has a place in the universe which is a physical position in space. We are in the Sol solar system, which is in the Orion arm of the Milky Way galaxy, which is in the Virgo Supercluster of galaxies. In the view of esotericism this spatial positioning of the Earth is not wrong exactly, but the conventional appreciation of what these and other such astronomical entities are, and their relation to one another (and by extension our relation to them), is. Or rather, it is a case of not seeing the full picture.

Many ancient philosophers saw planets and stars as ‘animals’ – not literally and specifically as biological organisms, but metaphorically and generally as *living sentient entities* (we might use the acronym LSE). This is correct says esotericism although adds: we can only partly compare the nature of their conscious existence with that of our own, for it is qualitatively distinct. And a direct, if still limited, appreciation of their sentient nature (as opposed to an indirect, philosophical one) depends on a supernormal mode of awareness. Click on the conventional mode of awareness, in a manner of speaking, and the conventional appreciation is had. Click on that supernormal mode of awareness, and the esoteric appreciation is had. Regarding modes of awareness, the contemporary Traditionalist philosopher Seyyed Hossein Nasr writes:

“Science is based in fact upon the idea that there is only one mode of perception and one level of external reality which that single level of consciousness studies. The world according to it is what we see if we extend the word ‘see’ to include what is shown by the microscope and the telescope which do not represent a new mode or level of seeing but simply the extension, horizontally, of what the human eye perceives. In contrast, authentic spirituality is based upon the basic thesis that not only are there levels of reality but also levels of consciousness that can know those levels of reality. What we perceive of the external world depends upon our mode of consciousness”.1

*Horizontal and Vertical Universes*

In the language of the Traditionalist school of esotericism, the conventional appreciation is of a ‘horizontal’ universe. The esoteric appreciation is of a ‘vertical’ universe. These two correspond to the two universes in ancient philosophical thought: 1) the mundane or sensible universe (the one we ordinarily see with our eyes and scientific instruments), and 2) the ‘supermundane’ or intelligible universe – the one which is *ultimately* perceivable/comprehensible. The earlier Traditionalist philosopher Frithjof Schuon wrote:

“One has to distinguish between ‘horizontal’ and ‘vertical’ dimensions, the vertical being supernatural and the horizontal natural; for the materialists, only the horizontal dimension exists, and that is why they cannot conceive of causes which operate vertically and which for that very reason are non-existent for them, like the vertical dimension itself.”2

‘Supernatural’ does not refer to the paranormal (ghosts etc.) but to an order of natural that is simply beyond the ordinary order of natural so is, in fact, still natural. And by ‘materialists’, Schuon had in mind the closed-minded intellectual position that is scientism. A mode of awareness can’t be wrong, any more than a mode of physical conditioning can be wrong – it can, however, be less than ideal. The normal mode of awareness is less than ideal, for with it is the conventional appreciation of a horizontal universe which is, as said, not the full picture (there is also the vertical universe). It is when the intellectual position is adopted – which it needn’t be – that this conventionally appreciated universe *is* the full picture, absent of any transcendent and contextualizing other order, that we have a problem.

*Higher Kingdoms of Nature*

In this part of the book we are trying to get a handle on the cosmology of esotericism which is a challenge as it features, for one thing, all astronomical entities as living sentient entities. And these LSEs are not biological *or* geophysiological entities (such as the Earth is in the Gaia hypothesis). The religious scholar Huston Smith wrote how this idea is the most difficult for the contemporary mind to grasp. This is because, born into our modern age, our minds are firmly imprinted from childhood with the idea that there are three or four kingdoms of nature (or general kingdoms of being) at most – mineral, plant, animal, and if we care to distinguish from the last which the life sciences struggle with but the rest of the time we do, human.

We can conceive of more advanced alien races – more advanced culturally and/or technologically (e.g. the Vulcans in *Star Trek*). But we struggle to conceive of entities/beings occupying kingdoms *above* the mineral, plant, animal and human. The medieval Christian mind would not rebel against this idea, for in that there were angelic orders of beings above the human, with God at the top of the ‘Great Chain of Being’. The ancient world also had its heroes, demigods and gods between us and an ultimate God as ‘the One’. But the modern mind does rebel against the idea that the human (the human-like on any planet, whether still fully organic or cyborgic as the techno-humanists imagine), is not at the top of the natural tree. Smith wrote:

“If things exist that are superior to us, they are not going to fit into our controlled experiments, any more than self-consciousness or advanced forms of abstract thinking would fit into (and therefore be brought to light by) experiments wood ticks hypothetically might devise.”3

Both parts of the idea are very difficult for the contemporary mind to grasp. The first part is of entities which occupy kingdoms above us *per se*. OK, we might think, perhaps in an evolutionary future. But the idea is of such entities *already* existing – not ‘to be’ but ‘already is’. We commonly think of an evolutionary line from the Big Bang all the way up or along to us. We draw a horizontal line in our science and history books from particles on the left to humans on the right, tracing a supposed journey of billions of years from the simple and lesser in nature to the more complex and greater. *This is the great horizontal myth*, would say the Traditionalist. Schuon wrote:

“Transformist evolution offers a patent example of ‘horizontality’…owing to the fact it puts a biological evolution of ‘ascending’ degrees in place of a cosmogonic emanation of ‘descending’ degrees.”4

The vertical alternative is from the greater to the lesser in nature: a spiritual *emanation* of levels of being, rather than a material *evolution* just in/along one horizontal dimension. The vertical alternative is where the very existence of the greater being brings into existence the lower being, because the latter is being ideated by – or consciously experienced by – the former as its vehicle of expression (this is the nature of the ‘emanation’). As we proceed through this chapter and the rest of Part One, there are two analogies that will particularly aid our understanding of this. The first is the author-character analogy.

*Authors and Characters*

An author imagines a character in a story. The character (let’s call him Jack) also imagines a character in a story (let’s call him David). So, David exists because of and in Jack (in Jack’s imagination if we will, as his ‘avatar’ to use the gaming term), just as Jack exists because of and in the first author in the same way. There is a ‘first author’ in esotericism – a greatest entity at the top of the vertical line, which we might call the Cosmic LSE. Then on the next level of being down, there are many lesser entities, which we might call sub-cosmic LSEs, which exist because of and in the Cosmic LSE. And on the next level of being down, there are many more yet lesser entities, which exist because of and in the sub-cosmic LSEs…and so on down the line. Like a staff organization chart with the ziggurat being an ancient symbol of this.

At some point down the line we reach a level of being on which there are solar system and planetary system LSEs. We (you and I, other humans, animals, plants and minerals) exist because of and in one of those planetary LSEs – the Earth LSE – on the next level of being down again. This includes not only our physical bodies but also, with respect to humans and animals, our minds (our thinking and feeling natures). We exist because the Earth LSE does. We are being ideated or consciously experienced by It (the Earth LSE) as its vehicle of expression. The Earth LSE is analogously our ‘author’ and we are its ‘characters’. Collectively we are its avatar – or, as some might express it, we are the Earth’s dream.

*Who Am I?*

The second analogy is the physiological analogy. We are like cells in the body of the Earth LSE. Or better yet, we are like cells in the body of the *Sol* LSE, with the Earth LSE as an organ in that body (the Venus LSE, the Jupiter LSE etc. would then be other organs in the same body). The answer to the question ‘Who am I?’ is analogously as a cell in the body of a ‘celestial divinity’, with the direct appreciation of this subject to that supernormal mode of awareness called *henosis* in ancient Greek (‘mystical union’). This is the transpersonal experience the person may have whereby it is as if a *greater entity* is looking out from behind the person’s eyes at *Itself*. The person is a ‘participant’ in this experience. On this subject, the Theosophist Alice Bailey wrote:

“First, the disciple becomes aware…his consciousness is expanded until it might be called planetary consciousness. Secondly, he begins to merge that planetary awareness into something more synthetic still, and gradually develops the consciousness of the greater life [the solar] which includes the planetary life as man includes in his physical expression such living organisms as his heart or brain.”5

The idea that you and I are not, in one sense, living ourselves, but are being lived by a greater entity – the Earth LSE – is startling, but perhaps not altogether unfamiliar. For there is our *immediate* perceptual experience to reckon with – before our modern, educated, rationalist minds kick in and tell us otherwise. A perceptual experience of living *in* an entity which is greater than ourselves. Esotericism challenges us to meditate on our immediate perceptual experience and to ask whether the modern idea, that we small and imperfect beings are somehow ‘higher’ on the scale of being than planets (not to mention stars, galaxies etc.), is really credible. Schuon wrote:

“Modern science…*c*an describe our situation physically and approximately, but it can tell us absolutely nothing about our extra-spatial situation in the total and real universe”.6

This ‘total and real universe’ is the one featuring living sentient cosmic entities (including the one we are living in) with the gist of the picture being something like this: the spatial size and majestic unity of astronomical entities as we ordinarily perceive them, are but the self-representations in the horizontal universe of their own much greater extra-spatial sizes of being and (relative to us) unitive perfection in the vertical universe. Our appreciation error is a bit like, or would be a bit like, seeing the life of our local town and thinking this town level of life is the only level of life, when in fact there is also, above this, the county level of life (including the county in which our town is located), and above this the provincial level of life (including the province in which our county is located), and above this the national level of life (including the nation in which our province is located), and above this the global level of life…with each level of life being contained within the one(s) above and containing the one(s) below. Schuon continued:

“Profane science, in seeking to pierce to its depths the mystery of the things that contain – space, time, matter, energy – *forgets the mystery of the things that are contained*.”7

We are contained in the Earth LSE (and wider Sol LSE). This includes our minds as well as our bodies – just as the character David’s mind and body would be contained within Jack (and Jack’s mind and body would be contained within his author). Another Traditionalist philosopher, Titus Burckhardt wrote: “The rationalistic view forgets entirely that everything which it may express concerning the universe, remains a content of human consciousness”.8 This *human* consciousness then ‘resolves’ into *planetary* consciousness, and finally into *solar* consciousness (as Bailey referred to), for all along, just without us knowing it, we are being ideated by or consciously experienced by It (the Sol LSE) as its vehicle of expression. We are the sun’s dream beyond the earth’s dream. Relatedly, the third century Neoplatonist philosopher Iamblichus wrote:

“An innate knowledge of the gods is co-existent with our very essence; and this knowledge is superior to all judgment…and subsists prior to reason and demonstration. It is also co-united from the beginning with its proper cause, and is consubsistent with the essential tendency of the soul to *the good*”.9

And fifteen hundred years later, the Platonist Thomas Taylor wrote:

“I confess I am wholly at a loss to conceive what could induce the moderns to controvert the dogma, that the stars and the whole world are animated, as it is an opinion of infinite antiquity, and is friendly to the most unperverted, spontaneous, and accurate conceptions of the human mind. Indeed, the rejection of it appears to me to be just as absurd as it would be in a maggot, if it were capable of syllogizing, to infer that man is a machine impelled by some external force when he walks, because it never saw any animated reptile so large”.10

*The Holarchical Universe*

The universal structure is a *holarchy*. This word brings together the words ‘hierarchy’ and ‘holon’. A hierarchy is a group of people (or any entities) organized into successive ranks, with each level being subordinate to (meaning both lesser than and dependent on) the one above. A holon is a thing which is simultaneously a whole and a part. The cosmic holarchy is of LSEs within LSEs, the lower rank of entities being dependent on *for their very existence* the rank above. And as we can also analogise and think of cells within organs within bodies (or towns within counties within provinces), so we have a holarchy and not just a hierarchy.

Behind the universal structure, beyond the cosmic LSE at the top of the vertical line, is God (or a more religiously neutral term would be ‘the One’). “In order that Being may be brought about, the source must be no Being but Being’s generator”, wrote Plotinus”11. God is not a LSE then (a Being), but contains within Itself, as the ultimate transcendent generator, the Cosmic LSE which, as the ‘first author’, contains within itself all the other LSEs (including the Earth LSE and therefore us). The ranks of LSEs between God and us are, if we wish to call them such, secondary gods. It is a cliché used by modern historians that we invented the gods. No, says esotericism, in a very real cosmogonic or creational sense they invent (note the use of the present tense) us. As another Neoplatonist, Proclus wrote:

“Let us as it were celebrate the first God, not as establishing the earth and the heavens [the Milky Way galaxy], nor as giving subsistence to [human] souls, and the generation of all animals; for he produced these indeed, but among the last of things; but prior to these, let us celebrate him as unfolding into light the whole intelligible and intellectual genus of gods”.12

This genus of gods is the assembly of extra-spatial LSEs. If the Earth LSE is like an organ, then all planets, in all solar systems, would be like organs with respect to the solar system bodies they are part of. And just as we humans may have that *henosis* experience, so too might other human-like beings on other planets. The idea of more advanced alien races culturally and/or technologically is a common one in science fiction. The idea of more advanced alien races in terms of self-awareness of their extra-spatial place in a universe of LSEs features in esotericism. This is an intriguing subject but is off-topic for this book.

*What Am I Here For?*

A different analogy would replace ‘organ’ with ‘department of a business’, and ‘cell’ with ‘worker’. A department that is fully integrated into the wider organization, but has its own specific function to perform. The answer to the question ‘What am I here for?’ is to consciously cooperate in our planet’s function as a ‘department’ of a ‘local office’ (our solar system) of a vast cosmic ‘organization’. Cooperating in, means helping to make it the best performing it can be – which in the end means creating and then sustaining, in a continuous improvement manner, a beautiful, just and peaceful planetary civilization. To do so would be to express the Good – which is the universal purpose – and our ultimate felicity depends on this.

The message coming especially from this different analogy, is that the task of successfully running our planet has, in a way to be appreciated, a wider ‘business context’. This being the case, the younger generation of today and their successors, who particularly have the task of reaching globalization’s destination, should not just look ‘horizontally outwards’ at our political management task set within conventional science’s spatial positioning of the Earth, but also look ‘vertically inwards’ at our purpose-in-existing business task set within esotericism’s extra-spatial positioning of the Earth. The twentieth century Hermeticist Manly Hall summed up both the picture and the task thus:

“The gods are modes of universal consciousness, that is, they are degrees of awareness in space. Humanity is basically also a degree of awareness, and so are all the other kingdoms of Nature…[The task is to] bring the kingdoms of the earth into harmonic concord with the kingdom of space.”.13

The Nature of Things

The universe is made of consciousness/life, not matter/energy. Material being does not produce consciousness; it is being conscious that produces (what appears to be) material being. Looking from the bottom upwards, it is like one level of characters being imagined by authors on a level above, who in turn are but characters being imagined by authors on a level above, and so on up to a first author at the top and an incomprehensible principal or principle (God/the One) behind that. Put another way, the universe is a dream within a dream, as the Bard said. There is no *matter* existing outside of (independently of) any dream, any dreamer. The Theosophist Helena Blavatsky wrote:

“From the stand-point of the highest metaphysics, the whole Universe, gods included, is an illusion; but the illusion of him who is in himself an illusion differs on every plane of consciousness”.1

And:

“The Universe is in reality but a huge aggregation of states of consciousness”.2

Films such as *The Matrix* resonate with this esoteric understanding although we are not literally talking about simulated realities – the substance of reality is ‘consciousness-stuff’, not matter/energy of any kind. And there are multiple levels of being, not just the one. In *henosis*, the person appreciates his/her ‘character-nature’ and, concomitantly, the character-nature of everyone/everything else. We are all, in one sense, being lived by a greater entity above. “Mitakuye Oyasin”, as the Lakota people of North America say (‘we are all one family’). We are all one family in the Earth LSE. It is our ‘sky father’ married to the ‘earth mother’ of our sense-perceived planet.

*Spheres Within Spheres*

“For the Deity, intending to make this world like the fairest and most perfect of intelligible beings, framed one visible animal comprehending within itself all other animals of a kindred nature…Now to the animal which was to comprehend all animals, that figure was suitable which comprehends within itself all other figures. Wherefore he made the world in the form of a globe”.3

A level of being is a sphere in esotericism. So too is a LSE. The conscious experience of any entity extends out to a certain ‘circumference’ around the self at the centre of the experience. At the top level is the Cosmic LSE (the one *ultimately* visible i.e. perceivable/comprehensible animal in the quote from Plato above). It has the form of a globe (a sphere). It comprehends within itself (as an author does his imagined characters) all other animals of a kindred nature (also authors at the same time as being characters). The circumference of any sphere corresponds to the range of conscious experience of the entity, or in the case of a level of being, all the entities making up that level. The whole universe can thus be pictured as a kind of Russian doll of spheres within spheres. At the centre of all the spheres (although not as a ‘dot’ recall, because it is not a LSE but contains within Itself all LSEs) is God/the One. As the anonymous Hermetic text *Liber XXIV Philosophorum* puts it:

“God is an infinite sphere whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere…God is beginning without beginning, unchanging progress, endless end…God is what alone lives from its own intellection…God is the darkness remaining in the soul after every light”.4

*The Consciousness Cycle*

This pertains also to the above quote. A person wakes up in the morning and is conscious. He goes to sleep at night and is unconscious. The cycle repeats. We may discern three aspects to consciousness when it is ‘on’ (i.e. when the person is awake): 1) there is a self that is conscious, 2) there is the content of that self’s consciousness (what s/he consciously experiences), and 3) there is the activity itself – the activity of consciously experiencing – going on. The Cosmic LSE is the biggest consciously experiencing entity. When it is ‘awake’ there is: 1) a self that is conscious, 2), the content of that self’s consciousness – *which is the entire universe*, and 3) the activity of consciously experiencing going on. When the Cosmic LSE is not awake, there are none of these three aspects or ‘divine principles’ manifesting. Consciousness is not on, therefore there is no universe.

In esoteric mathematics, there is a sequence to the divine principles. A self that is conscious is the number 1 (in Greek, the *monad*). From this comes the number 2 (the *dyad*), as we have here now a principle which is really two things – for you can’t have the content of a self’s consciousness without a self. From this comes the number 3 (the *triad*), as we have here now a principle which is really three things – for you can’t have the activity of consciously experiencing going on without the other two. From this comes the number 4 (the *tetrad*), as we have here now…well, life as we know it – for you can’t have that without the three principles behind it. 1+2+3+4=10 (the all-inclusive *dekad* and the all-important *tetractys* of the Pythagoreans).

“I swear by him who the tetractys found,

And to our race reveal’d; the cause and root,

And fount of ever-flowing Nature.”

- The Pythagorean oath from *The Life of Pythagoras*5

The idea of cycles is a common one in the world’s religions (notably Hinduism) and mythologies. When consciousness is on, there is ‘light’. When it is off, there is ‘darkness’. We recall the God in Proclus’s quote ‘unfolding into light’ the tiers of gods. That would be the cosmogonic emanation – the unfolding of the levels of LSEs as consciously experiencing entities. The Great Cycle of the universe has no beginning and no end – it goes on ‘day after day’. Blavatsky wrote:

“We believe in no [one-off] *creation*, but in the periodical and consecutive appearances of the universe from the subjective on to the objective plane of being”.6

With each Great Cycle there is progress. It is like a worker picking up his tools again in the morning and furthering his work building a glorious temple (expressing the Good). The worker is the Cosmic LSE, within which are lesser workers on all the levels. At our own humble level, in our own limited capacity, we are to be such workers. A human being is also a living sentient entity. There is a level of being below us (referring now to the strictly corporeal). Each of us are greater entities containing a myriad of lesser entities. We are ‘Jacks’ to a host of ‘Davids’. They – the myriad of lesser entities making up our observed corporeal bodies – are collectively our avatars, just as we humans, animals, plants and minerals are collectively the Earth LSE’s avatar. These lesser entities are, in their essential form, spheres, and so are we.

*Esotericism, Metaphysics and Science*

All LSEs, all spheres, have an internal dynamic of their own and they interact. At the level below us, these lives (invisible to conventional Western science as they are nonmaterial) interact, just as LSEs on every level do. We read the metaphysical thought of ancient philosophers as pre-scientific i.e. struggling with ideas that we firmly grasp now about such things as the atom and gravity. But in truth, the atom the esotericists among the ancient philosophers were talking about was the consciously experiencing entity sphere. And the forces they were talking about were those relating to their internal dynamism and interactivity, including combining into the corporeal forms we ordinarily see. Thus, as Blavatsky said:

“Modern science is ancient thought distorted, and no more”.7

This distortedness applies also to the idea that the universe is made up of atoms when it is made up of lives, and to the idea of biological evolution when there is, rather, a consciousness progression through world periods (see next chapter). When it comes to Plato’s *Ideas*, these are the universals manifested on all the levels of being. There is Beauty for instance in corporeal nature (as any gardener, artist or physician knows). There is Beauty in the macro-world too, which is the level above the corporeal and our level of being proper – manifested in, for example, societies that live in harmony with nature. And there is Beauty at all levels above. Other Ideas include Justice and Love. We are to understand that the higher the level of being, which is also to say the nearer to God at the top it is, the more qualitatively superior it is. In other words, the more sublime or perfect existence is on those levels. Few would argue that existence on our level is far from perfect.

Along the same lines as Blavatsky’s physics-is-but-metaphysics-distorted message, a few decades later the Traditionalist philosopher Rene Guenon wrote how for the ancient philosophers, physics was secondary to or a subset of metaphysics. Physics was the study of nature, but the *whole* of nature, the esotericists knew, included the vertical dimension. One error of modern man – or as Guenon put it, one part of the intellectual decline in the West – was the division of physics into discrete natural sciences. A much bigger error was the separation of physics from metaphysics, such that all we had left was ‘profane science’ rather than ‘sacred science’ (sacred science being the science of the whole of nature). Today, the idea of sacred science is scoffed at by modern science, whereas in the past, profane science had to justify its existence and worth in relation to sacred science. Guenon wrote:

“In seeking completely to sever the connection between the sciences and any higher principles, on the pretext of safeguarding their independence, the modern conception robs them of all deeper meaning and even of any real interest from the point of view of knowledge, and it can only lead them down a blind alley, imprisoning them, as it does, within an incurably limited realm [the horizontal]. Moreover, the development which goes on inside that realm is not a deepening of knowledge, as is commonly supposed; on the contrary, the information so gained remains superficial and consists merely in that dispersion in detail that we have already alluded to, in an analysis as barren as it is laborious and which can be pursued indefinitely without advancing a single step further in the direction of true knowledge. Furthermore it is not for its own sake that Westerners in general cultivate science as they understand it; their primary aim is not knowledge, even of an inferior order, but practical applications, as may be inferred from the ease with which the majority of our contemporaries confuse science and industry, so that by many the engineer is looked upon as a typical man of science…In assuming its modern form science has not only lost its depth, but also, one might say, its solidity, since attachment to the principles enabled it to participate in their immutability to the full extent that the nature of its subject matter allowed; once shut off exclusively in the realm of change, however, it cannot hope to achieve any kind of stability, nor to find any solid basis on which to build; no longer starting out from any certainty, it finds itself reduced to probabilities and approximations, or to purely hypothetical constructions which are merely the product of individual fantasy…Modern science, arising out of an arbitrary limitation of knowledge within a certain particular order which is indeed the most inferior of all, namely that of material or sensible reality, has as a consequence forfeited all intellectual value, so long that is to say as one uses the word intellectuality in all the fullness of its true meaning and refuses to participate in the “rationalist” error, or to reject intellectual intuition, which amounts to the same thing.”8

Guenon was a fierce critic of modernity in general, but would have agreed with Schuon and others today who recognize it is scientism, really, that is the problem, not science *per se* (for that is just the pursuit of knowledge – in what dimension one looks for it and with what mental faculty is a different matter). Back in the eighteenth century, Thomas Taylor expressed the same concern:

“The discoveries of experimental philosophy [modern science], float like straws on the surface, while the wisdom of Pythagoras and Plato lies concealed in the depths of the river…Is it to be supposed, that in an age when philosophy was almost adored; when it was esteemed by kings, cultivated by noblemen, and even reverenced by the vulgar; when empire was relinquished for its pursuit, and every danger encountered for its possession: is it to be supposed, that nothing but delusion was the offspring of so glorious a period, and nothing but folly the reward of such generous endurance? Or shall we say, that the discovery of truth was reserved for the age of experiment; and that she is alone to be apprehended in the infinite labyrinth of particulars? That she is to be investigated with the corporeal senses, and not with the powers of intellect; and that the crucible, the alembic, and the air-pump are the only mediums of detection?...Shall we call this the age of philosophy, in which talents are prostituted for sustenance, and learning submits to the impudence of wealth?...Again, the object of the Pythagorean and Platonic philosophy was to make its possessors wise and virtuous…but the object of modern philosophy, is a promotion of the conveniences and refinements of life, by enlarging the boundaries of traffic; and the mathematical sciences are studied solely with a view to this enlargement”.9

We can detect an intellectual decline in the West with regards to metaphysics (although in recent years there has been the beginnings of a revival). On the other hand, there were very few intellectuals in the past, and intellectuals are in large part our cultural leaders. Today’s intellectuals have simply developed their rational-scientific minds rather than, or more than, their ‘intellectual intuitions’. This problem of rationalism, such as it is, distinguishes modern Western culture and is an educational issue. Perhaps we might call conventional scientific knowledge ‘Type 2 knowledge’. This would still honour it as knowledge, whilst reminding us there is a presiding ‘Type 1’ sort. As a cultural activity and as a definition, science need not be confined to: a) the sensible/horizontal universe, and b) study through reason and experiment. That we are aware of an intellectual straitjacket when it comes to the scientific method should be all we need to know that there would also be a Type 1 knowledge.

We need a philosophical education in the sense known by Plato and Pythagoras. Then with *both* mental faculties developed (the rational mind and the intellectual intuition – the lesser intelligence and the greater intelligence), we can do more good than was possible in their day, having more cultural leaders i.e. more wise and virtuous people helping to build that beautiful, just and peaceful planetary civilization. Philosophy is the love of wisdom, and wisdom, Pythagoras reminded his students, is the science of the truth that is *in* beings. Study that science, which is to say study consciousness (which requires a methodology consistent with that project), and the universe made of consciousness – the ultimately comprehensible universe – will reveal itself. Hence the Delphic maxim ‘Know Thyself’. Part of that knowledge is of our consciousness origins in a greater entity above. As Alice Bailey wrote in 1925:

“The confines of the Heavens Themselves are illimitable and utterly unknown…Go out on some clear starlit night and seek to realise that in the many thousands of suns and constellations visible to the unaided eye of man, and in the tens of millions which the modern telescope reveals there is seen the physical manifestation of as many millions of intelligent existences…Realise further than the bodies of all these sentient intelligent cosmic, solar and planetary Logoi are constituted of living sentient beings, and the brain reels, and the mind draws back in dismay before such a staggering concept. Yet so it is.”10

The brain reeling is the *mysterium tremendum et fascinas* of a universe made of consciousness/life. Esotericism would have us appreciate: 1) that conventional science, in its dealings with corporeal nature, is somewhat of a blind bull in a priceless china shop – not really knowing what it is dealing with (which is lives); and 2) that as we look to develop a more holistic and global worldview in the decades and centuries ahead, a continued ‘horizontality’ only, however less reductionist, would still be a limited (and Western-only) view. If we are to have a truly global worldview, inclusive also of the wisdom of the East and that of many indigenous peoples, ‘verticality’ would need to make its reappearance.

Another aspect of the universe of consciousness Huston Smith referred to when he wrote of the hierarchy of levels being like a pyramid of magnets, with those lives on each level or tier being “attracted to the tier above while being empowered by that tier to attract the magnets below them”.11 This attraction is a *psychological* attraction – entities on one level being attracted to the level above, on account of having an intuition that their essential selves have a home there and eventually, after a journey, return to that. This ‘Great Return’ is the subject of the next chapter, and previewing this we might include the following from the second century Gnostic text *The Gospel of Truth*, attributed to Valentinus:

“Each one will speak concerning the place from which he has come forth, and to the region from which he received his essential being, he will hasten to return once again. And he want from that place – the place where he was – because he tasted of that place, as he was nourished and grew. And his own place of rest is his Pleroma. All the emanations from the Father, therefore, are Pleromas, and all his emanations have their roots in the one who caused them all to grow from himself. He appointed a limit. They, then, became manifest individually in order that they might be in their own thought, for that place to which they extend their thoughts is their root, which lifts them upward through all heights to the Father.”12

Past-Present-Future

Conventional science posits a universe that began 13.8 billion years ago with a Big Bang. As for when it will end, there is no agreed theory, but a recent one is the Big Rip, whereby as the universe expands it rips itself apart – we perhaps only have 22 billion years left. Other theories give us more time. There may or may not have been other universes before this one and afterwards (most scientists subscribe to a one universe only view), but one or many, the beginning, middle and end of all universes is but matter/energy and there is no inherent purpose to any of them. This is the averred backdrop to human life, essentially relativizing everything we think and do as but a massive waste of time and energy. This is utter nonsense says esotericism. It’s just the story modern Western man tells himself around a campfire.

Esotericism posits a ‘day after day’ universe of the nature described in the last chapter – cosmic consciousness on, cosmic consciousness off – with no first or last day, and with each day being a progression. With cosmic consciousness on, there are three dimensions of time, which in the author’s previous book were called Character-time, Aevertinity and Consciousness-time. ‘Character-time’ is ordinary time. This flows from left to right where yesterday would be the past, today the present, and tomorrow the future. Even if we could time-jump back to yesterday, or time-jump ahead to tomorrow, wherever we ‘land’ we would immediately proceed to pick up the same left to right forward marching stream of Character-time. This dimension is a one-way arrow and the ordinary time we experience and measure.

*Aevertinity*

‘Aevertinity’ is not the same as endless duration of ordinary time, for it is outside ordinary time altogether. Returning to the author-character analogy, so far as the character Jack is concerned (the same would be true for David), he is real and so is the world he lives in – he does not realize both he and his story-world are being imagined by an author. Jack lives in Character-time – which is to say, he has experience after experience, birthday after birthday, for however long Jack lives. Even if Jack lived for billions of years, there would still be the outside time dimension relating to his world only existing in an author’s imagination and therefore *not in the time of his world*. Aevertinity is the ever-present ‘now’ that is beyond ordinary time. Aldous Huxley referred to it in his classic work *The Perennial Philosophy*:

“The manifold world of our everyday experience is real with a relative reality that is, on its own level, unquestionable, but this relative reality has its being within and because of the absolute Reality…[This] divine ground of all existence is not merely a continuum, it is also out of time”.1

*Consciousness-Time*

‘Consciousness-time’ is the third dimension of time. Jack’s purpose is to ‘wake up’ and appreciate that he is not living himself but is being lived, in one sense, by an author above. As part of this he appreciates that the world which he took as real is not real (at least not in the sense that he took it to be), and that he and all the other characters in his world were brought into being and are likewise to wake up. So, there is a dimension of time here involving an outward creational arc (that brought Jack into being as the objectively real person he thought he was), and then the inward psychological arc that takes Jack out of being himself into conscious union with his author. Consciousness-time is thus symbolised by the circle. Ordinary time is symbolised by the horizontal line. And Aevertinity is symbolized by the *axis mundi*. All three together would be symbolised by the circle with the cross in it.

What is truly *Eternal* is the repeating of the Great Cycle – but there is a progression each time so it’s not mere Groundhog Day. With every Great Cycle, which is to say with every universe, there is: 1) the Aevertinal or ever-present ‘pole’; 2) the outward or coming into being arc, and the inward or coming out of being arc, which takes place in Consciousness-time; and 3) ordinary or Character-time which, though it seems like absolute reality to the characters in the story-world, is relative to a particular mode of awareness. *The one-way arrow from a Big Bang to a final universal end is part of the great horizontal myth*. Or to put another way, this is only reality when we haven’t got our esoteric glasses on. This means there’s no justification for nihilism or apathy. On the contrary, we can be life-affirming and we have a business task to perform as referred to in Chapter One.

“Permeating occidental cognitive orientations are concepts of time conceived as lineal, divided into mutually exclusive segments of past, present, and future”, wrote the religious scholar Joseph Epes Brown2. American Indian experience of time, by contrast – common with indigenous peoples – tended to be in terms of the circle or cycle (Consciousness-time), with an orientation to the “unchanging mystery of the present moment of a Now beyond Time” (the Aevertinal)3. The cultural historian Mircea Eliade wrote how modern non-religious man lives in a desacralized cosmos both in terms of space and time. In relation to space, and referring to our place in the universe, there is no “qualitative differentiation and, hence, no orientation [is] given by virtue of its inherent structure”4. In relation to time, man no longer participates in a yearly rebirth modelled on the Great Cycle following the Great Return.

This desacralized cosmos is the cause of our existential suffering and longing for meaning. But as Huston Smith observed, “a meaningful life is not finally possible in a meaningless world”5. A meaningless world is the purposeless universe presented by conventional science. This is why the cultural historian Richard Tarnas writes that: “No amount of revisioning philosophy or psychology, science or religion, can forge a new worldview without a radical shift at the cosmological level”6. A radical shift would include the reappearance of verticality, and in the extra-spatial universe, or with respect to that, there are these three (or four if we include the Eternal) temporal dimensions.

Cosmic consciousness is currently on – we’re in a universe right now – thus there is an Aevertinal pole along which we might picture, like a hanging necklace of pearls (and as a complementary image to the spheres within spheres picture from the last chapter), the levels of being and the LSEs on them. This pole is the ever-present temporal centre of our experience and of theirs. It is with respect to this pole that it can be said the universe did not begin in the past but in the present – *referring not to the present of ordinary time, but to the ever-present pole*. This is not the easiest thing to grasp, admittedly, but the author-character analogy helps. Brown also wrote how for the Lakota people, “time has a *spatial extension*: that which once happened literally took place, and *still has a place*”7. This relates to the subject of world periods in the next section.

A Great Cycle is complete (and is followed by ‘sleep’ and no universe, prior to a new day and a new universe) when the return journey is completed: when all the characters have ‘woken up’. At the largest scale, there is an outward or coming into being arc that brings the whole cosmos (all the levels of being, and all the entities on those levels – collectively the universal ‘Jack’) into being, and then an inward or coming out of being arc that takes the whole cosmos out of being. Our level of being is one of those pictured ‘pearls’. It is the only one we are really interested in as it is the only one we can really appreciate. It is only our level of being and, indeed, our solar system that we are really interested in – which connects with our ultimate ‘avataric’ relationship with the Sol LSE.

We all have to wake up. By ‘all’ is meant all humans…but this also refers to all animals, plants and minerals. Mitakuye Oyasin: they are all our ‘younger brothers and sisters’ who have not yet attained the type or modality of consciousness we have – ahead of them – which is a prerequisite for starting the second leg of the journey. That which once happened ‘still has a place’ as we look around us, in a contemplative way, at the lower kingdoms of nature. Related to this, the esotericist Rudolf Steiner wrote:

“To a man who can look with understanding at the spiritual that is there now, hidden within what is manifest to the senses, insight also into former states…however distant, cannot appear essentially impossible…once we are able to recognize the presence of the spiritual here and now, we shall find the earlier conditions given or implied in the immediate vision of the present, just as the condition of the one-year-old infant is implied in the appearance of a man of fifty”.8

*World Periods*

Esotericism speaks of seven world periods spanning the outward and inward arcs of Consciousness-time. We are in the fourth world period (of our local Sol system). Periods 1-4 see, respectively, each of the four kingdoms come into being – mineral, plant, animal and human. This would refer to kingdoms *in terms of types of consciousness*. And in the end, these are just subsets of one kingdom/type of consciousness. So more accurately, periods 1-4 see, respectively, more mature forms of the one kingdom come into being. Period 4 sees the most mature form of this one kingdom come into being (us), but period 4 also sees humans pass out of being as we wake up. We can read the coming in of human beings (the human type of consciousness on the Earth, but this would apply to human-like beings on any planet – the world periods relating to our level of being or the conventionally appreciated universe) in the *Metamorphoses* of the Roman poet Ovid:

“A creature of a more exalted kind

Was wanting yet, and then was Man design'd:

Conscious of thought, of more capacious breast,

For empire form'd, and fit to rule the rest:

Whether with particles of heav'nly fire

The God of Nature did his soul inspire,

Or Earth, but new divided from the sky,

And, pliant, still retain'd th' aetherial energy:

Which wise Prometheus temper'd into paste,

And, mixt with living streams, the godlike image cast.

Thus, while the mute creation downward bend

Their sight, and to their earthly mother tend,

Man looks aloft; and with erected eyes

Beholds his own hereditary skies.

From such rude principles our form began;

And earth was metamorphos'd into Man.9

As for periods 5, 6 and 7…Period 4 animals (already having *something* of the human in them in terms of consciousness – which is why a person can be so close to their pet cat or dog for instance) are, in period 5, humans (what we are today – we who already have something of the *supra-*human in us, hence our inherent religiosity even if that takes the form today as it does for many of secular humanism), and they wake up during that period. Period 4 plants (already having something of the animal in them, hence their sensitivity as gardeners know) are animals in period 5, and period 4 minerals (already having something of the plant in them, even though we struggle to apprehend it) are plants in period 5. Then in period 6 everything shunts along again. What were plants in period 4 and animals in period 5 are humans in period 6 and wake up. What were minerals in period 4 and plants in period 5 are animals in period 6. Finally, there is only one subset kingdom or consciousness in period 7 – humans that were minerals in period 4, plants in period 5 and animals in period 6. Again, it is important to remember that we are fundamentally talking about types of consciousness.

Periods 1-4 are also called, in a different language, Fire, Air, Water and Earth. What has taken place up to now (the Earth period) is a ‘condensation’ in the mind of the celestial divinity concerned (the Sol LSE) of its ‘idea’. The nebular hypothesis is a distorted reflection of this esoteric solar genesis. Any idea starts out as a vague and homogeneous *somethin*g, and finally condenses into a definite and heterogenous *thing*, and these positions have a correspondence with the mineral and human types of consciousness – the first being barely consciousness of anything at all (or nothing at all as we might adjudge), and the last being as we everyday experience it. The earlier periods, looking at our ‘kin’, can therefore be seen in the present, ‘hidden within what is manifest to the senses’.

We are currently in the latter half of the fourth period, and that period up to now can also be seen in the present. The fourth period is that which sees the human type of consciousness first come into being. Around us we see humans occupying different age groups, and our present esoteric historical age within the fourth period is the ‘young adult’ age (or at least that’s what the author proposes to call it in this book – the Theosophist might call it the fifth Rootrace). Before this age were three or four ages, depending on whether the first is counted, which we could call the ‘prenatal’, ‘infant’, ‘child’ and ‘youth’ ages. The next age in the sequence is the ‘mature adult’ age. We will consider these ages especially as they relate to socio-economic systems and the future of civilization in Chapter Five.

The new age to come (or actually already begun) would be mere millenarianism if it didn’t belong in a natural sequence of consciousness, and our free will enables us to fast-track or slow-track the fullness of this age but not derail it (just as we can go along with or resist growing up but we cannot escape it). In a wiser age ahead we can thus be assured, says esotericism, but not complacent. It is in the interests of all of us that we do fast-track to the fullness of the mature adult age or, to use a sporting phrase, get our heads in the game. This is obviously a different vision of the future than that postulated by scientific-atheist writers who see only more and more mechanistic thinking and, in parallel, more and more mechanization of the human body and the world. It is, in truth, the techno-humanists who are the fantasists, not the esotericists.

We naturally ask: What is the relationship between the world periods and ordinary (exoteric) history? The answer requires appreciating – in just the same way as with science – a distinction between profane and sacred. Sacred history would be the history of the *whole* of nature (a Type 1 knowledge), as sacred science is the study of the whole of nature. In the modern West, we have dropped metahistory just as we have dropped metaphysics. We can imagine Jack asking a fellow character in his story-world: ‘How many billions of years ago did the periods start?’ And that character, equivalent to an esotericist in his story-world, replying: ‘You’re missing the point, because these periods trace the coming into being of the dream you’re living in’.

If we insist that the horizontal universe is objectively real (which is not scientifically verifiable), then the past must be measurable in ordinary time. But we do not need to insist this, any more than we need to insist that the cosmic holarchy is spatially measurable. The Traditionalist would say that to insist such would, indeed, be intellectual laziness. For that would merely be to follow the way the rational mind works – a way that requires things to be fixed and to have finitude. But if we follow the way our other mental faculty works (the intellectual intuition), then there is no problem in accepting the horizontal universe to be only *relatively* real, to the extent that we can give primacy not to ordinary linear history, but to the time dimension that brought this relative reality into being i.e. Consciousness-time. The future and the past, as we give our minds over to contemplating them, can then be framed within the symbol of the circle with the cross in it.

“The basic error of systematized rationality…is to put fallible reasoning in place of infallible intellection; as if the rational faculty were the whole of Intelligence and even the only Intelligence”10.

Intellection is the action or process of understanding – the error is when we think this exclusively means reasoning (what the rational faculty does), as Schuon says above. Our subject in this chapter, put into the form of a slogan, is: ‘It is the history of consciousness that counts’. Especially as our consciousness, in a sense, isn’t ours anyway. We have spoken about ‘waking up’ and thus employed an eschatological or soteriological phrase. But this business is not chiefly about personal enlightenment or salvation, but about service to and within the cosmos. Bailey wrote:

“Men are apt to think that the whole evolutionary process – including the development of the subhuman kingdoms in nature – is merely a mode whereby men can reach perfection and develop better forms through which to manifest that perfection. But in the last analysis, human progress is purely relative and incidental. The factor of supreme importance is the ability of the planetary Logos to carry our His primary intention and bring His ‘project’ to a sound consummation, thus fulfilling the task given to Him by His great superior, the Solar Logos”.11

*How Am I To View The Universe?*

By way of concluding this part of the book, the answer is: In the opposite of the materialist, reductionist and mechanistic way. Plotinus wrote in the third century in words that are just as apposite today: “Those to whom existence comes about by chance and automatic action and is held together by material forces have drifted far from God and the concept of unity”12. Have drifted far from appreciating the ultimately comprehensible universe that is. When physicists today declare they have a near complete knowledge of everything, esotericism tells them to take a cold shower – they are not on the threshold of omniscience, but of humility in the face of a vertical universe that yet awaits their ken.

Is there a God? Yes there is, although we may prefer a more religiously neutral such as ‘the One’ in light of it being not a Being, but Being’s generator. Is the universe made of matter/energy? No, it’s made of consciousness/life. Did the universe begin *x* years ago and will it end in *x* years’ time? No, there is cycle after cycle of existence, with no beginning and no end, each time being the opportunity and having the purpose to better express the Good. We can be life-affirming and optimistic, having a discrete and noble task to perform which is to create and then sustain, in a continuous improvement manner, a beautiful, just and peaceful planetary civilization. Deep down we know this is the case – do we not?

Planets, stars, galaxies…all are living conscious entities contained within larger entities of similar kind and containing within themselves lesser entities of similar kind. A person’s felicity – also that of a planet, a star or a galaxy – lies in its self-perfection, or the maximising of its creative potential in terms of such built-in Ideas as Beauty, Justice and Love. These Ideas are collectively the Platonic ‘Idea of the Good’. There is no material cause of anything – chemistry comes from life not the other way around, and the brain (the corporeal body generally) comes from consciousness not the other way around. There is not one level of being but many, all existing in the Now beyond Time. To the specific question of how one should look at the ordinary big picture of science compared with the grander big picture of esotericism/the perennial philosophy, Huston Smith answered this:

“The perennial philosophy upstages the best show science can manage. For without backing off in the slightest on numbers, it makes, as it were, a right angle turn in to a wholly new dimension: that of quality-qualitative experience [the vertical]…To see what this involves, we might try to imagine the qualitative difference between the experience of a wood tick and ourselves, and then, continuing on in the same expanding direction, introduce orders of magnitude that science has accustomed to us: 1023 or whatever…If our imaginations could concretely effect such moves we would have no difficulty understanding Plato’s exclamation: ‘First a shudder runs through me, and then the old awe creeps over me.”13

The old awe refers to the *mysterium tremendum et fascinas.* Thepostmodern philosopher is partly right when he or she says there are but truth-claims. But as we must include this truth-claim (that there are but truth-claims) in with all the others, then we are not obliged to cut our mental coats according to this pluralist and relativist cloth. Furthermore, what this person fails to appreciate is that *all thought is contained within consciousness* – and that consciousness belongs to the extra-spatial universe (in the first instance, to the Earth LSE). We are all one family with respect to that greater life – not as romantic sentiment or as religious belief but as existential fact. We finish this part in the same place as we started – with our place in the universe. As Seyyed Hossein Nasr says, *it all comes down to consciousness*:

“Were we to accept the truth that ‘in the beginning was consciousness’…we would no longer feel as aliens in a dead and forbidding cosmos, as accidents in a lifeless universe. Far from being aliens, we would feel once again at home in the cosmos as did traditional men and women over the ages. Our rapport with animals, plants and even the inanimate world would change from one of strife and need for control and domination to one of harmony and equilibrium…Our deepest values, our attraction to and yearning for beauty, peace and justice, and the experience of love itself on all levels would not be seen as being simply subjective states devoid of any objective reality but on the contrary as corresponding to cosmic and ultimately metacosmic realities. And our ethical actions and norms, far from being simply based on standards set by merely human decisions and agreements, would be seen as having a divine origin and cosmic correspondences and as being much more real than simply convenient accommodations created by human societies for their survival or selfish interests.”14

*Coda*

Before moving on to the next part of the book which considers solutions to our political and environmental crisis, and forming the bridge between the two parts of the book, we might rewind to the point made about the postmodern philosopher who says there are but truth-claims, but has the blind spot of not seeing this must also apply to the truth-claim that there are but truth-claims. The *post-*postmodern philosopher does not have this blind spot, but as a result when asked what the truth is then, is silent. Into this ‘post-truth’ silence arise competing voices of all kinds – the internet being both a vehicle for and a symbol of this. In response to this post-truth condition, we can understand why there is a reactionary social conservatism, philosophical conservatism in the form of positivism, and political conservatism in the form of beggar-thy-neighbour capitalism. Western culture thus appears ‘stuck’ in an unsatisfactory and deleterious mental state, where a background materialist worldview still dominates (the one which says that the universe is all but matter, pointless, and will end in oblivion), and our leading public intellectuals, whilst not able to subscribe to this worldview entirely, have little or nothing substantively to say in its place and retreat into the postmodern mindset of pluralism and relativism.

Western culture, now globally dominant, appears also stuck in an unsatisfactory and deleterious political state, where a background capitalist world system still dominates, and whilst our leading progressives are not able to subscribe to this system entirely if at all, struggle to offer an alternative system that is *beyond* either capitalism or socialism. The next part of this book is, in a sense, an attempt to fix this problem. It includes, as we shall see, a political model (rather than an ideology) that reflects the holarchical nature of the universe. It includes, as we shall see, an appreciation that economic systems do not produce societal consciousness but rather the other way around. We are, today, in between one societal consciousness producing a capitalist world system, and another societal consciousness which will produce a world system not based on wealth at all (whether in private or public ownership) but on wellbeing. It includes, as we shall see, a realization that what will save the liberal rules-based international order under threat from illiberalism and nationalism, is not constraining the international and releasing the liberal, but rather constraining the liberal (so businesses have to operate in a socially and environmentally responsible manner), and releasing the international (proper and actual global governance through the United Nations).

Our Place in the Universe

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