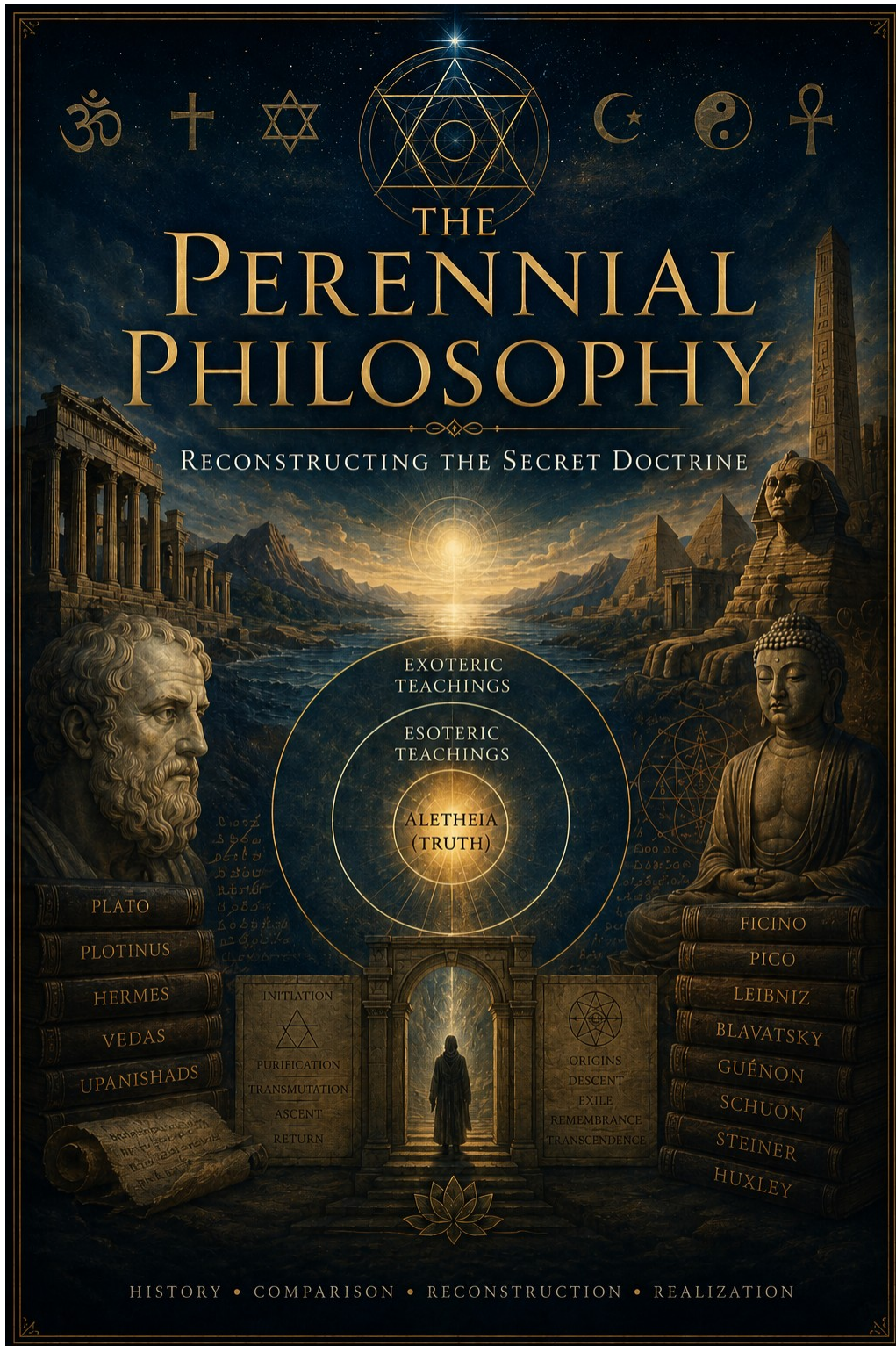


THE PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY

RECONSTRUCTING THE SECRET DOCTRINE



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Abstract

The main task of this essay is to function as a core intellectual history of the school of thought of Perennialism, while at the same time attempting to reconstruct minimally the essence of ancient belief systems, the so-called Secret Doctrine.

Perennialism has its roots in the Renaissance, with figures such as Ficino and Mirandola, questioning the authority of the Christian Church, and was later expressed in a number of counter-traditions to modernity, such as Romanticism, Theosophy, and Traditionalism.

The core idea of Perennialism is that the world's religions, as they have been transmitted, all contain fragments of a primordial, universally accepted, esoteric doctrine on the spiritual reality of man, which we seek to reconstruct.

Doing so will support our own, current investigations into the spiritual sciences, to which this essay contributes as a background for research.

While we present this intellectual history, we will also chime in with our own current perspectives on the innate truth of spiritual being, as we see it today.

Author's preface

The task of this essay is to reconstruct the perennial philosophy, the secret doctrine, that, according to the scholars of Perennialism, lies at the root of all esoteric, metaphysical, spiritual, and mystical teachings of the world's varying religions – there is a “red thread”.

In modernity, esotericism, spirituality, and mysticism were denied in favor of rationalist view of man, and a world view of materialist progress. The age of Romanticism was a counter-point to this rationalism, where the inner mystical-poetic view of life was explored with renewed enthusiasm. Proponents of the Enlightenment ideal of rationalism would say that it was *this* romantic-nationalist sentiment on the continent that led to the catastrophic anti-climax of the two World Wars, while proponents of Romanticism would say that the cause of the wars was exactly the inherent *disagreement* and incompatibility of two opposing world views and views of man.

The idea of a red thread in the world's religions is closer to the mystical-poetic sentiments of Romanticism, and for the perennialists, such as Evola (1934) and Guénon (1945), the age of modernity signified a collapse of the ancient doctrine of spiritual man, and a historical decline – the Kali Yuga. The scholar of Traditionalism, Mark Sedgwick (2004), would trace this school of thought back to the Renaissance, and that era's questioning of Church dogma, and concern with renewing and syncretizing ancient belief systems.

Later than the Renaissance and Romanticism, and as a precursor to Traditionalism, the Theosophy of Blavatsky (1877; 1888) was instrumental in reviving ancient, esoteric doctrine, and therefore in the Western World questioning the monopoly of Christianity, and pluralizing the authority of religion, though from the perspective of what she called the primordial Secret Doctrine.

In this essay, we will investigate these counter-traditions to modernity, and seek to find exactly this red thread of spiritual doctrine by attempting to reconstruct the original inner core of ancient belief.

We will also present our own perspective on spiritual doctrine, from the authentic point-of-view of the modern Hyperborean Siddhas, based on original transcendental meditation, mystical experience, dialogue, and research, as a corrective to previous perennialist traditions.

This essay is part of our wider program of investigation into the spiritual sciences.

Thank you for reading the *Epistemic Front Journal*, and for tuning in to *The Hyperborean Dispatch*.

Fragments of truth – What has been lost, and what must be revived from ancient philosophy?

A spiritual science should be based on primarily own experiences, combined with the teachings of others, but any information or guidance we would have must be confirmed or rejected by our own personal experience – experience is the ultimate verification of reality.

As in any spiritual development, transmutation, or ascent, only the seekers themselves can know and confirm the veracity of any spiritual teaching or practice – is this not actually the very mystery of being itself? That life must be lived and experienced from the point-of-view of personal experience, self-development, and realization?

For many modern scholars of the perennial tradition, spiritual authority should not be handed over to an external authority, whatever that may be, religious, ideological, scientific, or cultural paradigms, but must be established in the self, as also Kant (1784) noted. The Vedas taught deep meditation, and Pythagoras (3rd BC) taught the everyday introspection, purification, and refinement of the self in “divine virtue” that also the later alchemists would do in the *mysterium coniunctionis* (Jung, 1977).

This does *not* mean that we cannot learn from others, but the path of spiritual enlightenment and liberation must be trodden by ourselves – no one can do it for us.

And this does *not* mean that there is no higher truth, or absolute reality – but this higher truth is the truth of the Heart. As Blavatsky (1973) pointed out, only “the pure of Heart” will receive initiation, spiritual enlightenment and liberation.

Spiritual communities and teachings *are* important, so studying the perennial tradition is all about investigating those pieces of the puzzle that resonate with us, given the state of our own spiritual journey and awakening, which also was a crucial doctrine of the ancient initiatic mystery schools of Greece – the gradual rise in degrees of the adept.

We must remain open enough that we may grasp what would otherwise be new to us, but at the same time, we must remain skeptical that we do not become parrots of doctrine that has not been verified by the Heart, for “life is lived in the spectrum of love and war, truth and deceit”.

But then again, are we not all (priests/gurus and devotees alike) on a journey of remembering, creating, and realizing our own inherent spiritual potential, the truth and law of the Heart, while at the same time being part of diverse communities?

The idea of a perennial philosophy touches exactly on this aspect of life, the idea that reality is for *us* to realize, rather than merely objectively *know* – being and knowing are aspects of the same reality of the self – in life, there is a call, there is a *telos*.

But what happened in ancient times that the primordial teachings of the refinement and development of the self were abandoned, fragmented, and almost lost? This is the question that later scholars of the perennial tradition would seek to understand, and they would by that same gesture seek to revive the ancient wisdom teachings, as we shall later see from the comparison of classical scholars of the perennial tradition in *table 1*.

We would like to make our own stance clear: while personal mystical experience is primary to initiation, the second aspect is dialogue, that is, listening, especially to the other gender, for it's in the mystical, tantric union of the two genders that we fully comprehend who we are as spiritual beings – but to do that takes a sincere Heart (metaphor for origins, remembrance, love, transcendence) – *this is gnosis*.

Let's now take a look at the history and study of perennial philosophy.

Brief history and the study of perennial philosophy

Most scholars of perennial philosophy can agree that there is a “red thread” in the philosophy of religion, esotericism, mysticism, whether that red thread be the compatibility, unity, or evolutionary relationship of all the world religions – despite the variety of religion, there is a deeper ground, an *ugrund* that connects the individual and collective pursuits of spiritual knowledge and apprehension – this is the idea of a primordial tradition, a secret doctrine, or at least a higher reality and truth that our understanding evolves towards as mankind progresses spiritually.

Since ancient times, in the ages of Hyperborea and Atlantis, the mystical teachings had been closely guarded, perhaps for a reason, but in those times, mankind were not that many, and the spiritual teachings were considered a natural and integral aspect of the life of man. The later Vedic tradition is said to have been parted over only orally to the chosen initiates, a tradition that continued in the later Greek mysteries. This tendency exemplifies the secrecy in and decline of the Kali Yuga.

Mystical teachings were esoterically transcoded into poetry, metaphors, parables, and allegories, as also happened in the Greek mysteries.

But the proto-philosopher, Socrates, made the fatal crime of directly questioning the exoteric teachings of the official religious narrative, and so was murdered by his comrades in the Athenian state for “impiety and seducing the youth” (Plato, 399 BCa) – Socrates openly taught a deeper, personal truth than the mere distant worship of Gods – Socrates taught the doctrine of remembrance and return – *anamnesis* (Plato, 399 BCb; 385 BC). Socrates’ teachings bordered on the brink of Mythos and Logos.

Socrates did not leave any writings himself, but since his murder, the philosophy of religion has been deeply esoteric and hidden from the profane (Hanegraaff, 2025).

In the esoteric teachings, the myth of the murder of Christ that followed a few centuries later should metaphorically be understood as the “decapitation of the divine Logos, descending into man” – the slaying of Christ (the anointed/initiated one) is symbolic of the suppression of the spiritual awakening of man that followed under the dogma of the Nicaean Council in 325 – what followed were the Dark Ages.

The mystery schools and the academy of Plato were shut down by Roman decree, but the Gnostics kept the initiatory fire (mystical wisdom) burning, though they were severely persecuted. Also Neo-Platonists, such as Plotinus (270), contributed significantly to the ancient doctrines during this period, but nevertheless, the knowledge of the secret doctrine slowly vanished.

First in the Renaissance did we see a resurgence of the ancient Greek and Egyptian teachings, when the Italian, Marsilio Ficino (1433-1499), on behalf of the Medici, translated a large portion of major ancient teachings, especially the whole of Plato’s work, but also the Hermetica, and a range of Neo-Platonists (Hanegraaff, 2012).

Ficino was followed by the Humanist, Pico della Mirandola (1464-1493), who wrote what has been called the “manifesto of the Renaissance” (Mirandola, 1496), syncretically combining all the ancient belief-systems, such as Platonism, Hermeticism, and the Kabbalah.

Later, the Rationalist, G.W. Leibniz (1646-1716), coined the term, *philosophia perennis*, but the development of this period (the Enlightenment) marked an overt emphasis on rationalism and progress in the study of philosophy, not esotericism or mysticism.

First with the Theosophy of H.P. Blavatsky (1831-1891), and with the Traditionalism of R. Guénon (1886-1951), did we again see an interest in the ancient esoteric teachings (Blavatsky, 1877; 1888).

Comparison of perspectives on the perennial philosophy

Let's now compare the views of the main proponents of Perennialism, as to the nature of perennial philosophy, up till today:

Category	Ficino	Pico	Leibniz	Blavatsky	Steiner	Guénon	Schuon	Huxley
Historical Period	Renaissance	Renaissance	Early Modern	Theosophical	Anthroposophical	Traditionalist	Traditionalist	Modern
Primary Concern	Reconciliation of Plato and Christianity	Synthesis of all wisdom traditions	Universal rational truth	Esoteric evolution of humanity	Spiritual evolution of consciousness	Restoration of Tradition	Unity of religions	Mystical experience
Meaning of Perennial Philosophy	Ancient wisdom fulfilled in Christianity	Universal harmony of traditions	Enduring truths across history	Ancient Secret Doctrine behind all religions	Progressive revelation of spiritual knowledge	Primordial Tradition underlying all religions	Transcendent unity of religions	Universal mystical core
Primordial Tradition?	Partial yes	Partial yes	Not central	Strong yes	Qualified yes	Strong yes	Strong yes	Generally yes
Source of Truth	Divine revelation through Plato and Christianity	Universal wisdom traditions	Reason and revelation	Ancient Masters and occult wisdom	Spiritual investigation	Supra-human revelation	Absolute Reality	Mystical experience
View of Religions	Harmonious but Christianity highest	Fundamentally compatible	Partial expressions of truth	Fragments of ancient esoteric teaching	Successive stages of spiritual evolution	Authentic traditions derive from one source	Different forms of one Truth	Different expressions of one experience
Christianity	Fulfillment of ancient wisdom	Supreme but enriched by Kabbalah and Plato	Highest historical revelation	Important but incomplete	Central evolutionary event	One authentic tradition among several	One sacred form among many	One mystical path among many
Role of Esotericism	Important	Very important	Secondary	Central	Central	Essential	Essential	Helpful but not necessary
Role of Mysticism	Significant	Significant	Moderate	Important	Important	Secondary to metaphysics	Very important	Central
Role of Reason	High	High	Very high	Low	Moderate	Limited	Moderate	Moderate
Human Freedom	Important	Very important	Important	Moderate	Very important	Secondary	Secondary	Important
View of History	Providential development	Providential development	Progress of knowledge	Cyclical evolution	Evolutionary ascent	Decline from primordial age	Decline with spiritual remnants	Mixed
View of Modernity	Not applicable	Not applicable	Generally positive	Critical but hopeful	Generally positive	Strongly negative	Strongly negative	Mixed
Metaphysical Structure	Neoplatonic hierarchy	Neoplatonic hierarchy	Rational Christian metaphysics	Esoteric cosmology	Evolutionary spiritual cosmology	Non-dual metaphysics	Non-dual metaphysics	Mystical monism
Transmission of Wisdom	Philosophical lineage	Universal synthesis	Intellectual tradition	Secret Brotherhoods	Spiritual science	Initiatic chains	Initiatic chains and sacred forms	Mystical insight
Ideal Human Type	Christian philosopher-mystic	Universal sage	Rational philosopher	Adept	Spiritual scientist	Initiate	Gnostic contemplative	Mystic

Table 1: Comparison of 8 seminal thinkers and their perspectives on the concept of perennial philosophy.

To these 8 thinkers on the perennial philosophy, we could add Manly P. Hall (1901-1990) and Samael Aun Weor (1917-1977), but in our interest also those of Julius Evola (1898-1974), Miguel Serrano (1917-2009), and Nimrod de Rosario (1946-1996). Of course, many more scholars and practitioners work with ancient teachings, but the authors mentioned in the table can be considered founders or key contributors of specific schools or ages in the study of perennial philosophy, and the slight nuances of these thinkers are interesting to contemplate. R. Steiner (1861-1925) critiqued and developed Theosophy into his own spiritual science, while F. Schuon (1907-1998) developed the work of Guénon. A. Huxley (1894-1963) popularized the idea of a perennial philosophy of mysticism (Huxley, 1945).

Esotericism – The veil of truth

The perennial philosophy has always been associated with esotericism, occultism, secrecy, and initiation. The reason for this is manifold:

1. Originally, due to the sacredness of the subject matter, given the “fall” into matter, the exile – the teachings were valuable, and should not be diluted by the profane.
2. The need for spiritual development, refinement, and personal transmutation and perfection of the subject, who had fallen into gross matter and material ways in the Kali Yuga – the need for degrees of initiation. The initiate had to be well prepared.
3. Due to the dialectical nature of spiritual development, where truth is innate to being, but remembrance, knowledge, and insight thereof must gradually be developed through education, *bildung*, and realization – coming into being.
4. Later, intensifying in the outright “fear of persecution” from the masters of the worldly domains (Strauss, 1952; Melzer, 2014).

Let’s present this diagram of the layers of truth in the perennial school of thought:

THE VEIL OF TRUTH

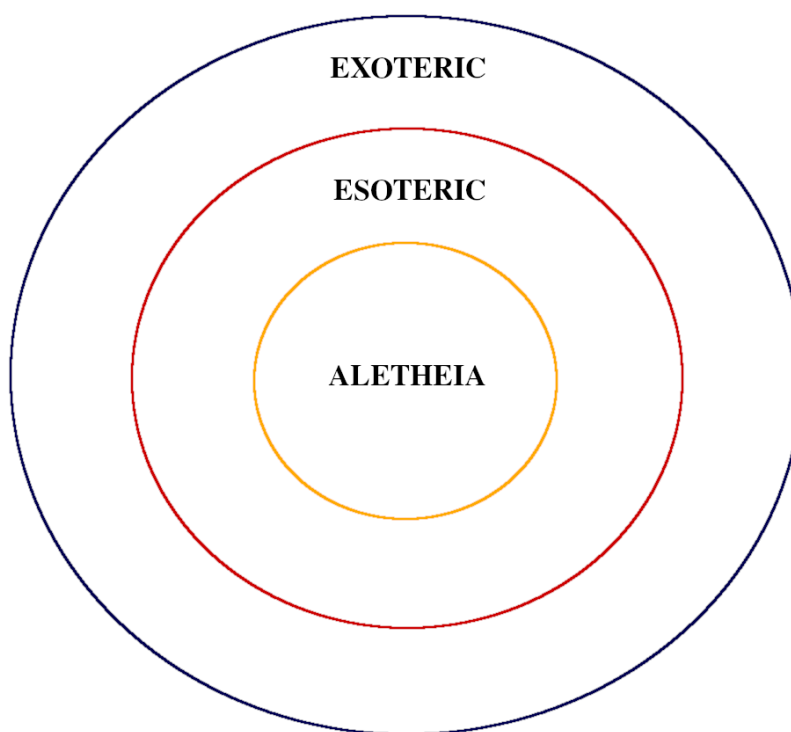


Figure 1: The three concentric layers of truth in Perennialism: aletheia, esoteric teachings, and exoteric teachings.

From the diagram, it can be seen that the inner core of *aletheia* must be realized by the initiate him-/herself, progressing from the outer sphere of exoteric teachings, through the intermediate sphere of initiatory, esoteric teachings, to the inner core of final realization/unveiling of truth, as Heidegger (1927) called “the unveiling of the truth of Being” – the last step must be accomplished by the initiate.

Central tenets of the reconstructed perennial philosophy

Having established that a perennial tradition exists in the world's religions, the next and crucial question becomes: what were the core tenets of this ancient, primordial doctrine? Based on the reading of the founders of the study of perennial philosophy, informed by the transmitted tradition, ancient and esoteric writings, and our own transcendental meditation and mystical experience, we will now present the reconstructed bare bones (or inner Heart) of the secret doctrine in 11 key points:

1. **Reality is ultimately spiritual.**
 - a. Perennialist scholars reject the reductionist/materialist belief, and confirm a higher, metaphysical/spiritual reality of Being.
2. **An Absolute exists beyond the material world.**
 - a. In the tradition, given different names: God, Brahman, the One, the *urgrund*, absolute spirit, pure Being, origins, source, etc.
3. **The cosmos possesses a hierarchical structure.**
 - a. I.e. the Great Chain of Being, or divine emanations from the Absolute, through spirit (divine archetypes), soul (conscious, psychic life), to the physical manifestation.
4. **Human beings possess a spiritual essence.**
 - a. The “divine spark”, spoken of in Gnosticism. For Schuon, man was “a bridge between heavens and earth”, for Steiner, multiple dimensions of consciousness, for Blavatsky, multiple subtle bodies.
5. **Humanity originates from a higher reality.**
 - a. The origins of man is spiritual, not material. Existence is a descent/exile from origins.
6. **The purpose of life is spiritual realization.**
 - a. The inner path of purification, refinement, transmutation, ascent, transcendence, and return is crucial.
7. **Spiritual practice is necessary.**
 - a. Knowing truth must be embodied in meditation, prayers, contemplation, asceticism, yoga, chants, ethical purification, and ritual participation.
8. **Spiritual energies are essential.**
 - a. We must know and work with the soul: the Light-Body, Chakras, Kundalini, Vril, etc.
9. **Symbolism is universal.**
 - a. Symbolism holds a universal key to understanding the mysteries.
10. **History is spirit unfolding.**
 - a. Either a decline (Traditionalism), a progress (Hegel, 1807), or cyclical (Theosophy).
11. **Authentic traditions preserve the esoteric knowledge of this truth.**
 - a. These key points are esoterically transmitted to initiates in the perennial tradition.

Descent – The exile from origins

Having delineated the history of the study of Perennialism, and having reconstructed the ancient doctrine, we will now take a closer look at the very idea of origins and incarnation, and in the next section, transcendence and return, as these two concepts, descent and ascent, are foundational ideas in the secret doctrine, encapsulating what the main motif of the doctrine was and is.

We have identified the idea of the Absolute, the hierarchical ontology of Being, and that mankind originates from a higher reality, and carries a spiritual essence, as crucial concepts in the secret doctrine, based on the studies of the scholars of Perennialism.

These two sections will be more based on our own interpretations, given our original transcendental meditations, and experience with mystical reality.

We can ask the following:

1. What is then origins?
2. Why would mankind ever descend – what was the cause of the descent?
3. What ontology can we know, given the idea of descent?

Different religions and mystical schools have slightly varying answers to these questions. In the Vedic tradition, Brahman is the ultimate reality, transcending time and space, but also immanently present in all being (in Maya). The cause of descent is described as the Dream of Vishnu (Maya), a projection of divine consciousness, but a dream, which leads to the ignorance, delusion, and forgetting of mankind of its origins in Brahman (Avidya). From these tales, we can confirm that a higher ontological reality exists, which is the participation in the divine Brahman.

Christianity would talk about “the fall of man” from the Garden of Eden, due to the devouring of an apple from the Tree of Knowledge, having been seduced by a serpent to do so – man is then cast out of Eden. Esoterically, this tale reflects a loss of innocence, which is described as “original sin” in that man became apart and independent from God, reflecting on the ontological difference – an individuation of Being, ironically, given the Tree of Knowledge, much as the concept of Avidya in the Vedic tradition.

Also, importantly, this was the “Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil”, so the tale also reflects coming into being of evil in the world, man’s ability to discern good from evil, which is the *very* coming into being of evil and morality. In this sense, the hierarchical ontology of Being is then established.

Gnosticism would consider the fall an expression of a divine tragedy, the idea of the divine Sophia wanting to set herself apart from the Creator, creating a rupture in the *pleroma* (spiritual realm), and thereby giving life to the Demiurge (Yaldabaoth), who then created the physical world. They reinterpret the Garden of Eden to be a prison of amnesia created by the Demiurge, and the serpent and the Tree of Knowledge to be liberating forces for mankind’s remembrance of divine origins, before becoming trapped in matter by the evil Demiurge.

In that sense, Gnosticism is closer to the original Vedic idea of the physical world as Maya, but all these three examples relate a metaphysical, psychological rupture in ontology, as the cause of descent, and a pristine, spiritual origins, which we must remember, and whereto we must return.

In this we agree, but from a Hyperborean perspective (Rosario, 1985; 2022; 2023), the descent is not *per se* a fall, but more the result of the cosmic war of good versus evil, and the determined incarnation of the Siddhas into the temporary, physical world (Maya) to fight the phenomenological, magical battle against the Demiurge, and to liberate mankind, for evil is metaphysically *confined* to temporality.

Ascent – Transcendence and return

Where the primordial tales of descent varies, what all perennial, spiritual traditions agree upon is the notion of remembrance, ascent, transcendence, and return as the ultimate goal of mankind.

But as we saw from the reconstruction of the 11 key points, another point where the perennialist scholars seem to disagree is on the philosophy of history. This is probably primarily due to the very idea of the future being *per se* rather uncertain – given our temperament, we can project all our fears and hopes unto the future, from absolute pessimism (Traditionalism), to optimism (Hegel, Steiner), to indeterminate, cyclical hermeneutics (Vedas, Blavatsky). Is history a tale of decline, progress, or cycles?

Nevertheless, ascent is the goal, and we *must* have hope – hope is crucial, whereas hopelessness negates the very purpose of faith, namely to conserve (faith), to persevere (in the struggle), and to reach our goal (transcendence).

Hope is the catalyst for spiritual constructivity, and according to Perennialism, the constructive work that must be done is on the soul of man itself – we must develop, refine, and transmute our being into a higher state to achieve transcendence.

When in the spiritual tradition we talk about the “transmutation of the soul”, transcendence, and ascension, what is absolutely crucial to know about are the three following concepts:

1. The Psychic Aether (Akasha, Aither).
2. The Light-Body, aka. Astral-Body, or Ethereal Body.
3. Spiritual energies, such as the Chakras, Kundalini, and Vril.

The knowledge of these concepts are well-guarded, but known in all authentic perennial traditions.

While we agree with much of Rosario’s metaphysics, he has a very negative and pessimistic view on these three concepts, and also on the soul, and basically proposes that these are also deceptive inventions of the Demiurge – we disagree.

We have written at length about the psychic aether (Riis-Søndergaard, 2025a; 2026a; 2026b), and also on the Light-Body and spiritual energies (Riis-Søndergaard, 2024a; 2026c), and the research into these phenomena is the foundation of our newly established research institute, *Blue Tone Enterprise* (Riis-Søndergaard, 2026d), that seeks to understand, prove, enhance, and defend these spiritual realities.

When we talk about origins, we must know that the aether and the Light-Body *are* the very origins – what else would there be in pure spirit, pure being, if not a body of pure light? Would the origins be impersonal and discarnate, as the Buddhists, Theosophy, and Rosario seem to proclaim, when they say that the soul will be shed upon return to source? No, from the point-of-view of the Hyperborean Siddhas, the aether is true life and eternal – the aether (spirit) *is* the source of the soul.

Importantly, today, we differentiate between the eternal aether (spirit), homeland of the soul, and the temporary astral realms, scenes of cosmic conflict. In this way, we accommodate for one of Rosario’s objections, but interestingly, Steiner (1908) has the opposite equation of the aether and the astral, though from our own personal experience, our equation holds true, but it might be a question of terminology and taste – Steiner says that the aether is inanimate, and that the astral is psychic, but for us, both are psychic, but the higher aether is eternal and monistic, whereas the lower astral is temporary and dualistic.

Thank you, and stay tuned for future essays, continuing the detailing of the spiritual sciences.

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