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A Genealogy of the Subtle Body

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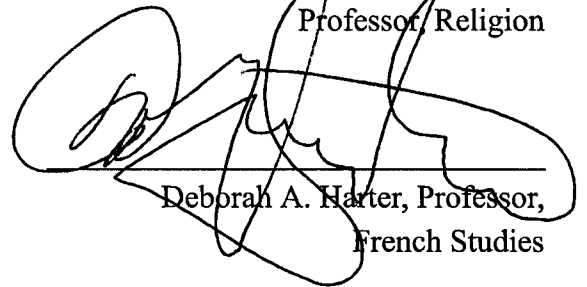
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ABSTRACT

This dissertation traces the historical genealogy of the term “subtle body,” following it from its initial coinage among the Cambridge Platonists back to the Neoplatonic sources from which they drew, then forward into Indology, Theosophy, Carl Jung, and the American Counterculture, showing the expansion of the term’s semantic range to include Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese materials.

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Introduction: Restoring the Body of Light

WANTED: Energetic Madmen. Those who have

Thought themselves a body large enough to

Devour their dreams.

– W.H. Auden

Who feels it knows it.

– Bob Marley

In most styles of the martial art *taijiquan* (*tai chi*) there is a movement called “grasping the sparrow’s tail.” It is a seminal posture, usually near the beginning of the form, in which the four most essential *taiji* techniques are contained. The poetic name is meant to summon the image of a nimble bird, able to take flight at any moment. How is a comparatively clumsy human supposed to grab one by the tail? This predicament becomes even more unfavorable if we do our ornithological homework. Sparrows are tiny, fat birds with little stubby, almost nonexistent tails. The image is a *kōan*. How to grasp the quite nearly ungraspable?¹

Dealing academically with the subtle body presents an analogous situation. On the ontological level, we’re told it’s something very subtle, ethereal, mercurial. It seems, perhaps, to be composed of some sort of super-fine particles. Or maybe it is bioelectricity, pure light, or the

¹ The koan is also wordplay in Chinese as the words for the short-tailed sparrow, *que* 雀, and the long-tailed magpie, also *que* 鹊, are homophonous.

manifestation of a higher spatial dimension.² On the epistemic level we can see it's not an entirely objective phenomenon. Subtle bodies don't seem to leave subtle corpses. So it's at least in part, and perhaps wholly, a mental imputation (however that fits into our worldview). On the historical level, we're told it is absolutely ubiquitous, something represented in all times and climes; from the occult physiology of Siberian shamans or contemporary African hunter-gatherers to medieval Daoist recluses, renaissance magicians, and Mayan medicine.³

How appropriate, then, that one of the more persistent images with regards to the subtle body, a motif present in all these contexts, is the bird. When we try to grasp it without sufficient methodological finesse, it slips right through our fingers. To catch the sparrow, to answer our *kōan*, the shaman might suggest becoming more bird-like ourselves. Similarly, in the prodigious and learned corpus dedicated to the epistemological problems of the subtle body, there seems to be a general acknowledgement that fruitful engagement is predicated on a subordination of theoretical discourse to praxis.⁴

² All of these views are attested in the abundant contemporary literature on the subtle body. For electric bodies, see Becker, Robert, *The Body Electric: Electromagnetism and the Foundation of Life* (New York: Morrow, 1985).; for light, see Kapstein, Matthew (ed.), *The Presence of Light: Divine Radiance and Religious Experience* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).; see also Tiso, Francis, *Rainbow Body and Resurrection: Spiritual Attainment, the Dissolution of the Material Body, and the Case of Khenpo A Chö* (Berkeley, California: North Atlantic Books, 2016).; for higher spatial dimensions see the most compelling: Smythies, John, "Consciousness and Higher Dimensions of Space." *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 19, No. 11-12, 2012, pp. 224-32. If dark matter is your thing, see Kazanis, Deno, "The Physical Basis of Subtle Bodies and Near-Death Experiences." *Journal of Near-Death Studies*, (14(2) Winter 1995), pp. 101-116.

³ For the shaman's body see: Eliade, Mircea, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1964).; for hunter-gatherer subtle physiology see: McEvelley, Thomas, *The Shape of Ancient Thought* (New York, NY: Allworth Press, 2002), p. 220.; for medieval Daoist bodies, see: Kohn, Livia. *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1989).; for renaissance magical bodies, see: Corrias, Anna, Imagination and Memory in Marsilio Ficino's Theory of the Vehicles of the Soul. *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition* Volume 6: Issue 1.; for a brief speculation on a Maya subtle anatomy, see Avalon, Arthur, *The Serpent Power* (New York: Dover Publications, 1974), p. 3. For the Incan subtle body, look to: Torra, Marc, *Incan Anatomy of the Soul* (Chakana Creations, 2012).

⁴ See: Behun, William, "The Body of Light and the Body without Organs." *SubStance* #121, Vol. 39, No. 1, 2010, pp. 125-140. See also, Johnston, Jay, *Angels of Desire: Esoteric Bodies, Aesthetics and Ethics* (New York, NY: Equinox, 2008).

But alongside these larger philosophical issues lies the more approachable historical question, one that allows us to remain within the skin of our very human bodies and maintain a comfortable academic distance. Where is it that this subtle body concept came from? And how did it ever come to contain these multitudes, from the luminous bodies of late-antique Greek and Syrian Neoplatonic philosopher-magicians to the subtle sheaths of the soul from Indian Yoga and Vedanta? When we take measure of the capacious scope of the term, in both its popular and academic uses, its ubiquity calls out for an explanation.

It is my intention in this dissertation to perform a genealogy of the term, where the facts of my investigation are philological, and the trails are textual. I proceed from the signifier “subtle body” in its earliest English uses amongst the Cambridge Platonists (chapter 1). I then trace it back to the late-antique Neoplatonists from whom the Cambridge philosophers translated the term (chapter 2). After that, I look forward to those fathers of Indology, who, in their earliest translations of Sanskrit philosophy relied heavily on the Cambridge Platonist lexicon, and thereby brought Indian philosophy into what had hitherto been a distinctly platonic discourse (chapter 3). At this point in the story I take us on a little reflexive interlude into the source of my own interest in this strange concept, one sparked by none other than the dark knight himself, Batman, who, as we will see is very much implicated in this genealogy. Chapters four and five deal with Helena Blavatsky and the Theosophical import, expression, and popularization of the concept, and chapters six and seven deal with Carl Jung, his colleague Frederic Spiegelberg, and the popularization of the idea in the Euro-American counterculture.

What is going on here?

The status of the subtle body has risen and fallen with the tides of debunking and rebunking that constitute the history of philosophy, and whether the subtle body constitutes a central and valuable philosophical concept or some dusky pagan myth is displayed most prominently in the history of the question in which it is most centrally implicated. What is the relationship between the mind and the body?

This dissertation rides on a recent upswing in the fortunes of the concept, following a variety of recent turns in academia (namely participatory, spatial, and ontological),⁵ new worldviews and new materialisms have created new spaces for models of embodiment, thought, and mind-body interactionism, and when it comes to the ancient concept around which this dissertation is constellated, new spaces for an old idea. Here it is my intention to unpack the philological baggage, to disambiguate the many strands and various discourses that have coalesced into the modern, highly syncretistic category of the subtle body. I do this fairly conventionally by bringing a philological, historical-critical lens to bear on literary and historical material from late antiquity through to the present.

But after my third chapter, something strange happens. I turn this lens back on myself, on my own life and motivations. What (or who) possessed me to write this strange book anyway? I address this question through four *kuden*, a term I first learned through Japanese martial arts meaning “oral transmission,” referring to teachings passed down outside the textual

⁵ See: Ferrer, Jorge N., Sherman, Jacob H. (eds.), *the participatory turn: Spirituality, Mysticism, Religious Studies* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 2008).; Warf, Barney and Arias, Santa (eds.), *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2009).; Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo, *Cannibal Metaphysics* (Minneapolis, MN: Univocal Publishing, 2014).

tradition. I include these four mini-chapters throughout the second half of this dissertation as a sort of phenomenology or personal playing out of the larger historiography I trace through the main chapters. Here we see that the very same themes that make the subtle body relevant through its history – the orientalist and mystical-esoteric discourses in which abides – are driving forces in the playing out of my own fate. And just as I retroactively connect dots as an historian of ideas, to make some sense of this messy concept, I retroactively connect the dots of my own life, to transmute the chaos of a life lived into narrative, into language, into something that can be understood.

To put it plainly, this dissertation hopefully serves as a bit of historical housekeeping for an idea that, to my mind, has been unfairly maligned. It follows quite closely J. Z. Smith’s famous summary of the purpose behind the field of religious studies: to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange. People who know about the subtle body typically fall into two camps. On the one hand, there are scholars (usually of some Asian area studies) who are familiar with the idea and, almost universally, see the subtle body concept as it exists in the West as a late-phase Theosophical import inspired by the oriental renaissance of the 18th and 19th centuries.⁶ To these scholars, for whom we might say the subtle body is a strange idea, perhaps as Erwin Rohde put it, abiding in Western philosophical discourse like “a drop of alien blood in the veins of the Greeks,” I hope to make it familiar by demonstrating its elite pedigree extending from the very fountainheads of the “western tradition,” through to the present, showing up in a lot of unexpected places along the way. On the other hand there is the lay audience which, in my experience, often has the same historiography tracing the idea back to Blavatsky, to whom the

⁶ Best exemplified in the sole academic volume dedicated to the idea, see: Samuel, Geoffrey (ed.), *Religion and the Subtle Body in Asia and the West: Between Mind and Body*. London: Routledge, 2013. p. 2.

subtle body is a familiar idea I seek to make strange by demonstrating its appearance in places generally thought too pristine for its mystical murkiness.

Morphologies of the Subtle Body

But beyond the historical and autobiographical dimensions of this dissertation lies a third path. Following the trifold hermeneutics of esoteric Buddhism (outer/inner/secret), we can call it the secret dimension, and it is this reading that I hope will be useful to people beyond the narrow world of the academy, beyond historians or the area specialists to whom this genealogy will be of practical value. In the pages that follow you will find a veritable library of subtle body formulations, contextualized within various epistemological and metaphysical frameworks, for purposes ranging from psychological integration to personal salvation, brought to life through everything from theurgical ritual to meditative visualization to mythological hermeneutics. This variety itself challenges any unitary answer to the question of what the subtle body refers to. But if we invert our gaze, and instead of staring downward at the via negativa of conceptual deconstruction and historical contextualization we cast our gaze skyward to the practical deployment of subtle bodies in subtle worlds, this variety can be re-read in a positive light. Instead of many views (various cultural instantiations of subtle bodies) referring to one reality (that one culturally transcendent body to which they all refer), we find a variety of realities (multiple ontological frameworks) and experiences of body, all hooked, gestured to imperfectly by this large umbrella term.

This genealogical project began as a search for the ground of a concept. What I quickly found, and found again and again, was that any apparent grounding soon evaporates under the blazing perspicacity of historical vision. The illusion of conceptual uniformity vanished before my eyes. And instead of that one book, that one ur-body on which the rest were all grounded, I found one hundred blooming flowers. Instead of the secret scroll that contained the definitive map, I stumbled upon a library of infinitely greater value. In the secret hermeneutic, this dissertation can be read as a sort of table of contents to just one narrow section of the archive of the subtle body.

Chapter One

The Body of Light in Renaissance England

*As our blood labours to beget
Spirits as like souls as it can,
Because such fingers need to knit
The subtle knot that makes us man*
– John Donne

*Man has no body distinct from his Soul:
for that called Body is a portion of Soul
discern'd by the five senses,
the chief inlets of Soul in this age.*
– William Blake

A trip to the source of the anglophone subtle body takes us to seventeenth-century England, to the heart of the British Renaissance -- when Italian humanism and Florentine Platonism had made their way across the English Channel, finding fertile soil at Cambridge University; where Plato, Plotinus, and the humanism of Marsilio Ficino were used to combat both the ascendant Calvinist Puritanism at home as well as the flourishing mechanical philosophy imported from the continent. It is in this context that we first encounter the term “subtle body,” initially between Thomas Hobbes and Renee Descartes in their heated exchange over body-soul interactionism, and later in the inspired tracts of the Cambridge Platonists and their heirs.

Subtle Bodies, Descartes, and Hobbes

It is in the correspondence between Hobbes and Descartes that the English-speaking world may have caught its first glimpses of the subtle body -- used in this context as an explanatory heuristic for Descartes to tether mind to body in his dualist scheme, and for Hobbes to explain the action of minds as the action of a rarefied, subtle materiality in the context of his single-substance, atoms-and-void materialism. Descartes writes variously about a subtle matter which he sometimes refers to as “subtle body” (*corpus subtilis*), and more often “animal spirits” (*espirits animaux*), or simply “spirits:” a warm, diaphanous substance whose motions are mechanistically determined by brain states. These spirits are manufactured in the heart and circulate throughout the body in long, thin tubes.⁷

The Cartesian subtle body was a late-career move away from the bolder dualism of his younger *Meditations*, where he more rigidly separated the activities of mind and body, the former wholly immaterial and free, the latter deterministically subject to the laws of mechanical causation. A whole panoply of philosophical problems were raised in the face of his early strong dualism. If mind and body are totally separate substances, how do they interact? And how are we supposed to square the freedom of the mind with the causal determinism of bodily existence?

The first question was put most succinctly by Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia in her 1643 letter to Descartes, “Given that the soul of a human being is only a thinking substance, how can it affect the bodily spirits, in order to bring about voluntary actions?”⁸ Through the near two decades of letters exchanged between them, we see a continual process whereby Descartes cedes

⁷ Clarke, Desmond M., *Descartes: A Biography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 325.

⁸ Shapiro, Lisa, *The Correspondence between Princess Elisabeth of Bohemia and Rene Descartes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

more and more intellectual capacities to the body – by 1645, even providing Elizabeth with a physiological account of the phenomenology of attending the theatre.⁹ By 1648, though he still maintained a mind-body dualism, Descartes had grounded almost every human capacity aside from pure thought in a medium of subtle matter coursing through the body, what he referred to as the “bodily soul.”¹⁰

A major critic of Cartesian dualism was the Englishman Thomas Hobbes, who, in a letter to Marin Mersenne of 1641, took Descartes to task for supposing in his 1637 essay on optics, the *Dioptrique*, that sensation is experienced by the soul and not the body. As Hobbes remarked, “since vision is nothing other than motion, it follows also that the thing which sees is nothing other than that which is moved, namely some body or other.”¹¹ This is the beginning of a rather contentious correspondence between the two, a central feature of which was an argument over who might lay claim to the notion of “subtle body,” which, in this context referred to the subtle matter through which light was transmitted from brain to soul.

In Descartes’ view, Hobbes had plagiarized the idea from his work.¹² Descartes didn’t have a very high regard for the critic (he never refers to Hobbes by name, simply calling him “The Englishman”), and brushed off his critiques, remarking with astonishment, “I was very surprised by the fact that, although the style in which it is written makes its author look clever and learned, he seems to stray from the truth in every single claim which he advances as his own.”¹³ Nonetheless, Hobbes’ strike at the hinge of Descartes’ dualism (the same hinge which

⁹ Clarke, 263.

¹⁰ Clarke, 386.

¹¹ Noel, Malcolm (ed.), *The Clarendon Edition of the Works of Thomas Hobbes, Vol. 6: The Correspondence, Vol. 1: 1622–1659* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 60 n.4.

¹² Noel 1994, xxviii.

¹³ Noel 1994, 57.

perturbed Elisabeth of Bohemia), would spur on Descartes' last great work, *The Passions of the Soul* (1649), wherein bodily action and thought become so intertwined as to be nearly indistinguishable. As one recent biographer put it, here the dualism of Descartes' earlier work survives on in residual form.¹⁴ And the subtle body serves as the hinge, mediating between body and soul – now the explanatory mechanism of memory, imagination, and even thought.

For Thomas Hobbes, Descartes' career-long move toward materialism (he never got all the way there) would have been a protracted approach toward Hobbes' own thoroughgoing materialist philosophy. And indeed this is what we see in their letters. Hobbes cannot understand how Descartes' subtle body idea differs from his own, and as demonstrated by his continual waffling on this issue and ceding of territory from soul to body, we can see Descartes was perturbed by it himself. It all comes down to their basic metaphysics. Descartes was a mind-body dualist to the last. Hobbes was a single-substance reductive materialist. For Descartes the subtle body, or bodily soul, served a mediating function which allowed the two separate substances to interact. For Hobbes this was simply nonsense. As he points out again and again in his *Leviathan* (1651) for Hobbes, to say something is incorporeal is simply to say that it is not, and so Descartes' notion of the incorporeal mind, even the truncated version that survives in his later work, is logically incoherent. Hobbes writes:

To men that understand the significance of these words, *substance* and *incorporeal*, as *incorporeal* is taken, not for subtle body, but for *not body*, they imply a

¹⁴ Clarke 2004, 392.

contradiction, insomuch as to say “an angel or spirit is (in that sense) an incorporeal substance” is to say in effect “there is no angel nor spirit at all.”¹⁵

And so in Hobbes’ materialism, the mind and soul, imagination and reason, are simply the effects of bodies that are subtler than the coarse materiality of our daily experience. Everything in our imagination or memory arises from sensation, and the whole process can be accounted for in a sort of atomic pneumatics. “Imagination,” he declares, “is nothing but *decaying sense*, and is found in men and many other living creatures, as well sleeping as waking.”¹⁶

Hobbes’ brazen reductionism did not go unnoticed, earning him the label of atheist at home and abroad. Probably wisely, he reserved his boldest expressions of his atomic materialism (that God himself was corporeal) for his 1668 Latin edition of *Leviathan*, published in the last years of his life, in a foreign language, in a foreign country.¹⁷ Hobbes’ materialist anti-metaphysical metaphysics as well as his sensation-based theory of mind would have a huge impact on John Locke, through whom the Hobbsean revival of Epicurean atomism would continue with the French materialists of the 18th century. But more immediately, Hobbes’ energetic championing of materialism would spur the pens of critics at home - particularly the British emissaries of renaissance humanism, the Cambridge Platonists. And it is in the 1678 *The True Intellectual System of the Universe, Part One: wherein All the Reason and Philosophy of Atheism is Confuted, and its Impossibility Demonstrated* of Ralph Cudworth, leader of the Cambridge Platonists, that the idea of the subtle body comes to the fore as a central philosophical term.

¹⁵ Hobbes, Thomas. *Leviathan*, ed. Edwin Curley (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994), 270.

¹⁶ Hobbes, 8.

¹⁷ Hobbes, xiii.

Ralph Cudworth's Vehicles of the Soul

Born in 1617 to a wealthy family, Cudworth spent his entire life at Cambridge. First becoming a student there at age 13, he got his Bachelor of Divinity at 27, became a professor at 28, became master of Christ's College at 37, and held that position until he died at the age of 71 in 1688.¹⁸ During this time he wrote prodigiously but published sparingly, leaving only three philosophical works (alongside a number of early theological treatises) to posterity.¹⁹ In his early years at Cambridge he came under the influence of Benjamin Whichcote (1609-83), widely regarded as the father of the Cambridge Platonist school.

Whichcote was principally responsible for resurrecting the renaissance humanism which had briefly flourished in Cambridge a century earlier. Brought to England by Erasmus, Thomas More, and John Fisher, their uniquely Italian blend of Christianity and Plotinian mysticism had a short-lived heyday as Fisher, the then chancellor of Cambridge, established a lectureship in Greek in 1504 from which Erasmus could spread the Christian humanism he had picked up during his years at Ficino's Florentine Academy.²⁰ But larger forces were at work in England during this time, as humanism was only one of many fads pulsing through Europe in this post-scholastic age. As history has shown, the British 16th century belonged to Luther and Calvin, not Erasmus and More. Erasmus left Cambridge in 1514, never to return. Fisher and More were both beheaded by Henry VIII in 1535. Their philosophical movement - with its pronounced Catholic inflection - was driven underground. Its vivifying influence continued,

¹⁸ Luchner, Katharina. *The Presocratics from the Latin Middle Ages to Hermann Diels* (Stuttgart : Franz Steiner Verlag, 2011), 215.

¹⁹ Luchner 2011, 216.

²⁰ Jones, Tod E. *The Cambridge Platonists: A Brief Introduction: With Eight Letters of Dr. Anthony Tuckney and Dr. Benjamin Whichcote* (Lanham, MD: U of America, 2005), 4.

however. Though no longer acceptable in elite theological or philosophical discourse, this first wave of British Platonism formed the *prima materia* of Elizabethan poetry, from Spenser's *Faerie Queene* to John Donne's sonnets.²¹

Whichcote was a sort of Socrates-figure for the Cambridge Platonist movement. He didn't publish anything during his long and distinguished career at Cambridge, and exerted his influence mainly through the weekly lectures he inaugurated after he was installed as provost. All that survives of him are a handful of sermons and aphorisms. Accused of "making too much of reason and too little of divine election," in a time and place all too familiar with the proscription and execution of wayward intellectuals, Whichcote held his ground.²² Though forced to step down from his position in 1650, he was spared the axe, and his influence was allowed to proliferate through the many disciples he cultivated during his time at Cambridge.

Chief among Whichcote's cadre of followers was Ralph Cudworth, "the leading systematic thinker among the Cambridge Platonists,"²³ elsewhere credited with the acuity and philosophical subtlety of Plotinus and the scholastic systematicity of Proclus.²⁴ The 17th century revival of platonic humanism in England, centered around Cudworth, was simultaneous with the rise of the mechanical philosophy, championed on the British side by Thomas Hobbes in his highly influential *Leviathan*. Though the Cambridge Platonists were aligned with the mechanical philosophers in their disdain for scholasticism (Hobbes famously quipped that

²¹ Jones 2005, 5. As for Edmund Spenser's Neoplatonic allegory in, for example, *The Faerie Queene*, see Bieman, Elisabeth. *Plato Baptized: Towards an Interpretation of Spenser's Mimetic Fictions* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988). Also Borris, Kenneth. *Visionary Spenser and the Poetics of Early Modern Platonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

²² Jones 2005, 17.

²³ Jones 2005, 17.

²⁴ Patrides, C. A. *The Cambridge Platonists* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969), 2.

Aristotle was “enemy number one,” something Cudworth would have sympathized with), they differed on the extent to which mechanism could serve as a viable explanatory paradigm.

Cudworth’s *True Intellectual System* is essentially a thousand-page repudiation of Hobbes’ work, which Cudworth depicts as a bastardisation of Epicurean atomism.²⁵ In Cudworth’s reading, Epicureanism had already been soundly refuted in antiquity by numerous thinkers – both pre-emptively by various pre-Socratics and later by the Neoplatonists of late antiquity and the early medieval period. His task, then, was quite simple. First, he establishes the material-mechanistic (i.e. single-substance), atheistic position on its own merits (chapter II), then tears it down, drawing from a rather astounding array of antique sources (chapters III-V). It is chapter V which concerns us here, wherein Cudworth marshalls Platonic and Hellenistic notions of the “subtle body” to argue simultaneously against the anti-corporealists (largely Platonic single-substance idealists) as well as the gross-corporealists (Hobbesean single-substance materialists), in search of a middle ground wherein both mind and body are substantially preserved.

Drawing from Aristotle’s *De Anima*, Cudworth repeatedly translates the term *soma leptomeres* as “a thin and subtle body.”²⁶ Amidst a detailed overview concerning the nature of corporeal and incorporeal existence, Cudworth elucidates the subtle body,

²⁵ Taliaferro, Charles, and Alison J. Teply. *Cambridge Platonist Spirituality* (New York: Paulist, 2004), 22. By comparison, modern editions of *Leviathan* run about 700 pages, though Cudworth is also responding to his larger oeuvre.

²⁶ Cudworth, Ralph, and Mosheim, Johann Lorenz. *The True Intellectual System of the Universe: Wherein All the Reason and Philosophy of Atheism Is Confuted, and Its Impossibility Demonstrated: With a Treatise concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* (London: T. Tegg, 1845. Three Volumes), 252.

For the first instance, drawing the idea from Aristotle’s *De Anima* lib 1, and more likely John Philoponus’ commentary on that work, in which the idea of the subtle body is expanded. See Chapter 2.

It is not impossible, but that the finest and most subtle body that is, might become as gross, hard, heavy, and opaque, as flesh, earth, stones, lead, or iron; and again, that the grossest of these bodies, by motion, and a different contexture of parts, might not only be crystallized, but also become as thin, soft, and fluid as the finest ether. So that there is no specific difference betwixt a thick and thin, a gross and fine, an opaque and pellucid, an hard and soft body, but accidental only; and therefore is there no reason why life and understanding should be thought to belong to the one rather than to the other of them.²⁷

Here Cudworth illustrates a neutral gradient that extends from the grossest bodies (lead, iron) to the most subtle (life, understanding), where there is a conflation of matter and mind such that any sort of reductive move in either direction is inadmissible. This is a rarefied start to his discussion of the subtle body. He quickly grounds it, and gets more specific, now citing Porphyry.

The soul...when it quits this gross earthly body, a more spirituous and subtle body, collected from the spheres (or elements) doth still accompany it...Where Porphyrius addeth, contrary to the sense of Plotinus: “That the soul is never quite naked of all body, but hath always some body or other joined with it suitable and agreeable to its own present disposition (either a purer or impurer one). But that at its first quitting this gross earthly body, the spirituous body, which accompanieth it (as its vehicle), must needs go away fouled and incrassated with the gross vapours and steams thereof, till the soul

²⁷ Cudworth and Mosheim 1845, 255.

afterwards by degrees purging itself, this becometh at length a dry splendour, which hath no misty obscurity, nor casteth any shadow.”²⁸

By this Cudworth ties various other ideas to Aristotle’s “thin and subtle body,” now talking about a spirituous body (from *soma pneumatikos*), as well as the spirit body as vehicle (the *ochema pneuma*). He follows the above quote with more evidence drawn from John Philoponus before going back to Aristotle, now the *Metaphysics*, wherein “there is properly but one sense, and but one sensory; he, by this one sensory, meaning the spirit or subtle airy body, in which the sensitive power doth all of it, through the whole, immediately apprehend all variety of sensibles.”²⁹ To parse the archaisms, the subtle body serves as the seat of all the senses – they are united in it, and it is through the subtle body that they access the soul. This is a doctrine straight out of Aristotle, for whom the spirituous body was centered in the heart, and identified as the *proton organon*, something “so subtle that it approximates the immaterial nature of the soul, and yet it is a body, which, as such, can enter into contact with the sensory world.”³⁰

Cudworth continues the exploration of the subtle body in classical context, now expanding the idea through further engagement with Philoponus,

Nevertheless, the same Philoponus there addeth, that according to these ancients, besides the terrestrial body, and this spirituous and airy body too, there is yet a third kind of body, of a higher rank than either of the former, (peculiarly belonging to such souls

²⁸ Cudworth and Mosheim 1845, 261.

²⁹ Cudworth and Mosheim 1845, 265.

³⁰ Couliano, Ioann. *Eros and Magic in the Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 4. For a more exhaustive treatment of Aristotle’s subtle body, see: Bos, A.P. *The Soul and Its Instrumental Body. A Reinterpretation of Aristotle's Philosophy of Living Nature* (Leiden-Boston 2003: Brill, 2003).

after death, as are purged and cleansed from corporeal affections, lusts and passions) called by them, *soma augoeides*, and *ouranion*, and *aitherion*, &c. A “luciform,” and “celestial,” and “ethereal body.”³¹

Here he outlines a tripartite body, drawing further on Proclus, Hierocles, Virgil, Galen, the Suda (a 10th century Byzantine encyclopedia), and Plethon (the 14th century “Second Plato”) to establish its legitimacy.³² In this view, we are possessed of three bodies, by degrees more rarefied: the terrestrial (our normal human body), the pneumatic (the subtle body), and the luciform or ethereal body, which is coeternal with the soul, and serves as its chariot or vehicle. Whereas the two lower bodies – the terrestrial and subtle – can be sloughed off (the terrestrial at death, and the subtle through purification of the passions), the luciform or astral body is the constant companion of the soul, and the medium by which the soul, as an illocal and incorporeal substance, intermingles with dense and extended material substance.

To tie up Cudworth’s 30-page excursus on the subtle body, he cites Hierocles once more, who, “positively affirmeth this to have been the true cabala, and genuine doctrine of the ancient Pythagoreans, entertained afterwards by Plato.”³³ Invoking a classical Platonic *prisca theologia*, where the subtle body doctrine is imagined as a divine revelation passed down from theologians of high antiquity, Cudworth traces the doctrine ultimately to that first atomist, Moses (identified with one Mochus, mentioned by Iamblichus), who transmitted the doctrine to Pythagoras, and

³¹ Cudworth and Mosheim 1845, 266.

³² Cudworth and Mosheim 1845, 267-271

³³ Cudworth and Mosheim 1845, 276.

hence to Plato and all the rest.³⁴ That is to say, it is not a doctrine derived purely by reason, but in part by revelation.

By the summary given above, it was Cudworth's hope to answer objections to the unextended, incorporeal nature of the soul (objections abundantly present in Hobbes), souls being "in themselves directly immovable, yet were capable of being in sense moved by accident, together with those bodies, respectively, which they are vitally united to."³⁵ In other words, just because something is incorporeal (the soul, for example), it does not necessarily follow that it cannot move or be moved by something corporeal – an argument Cudworth makes here via appeal to authority by citing an overwhelming abundance of ancient thinkers.

So what was Cudworth doing here? First, he was a substance dualist. He believed atomism and the mechanical philosophy to be correct in principle, but only half the story. This is the view he took Moses to have had, and one which was later diluted by Democritus and Leucippus, who created a single-substance materialist permutation of it which found its most robust representatives in Roman Epicureanism. For Cudworth, matter, being inert, requires motion originating from minds. The correct view, according to the *True Intellectual System* is that matter is inert, passive, and subject to the laws of atomistic mechanism, while mind is active, immortal, perceptive, and *sui generis*.³⁶ His use of the subtle body concept is his way of bridging the gap between them.

To summarize, Cudworth establishes three bodies: the terrestrial human body, the pneumatic subtle body, and the luciform vehicle of the soul. The first is an inert, material vessel. The second is a more rarefied median, almost soul, almost body, and the third is the perpetual

³⁴ Cudworth and Mosheim 1845, Chapter 1. See also Luchner 2011, 222.

³⁵ Cudworth and Mosheim 1845, 281.

³⁶ Luchner 2011, 219.

body of the soul, quite almost soul itself, yet not entirely incorporeal. It is by means of the luciform vehicle that the soul is able to reach out and effect change in corporeal phenomena, and it is by means of the subtle body, in which sensory data are assembled, that the soul is able to be affected materially.

Plastick Nature as Ontological Mediator

As we have seen, soul-body interactionism was a hugely problematic issue in the seventeenth century. Hobbes avoids the grand metaphysical hiccup entirely by declaring the soul (a term he rarely used) to be itself just a subtle body. Since the soul is a body, substantially identical to our gross, corporeal body, issues of compatibility simply don't arise. Sensation, emotion, thought – all of these are as physiological and mechanistic as is digestion or the movement of a limb. Descartes struggled with the issue, grounding more and more capacities in the body as time went on. His final answer seems to have been that the pineal gland, surrounded by the animal spirits, received the subtle matter from the sensory organs and transmitted it to the soul.³⁷ Elisabeth of Bohemia was never satisfied with Descartes' answer, and Cartesians continued to battle over the philosophical issues raised by dual substance interactionism for centuries after his death.

Ralph Cudworth was embedded in these arguments. Being no fan of Hobbes' "atheistical" position, Cudworth's own dualist metaphysics necessitated both corporeal and incorporeal substances. Unsatisfied with Descartes' vague relegation of this most subtle of

³⁷ Descartes, Renee. *Passions of the Soul*, trans. Stephen Voss (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1989).

interactions to a specific physiological locus which ambiguously facilitated the interaction between two exclusive substances, Cudworth took a third path. Instead of reducing everything to a material substrate, and instead of shrinking dual-substance interactionism down to “the little gland in the middle of the brain,”³⁸ he blew it up, creating an ontologically distinct subtle body of cosmic proportions.

Cudworth solves the dilemma of dual-substance interactionism through the introduction of a third term: plastic nature, a vital intermediary sphere which inheres not only microcosmically between soul and body, but also macrocosmically between God and matter.³⁹ It is the lowest energy of the soul, an artificial and unconscious substance which acts by “continuous inspiration of divine reason towards purposes determined by God.”⁴⁰

Plastic nature is the substantial third term that allows divine reason to descend into matter, guiding corporeal substance. This short circuits the providential issues both Hobbes and Descartes ran into. As Hobbes humorously and irreverently put it, God, continually harrassed by arranging every detail of the universe, could never truly enjoy the beauty of his own creation.⁴¹ This paradox also reared its head in the interactionism of Descartes. If God is the ultimate cause of creation, then either he “moves every stone,” acting also as every efficient cause, or the entire universe is just a deterministic machine in which natural laws execute themselves. Cudworth’s plastic nature cuts between the two terms, acting as the efficient medium by which causality is carried out in the universe.

³⁸ See Descartes 1989, 37.

³⁹ Gysi, Lydia. *Platonism and Cartesianism in the Philosophy of Ralph Cudworth* (Bern: Herbert Lang Verlag, 1962), 21.

⁴⁰ Gysi 1962, 22.

⁴¹ Gysi 1962, 23

On the level of the microcosm, it is the ontological presence of plastic nature that allows for the interaction of the soul and body. As plastic nature receives the inspiration (read literally as “breathing-in”) of divine reason, and exists in a state of vital union with matter, it can also receive the wholly incorporeal soul and tether it to a body, creating in the process an “accidental life,” where the soul is incarnated and bound to a limited field of action until its material vehicle dies and it is excarnated back into its non-local, incorporeal state, an event that has no real impact on the soul, since its relation to the body is only ever accidental and not substantial – that is, vital and not mechanical.⁴²

And so Cudworth’s somatic hair splitting – his threefold division of bodies: terrestrial, subtle, and luciform, can be seen as a microcosmic subdivision of his larger, cosmic plastic nature. This third term mediates between the incorporeal and corporeal substance just as the subtle body inheres between the luciform (nearly incorporeal) and terrestrial (wholly corporeal) bodies. So there’s this graduation of incorporeality from terrestrial to subtle to luciform to soul.

Plastic Nature answers questions of causality, allowing for the universe to unfold in a dual-substance fashion: mechanistically, yet illuminated by divine reason. It also explains why nature works slowly and imperfectly. Being itself a second-order, created, and unconscious substance, Plastic Nature’s creaturely limitations mean it moves slowly and sometimes makes mistakes.⁴³ It also shields creation from the awesome power of the almighty, which would otherwise crush any created Being that might come into contact with it.

⁴² Gysi 1962, 19.; for more information on the vitalism vs. mechanism paradigm war Cudworth was addressing here, see: Banchetti-Robino, Marina Paola. “Ontological tensions in sixteenth and seventeenth century chemistry: between mechanism and vitalism.” *Foundations of Chemistry* 13 (3):173-186 (2011).

⁴³ Gysi 1962, 22.

But, we might ask, does this really solve the ontological problem? Positing intermediary terms might assuage the fuzzy thinker, but we're still left with the question of how two mutually exclusive substances interact. Cudworth acknowledges the fact that the problematic still remains, and in spite of all the other great things Plastic Nature can help explain, the decisive question about what this "vital union" between soul and body consists of remains "a secret teaching of nature."⁴⁴

Henry More's Subtle Body Scheme

Cudworth's dive into Neoplatonic visions of intermediary vehicles between the body and soul was paralleled in the work of his fellow Cambridge Platonist, Henry More, who explores classical morphologies of the vehicles of the soul in his 1659 *The Immortality of the Soul: so farre forth as it is demonstrable from the Knowledge of Nature and the Light of Reason*. This work, much along the lines of Cudworth's long-awaited *TISU*, is an in-depth critique of Hobbes and a reply to Descartes, with whom More shared an extensive correspondence. But unlike Cudworth, in whose work Hobbes floats around like a spectral Voldemort, ever present, constantly critiqued, but never named; and unlike Descartes who dismissively referred only to "The Englishman," More grants Hobbes the rhetorical courtesy of calling him by name. Over 40 times actually, citing directly from *Leviathan* to critique it.

Here More ties the notion of a "subtill matter," which he identifies with the animal spirits of Descartes to Neoplatonic notions of the vehicles of the soul. Whereas, for Cudworth, the first

⁴⁴ Gysi 1962, 24.

instrument of the soul was the subtle body, the attachment of which was mediated by the cosmic structure of plastic nature, More gets a bit more physiological, where the subtle matter that facilitates things like vision, memory, and emotion, is “the immediate instrument of the Soule in all Vital and Animal functions.”⁴⁵ Within this subtle matter lies the subtlest “coelestial substance,” which is what the highest vehicle of the soul is made out of. This presence of luminous, coelestial matter in even the gross, terrestrial body is what allows the incorporeal soul to combine with the body.

More continues,

I shall make bold to assert, that the Soule may live and act in an *aerial* Vehicle as well as the *aetherial*; and that there are very few that arrive to that high happiness, as to acquire a *Coelestial* Vehicle immediately upon their quitting the terrestrial one: that heavenly Chariot necessarily carrying us in triumph to the greatest happiness the Soule of man is capable of.⁴⁶

Though coelestial matter is implicated in the vital and animal functions of the lowly terrestrial body, the acquisition of a vehicle of pure coelestial matter is not an easy matter, predicated on possession of a “Good and vertuous Soule.” In book III More establishes an astrological, graduating cosmology centered around these vehicles and their abodes. At the bottom of this hierarchy is the terrestrial body, associated with our gross, mechanical, corporeal domain.

⁴⁵ More, Henry. *The Immortality of the Soul, So Farre forth as it is demonstrable from the Knowledge of Nature and the Light of Reason* (London: William Morden Bookseller, 1659), 60.

⁴⁶ More 1659, 262.

For the profoundest pitch of Death is the Descent into the Terrestrial Body in which, besides that we necessarily forget whatever is past, we do for the present lead *a dark and obscure life*, as Plutarch speaks, dragging this weight of Earth along with us, as Prisoners and Malefactors do their heavy shackles in their sordid and seclude confinements. But in our return back from this state, Life is naturally more large to them that are prepared to make good use of that advantage they have of their *Aiery Vehicle*.⁴⁷

However if we fail to make good use of our aiery vehicle while alive, we will be fatally remanded back to our former prison after death – reincarnated in the terrestrial realm.⁴⁸ Here More follows the Socrates of *Phaedo*, echoing the old Orphic saying: the life of the body is the death of the soul.

But for the good souls, now released from their terrestrial shackles, “after many ages change their *Aerial Vehicle* for an *Aetherial one*,”⁴⁹ which is not a death, but a higher ascent into life. The aetherial vehicle, More explains, is the highest vehicle of light, also known as the coelestial. It is also the body of angels.⁵⁰ For the soul in this state, the periods of life are eternal, and possessed of “aetherial sense,” they can even descend into the terrestrial realm without being corrupted.⁵¹

⁴⁷ More 1659, 522.

⁴⁸ For what, precisely, making good use of your vehicle consists of, see More’s ethical philosophy as outlined in his *Enchiridion Ethicum* (1668). See also: Hutton, Sarah. Henry More's Moral Philosophy: Self-Determination and its Limits. *Studia Historii Filozofii* 3(8), 2017. pp. 11-24.; Dolson, Grace Neal. The Ethical System of Henry More. *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 6, No. 6 (Nov., 1897), pp. 593-607.

⁴⁹ More 1659, 522.

⁵⁰ More 1659, 52.

⁵¹ More may have had a taste of this aetherial sense. As Dolson remarks in her 1897 article, “love for the mystical was one of More's most striking characteristics. As so often happens, he united with it a strong tendency toward asceticism, which led him to undergo numerous voluntary privations for the sake of greater self-mastery. Yet, in spite of his fasts and visions, he was a man of sound common-sense.” (Dolson, 1897. p. 595).

The realms to which these different vehicles correspond are astrological. The terrestrial vehicle, of course, is at home only here on earth. The aerial vehicle, which is the subtle body most immediately accessible to us even in our destitute, incarnated predicament, is also the body of the *daimones*, who occupy the spheres between the moon and Saturn. Those ensouled in purely aetherial or coelestial vehicles have the spheres beyond Saturn as their natural abode. As More established before, the higher vehicles have the capacity to descend into the lower realms.⁵²

The importance of these astrological correspondences is pointed out in Chapter 18 where More addresses *The Conflagration*, that is, the destruction of the world. If the soul is truly immortal, the implication is that the universe, as well, must be everlasting. Citing Zeno, Cleanthes, Chrysippus, Seneca, Heraclitus, Epicurus, Cicero, Pliny, Aristocles, Numenius, “and sundry others,” More references an ancient eschatology wherein the cosmos will be consumed by fire.⁵³ While bowing to the prophecy, More qualifies it with some updated science. Fire, as Descartes had pointed out a few decades earlier, was itself only the motion of particles of matter. With this understanding in mind, “this hideous noise therefore of the *Conflagration* of the World must be refrain'd to the firing of the *Earth* onely...for there is nothing else combustible in the Universe but the *Earth*, and other *Planets*, and what Vapours and Exhalations arise from them.”⁵⁴ In this reading, the conflagration will extend from the earth to the planets, burning up with it all terrestrial and aerial bodies. Those ensouled in aetherial vehicles however, occupying the rarefied space beyond Saturn, will be free to remain in their blissful, immortal state while the

⁵² More 1659, 543-544.

⁵³ More 1659, 520.

⁵⁴ More 1659, 527.

lower souls either enter an immortal slumber or are reincarnated after the fire burns out and its smoke brings with it a life-restoring rain to the earth.⁵⁵

The Philosophical Romance of Joseph Glanvill

This sort of complex subtle body scheme is carried forward in the writing of Joseph Glanvill, an Oxford-educated Anglican clergyman honorifically lumped in with the Cambridge Platonists on account of his closeness to Henry More, his long-time correspondent and editor of some of his work. Inspired by the Platonic theology he found in More, Glanvill wrote his own book on the immortality and pre-existence of the soul in 1662: *Lux Orientalis; or, An Enquiry into the Opinion of the Eastern Sages Concerning the Praeexistence of Souls*. Following More's earlier defense of the notion of a pre-existing soul, Glanvill pronounces the era's boldest statement of the idea.

God being infinitely good, and that to his Creatures, and therefore doing always what is best for them, methinks it roundly follows that our souls lived and 'njoy'd themselves of old before they came into these bodies. For since they were capable of living and that in a much better and happier state long before they descended into this region of death and misery; and since that condition of life and self-enjoyment would have been better, than absolute non-being; may we not safely conclude from a due consideration of the divine goodness, that it was so?⁵⁶

⁵⁵ More 1659, 527-537.

⁵⁶ Givens 2011, 168-169.

Here we can see a similar cosmos to that of More, echoes of Plato. The soul pre-existed its current, incarnated state, living in a condition of happiness and self-enjoyment, only to be sunk into our region of death and misery. This conclusion is a natural extension of the notion of God's goodness. Since it's better to be than not to be, it follows that God, being good, engenders immortal souls at the beginning of creation which persist in a blessed state until, through some fault of their own, they descend into the lower realms, from which they can ascend through moral goodness.

It is in the end of his *Lux Orientalis* that Glanvill gets to his elucidation of the structure and functions of the various subtle bodies in what he refers to as “this *Philosophical Romance*, or *History*; the Reader is at his choice to call it which he pleaseth.”⁵⁷ Embracing the mytho-philosophical fusion we found in Henry More's treatment, Glanvill's tale begins in chapter 13, subtitled, “the souls of men are capable of living in other bodies besides Terrestrial; And never act but in some body or other.”⁵⁸ He continues,

For when I consider how deeply in this state we are immersed in the *body*, I can methinks scarce imagin, that presently upon the quitting on't, we shall be stript of all *corporeity*; for this would be such a *jump* as is seldom or never made in *nature*; since by almost all instances that come under our observation 'tis manifest, that the useth to act by due and orderly *gradations*, and takes no *precipitous leaps* from one *extream* to another.

⁵⁷ Glanvill, Joseph. *Two Choice and Useful Treatises: The One Lux Orientalis or an Enquiry into the Opinion of the Eastern Sages Concerning the Praeexistence of Souls. Being a Key to unlock the Grand Mysteries of Providence. In Relation to Mans Sin and Misery. The Other, A Discourse of Truth, By the late Reverend Dr: Rust Lord Bishop of Dromore in Ireland. With Annotations on them both* (London: Exeter Exchange in the Strand, 1682), 124.

⁵⁸ Glanvill 1682, 102.

‘Tis very probable therefore, that in our immediately next state we shall have another *vehicle*. And then, considering that our Souls are *immediately united* to a more *tenuious* and *subtile* body here, than this gross outside; ‘Tis methinks a good presumption, that we shall not be stript and divested of our *inward Stole* also, when we leave this *dull Earth* behind us.⁵⁹

For Glanvill, the notion that death brings with it total excarnation is absurd, as it goes against everything else we see in nature – that is, that things happen by degrees. Following this logic, we must assume our souls are tethered to a more “tenuious and subtile body,” which he also identifies with our “inward Stole.” And so the death of the Terrestrial body is merely a freeing of the soul, disembarking from gross corporeality aboard the vehicle of the subtle body.

Further, Glanvill declares, the noblest faculties and operations of the soul are “help’d on by somewhat that is *corporeal*, and that it employeth the bodily *Spirits* in its sublimest *exercises*.” From this it follows, “[the soul] always useth some body or other, and never acts without one.”⁶⁰ Since sensation is good, “we cannot conceive a *Soul* to *live* or *act* that is *insensible*,” and since sense exists only in union with matter, we are forced to admit that a soul without a body is “inert and silent.”⁶¹ But Glanvill pulls back from the edge here, saying his attack on the idea of totally disincarnate souls isn’t an attack on the incorporeality of the soul itself. He simply states that souls in the totally disincarnate state are so far from us, experientially speaking, that “we are very incompetent Judges...they being a sort of *Spirits*

⁵⁹ Glanvill 1682, 103.

⁶⁰ Glanvill 1682, 103.

⁶¹ Glanvill 1682, 103.

specifically distinct from our order: and therefore their *faculties* and *operations* are of a very *diverse* consideration from *ours*.”⁶²

Glanvill lays out his subtle body scheme, clearly inspired by Henry More’s, in chapter 14, “A Philosophical Hypothesis of the Souls Praeexistence.” Beginning with a characteristically Cambridge Platonist optimistic anthropogenesis, “The *Eternal* and *Almighty Goodness*, the blessed *Spring* and *root* of *all things*, made all his *creatures*, in the *best*, *happiest*, and most *perfect* condition,” Glanville continues with a story of the Soul’s incarnation and the accretion of grosser bodies.⁶³

First the soul is united to the “most *subtile* and *aethereal matter*,” which forms into a “*passive* and *easie body*” that is wholly subservient to the judgement of the Soul. This body is outfitted with senses, but they are of such perfect resonance with divine reason that they only present occasions for divine love and contemplation. “Thus then did we at first live and act in a *pure* and *aethereal* body; and consequently in a place of *light* and *blessedness*.” This paradisiacal state, Glanvill speculates, is located either in the sun or beyond Saturn, “that vast *Orb* of *Splendor* and *brightness*, though it may be ‘tis’ more probable, that those *immense* tracts of *pure* and *quiet aether* that are above *Saturn*, are the joyous place of our ancient *celestial* abode.”⁶⁴ The location, Glanvill specifies, is a topic of “lubricous uncertainty,” and so will remain a matter of some speculation. The morphology of the tale, however, is clearly following the model set out in More’s *The Immortality of the Soul*.

Persisting in this state for “long tracts of *duration*,” the soul, imperfect and finite as it is, is slowly encroached on by the lower operations of its aetherial vehicle. Slacking in its pursuit of

⁶² Glanvill 1682, 104.

⁶³ Glanvill 1682, 115.

⁶⁴ Glanvill 1682, 114.

immaterial objects, its lower portions, which as we saw above were originally wholly subsumed to the guidance of the soul, begin tending towards corporeity. As Glanvill puts it here, “Thus is *Eve* brought forth, while *Adam* sleepeth. The *lower life*, that of the body is now considerably *awakened*, and the *operations* of the *higher*, proportionably abated.”⁶⁵

The Serpent and Eve (corporeality) tempt Adam (the soul) with the forbidden fruit, which Glanvill identifies as sensual pleasure. At this crucial juncture, the lower faculties are awakened while the higher faculties are lulled into sleep, handing the reins of control over to the body. Upon this changing of the guard, “the soul contracts a less pure body...accomodate to *sensitive operations*; and thus we fall from the highest *Paradise* the blissful regions of *life and glory*, and become Inhabitants of the *Air*.”⁶⁶ Now in our aerial state, we still maintain some of our previous aetherial body, but only in a truncated form. Glanvill is clear that the higher operations of the soul and more rarefied bodies never entirely cease, but live on if only in a limited manner, as vestigial organs of the lower bodies.

As we descend into our aerial state, we can be quickly redeemed into the beatific aetherial body if only we turn our gaze away from the lower faculties back to the incorporeal realm. In this state “our bodies are more or less *pure*...proportionally to the degrees of our *apostacy*.” So we’re not entirely miserable here (in fact, as compared with our current terrestrial incarnation, to be in an aerial body is to be quite happy indeed), but exist at a turning point where we can either, with the help of Divine Spirit, resume our aetherial body by turning away from corporeality, or descend into the terrestrial realm through unrestrained “relish of its *joys and pleasures*.”⁶⁷ It is at this point that subtle bodies just won’t do the trick anymore.

⁶⁵ Glanvill 1682, 115.

⁶⁶ Glanvill 1682, 118.

⁶⁷ Glanvill 1682, 120.

The *higher powers* of the Soul being almost quite laid *asleep* and *consopited*, and the *sensitive* also by long and tedious exercises being much tired, and abated in their vigour, the *plastick faculties* begin now fully to *awaken*; so that a body of *thin* and *subtile air* will not suffice its now so highly exalted *energy*, no more than the *subtile Æther* can suffice us *terrestrial animals* for *respiration*; wherefore the *aereal congruity* of life expires also, and thus are we ready for an *earthly body*.⁶⁸

Terrestrial incarnation takes place gradually – first the “subtile aery vehicle” sympathizes with the higher, vaporous parts of the earth, forming an initial, denser airy body out of the atmosphere. This transitional body is what immediately interfaces with the fleshy body, still perceptible in our incarnated state “to all the functions of life, as is palpable in *respiration*.”⁶⁹

Once fully incarnated, our only way back up the chain is through mortification of the flesh. “Mortifie and subdue the body, conquer self-will, unruly appetites, and disorderly passions, and so in some measure...awaken the higher life...upwards to vertue and divine love; which...carry the Soul, when dismiss from this prison, to its old *celestial abode*.”⁷⁰ But it is only very rarely that one can ascend directly from the terrestrial to the aetherial vehicle. Usually it’s a gradual process of purification accompanied by the sloughing off of materiality, a reverse of the narrative of incarnation Glanvill just elucidated.

Following a brief excursus on the earth as a hollow sphere filled with fiery hell-caverns where unpurified souls go after quitting their terrestrial vestments, Glanvill finishes his

⁶⁸ Glanvill 1682, 121.

⁶⁹ Glanvill 1682, 122.

⁷⁰ Glanvill 1682, 123.

treatment, echoing More once again, with eschatological speculation, closing with a reaffirmation of the immortality of the soul, which will persist whether the earth is subsumed in a conflagration or not.

What we see in Glanvill is a very close re-reading of Henry More and morphologically identical reproduction of his scheme. They both continue the renaissance reading of Cudworth, a revivification of the Neoplatonic subtle body schemes of late antiquity (the subject of the next chapter), employing them to champion an ontology of dual-substance interactionism facilitated by mediating subtle bodies. We now turn to our final thinker from the broadly-construed Cambridge Platonist milieu, Anne Conway, who takes the subtle body in a novel direction.

Anne Conway's Spiritual Monism

Henry More's intellectual influence, as we can see in Joseph Glanvill, extended well beyond his university surround. A constant and beloved member of his circle was Lady Anne Conway, a personal student of More's whom he referred to as his "heroine pupil." Upon reading one of More's early poems on the pre-existence of the soul, Conway sent him a letter in 1652 pressing him in a manner remarkably similar to the critique Elisabeth of Bohemia had levelled at Descartes a decade earlier, notably asking "whether the *Soul* could enjoy the *Matter* without being *Clothed* in Corporeity; and if it could not, how it can be the *Fall* of the *Soul* that makes it Assume a *Body*?"⁷¹ Placed within More's more mytho-poetic philosophical framework, Conway is asking the very same question we've heard before: how, really, do soul and body

⁷¹ Givens 2011, 158.

interact? The Conway-More relationship and correspondence would continue for the next three decades, during which she would produce her own work, *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, published by Henry More after her death.

Conway begins her book with the cosmic optimism of the Cambridge Platonists. “God is spirit, light, and life, infinitely wise, good, just, strong, allknowing, all-present, all-powerful, the creator and maker of all things visible and invisible.”⁷² Following Glanvill’s logic of pre-existence, all God’s creatures are immortal and were engendered simultaneously with the creation of the world, which sprung naturally from God’s divine goodness and wisdom. So far so good.

In book seven Conway addresses the subtle body, and it here that she departs wildly from the dualistic schemes of the Platonists, championing her own form of spiritual monism. She begins, “Every body can change into a spirit and every spirit into a body because the distinction between body and spirit is only one of mode, not essence.”⁷³ Through her book Conway paints a picture of a tripartite cosmos divided between a God (infinitely good and wholly incorporeal), Christ as cosmological mediator, and Creation, which is a uniform substance. Since all of creation is one, contra Descartes, More, and Cudworth, there is no division within it between corporeal and incorporeal things.

This creation is one entity or substance in respect to its nature or essence...it only varies according to its modes of existence, one of which is corporeality. There are many

⁷² Conway, Anne. *The Principles of the Most Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, ed. Allison P. Coudert and Taylor Corse (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 9

⁷³ Conway 1996, 41.

degrees of this so that any thing can approach or recede more or less from the condition of a body or spirit.⁷⁴

In a sense this harkens back to the vital union between body and spirit outlined by Henry More or the interactionism of Cudworth, wherein body and soul are united “vitally and not mechanically.” On the other hand, Conway is going beyond either of them. For her, it is not an interaction, and there is no union going on. Corporeality and spirituality are simply two modalities of a substance that can take on either state through processes of condensation and rarefaction.

Conway continues, comparing the interface of body and spirit to the heating of iron.

Just as iron when it is tempered remains impenetrable, I concede that it remains impenetrable by any other equally coarse body. But it can be penetrated and is penetrated by a more subtle body, namely, by fire, which enters it and penetrates all its parts. It thus becomes soft, and if the fire is strong, it completely liquefies.⁷⁵

Her message here is that there is no substantial difference between mind and body – the perception of difference stems from confusing alternations of modality (e.g. heating and cooling) of a single substance for two different substances. As she remarks elsewhere, it is like confusing ice and water for two substantially different things. She takes her monism to its logical

⁷⁴ Conway 1996, 42.

⁷⁵ Conway 1996, 50.

conclusion. “Thus, everything...changes into something else, just as we see water change into stone, stones into earth, earth into trees, and trees into animals or living creatures.”⁷⁶

In a sense, Conway follows Hobbes’ way out of the dual substance dilemma – reducing the dichotomy to an ontological monism. But whereas Hobbes reduced the spiritual to the material, Conway goes in the other direction, reconfiguring material reality as simply a condensation of a spiritual substrate. The subtle body, in this view, is simply the rarefied spiritual potential that inheres in even the grossest bodies, as all creation, in her optimistic eschatology, will eventually ascend infinitely toward God in a state of subtle mystical henosis.⁷⁷

Why, Conway asks, if body and spirit really are two different substances, would the spirit be drawn to the body in the first place? To her this simply makes no sense, as “love necessarily occurs because of the similarity or affinity between natures.”⁷⁸ And since we can see empirically that spirits are in fact drawn to bodies, it stands to reason that there must be deep resonance between them. Taking us through all of the conventional body-spirit binaries (extended/nonextended, local/illocal, complex/unitary, penetrable/impenetrable), Conway shows that, were this sort of radical dualism the case, body and mind, logically speaking, could never really have anything to do with one another. Here she echoes Hobbes perfectly – two mutually exclusive substances simply cannot interact! But she flips him on his head, declaring,

Nor is there any difference between body and spirit (if body is taken not in their sense, who maintain that it is merely a dead thing lacking life and the capacity for life, but in a proper sense, as an excellent creature of God, having life and sensation, which

⁷⁶ Conway 1996, 26.

⁷⁷ Conway 1996, 27.

⁷⁸ Conway 1996, 48.

belong to it either actually or potentially), except that body is the grosser part and the spirit the more subtle.⁷⁹

The body is an excellent creature of God, having life and sensation? This is a huge departure from the Orphic body-as-tomb we've seen in Cudworth, More, and Glanvill. By now it is clear Conway had left the Platonism of her mentor behind – and this did cause some trouble between them in the last years of her life. But it was Henry More who introduced her to the philosophy that would shape her monism and answer the question she posed to him about dual substance interactionism. The philosophical source of Conway's spiritual monism was Kabbalah.

Cambridge Kabbalah

In 1670 the itinerant Flemish alchemist and Kabbalist Francis Mercury van Helmont (1614-1699) sailed to England on the invitation of Henry More, who sought to further his understanding of the Kabbalah, an exciting philosophy he viewed along the lines of Cudworth's *prisca theologia* as an ancient revelation – really a corrupt form of Pythagoreanism – that contained hidden truths occluded by the later Christian tradition.⁸⁰ Lady Conway also met with him while he was in town, providing her with her first taste of the “language of the learned Jews.”⁸¹ The impact of Van Helmont's Kabbalistic learning would be far-reaching, bolstering the optimistic Platonic cosmology More and Cudworth had fashioned, and introducing More to a tripartite biblical hermeneutics wherein the contents of the bible could be read literally, morally,

⁷⁹ Conway 1996, 51.

⁸⁰ Hutton, Sarah. *Anne Conway: A Woman Philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 163.

⁸¹ Hutton 2004, 160.

or “Cabbalistically.”⁸² For Conway the influence would extend beyond the academic as she, along with Van Helmont, would later convert to Quakerism and pioneer a Kabbalistic strand of the faith that would be castigated as a heresy in the Keithian Controversy of the 1690’s.⁸³

Henry More embraced Van Helmont’s Kabbalah, even going to far as to join his friend Christian Knorr von Rosenroth (1636-1689) in compiling and publishing his *Kabbala Denudata* (1684), a Latin translation of significant portions of the *Zohar*, the chief text of Jewish Kabbalah. As More remarked, “these notions of the Cabbalists” are “as sweet and pleasing...as new milk to any Kittin.”⁸⁴ The sweetness of Kabbala lay in its quite nearly Neoplatonic emphasis on the essential goodness and perfectibility of humanity, as well as its vision of human life as paideutic or instructive rather than punitive.⁸⁵ But More had his limit. He was particularly vexed over the materialistic implications of the Lurian cosmogenesis, *tsim-tsum*, wherein a concentration and contraction of divine nature initiates creation.⁸⁶ In the Lurian narrative, God withdraws from himself to give room for the creation of the cosmos. Traces of God are concentrated to become the image of the primordial man, Adam Kadmon. Particles of the divine light radiate out from Adam, but the vessels meant to hold the light shatter, plummeting down to the earth. The purest sparks ascend to heaven while the others fall into material bodies.⁸⁷ To More, this cosmology only makes sense if God is a corporeal being, and the notion of God’s corporeality, as the Cambridge Platonists had pointed out in Hobbes, is paramount to atheism.

⁸² Givens 2011, 164.

⁸³ Coudert, Allison P. *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the 17th Century: The Life and Thought of Francis Mercury Van Helmont, 1614-1698* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 242.

⁸⁴ Cited in Hutton 202.

⁸⁵ Givens 2011, 163. The Lurianic Kabbalah to which More and Conway were introduced was, in fact, heavily Neoplatonized, suffused with Plotinian strands from commentators like Israel Sarug Ayim and Chaim Vital. See Hutton 2004, 165.

⁸⁶ Hutton 2004, 163.

⁸⁷ Givens 2011, 163.

Conway, however, didn't see it this way, and despite More's efforts to keep his student within the Platonic fold, he could never convince her of his view.⁸⁸ The spiritual monism of Conway's work, though stemming from the interactionism of the Cambridge Platonists, goes beyond it ontologically to a vision of all creation as a single, spiritual substance, persisting in various states of condensation and rarefaction ultimately sourced in divine goodness to which it will eventually return. For Conway, the subtle body exists not as an ontological mediator, but simply as any body in a more spiritual mode.

Arguing with Machines

The Cambridge Platonists lived and wrote in a time of great upheaval, when the Aristotelian cosmos, which had dominated intellectual life from Bologna to Cambridge for four centuries, was being assailed from every side. As we have seen, it was the Platonic current, stemming from the Medici translation projects of the fifteenth century, that took root at Cambridge. But just as prevalent all over Europe was the revived Epicureanism sourced in the recently rediscovered *De Rerum Natura* of Lucretius, that gave rise to a new atomic metaphysics.⁸⁹ And both of these movements transpired amidst the *Pyrrhonian Crisis* based on the sixteenth century rediscovery of the classical Skepticism of Sextus Empiricus, whose influence extended from Pico della Mirandola to the *Essais* of Michel de Montaigne.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ Coudert, Allison. A Cambridge Platonist's Kabbalist Nightmare. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 36, No. 4 (Oct. - Dec., 1975), 651.

⁸⁹ For a quite readable and fun history, see: Greenblatt, Stephen. *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 2011.

⁹⁰ McEvelley, Thomas C. *Sculpture in the Age of Doubt* (New York: Allworth Press, 1999), 10.

By the early seventeenth century, the hunt was on for a new metaphysic to replace the outdated Aristotelian natural philosophy which had proven scientifically bankrupt in light of the skeptical crisis, Copernican revolution, Reformation, and Italian Renaissance of Platonic and Hermetic philosophies. The ethical and political dimensions of Aristotelian thought were also under fire following the unprecedented destruction brought on by the European Wars of Religion, wherein major squabbles over minor points of doctrine left millions dead over the course of a century and a half. Not only was a new science needed, but a new politics as well.

It was out of this milieu that the new Critical Philosophy of Descartes was born – a blend of Pyrrhonian skepticism (his *First Meditation*) combined with a new mechanical atomic philosophy stemming from a dual-substance interactionism established logically from the *cogito* (his *Second Meditation*).⁹¹ In England, the new science took off with the work of Francis Bacon, in whose *Novum Organum* (1620) an empiricist transmutation of the skeptical philosophy, based solely on sense experience and inductive reasoning, was taken as the foundation.⁹² Thomas Hobbes followed both of these thinkers, constructing a more or less coherent philosophical system based on a single-substance atoms-and-void metaphysics which supported a politics wherein rational, self-interested citizens peacefully abided in a pluralistic society predicated on a split between personal religious faith (*fides*) and public displays of religiosity (*confessio*), wherein God was reimagined as the state itself – the only surefire protection against the sort of

⁹¹ McEvelley 1999, 15.

⁹² The Baconian empirical reduction, it should be noted, was put forward purely as a methodological practicality, not an epistemological dogma. Bacon himself was radically open to altered states of mind and reality, writing extensively about what he termed *divination naturalis* or “natural divination,” which, he occurs when, “the mind, when it is withdrawn and collected into itself, and not diffused into the organs of the body, hath some extent and latitude of pernoctation, which therefore appeareth most in sleep, in exstasies, and near death, and more rarely in waking apprehensions.” (cited Kripal, Jeffrey J. *The Flip: Epiphanies of Mind and the Future of Knowledge* (New York, NY: Bellevue Literary Press, 2019).

interdenominational warfare that had destroyed Europe over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁹³ Hobbes' contemporary, Henry Power, excitedly expressed the potential of the newly born mechanical philosophies of the era:

These are the days that must lay a new Foundation of a more magnificent Philosophy, never to be overthrown, that will Empirically and Sensibly canvass the Phaenomena of Nature, deducing the Causes of things from such Originals in Nature as we observe are producible by Art, and the infallible demonstration of Mechanics: and certainly, this is the way, and no other, to build a true and permanent Philosophy.... And to speak yet more close to the point, I think it is no Rhetorication to say That all things are Artificial, for Nature it self is nothing else but the Art of God. Then, certainly, to find the various turnings and mysterious process of this divine Art, in the management of this great machine of the World, must needs be the proper Office and onely the Experimental and Mechanical Philosopher.⁹⁴

Over the course of the seventeenth century the logical consequences of this new mechanical metaphysic became the subject of heated debates. Descartes perpetually shied away from reducing his philosophy to a strict mechanical materialism because he understood the ethical, and we might say existential consequences that came along with it. Hobbes, however, went there boldly. Since, as Hobbes has it, all thoughts originate in sensation, and all sensation is

⁹³ Important as a general theme in the history of religions, extending to Locke (personal vs. public), Rousseau (religion of the person vs. religion of the citizen), Hume (historical vs. natural religion), and Kant (historical vs. rational faith)

⁹⁴ Quoted in White, Carol Wayne. *The Legacy of Anne Conway (1631-1679): Reverberations from a Mystical Naturalism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), 41.

mechanical, we can trace all our thoughts and decisions back to antecedent physical motions.⁹⁵ In Hobbsean materialism, all that *really* exists is body.⁹⁶ Free will is an illusion, the immortal soul is an internally incoherent fantasy, and God is nothing more than the collective material manifestation of the state.

As we have seen, Descartes and Hobbes loom large in the work of the Cambridge Platonists. And while it was a British-inflected, Italian Neoplatonism around which the school was loosely constellated, it was Hobbes' unrestrained materialism that provided polemical fire and dogmatic direction to their work. "Whether by implication or by direct attack, the Cambridge Platonists treated Hobbes as the opponent *sine qua non*."⁹⁷ But Hobbes was no dummy. He knew precisely where his materialism led, and treads its path unforgivingly throughout his *Leviathan*. To Hobbes, the ethical imperatives of the era – the search for a new science and a new hermeneutic, neither of which were disposed to the factionalisms of their contemporary Christianities – trumped the dire existential implications of any reductive materialism.

The Cambridge Platonists had a profoundly dark view Hobbesean materialism, and "sought a *modus vivendi* between the extremes of sectarian controversy on the one hand and the dangers of atheism on the other."⁹⁸ Henry More lucidly expresses the many and various problems he had with the reductive tendency of the new mechanical philosophy,

⁹⁵ White 2008, 41.

⁹⁶ Mintz, Samuel. *The Hunting of Leviathan: Seventeenth-century Reactions to the Materialism and Moral Philosophy of Thomas Hobbes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 63.

⁹⁷ Mintz 2010, 80.

⁹⁸ Mintz 2010, 80.

That it is impossible there should be any God, or Soul, or Angel, Good or Bad; or any Immortality, or Life to come. That there is no Religion, no Piety nor Impiety, no Virtue nor Vice, Justice nor Injustice, but what it pleases him that has the longest sword to call so. That there is no Freedom of the Will, nor consequently any rational remorse of Conscience in any Being whatsoever, but that all that is, is nothing but Matter and Corporeal Motion; and that therefore every trace of man's life is as necessary as the tracts of Lightning, and the falling of Thunder, the blind impetus of the Matter breaking through or being stopt everywhere, with as certain and determinate necessity as the course of a Torrent after mighty storms and showers of Rain.⁹⁹

To More, total moral relativism is the inevitable conclusion of the mechanical philosophy. Rather than the self-interested communion of souls depicted in *Leviathan*, More sees instead anarchy that immediately cedes to "him that has the longest sword." Cudworth echoes More, critiquing his contemporary atomists who,

undertook to defend brute animals to be nothing else but machines; but then supposed that there was nothing at all of cogitation in them, and consequently nothing of true animality or life, no more than is in an artificial automaton, as a wooden eagle, or the like: nevertheless, this was justly thought to be a paradox enough. But that cogitation itself should be local motion, and men nothing but machines, this is such a paradox, as none but either a stupid and besotted, or else an enthusiastic, bigotal, or fanatic Atheist

⁹⁹ Mintz 2010, 84.

could possibly give entertainment to. Nor are such men as these fit to be disputed with any more than a machine is.¹⁰⁰

To suppose that animals have no vitality or cogitation in them, that they are simple lifeless artifices is paradox enough. But, “us too?,” Cudworth asks. Are we nothing more than machines? To the Cambridge Platonists, *everything* hinges on this question. If we are simply automata, then,

there is no such thing as happiness at all in nature; because it is certain, that without consciousness or understanding nothing can be happy (since it could not have any fruition of itself), and if no understanding Being can be happy neither, then must the conclusion needs be that...“Happiness is a mere chimera,” a fantastic notion or fiction of men's minds; a thing which hath no existence in nature.¹⁰¹

In the light of these passages we can see that the subtle bodies of the Cambridge Platonists, far from being some scholastic trivia, actually address a core philosophical question, we might say *the* core philosophical question on which everything depends. Is there a part of us that transcends our material-causal conditions? And if so, what does it look like?

In distinction to Hobbsean reductive materialism wherein humans are machines, and as an express rejection of the normative Calvinistic model of humans as dejected souls whose salvation is subject to an arbitrarily apportioned divine election, the Cambridge Platonists, each

¹⁰⁰ Cudworth, Ralph, and Johann Lorenz Mosheim. Vol. III, 418.

¹⁰¹ Cudworth, Ralph, and Johann Lorenz Mosheim. Vol. III, 418.

in his or her own way, paint a picture of a holistic cosmos, where the human, even in its fully embodied state, is tethered to a divine goodness which it has the capacity to move away from or return to through its own free will. Cudworth fashions this tether through his plastic nature, microcosmically manifesting as the vehicles of the soul – the subtle and luciform bodies. Anne Conway enacts a Kabbalistic inversion of the mechanists, where everything is body, but the body is inspirited. “Nature is not simply an organic body like a clock, which has no vital principle of motion in it; but it is a living body which has life and perception, which are much more exalted than a mere mechanism or a mechanical motion.”¹⁰² And Henry More and Joseph Glanvill elaborate whole mythologies – “philosophical romances” – that cosmically contextualize the soul in a beneficent cosmos of eternal, aetherial luminosity.

¹⁰² Quoted from White 2008, 39.

Chapter Two

Vehicles of the Soul from Plato to Philoponus

*Philosophy is united with the art of sacred things
since this art is concerned with the purification of the luminous body,
and if you separate philosophical thinking from this art,
you will find that it no longer has the same power.*
-- Hierocles

*Measureless seas and stars,
Iamblichus' light,
the souls ascending,
Sparks like a partridge covey,
Like the 'ciocco' brand struck in the game,
'Et omniformis':
-- Ezra Pound*

The compound Cudworth first translates as “thin and subtle body,” *soma leptomeres*, is drawn from Aristotle’s *De Anima* I.5, wherein Aristotle summarizes the many and various views of his philosophical predecessors on the soul before putting forward his own. Here he says, “[There are] those who maintain that soul is a subtle kind of body (*soma ti leptomeres*),”¹⁰³ and a bit further down the page, “[Some take the soul] to be the subtlest (*leptomerestaton*) and most nearly incorporeal (*asomatotaton*) of all kinds of body.” He’s casting a wide net in this passage, critiquing both Democritus’ atomism as well as the substrate monism of Heraclitus, who declares, “Soul is the vaporization out of which everything else is composed; moreover it is the

¹⁰³ Aristotle. *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Barnes, Jonathan (ed.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984) 1429. (*De Anima* I.5 409a 34)

least corporeal of things and is in ceaseless flux.”¹⁰⁴ Aristotle frames the substrate monisms of the presocratics as simplistic models of rarefaction and condensation, and devotes the rest of book I to discrediting them. He puts forward his own theory of the soul throughout the rest of *De Anima*, centered around the doctrine of the *pneuma*, a warm, airy substance that serves as the substrate of the sensitive and imaginative soul.

This apparatus is composed of the same substance – the spirit (*pneuma*) – of which the stars are made and performs the function of primary instrument (*proton organon*) of the soul in its relation to the body. Such a mechanism furnishes the conditions necessary to resolve the contradiction between the corporeal and the incorporeal: it is so subtle that it approximates the immaterial nature of the soul, and yet it is a body which, as such, can enter into contact with the sensory world.¹⁰⁵

The *pneuma* has a long pre-Aristotelian history in Greek medicine which has been sufficiently reviewed elsewhere.¹⁰⁶ After Aristotle it becomes a central metaphysical tenet of Stoicism, which is based around a complex pneumatological anthropology,¹⁰⁷ under which it enjoys great cultural cache before being reabsorbed into Roman medicine in the first century C.E., where a school of “pneumatic physicians” springs up under emperor Trajan, followed closely by the great medical systematizer Galen.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁴ Heraclitus. *Heraclitus: The Complete Fragments Translation and Commentary and The Greek text.* trans. William Harris Fragment 43. <http://community.middlebury.edu/~harris/Philosophy/heraclitus.pdf>

¹⁰⁵ Coulianou 1987, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Coulianou 1987, ch. 1.

¹⁰⁷ See: See Hankinson, R.J. "Stoicism and Medicine." from Inwood, Brad (ed.). *The Cambridge Companion to The Stoics* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 295-309.

¹⁰⁸ Coulianou 1987, 5.

Galen (129-200 C.E.) was a physician-philosopher with a dual heritage. As a physician, he synthesized the doctrines of the rationalist and empiricist schools of medicine.¹⁰⁹ As a philosopher, he combined the thought of Hippocrates and Plato.¹¹⁰ As such he viewed himself as very much an in-between character, who, in the spirit of middle Platonism, derived speculative doctrines from an eclectic array of sources. Following Hippocrates and the rationalists, he was heir to the pneumatological discourse popular amongst the Stoics (with whom the rationalist school was aligned), deriving ultimately from Hippocrates and the Sicilian school, and elaborated by Aristotle. From Plato he inherited notions concerning the immortality and transmigration of the soul. It is in Galen that we find the clearest and earliest juxtaposition of these two views, the Aristotelian/Stoic and the Platonic.

And if we must speak of the substance of the soul, we must say one of two things: we must say either that it is this, as it were, luciform and ethereal body [*augoeides te kai aitherodes soma*], a view to which the Stoics and Aristotle are carried in spite of themselves, as the logical consequence (of their teachings) or that it is (itself) an incorporeal substance and this body is its first vehicle [*ochema*], by means of which it establishes partnership with other bodies.¹¹¹

Up to Galen, the Aristotelian *pneuma* was conceived of as a quasi-material element in all bodies (not just human) transmitted through procreation. For the Stoic pneumatologists, there was no

¹⁰⁹ Galen. *Three Treatises on the Nature of Science* (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub., 1985).

¹¹⁰ Galen. *On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*, Phillip De Lacy (trans.) (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1981).

¹¹¹ Quoted in: Bos, A.P. *The Soul and its Instrumental Body: A Reinterpretation of Aristotle's Philosophy of Living Nature* (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 282.

afterlife as such, as the *pneuma* dispersed upon bodily death. It is significant here that Galen ties this pneumatic body to another conception – the platonic *ochema*, or vehicle, which is the quasi-immaterial medium by which the wholly immaterial soul “establishes partnership with other bodies.”

Whereas Galen contrasts the Aristotelian concept of the *pneuma* with the Platonic *ochema*, philosophers in his wake would combine the two notions to form a synthetic quasi-material tertium quid that can mediate between the material/mortal body and the immortal, transmigrating soul.¹¹² The combination of these two is elaborated by the later Neoplatonic tradition from which Cudworth pulled in elucidating his own doctrine of the luciform vehicle, the highest and subtlest of bodies.

Plato’s *ochema*, which Galen uses here, is a problematic term. It shows up seven times in the platonic corpus, almost always in mythological context. Its most important appearances are in the *Phaedo* (113d), where it functions as the vehicle which bears souls on their descent to the underworld, in the *Phaedrus* (246a-249d) as a sort of ouranic-elevator by which the soul ascends to the top of the heavens (the charioteer myth), and finally in the *Timaeus* (41e, 44e, 69c) as a vehicle allotted by the demiurge to each soul, bestowing locomotive capacity.¹¹³

In these three dialogues, Plato establishes the *ochema* as an instrument of the soul – a means of transportation to be adopted and discarded in accordance with which realm is being traversed. There is the proper *ochema* for the underworld (*Phaedo* 113d), the proper *ochema* for the terrestrial world (*Timaeus* 44e and 69c), and the *ochema* for traversing the heavens (*Timaeus*

¹¹² Samuel, Geoffrey. *Religion and the Subtle Body in Asia and the West: Between Mind and Body* (London: Routledge, 2013), 150.

¹¹³ I explore all of these in two other papers: *The Doctrine of the ochema-pneuma in Early Medieval Neoplatonism*, and *The Chariot of Soul: The Platonic ὀχήμα in context*.

41e, *Phaedrus* 246a-249d). This is the reading that is picked up by Galen and combined with Aristotelian pneumatics, and which would go on to become important to Neoplatonic soteriology with Porphyry, and central to the theurgy of Iamblichus as the compound *ochema-pneuma*.

How and when these two notions – *ochema* and *pneuma* – became intertwined has been the subject of a century of speculation.¹¹⁴ What is evident is that by the late third century the paired term *ochema-pneuma* had become an established philosophical doctrine, present in writings from Alexander of Aphrodisias to the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Proceeding from Aristotle's association of the *pneuma* with the element of which the stars are made (aether) in *Generation of Animals* 43b,¹¹⁵ the late Platonists reconfigure the Platonic *ochema* to be constructed of aether, referring further to Aristotle's *Eponimis* 981c and *De Caelo* 270b.¹¹⁶

The theory of the *ochema-pneuma* finds its earliest elucidation in the writings of Porphyry and his student Iamblichus, beginning in the third century CE. It becomes a philosophical matter of importance into the sixth century through the writings of Proclus, Damascius, and John Philoponus.¹¹⁷ With the rise of Christianity, for which the pre-existence and transmigration of souls was anathema, the concept is consigned to centuries of scholastic purgatory, perpetuated only in the Byzantine encyclopedic tradition, before being resurrected in the renaissance by Marsilio Ficino and employed by the Cambridge Platonists.¹¹⁸ We now turn to its late-antique and early-medieval context.

¹¹⁴ Kissling, Robert Christian. "The Oxhma-PNEUMA of the Neo-Platonists and the De Insomniis of Synesius of Cyrene." *The American Journal of Philology* 43.4 (1922): 318.

¹¹⁵ Samuel 2013, 151.

¹¹⁶ Finamore, John F. *Iamblichus and the Theory of the Vehicle of the Soul* (Chico, CA: Scholars, 1985), 1.

¹¹⁷ Samuel 2013, 151.

¹¹⁸ The Byzantine transmission of this idea is a dissertation all its own. For Ficino's use, see Corrias, Anna. Imagination and Memory in Marsilio Ficino's Theory of the Vehicles of the Soul. *The International Journal of the Platonic Tradition Volume 6: Issue 1*. As for primary sources, see the Psellus and Italos commentaries on the Chaldean Oracles in Bazan, Francisco Garcia (ed.). *Oraculos Caldeos* (Madrid, Editorial Gredos, S. A.), 1991.

Porphyry's Compounded Vehicle

Beyond the Platonic and Aristotelian inheritances that led to the doctrine of the *ochema pneuma*, Porphyry (234-305 C.E., student of Plotinus) incorporated a notion of the *pneuma* pulled specifically from the Chaldean Oracles as a way of legitimizing and metaphysically contextualizing the practice of theurgy, integrated into his philosophical system as an introductory method of purifying the irrational parts of the soul.¹¹⁹

According to John Finamore, author of the seminal study on the subject, the *ochema pneuma* of Porphyry and Iamblichus came to serve three functions:

It houses the rational soul in its descent from the noetic realm to the realm of generation; it acts as the organ of sense-perception and imagination; and, through theurgic rites, it can be purified and lifted above, a vehicle for the rational soul's return through the cosmos to the gods.¹²⁰

On Finamore's reading, it is the mediating tether between the body and soul, the *tertium quid* I've been referring to (this can be seen as a Platonic inheritance), it is the organ of perception and imagination (this is Aristotle), and it can be purified through theurgic rites to return one to God (this is the Chaldean Oracles). Beyond these three characteristics, there is very little that Porphyry and Iamblichus agree upon with respect to the *ochema-pneuma*.

¹¹⁹ Kakavelaki, Antonia. *The notion of pneuma (πνεῦμα) in the work of John Philoponus (490A.D-570A.D)*. Unpublished Digital Copy, 4.

¹²⁰ Finamore 1985, 1.

For Porphyry, it is a compounded phenomenon – a temporary abode. It is composed of a series of mixtures from the planets and celestial spheres which come together during the soul’s descent through the cosmos into the world. Following the work of the philosopher/theurgist, as the soul is purified, it once again assumes the *ochema-pneuma* and ascends back up to God. However, in the process, the elements of which the *ochema-pneuma* is composed are absorbed back into the planets and spheres from which they derived, so that by the time the soul has returned fully in Neoplatonic henosis, the *ochema-pneuma* is no more.¹²¹

The Porphyrian view is consonant with the *Phaedrus* myth. In this story the soul (*psyche*) assumes the chariot only to ascend through the heavens. Once it has reached the upper limit of Ouranos, it disembarks from the chariot, becoming Mind (*nous*) in the process (that is, it is the *nous* which disembarks from the chariot) as it “stands on the back of heaven,” and observes “Being which is.”¹²² Whereas the *Phaedrus* depiction has a sharp disjunction between embarking and disembarking the *ochema*, in Porphyry’s view the assemblage and dissolution of the *ochema* are gradual processes, performed during ascents and descents through the cosmos, with no definitive moment of embarking or disembarking as such.

This vision of the compounded *ochema* built from celestial accretions serves also as an explanatory rationale for astrology, a topic in which Porphyry had great interest.¹²³ Central to ancient astrological theory was the idea that the position of the planets and stars at the moment of one’s birth had great influence over his or her destiny. In the Porphyrian story, as the *ochema* is compounded of star and sphere matter in its descent, there is a physical relationship between the embodied individual and the stars of which his or her *ochema* is constructed, drawing a material

¹²¹ Samuel 2013, 151.

¹²² Here I refer to *Phaedrus* 247e

¹²³ Samuel 2013, 151.

connection between body and cosmos which can account for everything from what lifeform one assumes (human or otherwise) to his or her family, talents, and predispositions.¹²⁴

Porphry outlines the cosmic descent of the soul in his work *On What is in Our Power*, wherein we see the soul descending from the intelligible realm and choosing its own incarnation.

Souls, prior to falling into bodies and different lives, have the power of self-determination for choosing this or that life, which they are to live out with a certain life-form and a body appropriate to that life-form. (For it is in their power to choose the life of a lion or of a man). That power of self-determination, however, is hindered as soon as they fall into one of these kinds of lives. Once they have gone down into bodies and become souls of living things instead of unconfined souls, they bear [only] the power of self-determination that is appropriate to the constitution of that living thing, and in some things will be highly intelligent (*polunoun*) and contain much flexibility (*polukinêton*), e.g., in human beings, while in others [it will] be relatively inflexible and one-dimensional (*monotropon*), as in the case of nearly all other living things.¹²⁵

This descent takes place in two ways – first through the seven celestial spheres in what Porphyry calls the “first life,” and secondly with respect to the twelve branches of the zodiac, the “second life.” Again Porphyry, “The pathway of the first life takes place across the seven spheres, but each [soul] moves through these [spheres] in a different way according to their impulses towards

¹²⁴ Porphyry. *To Gaurus on How Embryos Are Ensouled and On What Is in Our Power*, Wilberding, James (trans.) (London: Bloomsbury 2011), 132.

¹²⁵ Porphyry 2011, 143-144.

certain second lives.”¹²⁶ In the standard Ptolemaic astronomical model of the day, these seven spheres would have been the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, each of which would have corresponded with a different form of desire accreted by the vehicle in its descent.¹²⁷ With this view in mind, naturally in the soul’s ascent back to the intelligible realm, these desires must be shed – returned to the spheres from whence they came. So the ascent of the soul, on this view, is simultaneous with the dissolution of accreted desire.

The actual physics of this accretion is lost to posterity in the fragmentary nature of Porphyry’s extant astrology, but from what we have we can gather, the composition of Porphyry’s *ochema* would have been primarily determined by its course through the seven celestial spheres, and secondarily determined by the relation between the seven spheres and the twelve signs of the zodiac during the soul’s celestial concourse, resulting in a “written” fate, what Porphyry terms: “the second life, which the order of the planets and their arrangement with respect to the ascendant reveals in written form.”¹²⁸

But fate, to Porphyry, though written in the stars, was not written in stone. He is careful to constantly qualify the place of free will in these calculations, referring to “the dual [choice] of lives – the one being a kind of unchangeable life that the soul can either choose or not choose, but once it has chosen, although it is then unable to escape and change this choice, it regulates this life through either virtue or vice.”¹²⁹ So though the vehicle of the soul – extending to the

¹²⁶ Porphyry 2011, 146.

¹²⁷ Samuel 2013, 152. For cognate astrological systems see DeConick, April. *The Road for the Souls Is through the Planets: The Mysteries of the Ophians Mapped. Practicing Gnosis: Ritual, Magic, Theurgy and Liturgy in Nag Hammadi, Manichaean and Other Ancient Literature*. Leiden: Brill 2013, 37-74. See also Macrobius’ summary of the astrology of the Neoplatonists in Macrobius Ambrosius Theodosius, Marcus Tullius Cicero, William Harris Stahl (trans.). *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1952), 132-133. See also Porphyry’s *Cave of the Nymphs*.

¹²⁸ Porphyry 2011, 146.

¹²⁹ Porphyry 2011, 146.

very structure of our terrestrial body – is in a sense pre-determined by its descent through the spheres, it remains up to us whether we live base or noble lives. And, quoting Homer, Porphyry reminds us that though the vicissitudes of every person's fortune are preordained in the cosmic descent of the *nous*, it is our own internal choice whether we exacerbate or mitigate our own suffering.

‘How mortals do blame [us] gods!

For they say that evils come from us [gods],

but in fact they themselves also

By their own follies bear pain beyond their fair share.’¹³⁰

On this point, Porphyry would have been acutely existentially aware of the determinative impact of one's psychophysical makeup. As he records in his preface to the *Enneads*,

I myself at one period had formed the intention of ending my life; Plotinus discerned my purpose; he came unexpectedly to my house where I had secluded myself, told me that my decision sprang not from reason but from mere melancholy and advised me to leave Rome. I obeyed and left for Sicily, which I chose because I heard that one Probus, a man of scholarly repute, was living there not far from Lilybaeum. Thus I was induced to abandon my first intention but was prevented from being with Plotinus between that time and his death.¹³¹

¹³⁰ Porphyry 2011, 147.

¹³¹ Plotinus, Stephen MacKenna (trans.). *The Enneads*. (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 12.

To say Porphyry's suicidal intent sprang not from reason but from mere melancholy is to say, in the context of the humoral-astrological paradigm in which he was operating, it was a malady of the body, not the soul. Melancholia, or black bile, was one of the four humors as codified by Hippocrates. It originated in the spleen and was associated with Saturn. Within Porphyry's incarnational schema, we might surmise his soul ended up with an excess of the Saturnian accretion in his cosmic descent, resulting in a tendency toward having suicidal thoughts. This story illustrates Porphyry's personal negotiation between his own pre-determined makeup and free will in what Gregory Shaw, the world's foremost authority on Iamblichus, has labelled the "mystical existentialism" of the Neoplatonists.¹³²

Though Porphyry's scheme was somatically optimistic – the soul incarnates deliberately, descending through the spheres and accreting subtle bodies of grosser and grosser makeup until it arrives in its intended terrestrial vehicle – embodied nature was still an obstacle to be negotiated by the soul whose ultimately soteriology still lay in a sloughing off of materiality, a shedding of the subtle bodies through cosmic flight, a return to the intelligible realm. Acknowledging the irreversible nature of our incarnated state, Porphyry, like a third-century Jean-Paul Sartre, stressed the continued freedom of the soul in its choice of virtue or vice, where in spite of our material-historical shackles, our souls remain ultimately free.¹³³

¹³² Shaw, Gregory. Demon est Deus Inversus: Honoring the Daemonic in Iamblichean Theurgy. *Gnosis: Journal of Gnostic Studies*, Volume 1: Issue 1-2, 2016.

¹³³ By this I don't mean to identify Porphyry's position with Plotinus' undescended nous – for Porphyry the intellect was shackled by materiality, but remained free on a practical level to choose between virtue and vice. See Steel, Carlos. *The Changing Self, A Study On the Soul in Later Neoplatonism: Iamblichus, Damascius and Piriscianus* (Brussels: Koninklijke Academie voor Wetenschappen, Letteren en Schone Kunsten, 1978), p.38n21.

The Divine Iamblichus

In the early 280's C.E., a decade after the death of Plotinus, Porphyry returned from Sicily to Rome where he established a school and became the teacher of one Iamblichus, an aspiring philosopher from old Syrian royalty. The details of their relationship are somewhat hazy, recorded mostly in the hagiographical pen of the fourth century doxographer Eunapius.¹³⁴ But it seems Iamblichus studied with Porphyry in Rome for some time, establishing himself as the philosopher's most distinguished pupil. Following this period, Iamblichus returned to his native Syria to teach in Apamea, where, with the help of local patrons, he established a large school housed in a number of suburban villas from which he accrued a considerable following as well as international renown. The image we get from Eunapius is a standard Platonic model – the teacher living closely with the students, teaching both casually and formally, fielding questions from disciples, debating with other philosophers, and travelling to the hot springs of Gadara for class outings.¹³⁵

Eunapius' account, however, is also full of anecdotes about the magical feats of Iamblichus, who apparently exhibited the powers of levitation, photism, extrasensory perception, and the ability to summon water spirits. It was perhaps such tales that irked his former teacher Porphyry into publishing his open *Letter to Anebo* some time after 280. In this letter, only fragmentarily preserved, Porphyry poses a barrage of questions about spirits and Gods, and how they relate to humans and the cosmos at large, all with an eye toward critiquing his ex-pupil's

¹³⁴ Philostratus and Eunapius, Wilmer Cave Wright (trans.). *The Lives of the Sophists* (London: William Heinemann, 1922).

¹³⁵ For more exhaustive treatment see Iamblichus, Clarke, Dillon, and Hershbell (trans.). *On the Mysteries* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003), xxvi-xxvii.

interest in the occult, typified in the late Hellenic mind by the image of a pseudo-Egyptian conjurer.¹³⁶ The letter is substantially an attack on ritual practice in general.¹³⁷

Iamblichus replies in kind, writing pseudonymously as an Egyptian priest, Abamon, Anebo's superior, taking on Porphyry's questions point-by-point. Through this work, known since the Renaissance as *On the Mysteries*, Iamblichus takes the opportunity to outline an exhaustive cosmology, vision of the human body and soul, and theurgic soteriology of ritual praxis. Iamblichus' rebuttal of Porphyry was successful. His vision redefined what it meant to be a Platonic philosopher in late antiquity to such an extent that it is immediately recognizable whether a philosopher is pre or post-Iamblichean. And central to his unique and rigorously-elucidated cosmology, anthropology, and soteriology was the doctrine of the *ochema-pneuma*.

In distinction to his teacher's accretion-dissolution model, Iamblichus held the view that the *ochema* was immortal, created whole cloth by the Demiurge himself at the beginning of creation from pure aether.¹³⁸ Since it was so fashioned, it is not subject to decay in the same manner as Porphyry's *ochema*, and could survive separation from the soul.¹³⁹ Iamblichus differs principally from Porphyry in the generation (it comes from the Demiurge, not through celestial accretion) and composition of the *ochema* (it is pure aether, not parts of the various celestial spheres). By virtue of being constructed personally by the Demiurge, just as the immortal cosmos in *Timaeus* is created without any loss of substance from the celestial gods,¹⁴⁰ the

¹³⁶ Iamblichus 2003, xxix.

¹³⁷ Struck, Peter T. *Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of their Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 205.

¹³⁸ Samuel 2013, 152.

¹³⁹ Samuel 2013, 152.

¹⁴⁰ And because of this does not require eventual dissolution.

Iamblichean *ochema* is immortal. As Proclus later puts it, the *ochema* “is somehow self-constituted and not created by subtraction from others in order that it not require dissolution back into another.”¹⁴¹

Regarding the shape of the *ochema*, it is of course that most perfect of shapes, the sphere, reflective of the shape of the universe (*Timaeus*) as well as the processions of the gods in Ouranos (*Phaedrus*).¹⁴² Following the Hermetic and Neoplatonic principle of “like approaches like,” by emulating the shape of perfection, the *ochema* can partake of the same.¹⁴³ As Iamblichus relates in his commentary on the *Timaeus*,

Since, then, the cosmos must be rendered similar to the universal Soul that presides over it, it must be made to resemble the lifegiving pattern of the Soul. Therefore, according as the Demiurge has established it in terms of two circles, so he constructed the Universe in the form of a sphere, to be an image of the Soul’s self-motion. For which reason also our vehicle is made spherical, and is moved in a circle, whenever the soul is especially assimilated to Mind; for the intellection of the soul and the circular motion of bodies imitates the activity of Mind, even as the ascents and descents of souls motion in a straight line, for these are motions of bodies which are not in their proper places.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Finamore 1985, 11.

¹⁴² Samuel 2013, 152.

¹⁴³ Samuel 2013, 153.

¹⁴⁴ Cited in Samuel 2013, 153. See also Dillon, John M., and Iamblichus. *Iamblichi Chalcidensis in Platonis Dialogos Commentariorum Fragmenta*. Leiden: Brill, 1973. Fragment 49.

Though the *ochema* is constructed of pure aether by the Demiurge himself, being brought into contact with the imperfect human soul creates some discord. Not only is the *ochema* spherical, but it also moves in a circular motion. When the relationship between the *ochema* and the soul is good, they revolve together. However, as lower souls partake less fully of the Good (and hence circularity), the relationship between the soul and its *ochema* can be affected negatively by material factors. It is the job of the human soul to assimilate itself to the divine Mind.¹⁴⁵ The more the soul becomes one with the Mind, the more circular will be its motions. The more circular its motions are, the more harmonious will its relationship to the *ochema* be.

Iamblichus is aware of the problem here. How does the imperfect human soul influence the perfect *ochema*? This is the mind-body question, the dual-substance interaction problem we saw in the seventeenth century. Though the framework differs, the question remains substantially the same. How does that which is perfect and complete interact with that which is imperfect and incomplete? This is a central concern of Iamblichus' *On the Mysteries*, wherein he establishes a soteriology which can only be accomplished through incarnated theurgy. In distinction to his recent Neoplatonic predecessors, Iamblichus seeks not to escape the body, but to transmute the chaos of bodily experience into a unified microcosmos through ineffable theurgical praxis in what Gregory Shaw calls a form of theurgic homeopathy, "Even the densest aspects of matter, therefore, were potential medicines for a soul diseased by its body, and the cure for a somatic fixation in this theurgic homeopathy was the tail of the (daimonic) dog which bound it."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Finamore 1985, 50.

¹⁴⁶ Shaw, Gregory. *Theurgy and the Soul: the Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 52.

Iamblichus begins book I of *On the Mysteries* with an exhaustive theological and demonological taxonomy. The gods rule over the entirety of creation, while demons have allotted portions over which they exert their limited authority. As such the gods are separate from matter, while demons are enmeshed in it.¹⁴⁷ Through the work of theurgy, the contaminated human soul can associate with the highest orders of souls – those of the gods, angels, and archangels – and thereby ascend from the realm of generation to that of Being. However, there are many intermediary demons which serve to drag souls into materiality. Finamore sums up the various varieties of intermediary demons. “Vapors that subsist in the region under the moon are mixed with demons, combinations of genesiourgic pneumata with heroes. They hyllic archons are filled full of material liquids, and human souls are filled with excessive stains and foreign pneumata.”¹⁴⁸

That is, incarnated humans lie at the bottom of a continuous chain of incarnations – more and more rarefied as one goes up. At the top of the chain, the celestial gods, who are incarnated in bodies of the highest subtlety, “receive neither harm nor impediment to their intellections from their bodies.” Humans, on the other hand, are both harmed and impeded by theirs.¹⁴⁹ So we’ve established a gradient of the influence of the perfect on the imperfect and vice versa. But the larger metaphysical issue still remains. How is it that these two seemingly mutually exclusive substances interact? In a passage in the middle of *De Mysteriis*, Iamblichus dissolves the question.

¹⁴⁷ Shaw 1995, 50.

¹⁴⁸ Shaw 1995, 51.

¹⁴⁹ Shaw 1995, 51.

Just as something begotten partakes of being by means of generation and the body partakes of the incorporeal corporeally, so too physical and material things in generation partake of the immaterial and ethereal bodies that are above nature and generation in a disordered and faulty way...Participation, the commixture of material elements with immaterial emanations, and the receiving in one way down here of something given in another way become the cause of the great difference in secondary entities.¹⁵⁰

To clarify what Iamblichus is saying, created things are to being as the corporeal is to the incorporeal, as the physical is to the ethereal – for each analogy, the former partakes of the latter “in a disordered and faulty way.”

So the corporeal does in fact partake of the incorporeal, but in a faulty manner. What does this mean? Referring to *Timaeus* 35a wherein the Demiurge forces *the same, the other, and essence* into an equal batter, is key to decoding what Iamblichus is getting at here.¹⁵¹ He refers to the commixture of material elements with immaterial emanations – which as above he has shown is the equivalent as the commixture of created things and being, of the corporeal and the incorporeal, of the physical and the ethereal. This commixture becomes less and less ethereal as one descends the Chain of Being – from the gods and archangels to incarnated humans, leading to “great difference in secondary entities.” What is ultimately being implied here is that all of the beings within this chain are possessed of both material elements and immaterial emanations

¹⁵⁰ Quoted in Finamore 1985, 52.

¹⁵¹ Plato, R.G. Bury (trans.). *Timaeus, Critias, Cleitophon, Menexenus, Epistles* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 67.

Timaeus 35a: It is necessary that the Soul should recognize everywhere . . . the same, the other and essence, those three μέγιστα γένη of the . . . Sophist. Hence on the Greek principle that like is known by like, Plato makes real substances out of these three abstractions and puts them as plastic material into the hands of the Demiurgus for the formation of the Soul.

to a greater or lesser degree. So though they may be two different substances, they are never really found entirely apart.

As such, even the immaterial *ochema*, created from the hybrid putty of the demiurge, is possessed of non-immaterial factors by which material pollution can accrete. This accretion, as we've covered, can cause distortion to the soul itself, preventing it from partaking fully of the good, one symptom of which is an irregularity in its circular movement – disharmony between the soul and its vehicle.

For Iamblichus, it follows naturally from this doctrine that some form of purification is necessary to remove the stains of materiality from the vehicle. Once the corporeal pollution has been cleansed from the *ochema*, then there is nothing preventing the soul from partaking fully of the Good. A further corollary Iamblichus attaches to this doctrine, a point that is uniquely his, is that once the vehicle has been so purified, one can even descend into a human form without accreting any pollution whatsoever.¹⁵² And conversely, and this is key to Iamblichus' soteriology, even our current, incarnated state, the total purification of the luminous *ochema* is possible.

So there are two aspects here that Finamore points out. Firstly, there is the highest Good, of which the soul partakes to a greater or lesser degree depending on its position in the Chain of Being (gods and angels at the top, humans at the bottom). The soul partakes of this Good via the intermediaries between it and the Good. That is, if it is at the top, it accesses the Good directly. If it is at the bottom, it's only access to the Good is through an indirect series of daimonic intermediaries. Secondly there is the contamination of the *ochema* caused by matter. Insofar as

¹⁵² Finamore 1985, 52.

the soul is stained by matter it is incapable of partaking of the highest Good – so one might say one's place on the chain of being is proportional to the amount of material accretion on the *ochema*.¹⁵³

These two points together necessitate the very sort of theurgical purification that Iamblichus prescribes, a procedure that engineers their reversal. First, the practice of theurgy removes the contamination from the soul. Second it reunites with the Good by means of divine intermediaries. So in the end one is both purified from the contamination of matter and unified with the highest Good, ranking one among the gods.

Platonism in Theory and Practice

The differentiation between Porphyry and Iamblichus on the structure and function of the *ochema* was merely a theoretical underpinning of their larger disagreement over the relationship between philosophical *theoria* and ritual *theurgia* in the Platonic life, the central matter of negotiation between Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo* and Iamblichus' *On the Mysteries*.

The story of theurgy in Neoplatonism seems to begin with Porphyry, who was of multiple minds on it.¹⁵⁴ Where it was Porphyry who introduced to *Chaldean Oracles*, the urtext of theurgy, into the Platonic tradition in the first place, going so far as to write a commentary on them,¹⁵⁵ it was also Porphyry who excoriated ritual practice both in *Letter to Anebo* and in his *On the Abstinence of Animal Food*, wherein, echoing contemporary Christian takedowns of pagan

¹⁵³ Finamore 1985, 53.

¹⁵⁴ According to Augustine see Smith, Andrew. *Porphyry's Place in the Neoplatonic Tradition: a Study in Post-Plotinian Neoplatonism* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1974), 129.

¹⁵⁵ Dodds, E. R. Theurgy and Its Relationship to Neoplatonism. *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 37, Parts 1 and 2 (1947), 58.

ritual, he attributes the origin of ritual animal sacrifice not to the gods, but to malevolent bloodthirsty demons.¹⁵⁶

For he who is studious of piety knows very well that no animated being is to be sacrificed to the Gods; but a sacrifice of this kind pertains to *Daimones* and to other Powers...Falsehood is allied to these malevolent beings, for they want to be considered as Gods, and the power which presides over them is ambitious to appear as the greatest God. These are they who rejoice in libations and the savour of sacrifices.¹⁵⁷

In his more theurgy-friendly moments, Porphyry acknowledges theurgical praxis as an expedient means for the purification of the lower vehicles, allowing one to see the gods and converse with spirits and angels by means of the *ochema pneumatikon*.¹⁵⁸ However, he ambivalently warns his readers, the practice is perilous, and can lead as easily to evil as to good. At the end of the day theurgy, if useful at all, was simply a therapeutic means for middling souls, not the mystagogical path of true Philosophers. As such it was in no way necessary for enacting the soul's return to God, and could in fact be inimical to that process. In keeping with his body-pessimistic, mystical existentialist view, Porphyry could not acquiesce any part of his soteriology to factors outside the free soul itself.

Employing the formula of his master Plotinus, Porphyry advised the philosopher to forgo all ritual activities in order to return “alone, through himself, to God alone”;

¹⁵⁶ Shaw 1995, 15.

¹⁵⁷ Shaw 1995, 15.

¹⁵⁸ Dodds 1947, 58.

while the philosopher should understand the enchantments of nature and the cults tied to its daimons, he should have nothing to do with them. “In every respect,” Porphyry, says, “*the philosopher is the savior of himself.*”¹⁵⁹

Since it is a return to the hypercosmic *nous* that Porphyry seeks, a *nous* which abides wholly free of material pollution in the incorporeal empyrean beyond all the cosmic spheres and their celestial accretions, how could ritual practice: sacrificing animals, using herbs, stones, barbaric mantras, ritual postures, or gestures of the terrestrial body possibly facilitate this ascent?¹⁶⁰ Indeed in Porphyry’s dualistic cosmology, theurgy could only ever effect encosmic change, perhaps a purification of the lower bodies, but more likely the propitiation of bloodthirsty trickster daimones masquerading as gods. Porphyry sought permanent escape from the cosmos, notably abandoning the traditional Platonic doctrine of rebirth,¹⁶¹ and fashioned a dualistic, “gnosticized” vision wherein salvation was defined as the soul “never again to find itself held and polluted by the contagion of the world.”¹⁶²

Iamblichus, as we know, studied under Porphyry for some time in Rome, where he was introduced to the higher reaches of Platonism, studying the dialogues of Plato as well as the *Enneads* of Plotinus. But Porphyry also introduced him to the *Chaldean Oracles* and the practice of theurgy, which in Porphyrian context acted as a preparatory means to the philosophical life, geared towards the purification of the lower vehicles and their irrational

¹⁵⁹ Shaw 1995, 15.

¹⁶⁰ While the precise details of theurgical ritual have been more or less lost to the sands of time, we can see glimpses of it through secondary traditions. See: Betz, Hans Dieter (ed.). *The Greek Magical Papyri In Translation. Volume One: Texts* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1996). See also Damascius’ *Philosophical History* for other intimations.

¹⁶¹ Shaw 1995, 16.

¹⁶² Shaw 1995, 16.

elements.¹⁶³ Where it was a peripheral and hazardous enterprise in the context of Porphyry's system, theurgy became the cornerstone of Iamblichus' Platonism which he elaborated after establishing his school in Apamea. In addition to tales of Iamblichus' magical exploits, word of the centrality of theurgy to Iamblichus' community may have spurred Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo*, an attempt to reign in his wayward disciple.

Iamblichus' reply to Porphyry in *On the Mysteries* is a sustained defense of a monistic metaphysics derived primarily from the *Timaeus* as well as theurgical soteriology wherein ritual practice (the hieratic art) is not just encosmic sympathetic magic for conjurers and wannabe philosophers, but the express means by which unity with the One is actually attained. As Iamblichus puts it, "But come now, you say, is not the highest purpose of the hieratic art to ascend to the One, which is supreme master of the whole multiplicity (of divinities), and in concert with that, at the same time to pay court to all the other essences and principles?"¹⁶⁴ In this single question we can see the point of divergence between Iamblichus and his teacher. Whereas Porphyry sought to escape the cosmos in the exarnating ascent of the *nous*, Iamblichus seeks not only to ascend to the One, but also to pay court to all the other intermediary beings. Far from cosmic flight, Iamblichus pursued a holistic scheme of cosmological attunement. As Gregory Shaw puts it,

With theurgy Iamblichus hoped to recover Plato's positive orientation to the cosmos. At issue was the divinity of the world, and for Iamblichus the most effective means to acknowledge this was through the performance of rites that conformed the soul

¹⁶³ Shaw 1995, 16.

¹⁶⁴ Quoted in Parnell, Jason B. *The Theurgic Turn in Christian Thought: Iamblichus, Origen, Augustine, and the Eucharist*. Unpublished Dissertation, University of Michigan 2009, 67.

to its orders...In theurgy, Iamblichus provided a soteriology that theoretically could touch any soul, from the most material to the most spiritual, while preserving their communal affiliations. With a more consistent metaphysics Iamblichus succeeded in restructuring Plato's teachings in a way that preserved the mystical elements of Plotinus' soteriology without losing contact with the physical cosmos or society.¹⁶⁵

Iamblichus expressly repudiates the dualistic, body-pessimistic views of his recent predecessors, from Numenius, who viewed matter as evil, to Plotinus, for whom, though matter itself was divine and essentially good, its expression to the incarnated sensorium was the "cause of all evils" and "evil in itself."¹⁶⁶ Iamblichus' alternative metaphysic is centered around an internally diverse material/immaterial monistic substrate, as we've seen above, "a commixture of material elements with immaterial emanations," with the gods at the top of the hierarchy exhibiting a maximum of immaterial emanations, and humans at the bottom exhibiting a maximum of material elements, yet neither substantially exclusive from the other – all beings effectively abiding along an ontologically neutral continuum. It is within this monistic context that Theurgy functions as the primary path to salvation.

To Iamblichus, the soteriologies of Porphyry or Plotinus, being locked within the confines of a dualistic metaphysic, were not up to the task of facilitating the inherently nondual state of union with the One. Indeed how could they be? Interpreted by Iamblichus as transmundane philosophical *theoria*, their prescriptions were still limited to states of "knowledge," which are inherently dualistic: as Iamblichus puts it, "knowing an 'other' as

¹⁶⁵ Shaw 1995, 17.

¹⁶⁶ Shaw 1995, 32.

‘other’.”¹⁶⁷ The philosophical *theoria* of his predecessors was *de facto* incapable of getting beyond the descriptive and discursive. They erred epistemically, “assuming that the cosmos could be adequately measured by the dialectical oppositions of the discursive mind.”¹⁶⁸ As Wittgenstein might put it, they failed to show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle.

In *Timaeus* 41c, as he sculpts the physical world in the act of primordial cosmogenesis, the Demiurge grants a spark of himself to each soul. This initial act of divine sympathy was the key to Iamblichus’ theory of salvation, and to him it meant,

Each soul had the responsibility to perform its own demiurgy, that is to say, its own *theurgy*. The task for every soul was to partake in divine mimesis by creating a cosmos out of the initial chaos of embodiment. Therefore the “demonic” condition of the embodied soul was a *felix culpa* without which the soul could not participate in cosmogenesis, including its own creation and salvation.¹⁶⁹

Since the creation of the cosmos is an extra-temporal event, it remains accessible even in our incarnated, temporalized condition, by means of and only by means of ineffable theurgic ritual.¹⁷⁰ Now we can grasp Iamblichus’ meaning – the immortal, luminous *ochema* incarcerated in matter is restored to its innate harmony with the cosmos by participating in the cosmogony of the demiurge. Theurgy is a somatic recapitulation of the Platonic cosmogenesis, and the elevation of

¹⁶⁷ Shaw 1995, 108.

¹⁶⁸ Shaw 1995, 61.

¹⁶⁹ Shaw 1995, 17.

¹⁷⁰ Shaw 1995, 39.

theourgia over *theoria*, was Iamblichus' way of bodily eclipsing the dialectic and getting back to the start, before the fly was ever even in the bottle in the first place.

Proclus: The Great Systematizer

During the time of Porphyry and Iamblichus, the Athenian Academy of Plato was but a distant memory, having disbanded during the tenure of the last scholarch, Antiochus of Ascalon in the first century B.C.E.¹⁷¹ Following the dissolution of the Academy, the geographical locus of the Platonic tradition splintered across the mediterranean, from the Alexandrian school of Eurodus and Philo to Plotinus' seminars in Rome. As John Dillon depicts this period, "there was no official centre of Platonism that could serve as a watchdog for 'orthodoxy', and...the transmission of philosophical doctrine was very much a matter of individual teachers and small groups practising a sort of self-identification."¹⁷² Iamblichus' school in this context was one of the more robust, we might even say institutionalized centers of Platonism in the period.

After Iamblichus' death around 325, his close disciple Aedesius took over his school. It quickly dissolved under his leadership.¹⁷³ However, the many and various students Iamblichus cultivated during his tenure spread his theurgical "Syrian school" Neoplatonism far and wide, where his disciple Sopater became a personal advisor to Constantine I, his other student, Eustathius the Cappadocian became Constantius II's ambassador to the court of the Persian King

¹⁷¹ Karamanolis, George E. *Plato and Aristotle in Agreement? Platonists on Aristotle from Antiochus to Porphyry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 43. Antiochus was the teacher of Cicero, and is depicted by later doxographers as the transitional figure between Academic Platonism and Middle Platonism.

¹⁷² Dillon, John M. *The Middle Platonists: 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1996), 424.

¹⁷³ He moved north and founded his own school in Pergamon.

Shapur II, quite nearly converting him to the philosopher's life.¹⁷⁴ Another student, purportedly of Iamblichus' school though his historical details are quite fuzzy, was Plutarch of Athens, who, so the story goes, studied with either Iamblichus and/or Aedesius in Apamea, and subsequently returned to Athens to re-establish the Platonic Academy.¹⁷⁵

This new Neoplatonic Academy was a bit longer-lasting than Iamblichus' project in Apamea, and in the third generation produced Proclus, the last great luminary of Platonic antiquity, and Plato's liaison to the Middle Ages.¹⁷⁶ Proclus (412-485 C.E.) was born in Constantinople, but moved early to Alexandria to study philosophy and rhetoric. Unsatisfied with the level of philosophical disquisition he found there he made for Athens, to the revived Academy, now in its second generation under Plutarch's student, Syrianus.

Though we remain unsure of what precisely Plutarch of Athens taught, the surviving fragments of Syrianus and works of Proclus have the indelible imprint of Iamblichus,¹⁷⁷ exhibiting his monistic metaphysics, much of his technical terminology, and a pronounced reverence for the Syrian theurgist whom Proclus always qualifies as either "Divine" or "Most Divine."¹⁷⁸ To Proclus, Iamblichus' theurgical method is "a power higher than all human wisdom, embracing the blessings of divination, the purifying powers of initiation, and in a word all the operations of divine possession."¹⁷⁹ Beyond the intellectual and methodological affinities,

¹⁷⁴ Smith, Kyle. *Constantine and the Captive Christians of Persia: Martyrdom and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 74.

¹⁷⁵ The dates don't line up, but it's reasonable to suppose he studied with someone from the Iamblichean diaspora after the dissolution of his school.

¹⁷⁶ Under the name Pseudo-Dionysius, who produced a thinly Christianized version of Proclus' *The Elements of Theology*. In the words of Dodds, Proclus conquered Europe in the guise of an early Christian. See Dodds, E.R. *The Elements of Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963), xxviii.

¹⁷⁷ Wear, Sarah Klitenic. *The Teachings of Syrianus on Plato's Timaeus and Parmenides* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 17. Syrianus is the first to combine Porphyry's and Iamblichus' visions of the vehicle of the soul, though he does so in a way that differs from Proclus' presentation.

¹⁷⁸ Dodds 1963, xxii.

¹⁷⁹ Dodds 1963, xxii

Proclus was also renowned as an expert in weather magic, theurgical techniques of daimonic evocation, and through his engagement with the “Chaldaean purifications” was granted a number of visionary experiences with a luminous form of the goddess Hekate.¹⁸⁰ As the later doxographer Olympiodorus would put it, “some put philosophy first, as Porphyry, Plotinus &c. ; others the priestly art (*hieratike*), as Iamblichus, Syrianus, Proclus and all the priestly school.”¹⁸¹

Regarding his vision of subtle bodies, Proclus followed his teacher Syrianus, splitting the difference between Porphyry and Iamblichus, combining their schemes into a series of graduated vehicles, each of which the soul assumes during its descent. First it boards the luciform vehicle (*augoeides ochema*), which is the first and perpetual vehicle of the soul. That is, the luciform vehicle of Proclus is essentially the indestructible vehicle of Iamblichus, that which is perfect and without material pollution. It is principally Proclus from whom Ralph Cudworth draws a millennium later in elaborating his own luciform vehicle. Using an Aristotelian term, Proclus labels this vehicle “innate” (*symphyton*). It accompanies the immortal and rational soul.

As the soul continues its descent in its perfectly spherical and luminous *ochema*, it accretes “mantles” (*chitones*) from the four elements. The aetheral vehicle is next (*aitherion ochema*), followed by the solar vehicle (*helioeides ochema*), then the astral vehicle (*astroeides ochema*). Following this is the pneumatic vehicle (*pneumatikon ochema*), and finally the material vehicle (*hyliaion ochema*), which forms the soul’s “physical oyster-shell (*ostreodon soma*) and prison.”¹⁸²

¹⁸⁰ Marinus, Henri-Dominique Saffrey and Alain Philippe Segonds (ed. and French trans.) *Proclus ou Sur Le Bonheur*, (Paris: Les Belles Lettres), 2001.

¹⁸¹ Dodds 1963, xxiii

¹⁸² Siorvanes, Lucas. *Proclus: Neo-platonic Philosophy and Science* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1996), 131.

By the time the soul has reached the pneumatic phase, it is no longer the wholly rational and immortal soul of the upper vehicles, as the cumulation of polluting material has altered the appearance (*eidon*) and occluded the light of the spherical and luminous *augoeides ochema*. At this point it is termed the irrational soul (*alogos*), and is henceforth subject to the vicissitudes of Necessity (*anagke*). That is, Proclus gives us a clear picture of the Iamblichean theurgy in reverse. Descending into materiality, the soul is polluted. It is simultaneously distanced from the gods, and upon boarding the pneumatic vehicle, is once again chained to Necessity.

At the same time we can see the synthesis of the ideas of Iamblichus and Porphyry. The lower vehicles are conditioned and destructible. The pneumatic vehicle, for example, does not survive the soul's upward passage.¹⁸³ The upper vehicle, however, the luciform vehicle, is just like that of Iamblichus: perfect and indestructible. The intermediary vehicles, in Porphyrian fashion, correspond with various celestial phenomena – the aether, the sun, and the stars. Proclus' doctrine of the *ochema* is a perfect synthesis of those of Iamblichus and his teacher Porphyry.

Damascius: The Last Scholarch

Damascius (462-538 C.E.)¹⁸⁴ was the sixth and final scholarch of the Neoplatonic academy, learning from both Proclus' disciple Marinus (to whom we are indebted for our *Life of Proclus*) and Marinus' disciple Isidore, whom Damascius depicts in affectionate detail in his *Philosophical History*. Like Iamblichus, Damascius was a Syrian by birth. Like Proclus, he had

¹⁸³ Siorvanes 1996, 132.

¹⁸⁴ I take these dates from Rappe, Sara. *Reading Neoplatonism: Non-discursive Thinking in the Texts of Plotinus, Proclus, and Damascius*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

an early disillusionment with the thinkers Alexandrian philosophical scene, whose “superficial mind-games” he would frequently satirize in his writings. He transferred to the Athenian Academy in the generation after Proclus and himself became scholarch around 515,¹⁸⁵ from where he championed an energetic revival of Platonism in the face of a swiftly rising Christian tide. This had the adverse effect of bringing his Academy into the crosshairs of Emperor Justinian, whose persecution campaigns would severely curtail the cults of the gods, extinguish Manichaeism in the West, and put the final nail in the coffin of the Athenian Academy.¹⁸⁶

In response to the closing of their school in 529, Damascius and six disciples set off for the court of the Persian King Khusrau I who, in mirroring the earlier story about Eustathius and Shapur II, would be quite nearly converted to Platonism were it not for the intervention of the court Magi. Khusrau was renowned as a philosophically curious King who entertained wisemen from the far reaches of his empire, which in this period extended from the borders of Syria into northern India. After being granted religious amnesty by Justinian, the seven philosophers returned to the west. But the Athenian Academy was never re-opened.

Damascius elaborates his own vision of the subtle body principally in his commentary on Plato’s Parmenides, but also significantly in his major work *Problems and Solutions Concerning First Principles*. It also appears incidentally in his *Philosophical History*.¹⁸⁷ His vision is in large part a hearkening back to Iamblichus’ elucidation of the *augoeides ochema*, the single luminous vehicle of the soul that mediates gradations of Being along a monistic spectrum. He specifically repudiates the multiplicitous vision of Proclus, showing us that for the soul to have

¹⁸⁵ Siorvanes 1996, 28.

¹⁸⁶ Much recent debate over the historicity of this narrative -- for problematics involved see Walker, Joel T. The Limits of Late Antiquity: Philosophy Between Rome and Iran. *The Ancient World* 33.1 (2002).

¹⁸⁷ Most interesting in fragment 153 - quote it here

multiple vehicles, it would itself have to be numerically divisible, which is nonsense. As Damascius puts it,

The immortal body of the soul remains the same in number, but sometimes is more a sphere, and at other times is less a sphere, and sometimes is more filled with divine light, and sometimes it shuts down and is more like the ephemeral, and the living being suffers something essentially, so too the soul itself remains what it is but changes around itself and by itself, just in the way that is natural for incorporeal things to change, since for example sight remaining what it is, is perfected by light, and it is blocked under the darkness, and yet it does not perish unless the light or the darkness overwhelms it.¹⁸⁸

His point here is most subtle, and his elucidation of a body of the soul which remains numerically one, yet is able to be changed with respect to its configuration, its luminosity, or its corporeality, and even to suffer “essentially,” hinges on an ontological distinction he makes between a thing’s being (*huparxis*) and a thing’s substance (*ousian*), where, just as vision is the condition of the possibility of both light and dark, the being of a thing is prior even to its substance, which can alter depending on what kind of reality it is participating in.

In order to explain identity-in-change, Damascius appeals to the distinction between *huparxis* [existence] and *methexis* [substantial participation]. With the form of the *huparxis*, he means that which formally constitutes the being of the soul as soul, its

¹⁸⁸ Ahbel-Rappe, Sara. *Damascius' Problems & Solutions Concerning First Principles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 30.

essential form. However much the soul also changes, it remains *kath huparxin* always as it is, but it can realize its being in very different ways according to the reality wherein it participates. Through this changing of participation, the essence of the soul can take different forms and yet remain the same.¹⁸⁹

Damascius dissolves the question of substantial interactionism first by embracing the monistic spectral metaphysics of Iamblichus, and second by positing the soul as a pre-substantial entity whose participation (*methexis*) in the cosmos is determinative of its essence (*ousia*). That is to say, the body of the soul manifests differently in the different realities along the Neoplatonic cosmic spectrum, and as in Iamblichus, these different bodily manifestations correspond to the shape and luminosity of this body. When it is in its highest reaches, standing next to the divine soul, it “projects its being,” in spherical perfection, incorporeality, and total luminosity; whereas in the lower, sub-lunar regions it persists in a state of densified, corporeal darkness. As Damascius puts it in his *Propositiones*,

Like a sponge, the soul loses nothing of its being but simply becomes rarified or densified. Just so does the immortal body of the soul remain individually the same, but sometimes it is made more spherical and sometimes less, sometimes it is filled with divine light and sometimes with the stains of generative acts, and as its life undergoes some essential change so also the soul itself, while remaining what it is, is changed in itself and by itself.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁹ Steel 1978, 109.

¹⁹⁰ Shaw 1995, 104.

So the soul and its immortal body, for Damascius, is a sort of pre-substantial sponge which, when brought into contact with the intelligible realm, absorbs the light of the One, filling its pores and makes it spherical, luminous, and incorporeal. Deprived of that light, it loses its perfect shape, becoming both dark and gross. Carlos Steel sums up Damascius' contribution at the end of antique Platonism:

Damascius was the only one who thought through the problem of change of the soul to its ultimate consequences...better than any of the earlier Greek philosophers, he understood that the essence of the soul is not unchangeably fixed but rather exists precisely in its *freedom* to determine itself as what it *would* be. It does not *undergo* substantial change but it is both the subject and the object of its change. By always changing itself, it remains itself.¹⁹¹

In a sense, the theurgical monism of Iamblichean Neoplatonism, operating in the twilight of antiquity, traces a similar line of flight to the monisms of the Presocratics writing at its inception. Where, in McEvelley's wording, in the aquatic monism of Thales or the aerial monism of Anaximenes, the Milesian tradition posited "everything you see is One," the Eleatic philosophers, beginning with Xenophanes, inverted the statement to "everything that sees is One" in what we might term subjective monism.¹⁹² We can observe the same move in the mystical existentialism of the Neoplatonists, from the dualistic anti-cosmic incarnating

¹⁹¹ Steel 1978, 116.

¹⁹² McEvelley, Thomas. *The Shape of Ancient Thought*. New York: Allworth Press, 2002.

philosophy-as-escape of Porphyry, for whom our astrological and material facticity is a hindrance to be overcome through philosophical *theoria* with no reference to encosmic pollution, to Iamblichus, for whom the cosmos is divine, and incarnation is itself integral to theurgical soteriology of divine mimesis and demiurgic cosmogenesis. The subjective reappropriation of our existential constraints reaches its logical conclusion in Damascius, in whose vision material facticity has been subjectivized and reclaimed by the soul which operates in an ontological but pre-substantial multinaturalism, where we might follow Deleuze in saying, “there are not points of view on things, since things and beings are themselves points of view.”¹⁹³

Damascius’ elucidation of the pre-substantial matrix of the subtle body served his larger project of fusing the theoretical and theurgical trajectories of the Neoplatonic tradition, which in his view were complementary methods on equal footing:

There are those who prefer philosophy, like Porphyry and Plotinus and many other philosophers, and those who prefer theurgy, like Iamblichus and Syrianus and Proclus and the rest of the hieratics...But Plato, realising that strong arguments can be advanced from both sides, united them in one single truth by calling the philosopher a Bacchus. For indeed if the man who has freed himself from genesis were to stand in the middle, he would pull both to himself.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹³ Quoted in Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. *Cannibal Metaphysics* (Minneapolis, MN: Univocal Publishing, 2014). p. 90. Viveiros de Castro incorrectly cites Deleuze, Gilles, Hugh Tomlinson (trans.) *Bergsonism*. New York: Zone Books, 1988. When in fact the quote comes from Deleuze, Gilles. *The Logic of Sense* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1990). p. 173.

¹⁹⁴ Quoted in Damascius, Athanassiadi (trans.) *The Philosophical History* (Athens: Apamea Cultural Association, 1999), 57.

So in Damascius we have something of a Neoplatonic Synthesis with respect to the *theoria-theurgia* debate which was kicked off by Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo* and served as the overarching question of method that backlit the multifarious elucidations of the *ochema*.

Mediated by Iamblichus' subtle body schema, Damascius sublates the paradox of the One and the Many with an appeal to a pre-substantial ontology, the *huparxis* that remains numerically one through the substantial changes effected on the *ochema* in its traversal of the many cosmic domains from the intelligible through the daimonic to the levels of humans, animals, and even plants.¹⁹⁵ He gives us a system wherein the soul descends fully – bodily – into a panoply of lifeforms, actually suffers, but remains intrinsically itself throughout; as Ezra Pound puts it in this chapter's epigram, "et omniformis."¹⁹⁶

John Philoponus and the Incredible Myth

Of the seven philosophers who journeyed to Persia with Damascius, only two would continue writing after their return to the West: Simplicius and Priscian. Both of these figures would be pulled into polemics with the Christian Neoplatonist John Philoponus (c. 490-570 C.E.).

Philoponus' career can be roughly divided into two parts. All of his earlier writings are lecture notes from the Aristotle seminars of his teacher Ammonius Hermeias (c. 440-520 C.E.), who learned his Platonism directly from Proclus in Athens. These early works include

¹⁹⁵ Damascius 1999, 79. Here we see the Neoplatonic absorption of the robust Pythagorean theory of reincarnation.

¹⁹⁶ As esoteric and heady as neoplatonic philosophy can be, few things are as abstruse as Ezra Pound's poetry. For an unpacking of how Iamblichean Pound really was, see Baldwin, Anna and Hutton, Sarah (eds.). *Platonism and the English Imagination* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 308-318.

commentaries on Aristotle's: *On Generation and corruption*, *On the Soul*, *Prior Analytics* and *Posterior Analytics*, among others.¹⁹⁷ The second phase of his career coincides with the 529 closure of the Athenian Academy, at which point Philoponus' works take a decidedly critical shift, taking the form of original, polemical tracts, including *On the Eternity of the World Against Proclus* (529), *On the Eternity of the World Against Aristotle* (530's), and *On the Creation of the World* (540's).¹⁹⁸

He was an immensely original thinker, notably rejecting the long-held belief that the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle could be harmonized,¹⁹⁹ and replacing the Aristotelian theory of motion with his own "impetus theory."²⁰⁰ After elucidating his own vision of the vehicles of the soul in his commentaries on Aristotle, Philoponus would go on to reject the notion entirely, beginning with his 529 takedown of Proclus.

In his commentary on Aristotle's *On the Soul*, Philoponus outlines his own doctrine of the pneumatic vehicle, dividing the soul into three sections: the rational and irrational, which are entirely separate from the physical body, and the vegetative, which is intertwined with the physical body. The middle soul, the irrational, is composed of the four elements, just like the vegetative soul. It also has a surplus of air in its construction, and is hence known as the pneumatic body. Already in this engagement, however, we can see a shift away from what we might call the dogmatism of his Neoplatonic predecessors. He begins his section on the pneumatic body with a question, "We ought to ask first how it is evident that there is a pneumatic

¹⁹⁷ Kakavelaki, Antonia. *The notion of pneuma (πνεῦμα) in the work of John Philoponus (490A.D-570A.D)*. Unpublished Digital Copy. Athens, 2013.

¹⁹⁸ Kakavelaki 2013, 2-3. On the chronology of Philoponus' work see Sorabji, Richard. *Philoponus and the Rejection of Aristotelian Science* (London: Duckbacks, 1988), 14-18.

¹⁹⁹ Kakavelaki 2013, 2.

²⁰⁰ Revived in the 12th century Renaissance, the fountainhead of the impetus theories of Galileo, Descartes, and Newton. Again, see Sorabji 1988.

body at all. For it is proper to ask first whether it exists at all, and then show that non-rational life is in it.”²⁰¹ Perhaps it was because of his Christian heritage that he felt it necessary to justify, from the ground up, even these foundational Neoplatonic doctrines long since taken for granted.

After outlining the pneumatic body and justifying its existence through an appeal to afterlife narratives as well as stories about ghosts, Philoponus posits a yet higher body,

After the places of punishment in the underworld it comes back here for as long as it takes for it to purify itself, and is lifted upwards, liberating itself from becoming, and then it does away also with spirit and desire together for this vehicle, I mean the *pneuma*; but after this there is yet another body eternally attached to it, which is celestial and therefore eternal, which is called luminous or astral.²⁰²

So far this sounds like a standard Proclean model, where the pneumatic body can be sloughed off through purification to reveal the celestial luminous body, “eternally attached” to the soul.

Philoponus’ unique move in this commentary is to further contextualize this now heavily theory-laden Neoplatonic anatomy of the soul within Aristotelian-Hippocratic medical context.²⁰³ The *pneuma* is centered in the heart from where it is diffused throughout the body. He associates it with nervous function and bodily heat. Desire is based in the liver, while the entire sensorium is centralized in the brain (a Galenic inheritance) which seems to serve as an interface with the pneumatic body. In the process of medicalizing this most Neoplatonic of concepts, he is altering

²⁰¹ Philoponus, John, and Philip van der Eijk (trans.) *Philoponus: On Aristotle On the Soul 1.3-5* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 33.

²⁰² Philoponus 2014, 34.

²⁰³ Kakavelaki 2013, 9.

its context and deracinating it from the larger soteriological framework in which all of our above thinkers, from Porphyry to Priscian were engaged. Indeed the overarching framework of Philoponus' commentary on Aristotle's *On the Soul* seems to be, strangely enough, rather Aristotelian, in stark contrast to the many commentaries that came before his time – those of Proclus, Syrianus, Iamblichus, and Porphyry, where Aristotle served more as a vehicle for the expression of Neoplatonic metaphysics than object of critical engagement.

To summarize John Philoponus' early engagement with the vehicles of the soul, in the opening section of his commentary on *On the Soul*, he begins with a proof of the existence of the pneumatic and luciform bodies, following which he elaborates a subtle body scheme which quite precisely recapitulates that of Proclus. Beyond this, he explains how the pneumatic body connects with the vegetative (i.e. gross corporeal) body with hitherto unseen medical sophistication, combining Aristotle with more recent Galenic developments in medicine.

This early proof and elucidation of the vehicles of the soul stands in stark contrast to his later *Against Proclus: On the Eternity of the World*. In this work, where he is criticizing the writings of his philosophical grandfather Proclus, who was the source of his earlier subtle body schema, he very explicitly rejects any notion of the subtle, pneumatic, or luciform vehicles.²⁰⁴

The hypothesis of the Greeks about the eternal body, which they call luciform (*augoeides*), upon which the rational faculties of the soul first embark, and towards which the corruptible bodies move, is an incredible myth. And that it is impossible for the

²⁰⁴ Kakavelaki 2013, 10.

eternal body, resting in one place, to move the corruptible body by a certain natural force like the magnet moves the iron.²⁰⁵

Philoponus follows this statement with a rather technical refutation of the idea based on Aristotle's idea of local motion from *De Caleo*,²⁰⁶ in combination with his earlier refutation of the idea that two bodies can occupy the same space.²⁰⁷

By the time of the fifth church council at Constantinople in 553 Philoponus had become a proponent of monophysite christology (that Christ was wholly divine, and not of two natures), a doctrine that was decidedly at odds with the sort of latitudinarian metaphysics allowed by the various subtle body formulations of the Neoplatonists, predicated on a metaphysic of mind-matter integration and notions of a pre-existent, transmigrating soul as they were. And though his work was later condemned in the church council of 681 (his reading of the Trinity through Aristotle's *Categories* was a bit too Athens, not enough Jerusalem), Philoponus' point here was well-taken. With this move the *ochema-pneuma* went from being a hotly contested, constantly reformulated mediator between the human and the divine, between body and mind, to being an antiquated object of arcane philosophy. Indeed, an incredible myth.

As we have seen, this *mythos* was once again drawn into the realm of *logos* through the early-modern platonic renaissances of Florence and Cambridge, implicated in the debates over dual-substance interactionism in the 17th century, and even employed in the epistemic struggles between revelation, rationalism, and empiricism. The story takes a novel turn in the British 18th

²⁰⁵ Kakavelaki 2013, 10.

²⁰⁶ Kakavelaki 2013, 10.

²⁰⁷ Philoponus, John, and Michael Share (trans.) *Philoponus: Against Proclus on the Eternity of the World 1-5* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 89.

century, specifically amongst the fathers of Indology who, in translating Sanskrit philosophy into English, encounter what appear to be highly erudite formulations of various subtle bodies in the texts of Sāṃkhya and Vedānta.

Chapter Three **Oriental Origins**

*This is my Infinite Being; shall the sun lend it
Any light – or the moon, or fire? For it shines
Self-luminous always: and he who attains me
Will never be reborn.*

*Part of myself is the God within every creature,
Keeps that nature eternal, yet seems to be separate,
Putting on mind and senses five, the garment
Made of Prakriti.*

– Bhagavad-Gita XV²⁰⁸

If we enumerate the aspects of Cambridge Platonist thought that were carried forward in the European philosophical tradition, subtle bodies and aetherial vehicles are not among them. The resurrection of the discourse of late antiquity we find in Cudworth, and the elaboration of subtle bodies on subtle planes we see in More and Glanvill instead became the subject of literary treatment and were later re-conceived as stock notions to be used in the philosophical and historical translation projects of colonial Indology. The oriental provenance suggested in Cudworth and More, who trace notions of the subtle body back to Moses and Zoroaster respectively, would give the idea new life in the Sinophilic enlightenment of the 18th century, and the Indophilic romanticism of the 19th.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁸ Swami Prabhavananda and Isherwood, Christopher (trans.). *The Song of God: Bhagavad-Gita* (England: Phoenix House Ltd., 1972).

²⁰⁹ Here I follow Clarke's scheme. See: Clarke, J.J. *Oriental Enlightenment*. London and New York: Routledge, 1997.

Chevalier de Ramsay

The most important representative of the subtle body in 18th century Europe was Chevalier Andrew Michael Ramsay (1686-1743), a curious figure – equal parts Scotsman, baker’s son, Catholic convert, tutor to the wealthy, Jacobite, itinerant spiritual seeker, best-selling author, and later, freemason.²¹⁰ His work is suffused with renaissance *prisca theologia*, pre-existent souls, and subtle bodies, and his 1727 *Travels of Cyrus* can be unproblematically seen as the first popularization of the idea of the subtle body, bringing the notion to an audience beyond the hallowed halls of the Neoplatonists and ivory towers of Cambridge.

Travels of Cyrus was a work of historical fiction, tracing the lost years in the life of Cyrus the Great, filling in the lacuna in Xenophon’s earlier *Cyropaedia*, which had omitted what happened in the great king’s life between the ages of 16, and 40, which we see through Ramsay’s eyes as a most transformative period of spiritual wandering – learning traditional wisdom from the wise sages of the orient. The book was an instant success. Published initially in French, it was immediately translated into English, and later German, Italian, Russian, Spanish, and Greek, going through dozens of editions in the decades following its publication.²¹¹ As part of the “mirrors for princes” genre geared toward the education of young royalty, and following Fenelon’s enormously popular 1699 *Télémaque*, and Montesquieu's 1721 *Persian Letters*,

Important to include More: “the Gymnosophists of Aegypt, the Indian Brachmans, the Persian Magi, and all the learned of the Jews were of this Opinion.” (More 1662:110).

²¹⁰ It was Ramsay, it seems, who first forged the mythology tethering freemasonry to the Knights Templar. Gibbons, Brian J. *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought: Behmenism and Its Development in England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. 183. See also: “The Wayward Political Apostle: Andrew Michael Ramsay” *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* Vol. 2 No. 14 [Special Issue - July 2012].

²¹¹ Givens, Terryl L. *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-mortal Existence in Western Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. 190-191.

See also: App, Urs. *The Birth of Orientalism*. Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2010. 266.

Ramsay's *Travels* takes a decidedly mystical route, where the author seeks to describe the "religion, manners, & policy of the several countries...also the great revolutions...in Egypt, Greece, Tyre, and Babylon," all with an eye toward disseminating his own *prisca theologia* which had its ultimate source in China.²¹²

In the closing chapter of his *Travels*, Ramsay displays his views openly, declaring, "These truths have been transmitted to us from age to age, from the time of the deluge till now, by an universal tradition."²¹³ These truths include: "the doctrine of the prae-existence of souls, and their final restoration,"²¹⁴ as well as "the doctrine of the transmigration of souls...A very ancient doctrine, and common to all the Asiaticks, from whom Pythagoras and Plato derived it."²¹⁵ In a telling passage, Ramsay shows how all the traditions that sustain the ancient theology predict a time when,

Every thing is to be restored to it's first splendor, by the coming of a hero called Kiun-Tse [*Junzi*, the Confucian gentleman ideal], which signifies Shepherd and Prince, to whom they give likewise the names of, the most Holy, the universal Teacher, and the supreme Truth. He answers exactly to the Mythras of the Persians, the Orus, or second Osiris of the Egyptians, the Apollo or Mercury of the Greeks, and the Brama of the Indians.²¹⁶

²¹² I myself read Gore Vidal's *Creation* when I was 16. His work is about the spiritual wanderings of one Cyrus Spitama, who meets with Confucius, Laozi, etc., had a huge impact on me. Clearly an echo of these earlier works.

²¹³ Ramsay, Chevalier. *The Travels of Cyrus To which is annexed, A Discourse Upon the Theology and Mythology of the Pagans*. London: James Bettenham, 1752. 345.

²¹⁴ Ramsay 1752, 344.

²¹⁵ Ramsay 1752, 319.

²¹⁶ Ramsay 1752, 339.

These traditions – Chinese, Christian, Persian, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, and Indian – all appear to foretell the suffering and conflict of a messiah who comes down to the earth to save humanity. As Ramsay says a few pages later, “We see then that the doctrines of the primitive perfection of nature, it’s fall and its restoration by a divine Hero, are equally manifest in the Mythologies of the Greeks, Egyptians, Persians, Indians and Chinese.”²¹⁷

Perhaps the most pronounced commonality – that around which all the other similarities in Ramsay’s perennialism gravitate – is a fondness for threes. Whether we speak of God (three attributes of power, wisdom, and goodness), the messiah (who persists in the three states of pre-existent, suffering, and triumphant), or human nature (which exists in the three states of elevated, fallen, and re-established), everywhere there is a tripartite or ternary form. This form extends to the makeup of the human, and we find the clearest expression of this tripartite subtle anthropology in Pythagoras.

This Philosopher was of the opinion that man was composed of three parts, a pure spirit, and ethereal matter, (which he called the subtle vehicle of the soul) and a mortal or gross body. The old Greek Poets had dressed up this opinion in a different guise; they called the ethereal body the representation, the image or the shadow; because they fancied that this subtle body, when it came down from heaven to animate the terrestrial body, assumed its form just as melted metal takes that of the old in which it is cast. They said that after death the spirit, still cloathed with this subtle vehicle flew up to the regions of the moon, where they placed the Elysian fields. And there, as they imagined, a

²¹⁷ Ramsay 1752, 341.

sort of second death ensued by the separation of the pure spirit from its vehicle: The one was united to the Gods, the other staid in the abode of the shades.²¹⁸

Here we can see a fairly precise replication of Cudworth's scheme, and in the footnotes we see the exact sources from which Cudworth drew (Plotinus, Philoponus, Proclus, Hierocles, and the Suda), and then at the very end, Cudworth himself. In another footnote, Ramsay gives us the Greek terms for his three bodies – *pneuma* for the pure spirit, *psyche* for the subtle body, and *soma* for the terrestrial body,²¹⁹ so his nomenclature differs somewhat, but he follows the basic layout established by Cudworth's philological resurrection.

He goes on to address that third and highest body, “the pure spirit and its subtile vehicle being born together, were inseparable, and returned after death to the star from whence they descended.”²²⁰ This, again, is from Cudworth, and an echo of the *ochema* we find in Plato's Timaeus. “The Platonists and almost all the ancient Philosophers had the same notion.”²²¹

From the Greeks we proceed to St. Paul's discussion of the resurrection body, which Ramsay identifies with the spiritual body of the Platonists. In the Pauline scheme, there are only two bodies – the terrestrial and the celestial, yet for Ramsay the message is the same.

Hence it is, that some of the ancient fathers, as well as our modern divines, have concluded, that the mortal and terrestrial body, which is ever changing, and does not continue one moment the same, is something merely accidental to our substance, and

²¹⁸ Ramsay 1752, 293.

²¹⁹ Ramsay 1752, 293 n.f.

²²⁰ Ramsay 1752, 293-294.

²²¹ Ramsay 1752, 294.

does not originally belong to it: a thick crust; a coarse covering cast over the celestial, spiritual, active and glorious body...And this notion renders the doctrine of the resurrection intelligible and philosophical.²²²

Echoes of Glanvill. Notions of the pre-existence of the soul and subtle intermediary bodies, aside from being ancient revelations passed through the most philosophically acute minds in history, are actually necessary to make sense of Christian dogma. For Ramsay, it is only through the notion of the subtle body that the doctrine of resurrection makes any sense at all – that is, that after the conflagration, we will return in an “unvailed and enlarged...incorruptible body.”²²³

Ramsay’s ancient theology culminates in his posthumously published *The Philosophical Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion* (1749), which opens with the important acknowledgement, “There is none we have made more use of than the learned Dr. Cudworth. As this great man had not a systematic genius, his work is a confused heap of pearls and precious stones, which we have endeavour’d to range under different heads, and digest all into a regular scheme.”²²⁴ Indeed in Ramsay’s magnum opus, he takes Cudworth’s pearls and precious stones and sets them in a rigorously elucidated, thousand-page theology done in the geometrical style of Spinoza’s *Ethics*, from proposition to scholium to corollary, one to the next.

This work is largely the narration of a *prisca theologia* which, much like the voyages of Cyrus, journeys beyond Cudworth’s Egyptian and More’s Persian geo-historical limitations.

Referring to the Egyptocentric *prisca theologia* then in vogue, Ramsay claims,

²²² Ramsay 1752, 294-295.

²²³ Ramsay 1752, 294.

²²⁴ Ramsay, Andrew. *The Philosophical Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion*. Volume II. Glasgow: Robert and Andrew Poulis, 1749. v.

[Were people] acquainted with the Chinese, Indian, Chaldean, Persian and Greek mythology, philosophy and religion, [they] would never have fallen into this low scheme. The most part of the ancient and oriental nations were very little taken up about the periodical inundations of the Nile; and some of them did not so much as know, that there was a corner in the world called Egypt.²²⁵

Despite the high antiquity of Egyptian civilization, its preservation of the antediluvian tradition is fragmentary at best. Echoing the earlier position of John Webb (1612-1672), who posited Chinese as the single ur-language which preceded the confusion of tongues at Babel, Ramsay relocates the most ancient tradition to China, the first place to form a regular state structure after the flood.²²⁶

As the Chinese are one of the most ancient people that inhabited the earth, and that were formed into a regular government soon after the deluge, it is no wonder we find among them such venerable traces of the Noevian tradition...The Chinese mythology, or rather theology, is a key to all the others less ancient, and more obscured by succession of time. If we find such clear vestiges of this sacred truth in China, should be be astonished to discover the same in Persia, Chaldea, Egypt, and Greece?²²⁷

²²⁵ Ramsay, 1749, 126.

²²⁶ App, 2010. 274.

²²⁷ Ramsay, 1749. 121.

So in reading into Ramsay's scheme here, it appears that the true *prisca theologia* is actually a *sinotheologia* which was subsequently transmitted West – first to the Indian “Bramans,” then to the Magi of Persia, priests of Egypt, and philosophers of Greece. On the Greek side, it was principally Pythagoras, in his eastern travels, who imbibed the ancient tradition. And as we've established, the tripartite anthropology was part of this inheritance.

Ramsay's treatment of the subtle body in his *Philosophical Principles* is simply a rehashing of Cudworth's rundown, relying entirely on Greek and Latin sources.²²⁸ The logic by which he extends the notion into Egypt, Persia, and beyond depends on a generous capacity for inductive generalization.

The triple distinction of SPIRIT, SOUL, and BODY, seems to have been a most ancient doctrine, common to all nations, from the earliest times of the world. We have already shown, that there is a perfect affinity, betwixt the Egyptian theology, and that of the oriental nations. We have also shown, that the Greeks, and especially Pythagoras...borrowed all their philosophy from the Egyptians.²²⁹

And so we are unfortunately left without the citations that would establish the subtle body anthropologies of the orient. After citing Hierocles, Porphyry, Isidore, and Galen – all Western authorities – Ramsay concludes,

²²⁸ Ramsay 1749, 293-298.

²²⁹ Ramsay 1749, 294.

By these quotations it appears, that the Platonists, Pythagoreans, Egyptians, Chaldeans, and all the Orientals believed, that the soul had an ethereal, aerial, and terrestrial vestment, cloathing, or tabernacle; that they put off the last by natural death; the second by a supernatural death in a separate state; and that they retained the last for ever.²³⁰

In Ramsay we see a precise replication, an acknowledged lifting, of Cudworth's scheme, complete with concerns of the conflagration drawn from More and Glanvill. Without altering the shape of the Cambridge subtle body map, Ramsay re-historicizes the concept, with the benefit of the newly developing fields of sinology and indology, within a more geographically capacious *prisca theologia*.²³¹

Zooming out a bit, Ramsay's account draws the subtle body into the larger 18th century battle for the historical imagination of Europe, with the *prisca theologia* Platonic orientalists on one side promulgating a sort of "old is gold" historical scheme, and the historical modernists, who viewed antiquity as a barbarous land of primitive idolaters, on the other. For the modernists, history was synonymous with progress. With David Hume as its main representative in the 18th century, this line of thinking reached its logical conclusion in Hegel. As Hume put it in 1757, directly responding to Ramsay, whom he cites in his *Natural History of Religion*,

'Tis a matter of fact uncontestable, that about 1700 years ago all mankind were idolaters. The doubtful and sceptical principles of a few philosophers, or the theism, and

²³⁰ Ramsay 1749, 297.

²³¹ App, 2010. Introduction.

that too not entirely pure, of one or two nations, form no objection worth regarding.

Behold then the clear testimony of history. The farther we mount up into antiquity, the more do we find mankind plunged into idolatry. No marks, no symptoms of any more perfect religion.²³²

Though Hume's modernism, with its focus on historical progress and the ascendancy of European civilization clearly won in the academic arenas of history and philosophy, Ramsay's historiography seeded the imagination of the great orientalists and many a poet of the 18th and 19th centuries. And though he lacked the linguistic acumen to delve into the primary sources with which he might support his sino-centric orientalism, Ramsay's intuition that the subtle body was an idea of oriental provenance was in a sense vindicated by the indologists who followed in his wake.

Henry Thomas Colebrooke

Henry Thomas Colebrooke (1765-1837) was one of those rare polymaths – the kind who seem only to exist in bygone eras. As a young man he excelled in his studies of classics and mathematics, and had a special affinity for astronomy. At age 17 he set sail for Calcutta, where he initially worked as an assistant in a Persian translator's office.²³³ Finding Persian uninspiring, he quickly began supplementing his linguistic studies with Arabic and Urdu.²³⁴ Some years into

²³² App, 2010. 295.

²³³ Rocher, Rosane, and Ludo Rocher. *The Making of Western Indology: Henry Thomas Colebrooke and the East India Company*. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012. Print. 15.

²³⁴ Rocher, Rosane, and Ludo Rocher 2012, 14. "The one, and the most necessary, Moors [Urdu], by not being written, bars all close application; the other, Persian, is too dry to entice, and is so seldom of any use that I seek its acquisition very leisurely."

his sojourn to India he would find his true linguistic love, Sanskrit, in the pursuit of the “ancient algebra of the Hindus.”²³⁵

Over the next decades, as a member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal (joined in 1792), Colebrooke published prodigiously on an expansive range of Sanskrit-related subjects – from mathematics to mythology. Most importantly, he was among the cohort of philologists who first established a family resemblance between Sanskrit and Greek, effectively elevating the status of all things Hindu in the eyes of Europe.²³⁶ In 1823 he founded the Asiatic Society of London.

Though highly-regarded in England, his real legacy would lie with his continental translators and heirs – most notably the Schlegel brothers, Franz Bopp, and Hegel. In the words of Max Müller, “Had he lived in Germany, we should long ago have seen his statue in his native place, his name written in letters of gold on the walls of academies; we should have heard of Colebrooke jubilees and Colebrooke scholarships.”²³⁷

Colebrooke’s influence was twofold. As a paragon of exactitude, the style and precision of his scholarship provided the model on which Indology, and indeed all further *Geisteswissenschaften* would develop. As a romantic orientalist, seeing modern science and mathematics as rediscovering what was already known in the *Vedas*,²³⁸ India as the source of all civilization,²³⁹ and Greek philosophy as quite likely a European inheritance from the more ancient philosophy of the Hindus,²⁴⁰ his thought would be central to the birth of German Romanticism.

²³⁵ Rocher, Rosane, and Ludo Rocher 2012, 21

²³⁶ Though the mythology credits Sir William Jones with this discovery, it was a much more expansive project.

²³⁷ Rocher, Rosane, and Ludo Rocher 2012, 204.

²³⁸ Rocher, Rosane, and Ludo Rocher 2012, 17.

²³⁹ Colebrooke, Henry Thomas. *Essay on the Religion and Philosophy of the Hindus*. London: n.p., 1858. Print. 443.

²⁴⁰ Colebrooke, Henry Thomas, and Horace Hayman Wilson. *The Sankhya Karika, or Memorial Verses on the Sankhya Philosophy by Iswara Krishna: Also the Bhasya or Commentary of Gaurapada*. Oxford: 1837. Print. 136.

Toward the end of his career, Colebrook set about composing five doxographical essays surveying the most prominent schools of Indian philosophy. The first of these essays was devoted to *sāṃkhya* and *yoga*. He did not hide his disdain for *yoga*, labelling the *Sutras* of *Patanjali*, “a fanatical work.” By contrast, he found *sāṃkhya* “a nearer approach to philosophical disquisition, however mistaken in its conclusions,” seeing in it an approximation of Pythagoreanism.

A system of philosophy, in which precision of reckoning is observed in the enumeration of its principles, is denominated *Sankhya*; a term which has been understood to signify *numeral*, agreeably to the usual acceptation of *sankhya*, number: and hence its analogy to the Pythagorean philosophy has been presumed.²⁴¹

Upon closer inspection, Colebrooke found further similarities between the philosophy of Pythagoras and the doctrines of the *sāṃkhyas*. “Like the Hindus, Pythagoras, with other Greek philosophers, assigned a subtle ethereal clothing to the soul apart from the corporeal part, and a grosser clothing to it when united with the body; the *sukshma* (or *linga*) *sarira* and *sthula sarira* of the *Sankhyas* and the rest.”²⁴² Being a subject beyond the scope of his essays, Colebrooke delayed the larger comparative project for a future date. “I expect to show that a greater degree of similarity exists between the Indian doctrine and that of the earlier than of the later Greeks...I should be disposed to conclude that the Indians were in this instance teachers rather than learners.”²⁴³

²⁴¹ Colebrooke 1858, 241.

²⁴² Colebrooke 1858, 442

²⁴³ Colebrooke 1858, 443

Though Colebrooke would pass away before ever completing (or really embarking on) his comprehensive comparison of Greek and Indian philosophy, echoes of it show up repeatedly throughout his last decade of scholarship. The most notable place regarding this Greek/Indian doctrine of the “subtle ethereal clothing” appears in his posthumously published 1837 *The Sankya Kariká: Or, Memorial Verses on the Sánkhya Philosophy*, published with Colebrooke’s translation and a commentary by his protoge, Horace Hayman Wilson, who explained Colebrooke’s use of the term “subtile body” to translate *Liṅga Śarīra*.

The notion of some corporeal, however subtile, envelopment of the soul – the *eidolon*, *umbra*, *manes*, *simulacrum*, spirit, or ghost – giving to invisible and intangible soul some visible and tangible materiality...has prevailed in all times and in all ages. Nor was the doctrine confined to the people or the poets: such of the philosophers as maintained the immateriality of soul, attaching to it, until its final purification, some portion of corporeal substance, or some substantial, though subtile investure, or *ochema*, or vehicle.²⁴⁴

Following closely on the above, Wilson cites none other than Ralph Cudworth.

Thus Cudworth (vol. III. 517) states that “the ancient assertors of the soul’s immortality did not suppose human souls, after death, to be quite stripped stark naked from all body, but that the generality of souls had then a certain spiritous, vaporous, or

²⁴⁴ Colebrooke 1837, 136.

airy body accompanying them; as also they conceived this spiritous body to hang about the soul also here in this life, before death, as its interior indument or vestment, which also then sticks to it when that other gross earthly part of the body is by death put off as an outer garment.” It also appears, that “besides the terrestrial body, and this spirituous body, the ancients held that there is a third kind, of a higher rank, peculiarly belonging to such souls, after death, as are purged and cleansed from corporeal affections, called by them *soma augoeides*, or a luciform body.”²⁴⁵

Here we see Colebrooke and Wilson outline Cudworth’s tripartite body to elucidate a morphologically analogous dual-body system in *sāṃkhya* wherein there is the perishable “gross body” (*sthula śarīra*) occupied by a transmigrating “subtle body” (*sūkṣma* or *liṅga śarīra*), which is reincarnated, based on *karma*, until such a time as it attains knowledge, whereupon it achieves liberation. “Soul’s purpose is either fruition or liberation; and to accomplish one or the other of these, subtle body passes through various conditions, assuming different exterior forms, as an actor puts on different dresses.”²⁴⁶ Not only is the subtle body of the *sāṃkhyas* morphologically similar,²⁴⁷ but it is embedded in a soteriological context nearly identical to that of classical Greek thought – i.e. transmigration of a disembodied soul for the purpose of edification, resulting in the sloughing off of materiality and the acquisition of a beatific state.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ Colebrooke 1837, 137.

²⁴⁶ Colebrooke 1837, 138.

²⁴⁷ Colebrooke 1837, 135. Though depicted mostly as a dual-body model, there appears to be a tripartite model as well – there is some confusion about this.

²⁴⁸ As Colebrooke puts it, “The professed design of all the schools of the *Sankhya*...is to teach the means by which eternal beatitude may be attained after death, if not before it. Colebrooke 1858, 249.

The invocation of Cudworth here, and by extension the Platonic conversation concerning subtle vehicles of varying materiality, is quite natural. Though Colebrooke does not explicitly state it in this book, along the way he gestures rather eagerly toward an historical diffusion model to account for the uncanny similarities. Again from Wilson's commentary,

The authorities quoted by Cudworth for these opinions are new Platonists, or Christian writers of the fourth and fifth centuries...they profess, however, to repeat the tenets of Pythagoras and Plato; and Cudworth asserts, that the distinction of two interior vehicles or tunicles of the soul, besides that outer vestment of the terrestrial body, is not a mere figment of the latter Platonists, but a tradition derived down from antiquity...Although, therefore, less clearly expressed than by the Hindu writers, the early Greek philosophers entertained similar notions of the nature of the subtle body, which was inseparable from soul until the period of its final exemption from transmigration."²⁴⁹

Here we see a history of the subtle body concept via Cambridge Platonism, through late Neoplatonism, ultimately to Pythagoras by way of Plato. Indeed this would be a useful heuristic to Colebrooke and Wilson's learned 19th century audience. The morphological similarity could help illuminate the metaphysics and anthropology of the very foreign *sāṃkhya* for readers raised on classical Greek philosophy. But they does not stop there. And I don't think their audience would either. In the mythology, at least as far back as Philostratus (170-250 C.E.), Pythagoras is remembered as a wandering mystic who studied under the priests of Babylon, Egypt, and India.

²⁴⁹ Colebrooke 1837, 137.

²⁵⁰ In the iconography, he's often depicted rather unambiguously in a turban.²⁵¹ That the Greeks have an analogous, though less clearly explicated model of the subtle body, derived from Pythagoras; that Colebrooke has elsewhere expressed that Greek philosophy was likely inherited from India, seems to suggest that the doctrine may well have been one of the things Pythagoras picked up during his eastern travels. As such, the *sāṃkhya* presentation bears not just a morphological similarity, but historical primacy over the presentations of Cudworth's late-antique sources, and thus all Western depictions of the subtle body. Where Cudworth presented the subtle body concept as a *prisca theologia* inheritance, the "true cabala, and genuine doctrine of the ancient Pythagoreans," and Ramsay traces it all back to China, Colebrooke presents an Indologically-inflected, early romantic, Indocentric reconfiguration which combines the older *prisca theologias* with a more modern diffusionist historical sense. In other words, the comparison between subtle bodies East and West works not just because they look really similar, but because the Neoplatonists, back through Plato and Pythagoras, actually got theirs from India.

²⁵⁰ Though most antique sources (Diogenes Laertius, Porphyry, and Iamblichus) all agree he only travelled to Egypt and Chaldea, Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, claims Pythagoras learned Indian doctrines during his time in Egypt. At least from the time of Ramsay on, Pythagoras was thought to have actually gone to India (Ramsay *Mythology of the Ancients* 1728, p. 61), an idea that has persistently caught on since Voltaire's short story, "An Adventure in India."

²⁵¹ This iconographic tradition is evidently quite young, actually. Though there are a number of turban-bedecked busts from antiquity conventionally labelled busts of Pythagoras, it seems there is no justification for labelling them as such aside from an anachronistic sense that he wore a turban (see Joost-Gaugier, Christiane L. *Measuring Heaven: Pythagoras and His Influence on Thought and Art in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (New York, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 143-148.) Our earliest depiction of Pythagoras, a Roman mosaic from the fourth century, depicts him as "wearing a himation...Framed by thick short hair and a short beard, his long, narrow face has generalized Greek features, while its expression, with eyes cast upward as though attentive to a speaker on high, suggests he is undergoing a mystical experience." (Joost-Gaugier 2006, 147.) As late as Raphael's 1509-1511 "The School of Athens," Pythagoras is depicted as a balding Greek. From what I can tell, the earliest Pythagoras-in-a-turban actually comes from Athanasius Kircher's 1650 *Musurgia Universalis, Liber I*.

The Sheaths of Vedanta

Colebrooke's invocation of Cudworth and his late-career speculation on the Indian origins of the Greek philosophical tradition were backlit by his decades-long career as one of the world's leading Sanskritists. Over this time he composed one of the earliest anglophone Sanskrit grammars,²⁵² wrote a book on Hindu mathematics,²⁵³ and dozens of articles which were later collated in his posthumously published three volume series *Miscellaneous Essays* (1837, 1858, and 1873). His late writings on and translations of Indian philosophy established a standard doxography which was unmatched in scope and perspicuity until Max Müller's 1899 *Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*.²⁵⁴ And though he grants his most substantive treatment of the subtle body to his translation of the *Sāṃkhyakārikās*, his work of greatest importance to the future of the subtle body idea was his essay on Vedanta, "The Exposition of the Vedanta Philosophy," published first in the *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and London* (1830), and later in his *Miscellaneous Essays*.²⁵⁵

Toward the end of this essay, Colebrooke addresses the vendantic model of soul-body interaction which takes place through a series of "sheaths" of graduating subtlety.

The soul is incased in a body as in a sheath, or rather in a succession of sheaths.

The first or inner case is the intellectual one (*vijnyanamaya*): it is composed of the sheer

²⁵² Colebrooke, Henry Thomas. *A Grammar of the Sanskrit Language*. Company's Press, 1805.

²⁵³ Colebrooke, Henry Thomas. *Algebra with Arithmetic and Mensuration from the Sanscrit of Brahmegeupta and Bhascara*. London: C. Buworth, 1817.

²⁵⁴ Rocher 2012, 176.

²⁵⁵ Also published later in Vol. II of his miscellaneous Essays

(*tam-matra*), or simple elements uncombined, and consists of the intellect (*buddhi*) joined with the five senses.

The next is the mental (*manomaya*) sheath, in which mind is joined with the preceding. A third sheath or case comprises the organs of action and the vital faculties, and is termed the organic or vital case. These three sheaths (*cosa*) constitute the subtle frame (*sucshma-sarira* or *linga-sarira*) which attends the soul in its transmigrations. The interior rudiment confined to the inner case is the causal frame (*carana-sarira*).

The gross body (*sthula-sarira*) which it animates from birth to death in any step of its transmigrations, is composed of the coarse elements, formed by combinations of the simple elements.²⁵⁶

In this essay we see the elucidation of a fourfold subtle body scheme, distinct from both the dualistic model Colebrooke read out of the *Sāṃkhyakārikās* as well as the tripartite Neoplatonic model he drew from Cudworth as a comparison. Going from subtlest to grossest, the first Vedantic “sheath” is the intellectual, Colebrooke’s translation of *vijñāna*. This is itself a compound of the five senses and intellect, or *buddhi*. The second sheath is the mental, a translation of the sanskrit term *manas*, a grosser form of mind than *buddhi*. Third we have the organic or vital body. Taken together these three – intellect, mind, and vital – are synonymous with the *līṅga śarīra* or *sūkṣma śarīra*, what he translates here as “subtile frame,” and what he employs Cudworth’s term “subtle body” for in his translation of the *Sāṃkhyakārikās*. The inner part of this tripartite subtle body is the causal frame, or *Karana-śarīra*. And the fourth aspect,

²⁵⁶ Colebrooke, Henry Thomas. *Transactions of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland Vol II*. 1830. 35-36.

of course, is the gross body, *sthūla śarīra* , composed of the five coarse elements (aether, wind, fire, water, earth).

This more conservative essay refrains from the comparative speculation of Colebrooke's other works and simply presents these translation in a relatively unaffected, straightforward manner, even going to far as to refrain from using Cudworth's term, a standard which also applies to Colebrooke's chapter on Vedānta in his *Lectures on the Philosophy and Religion of the Hindus* (1827). In this work Colebrooke gives us a more synthetic view of the structure and function of the Vedāntic subtle bodies.

[The soul] passes from one state to another, invested with a subtle frame consisting of elementary particles, the seed or rudiment of a grosser body. Departing from that which it occupied, it ascends to the moon; where, clothed with an aqueous form, it experiences the recompense of its works; and whence it returns to occupy a new body with resulting influence of its former deeds...

The returning soul quits its watery frame in the lunar orb, and passes successively and rapidly through the ether, air, vapour, mist, and cloud, into rain; and thus finds its way into a vegetating plant, and thence, through the medium of nourishment, into an animal embryo.²⁵⁷

Of the various schools of Indian philosophy elucidated by Colebrooke and his associates in the first generation of Indology, it was Vedānta that was to capture the imagination of the 19th

²⁵⁷ Essays on the religion and philosophy of the Hindus 229.

century, earliest with Charles Wilkins' (1750-1836) translation of the *Bhagavad Gītā* (1785), which made its way into Beethoven's *tagebuch*,²⁵⁸ and served as Emerson's gateway to the orient.²⁵⁹ This was followed closely by Antequil Duperron's translation of the Upaniṣads, *Oupnek'hat or Upanischada* (1796), the book which inspired Schopenhauer's intellectual conversion and is cited side-by-side with Colebrooke's essays in Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*. In the same way, it is not the sāmkhya subtle body that catches on in Colebrooke's wake – though his Platonic comparativism certainly seeds the India-first orientalism of this period, best captured in Voltaire's famous statement, “everything has come down to us from the banks of the Ganges” – rather, it was the multifarious “sheaths” of the vedāntins that we see picked up and carried forward first in further Indologically-oriented elucidations, and later in the creative late-century occult creolizations of the idea.

Beyond Colebrooke

Colebrooke's translations and invocation of Cudworth echo throughout the nineteenth century. We see his subtle body scheme replicated in J. Cockburn Thomson's 1855 translation of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, in which he contextualizes the *Gītā* as “embodying in full the theological ideas of the Theistic Sankhya.” To help readers understand the content of the *Gītā*, Thomson provides a lengthy introduction featuring the subtle body,

²⁵⁸ Solomon, Maynard. *Late Beethoven: Music. Thought. Imagination*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003. 288 n.16.

²⁵⁹ Clarke, 2010. 85.

From the moment of its emanating from the spiritual essence and its union with matter, the soul was supposed to be invested with a subtile body, which it never quits till the moment of final emancipation, or till the entire dissolution of all matter takes place. This body, called the *Linga*, or *linga-sharira*...is the vehicle in which the soul is borne from one region to another...It is material, although imperceptible; it is coeval with the soul, born with it, and ceasing to exist at its emancipation; but never quitting it for a moment as long as it is subject to material existence, no matter in what sort of substantial body the soul may be placed...in an animal, fish, fowl, beast, or man, and in superhuman beings the *linga* is still the same; being, as it were, a spiritual body.²⁶⁰

Thomson is clearly no fan of the idea, however. In stark contrast to Colebrooke, who mines high-minded philosophy for a proxy, or Ramsay, who looks to the ancient sages of the orient, Thomson chocks it all up to childish error.

Perhaps the best idea which can be given of it, is to compare it with our own childish notions of ghosts, with the phantoms or images of bodies in Greek superstition, and with the mystic non-material body with which some of the early Christians attempted, though evidently with error, to explain the Resurrection.²⁶¹

A clear slight to his predecessors Ramsay and Glanvill who sought to valorize the subtile body to the point of declaring it indispensable to a proper understanding of the Christian doctrine of the

²⁶⁰ Thomson, J. Cockburn. *Bhagavad-Gítá; A Discourse Between Krishna and Arjuna on Divine Matters*. Hertford: Stephen Austin, 1855. lxxvii.

²⁶¹ Thomson, J. Cockburn 1855, lxxviii.

resurrection. At the end of his introduction, following a rundown of the basics of sāmkhya and yoga interspersed with the self-certain author’s qualifications concerning the childish and craven disposition of the Hindu philosophers who created these systems, Thomson reveals perhaps why the Gītā is even worth engaging.

One thing may, however, be said for the strange nation among whom these doctrines are still disseminated. In no country, under no climate in the world, has religious feeling, in whatever shape, been so firm and constant in the hearts of all classes as in India. No nation, no people under the sun, has had the future after death so constantly before their minds, has been so little wedded to this life, and so intent on their emancipation from it. This would seem to be a fine groundwork for the eternal teaching of the Sacred Book.²⁶²

While the Hindu focus on the post-mortem state is admirable, Thomson is not impressed by the “faulty physiological system,” comprised of tacitly received superstitions for which “too little attempt had been made to supply the place of science.”²⁶³

The idea makes a simultaneous appearance in the most curious *The Dream of Ravan*, an anonymous work originally published as a serial fiction piece, a “highly poetic mystical allegory” in *The Dublin University Magazine* (1853-1854).²⁶⁴ The story is based on an episode from the *Rāmāyaṇa* in which Rāvaṇa’s wife, the “dusky Mandodari,” lamenting the future

²⁶² Thomson, J. Cockburn 1855, cxii.

²⁶³ Thomson, J. Cockburn 1855, lxxx.

²⁶⁴ Goodrick-Clarke Clare and Nicholas. G.R.S. *Mead and the Gnostic Quest*. Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2005. 6.

wherein her husband's affections are eclipsed by a younger lover, is assuaged through an elucidation of Sāṁkhya metaphysics – specifically the three *guṇas*: “Satva truth, Raja passion, and Tama darkness...each of them confineth the incorruptible spirit in the body.”²⁶⁵ In the opening section of the drama, a chorus comprised of *ṛṣis* (seers) teach her about how the relations between the *guṇas* reflect the relations between man and wife, and that in the future, when Rāvaṇ, though at present he needs her *tamas* quality, in the future he'll be better suited by *sattva*. Reflecting its serialized form, the story is highly episodic, proceeding on to a dream of Ravan wherein the narrative, in poetic format, is frequently interspersed with prose commentary to elucidate this or that Hindu doctrine.

Whoever the author of the work was, he or she was indologically well-read. The above quote on the three *guṇas*, for example, though unattributed in the work, is pulled from Wilkins' translation of the *Gītā*,²⁶⁶ and throughout the author betrays a familiarity with Sanskrit as well as esoteric indological disputes.²⁶⁷

The story concludes with an interpretation of the dream, featuring an elucidation of the subtle body and the vedāntic anthropology which backlights the poem.

Man is a duality; he comprises two modes of existence – one natural, one reversed. The original, normal, and true mode of his being...His state eternal Turya, or ecstasy. The opposite or reversed mode of his being...comprising a subtle inward body or soul, and a gross outward body of matter...

²⁶⁵ Mead, G.R.S. *The Dream of Ravan: A Mystery* (Reprinted from "The Dublin University Magazine," 1853 & 1854.). London: The Theosophical Publishing Society, 1895. 41.

²⁶⁶ Wilkins, Charles. *The Bhagvat-Geeta or Dialogues of Kreeshna and Arjoon in Eighteen Lectures with Notes*. London: C. Nourse, 1785. 107.

²⁶⁷ On disagreeing manuscripts between Schlegel and Gorresio, see Mead, 1895, 191-192.

The idea is further expanded: man is there represented as a prismatic trinity, veiling and looked through by a primordial unity of light – gross outward body; subtle internal body or soul; a being neither body nor soul, but absolute self-forgetfulness, called the cause-body, because it is the original sin of ignorance of his true nature.²⁶⁸

Here our anonymous author displays a vision of the vedānta anthropology, in this case a cascading scheme – first a duality between a true mode of eternal ecstasy and a reversed mode. The latter is bifurcated into two bodies – a subtle inward soul and a gross outward material body, producing a tripartite scheme: primordial unity of light, subtle internal body also known as cause body, and gross outward body. But this tripartite model is merely the preliminary to the true vedāntic model, “This prepares us for, and conducts us to, the complete and fully-developed view of man as a quaternity, in explaining which we must retread the same ground we have already gone over, but with more care and deliberation.”²⁶⁹

The quaternary elucidation is also the story of the unfolding or emanation of the soul. In its first state, it abides in that “inmost sphere of Turya [*turyia*], in which the individualised spirit lives the ecstatic life.” From here it proceeds to the sphere of transition which the author identifies with *Lethe*, wherein the soul is plunged into a state of total unconsciousness, undergoing a “change of gnostic polarity,” where its tendencies are inverted from self-knowledge to knowledge of outside things. This is the third sphere of “Pradnya [*prajñā*], or outward knowing, – this struggle to reach out and recover outside itself all that it once possessed within itself, and lost, – to regain for the lost intuition and objective perception through the senses and

²⁶⁸ Mead, G.R.S. 1895.

²⁶⁹ Mead, G.R.S. 1895, 212.

understanding.”²⁷⁰ This is also known as the sphere of dreams, where the soul believes in a universe of light and shade and all existence is phantasmic.

Within this dualistic, phantasmic cosmos, the soul imagines for itself “the Linga-deha (Psyche), or subtle, semi-material, ethereal soul, composed of a vibrating or knowing pentad, a breathing or undulating pentad,”²⁷¹ which is itself just five different aspects of consciousness: simple consciousness radiating into egoity, the imagination, the reflective faculty, and the faculty of judgment. And these five consciousnesses are identified with the five "vital aerae:" the breath of life, and the aethers of sensation, motion, and other vital phenomena.

Using the *linga deha*, that is “this subtle personification” as a vehicle, the soul proceeds concretely into the fourth sphere where,

Matter and sense are triumphant; where the universe is believed a solid reality; where all things exist in the mode of Akara, or substantial form; and where that, which successively forgot itself from spirit into absolute unconsciousness, and awoke on this side of that boundary of oblivion into an intelligence struggling outward, and from this outward struggling intelligence imagined itself into a conscious, feeling, breathing nervous soul, prepared for further clothing, now out-realises itself from soul into a body, with five senses organs of perception, and five organs of action, to suit it for knowing and acting in the external world, which it once held within, but now has wrought out of itself.

²⁷²

²⁷⁰ Mead, G.R.S. 1895, 213.

²⁷¹ Mead, G.R.S. 1895, 214.

²⁷² Mead, G.R.S. 1895, 215-216.

Here the author of the *Dream of Ravan* provides us with a four-fold emanatory subtle body map which is clearly inspired by the earlier elaboration of the Vedanta scheme we see in Colebrooke, singled out by its quaternary structure and use of the term “cause-body,” a reference to the *kāraṇa-śarīra* , what Colebrooke translated as ‘causal frame,’ which forms the second of the four bodies of the Vedantic scheme. In more poetic language our anonymous author replicates the fourfold – *viññāna*, *kāraṇa śarīra* , *sūkṣma/linga śarīra* , *sthūla śarīra* that Colebrooke had elucidated two decades earlier, also showing us how the emanation outward from purely inwardly-turned *viññāna* is simultaneously a cosmogenesis. As the soul takes on bodies of grosser and grosser corporeality, it co-creates a cosmos which, though illusory, takes on a more corporeal, objective nature as the bodies take on a grosser and more corporeal quality. This is also a step away from the simpler *Sāṃkhya* system provided by Colebrooke, and is certainly beyond the Platonic pale. I don’t think Cudworth would recognize the subtle body of *The Dream of Ravan*.

The subtle body continues to appear as a translation of *linga/sūkṣma śarīra* throughout the rest of the 19th century, showing up next in Reverend Richard Wrighton’s 1859 *An Introductory Treatise on Sanscrit Hagiographa: or the Sacred Literature of the Hindus*, a “popular treatise” or introductory summary of Indian philosophy for the layman. Chapters two and three deal with *Sāṃkhya* and *Vedānta* respectively, elucidating the “subtile bodies” of the *Sāṃkhyas* and the sheaths the the *Vedāntins*, drawing heavily on Colebrooke.

A near summary of the story thus far actually appears in the missionary Joseph Mullens’ (1820–1879) *The religious aspects of Hindu philosophy stated and discussed* (1860), wherein he summarizes a dualist scheme for the *sāṃkhyas*, who divide between *sūkṣma śarīra* subtle body

and the *sthūla śarīra* gross body, a scheme which is elaborated on by the Vedāntins. Mullens relates this model of transmigration to that of the ancient Greeks, citing Cudworth's elucidation of the Platonic *ochema* and his general *prisca theologia*. He finishes his treatment with a casual observation concerning a fundamental morphological difference between the eastern and western models.

While the Sankhya teaches that the subtle body always remains, some Pythagoreans and Platonists seem to have held that this body is changed for a better one, as the soul rises higher in virtue. The parallel between the belief of the eastern and western worlds is exceedingly interesting.²⁷³

What began in Colebrooke as an historical and philological gloss, a morphological proxy to help make sense of a curious term from the *Sāṃkhyakārikās*, is here found to be only an approximation of the subtle body model of the Sāṃkhyas. In this passage we can see a divergence, where opinions on the permanence of the subtle body stand at odds. Reflecting the discourse of late antiquity, the Sāṃkhyas seem to stand in the Iamblichean camp, where the subtle body “always remains,” while the group of Platonists Mullens is looking at exchange subtle bodies for higher ones as they ascend, consonant with Porphyry. Unfortunately our author refrains from further investigation, but his question remains interesting, and he appears to have been the first one to ask it. How similar, really, are the subtle bodies we see in the Platonic tradition and those we find in Indian philosophical systems?

²⁷³ Mullens, Joseph. *The Religious Aspects of Hindu Philosophy Stated and Discussed*. London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1860. 223.

Müller's Six Systems of Indian Philosophy

As we have seen, the Indianization of the subtle body, the tethering of the *liṅga* or *sūkṣma śarīra* to Cudworth's elaboration of the Platonic subtle body we find first in Colebrooke, caught on. Attested in every subsequent decade of the 19th century following the publication of Colebrooke's comparison in 1837,²⁷⁴ elaborations of the Hindu subtle body appear in a variety of contexts – indological, literary, polemical, from authors lay and academic, Christian missionaries, and eventually voices both domestic and foreign. That is, starting in 1860's we begin to see native Indian authors, those born into Hindu families, fluent in Sanskrit, weighing in on the Anglophone subtle body comparative project.

The earliest Indian author I've tracked down is the Brahmin turned Christian theologian, Nilakanth-Nehemiah Goreh. In his *A Rational Refutation of the Hindu Philosophical Systems* (1862), he elaborates the Vedāntic scheme's subtle and causal bodies in order to demonstrate the incoherence of *Vedānta*, arguing really against *Vedānta* epistemology and metaphysics by mining the 16th century theistic *Sāṃkhya* of *Vijñānabhikṣu*.²⁷⁵ He would go on to become a wandering Christian *saṃnyāsin*, fashioning his own consciously syncretistic form of Christianity. Max

²⁷⁴ Phillips, T. *The Missionary's Vade Mecum or A Condensed Account of the Religious Literature, Sects, Schools, and Customs of the Hindus in the North West of India*. Calcutta: Baptist Mission Press, 1847. 149

Phillips replicates Colberooke's Vedanta bodies – subtle and causal frames

1862 *The Śankhya Aphorisms of Kapila* p. 83 Sankhya subtile body

1876 *The London Quarterly and Holborn Review*, Volume 47 Sankhya subtile body p. 87

1812 Prabod'h Chandro'daya or the Moon of Intellect: an allegorical drama 'subtle body' trans J Taylor MD - curious early pre-Colebrooke translation?

²⁷⁵ Nehemiah Nilakantha Sastri Goreh. *A Rational Refutation of the Hindu Philosophical systems*. London and Madras: The Christian Literature Society for India, 1862.

Müller would later remark, “Men such as Dr. Henry Brown were Christian Platonists at Cambridge; why then should there be no Christian Vedantists, such as Nehemiah Goreh?”²⁷⁶

To wrap up our foray into the Indological subtle bodies of the 19th century, we can look nowhere else than to Max Müller’s *Six Systems of Indian Philosophy* (1899). Written at the cusp of the 20th century, this work contained the most lucid anglophone elaboration of the subtle bodies of both *Vedānta* and *Sāṃkhya* to date. Following the comparative work of his predecessors, Müller began his treatment of the concept in his section “Metempsychosis – Samsara” by treating the *prisca theologia* schemes which trace the notion of reincarnation to Egypt via Empedocles or India via Pythagoras as unnecessarily complicated.

To me it seems that such a theory was so natural that it might perfectly well have arisen independently among different races. Among the Aryan races, Italian, Celtic, and Scythic or Hyperborean tribes are mentioned as having entertained a faith in Metempsychosis, nay, traces of it have lately been discovered even among the uncivilised inhabitants of America, Africa, and Eastern Asia. And why not? In India, certainly it developed spontaneously; and if this was so in India, why not in other countries, particularly among races belonging to the same linguistic stock?²⁷⁷

So here we have a new model to account for the sameness we see across historical, geographical, and linguistic boundaries. If the Cambridge Platonists, up to and including Ramsay championed

²⁷⁶ Quoted in Young, Richard Fox. Encounters: The Case of Nilakanth-Nehemiah Goreh, Brahmin Convert. *International Bulletin of Mission Research*. Volume 29 Issue 1, January 2005. From Müller, Max. *Auld Lang Syne, 2d series, My Indian Friends*. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1899. 70–71.

²⁷⁷ Müller, Max. *The Six Systems of Indian Philosophy*. London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1919. 105.

a *prisca theologia* handed down from the wise sages of antiquity, Colebrooke, while still relying on the same ancient testimony, proposed a slightly more historical-critical diffusionist model. Here Müller chocks the ubiquity of the notion of reincarnation up to what we might anachronistically call cognitive sameness. Reincarnation seems like a perfectly reasonable idea. Someone must have come up with it. Why not multiple people in multiple places?

He then qualifies the unique dimension of Hindu notions of transmigration. "It should be remembered, however, that some systems, particularly the *Samkhya* philosophy, do not admit what we commonly understand by metempsychosis...it is not the Purusha [soul] that migrates, but the Sukshma-sarira, the subtle body."²⁷⁸ The significance of this differentiation is that, in the *Sāṃkhya* system, the soul remains "always intact, a mere looker on," while it is the subtle body, functioning as an emanation of the soul, that incarnates into and inheres in the natural cosmos (*prakṛti*). This formal distinction differentiates the Indian subtle body scheme from those Platonic ones we've seen – where it is the soul itself which accretes subtle bodies of increasing corporeality. In other words, Müller points to the radical dualism of the *Sāṃkhya* scheme, which differentiates between *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, a split mediated by the *sūkṣma-śarīra* – a model that stands at odds with the Platonic schemes where we see the *psyche* literally putting on bodies as it descends the celestial spheres, until it lands in its prison, its cosmic oyster shell, in the terrestrial realm.

In Max Müller we witness a critical turn. The Hindu subtle bodies are not Platonic subtle bodies. And the Platonic subtle bodies are not simply late-phase bastardizations of the more sophisticated Indian models. They're actually quite distinct if we look closely. Echoing Joseph

²⁷⁸ Müller, Max 1919, 105.

Mullens' 1860 gesture toward the formal disparities between the Indian and Neoplatonic schemes, Müller elucidates with Indological erudition what his missionary predecessor could not – that there is a difference, and a big one. But what is more significant here, for our genealogical project, is that despite the recognition of this formal distinction, the nomenclature is preserved. The subtle body had caught on. But in Müller its meaning had changed. Shaken from its Neoplatonic hermeneutic, it was now being employed in a more reflexively critical and historically-aware manner. Subtle bodies East and West were parting ways.

But this de-mooring of the subtle body from its overdetermined Neoplatonic philological context was not simply a stuffy Indological matter. In the same time period that this critical turn was taking place, a new form of subtle body hermeneutics was being pioneered in the popular arena. We turn now to the Theosophists.

But first, an interlude.

Kuden: Day of the Samurai

Very little is known about this strange concept of the subtle body.

– C.G. Jung

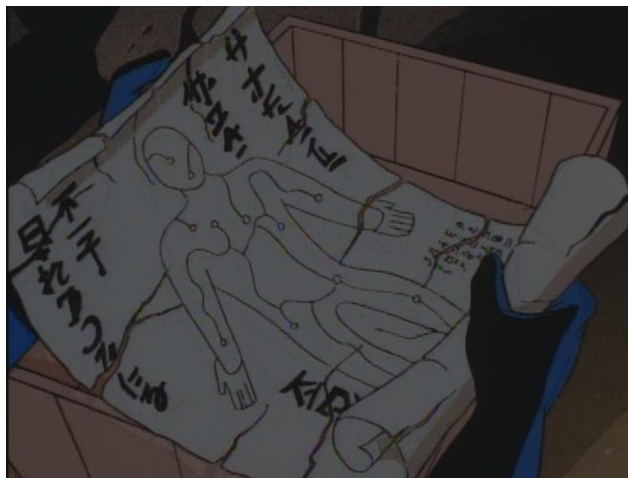
I can trace my own interest in this strange concept, I think, to an episode of *Batman: The Animated Series*. The particular episode, “Day of the Samurai,” which aired on February 23rd, 1993, was about Batman’s relationship with his old karate master, Yoru Sensei, the last living descendent from an ancient line of martial arts masters. I’ll let Bruce Wayne tell the story.

Once upon a time, Alfred, five hundred years ago to be exact, there was a fighting master who learned how to manipulate the ki lines. The currents of life force. He called the art *Kiba no Hoko*. The Way of the Fang. It was such an efficient and terrible fighting art that the master decided it was too dangerous to teach. A mere touch could render a man unconscious or cripple him. There was even a touch that was fatal. So the master hid the only copy of the instruction scroll for *Kiba no Hoko* in one of the thousand caves on the slopes of Mt. Kajiki. He told no one, but his eldest son. The location has been kept a family secret for five hundred years.²⁷⁹

²⁷⁹ Perry, Steve. "Day of the Samurai." *Batman the Animated Series*. Cartoon, 1993.

At one point in the episode we get to see the scroll containing the secrets of the *Kiba no Hoko*.

This was my first map of an esoteric anatomy or occult physiology that I ever saw. I recall writing in my journal that we apparently have these two kinds of bodies: the one physical (cells and all that stuff), and the other secret (like the map in the scroll – invisible yet palpable “Ki lines”).



More than introducing me to alternate visions of the body, this episode introduced me, or I might even say, initiated me into an entire subculture. Since cartoons don't typically come with footnotes, I sought out the episode's writer, Steve Perry, in whose analysis the “Day of the Samurai” was “nothing particularly original...kung fu and samurai movie buffs will recognize all the tropes, but American animation hadn't gone down many of those roads.”²⁸⁰ A Journey to the East where the hero learns ancient secrets from an old master and/or scrolls hidden in mountain caves was hardly a new storyline by the 1990's. What was novel however, and most significant for someone of my generation, was its entry into the more recently blooming media of the American cartoon. This episode functioned as a distillation of 1960's Counterculture orientalist mysticism. It had all the major elements: the empowering journey to the East, reflective of everything from Hermann Hesse's 1932 book of the same title to the countless spiritual seekers who had travelled to India and Japan during the 1960's; martial arts, mysticism, and the Jung-Campbell hero's journey.²⁸¹

²⁸⁰ Personal Communication Oct 16, 2018, 12:25 PM

²⁸¹ First is the calling – Batman is literally called on the phone by his Sensei to come to Japan to help him. Second is the search or descent, where Batman seeks the scroll in a mountain cave, followed by the retrieval of a lost item --

On the sources from which he drew, Perry writes,

The Green Hornet, with Bruce Lee; later, Kung Fu, with Carradine...I consumed it all. Science fiction, fantasy, mystery novels, westerns, movies, TV, philosophy, all the classical zen stuff from D.T. Suzuki to Alan Watts, Musashi's Book of Five Rings, the Tao, the I-Ching, lotta new age hippie stuff. I read everything...Jung, Campbell, of course. Ram Dass, yoga, meditation, all that.²⁸²

The long and complex history of ideas behind this episode was far from my mind in 1993. What was clear, however, was that there was this other, secret anatomy. It was valuable. People protected it by writing it in scrolls that were then hidden away in mountain caves. I wanted to learn more about it.

But this invitation to the Counterculture can only really be understood within the broader context of a 1990's American childhood, one that transpired between the falling of the wall and the falling of the towers – the post-historical fantasy decade that cast its orientalist gaze on a Japanofuturistic e-Asia, the aesthetic retroactively epitomized and satirized in Vaporwave. This e-Asia suffused all childhood media of the era, from *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (1987-1996) to *Double Dragon* (1993-1994), and as we've already established, *Batman: The Animated Series* (1992-1995). This was the imaginal space I occupied through multimedia frenzy. It was ubiquitous in cartoons, comic books, video and computer games. And a staple of this orient was a vague energetic substrate (chi, qi, or ki, dragon fire, or the mutagen ooze from Dimension X

in this case, the scroll, and with it, knowledge of the subtle body. And finally the return. Empowered by his knowledge of subtle anatomy and the touch of death, Batman can face the evil Ninja at the end of the episode.

²⁸² Personal Communication Oct 16, 2018, 12:25 PM.

that turned quotidian New York street turtles into Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles), that supported occult, mutable physiologies – both cultivable, the source of superpowers.²⁸³

It was the many and varied mystical-esoteric discourses (orientalist, energetic, and hyperdimensional to name a few) that gave these media the psychedelic edge that transmuted 1990's Saturday morning cartoon, with its psychotropic eucharist of Lucky Charms and dairy libation, into an initiatory cult.²⁸⁴ And the way the characters manifested their superpowers and altered states of energy and consciousness always seemed to have something to do with martial arts. If I were interested in this stuff, it was clear where I should start looking.

In setting my eyes on the subtle body of a mystical Orient I was unknowingly drinking from a fantastic spring millennia in the making, a spring I've begun to elucidate in the chapters above. And it is here, in these *kuden*, a term out of Japanese martial arts meaning “oral transmission,” that I wish to let you look under the hood, to give you a glimpse of the underlying mechanics of this dissertation. The search I began as a six year old imitating Batman has, through a circuitous route, resulted in the production of this historical genealogy, which is simultaneously an historical introspection, or perhaps an archeology of my self.

²⁸³ This imagined orient, midnight in a cartoon 90's retro futuristic Tokyo, is still one of the most reliably consistent places I visit when dreaming

²⁸⁴ I owe this totally reasonable analysis of the psychedelic dimensions of childhood cartoon culture to Kripal, Jeff. *Secret Body* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 25.

Chapter Four

The Wisdom of the Mahatmas

*For centuries we have had in Thibet a moral,
pure hearted, simple people, unblest with civilization,
hence—untainted by its vices. For ages has been
Thibet the last corner of the globe not so entirely corrupted
as to preclude the mingling together of the two atmospheres
—the physical and the spiritual.
—Koot Hoomi²⁸⁵*

The continental drift of the Mystical Orient – from the Egypt and Persia of the Renaissance to the China of the seventeenth century to the India of the long eighteenth – continued into the nineteenth century, where the Orient found its final terrestrial home in “essentially the globe’s last remaining terra incognita,” Tibet.²⁸⁶ As we have seen, from the Chaldean provenance of the Neoplatonists through the Egyptian of Cudworth and Indian of Colebrooke, the home and philosophical surround of the subtle body is intimately bound to prevailing cultural notions of the exalted Other. In this chapter we will look at the Tibetan shift and the further creolization of the subtle body concept through the learned syncretism of Helena

²⁸⁵ Barker, A.T., 1926: *The Mahatma Letters to A. P. Sinnett, from the Mahatmas M. and K.H.* (London: Rider & Co., 1948).

²⁸⁶ Liechty, Mark. *Far Out: Countercultural Seekers and the Tourist Encounter in Nepal* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 6.; For where the orient goes once it achieves escape velocity, see Kripal, Jeffrey J. *Mutants and Mystics: Science Fiction, Superhero Comics, and the Paranormal* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 31-69.; the move from the himalayas into space (or the fifth dimension) is best captured by Grant Morrison’s 1994 Kathmandu alien abduction experience, see: Morrison, Grant. *Supergods: What Masked Vigilantes, Miraculous Mutants, and a Sun God from Smallville Can Teach Us About Being Human* (New York, NY: Spiegel & Grau, 2011), 260-266.

Blavatsky. It is here that we see the first truly democratic dissemination of the subtle body idea as it becomes a token of the modernist occult underground.

Tibetological Foundations

Though direct European intellectual engagement with Tibet extends back at least into the 13th century, with the Flemish Friar William of Rubruck,²⁸⁷ and official Jesuit missionary contact in Tibet began in the 17th century with Ippolito Desideri,²⁸⁸ it isn't really until the mid-19th century that Tibet enters the European imaginary with any force. Just as British imperial policies in India spurred the formation of academic Indology, it was Tibet's geostrategic value as part of the Great Game which first made the Land of Snows an object of European desire and inspired the formation of academic Tibetology.

The story begins with the Austro-Hungarian "Bodhisattva," Sándor Kőrösi Csoma (1784-1842). Born to a poor family in Transylvania in 1784, Csoma eventually made his way to the University of Göttingen where he studied from 1816-1819, quickly mastering a number of Asian languages – Sanskrit, Bengali, and Marathi – in addition to the numerous European languages in which he was already fluent. Setting out in 1820 to find the historical homeland of the Hungarian peoples, which he supposed to be amongst the Uyghur populations of Western China, he journeyed across Iran (1821), Afghanistan (1822), and finally Kashmir, where he first became acquainted with the Tibetan alphabet.

²⁸⁷ Winder, Marianne. 'Buddhism and Tibetology.' *Bulletin of Tibetology* No.1 (1984): 11.

²⁸⁸ Gopnik, Alison. 'How an 18th-Century Philosopher Helped Solve My Midlife Crisis: David Hume, the Buddha, and a search for the Eastern roots of the Western Enlightenment.' *The Atlantic* (October 2015). Also see Thierry Dodin and Heinz Rather (eds.). *Imaging Tibet: Perceptions, Projections, and Fantasies* (Somerville MA: Wisdom Publications, Inc., 2001), Ch. 1 "The Image of Tibet in the West."

Displaying linguistic genius (by this time he could read 17 languages), he secured a grant from the British colonial government which paid for him to journey north to Ladakh, where Csoma would spend the rest of his career assembling the first English-Tibetan dictionary. In the mid 1830's he would also publish the first foreign-language Tibetan grammar. With the notoriety garnered by his dictionary and grammar, Csoma finally had the means to visit Lhasa and make his way north into western China, the land of the Uyghurs. However, upon setting out on his final voyage, he contracted malaria and passed away in Darjeeling at the age of 58.²⁸⁹

Csoma's interest in Tibetan was purely linguistic. Though he studied with lamas in monasteries, in distinction to his Jesuit predecessors (Desideri, for example, was famously well-versed in Tibetan philosophy, even going so far as to translate some Tsongkhapa into Latin and Italian),²⁹⁰ Csoma displayed little philosophical interest, and spent most of his career parsing the language and establishing an exhaustive lexicon,²⁹¹ two tasks that would open Europe to the Tibetan language and facilitate the swell of missionary activity that followed in his wake. And though he never wrote directly on Tibetan presentations of the subtle body, Csoma did publish the first Anglophone articles on Tibetan Tantra (Kalachakra) and medicine (the rgyud bzhi), articles which provided the basis from which nominally Tibetan subtle body maps would be elaborated in the latter half of the century.

Tibetology expands slowly over the course of the nineteenth century. In 1842 Philippe Édouard Foucaux, a student of the famous French Indologist Eugene Burnouf began teaching Tibetan at the École des langues orientales in Paris, publishing a French language Tibetan

²⁸⁹ Hetenyi, Ernest. 'Alexander Csoma de Koros: The Hungarian Bodhisattva.' *Bulletin of Tibetology* No.1 (1972).

²⁹⁰ Gopnik 2015.

²⁹¹ Of the dozens of miscellaneous essays he wrote over his career, some ventured into doxography, including the earliest English language table of contents to the Kanjur.

grammar in 1858. In 1863 Emil Schlagintweit, an amateur scholar and explorer, published perhaps the first comprehensive introduction to Tibetan Buddhism, *Buddhism In Tibet. With An Account Of The Buddhist Systems Preceding It In India*. These developments were accompanied by growing British imperial interests in the Himalayas coupled with a new wave of Capuchin missionary activity in the region,²⁹² leading to a substantive Tibetological flowering of the 1890's, exemplified by L.A. Waddell's 1895 *The Buddhism of Tibet or Lamaism*, and S.F. Oldenbourg's 1897 *Bibliotheca Buddhica*.²⁹³

Paralleling the development of Tibetology as an academic field was the birth of occultism, a term first coined in 1842.²⁹⁴ Developing earliest in Francophone context and popularized through the syncretistic Kabbalah of Eliphas Levi, occultism was first introduced into the English-speaking world through the works of Helena Blavatsky and her Theosophical Society, without a doubt the most important individual and institution in the popularization of the soon-to-be intertwined notions of Tibetocentric orientalism and the subtle body.

Helena Blavatsky and the Tibetan Mahtamas

Just as Andrew Michael Ramsay was the most important European representative of the subtle body in the eighteenth century, Helena Blavatsky was its most important advocate in the nineteenth, and it was her elucidation of ideas about subtle embodiment that would most directly

²⁹² Shakya, Tsering. 'The Development of Modern Tibetan Studies.' In: *Robert Barnett (Hg.): Resistance and Reform in Tibet* (Bloomington/Indianapolis, Indiana University Press 1994).

²⁹³ Winder 1984, 12.

²⁹⁴ Hanegraaff, Wouter J. (ed.). *Dictionary of Gnosis & Western Esotericism* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 887. For a more exhaustive etymology see: Partridge, Christopher. *The Re-Enchantment of the West Volume I: Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture, and Occulture* (London: T&T Clark International, 2004), 68-70.

inform the subsequent unfolding of the idea in the West. Indeed her impact has been so outsized that contemporary academic treatment of the subtle body actually traces its anglophone heritage back to her, as if it were purely a product of nineteenth-century occultist orientalism.²⁹⁵ My work thus far has been in part an effort to provide a more historically nuanced and textually exhaustive context. But here we will turn to that most important of subtle body theorists, who by the end of her life was characterized as “arguably, the most influential woman in Europe and America,”²⁹⁶ and her most important of contributions to the formation of the subtle body: creolization.

Helena Petrovna Blavatsky (1831-1891) was born into an aristocratic Russian military family, occasioning her with an early taste of Tibetan culture. When the young Helena was five years old, her grandfather was stationed in Astrakhan, the capital of Kalmykia, the only Buddhist nation in Europe, on the western shore of the Caspian Sea as second in command of the province and Russia’s liaison to the Kalmuck chieftains who maintained regiments of cavalry for the Russian military. Though Blavatsky would later claim that she was herself “brought up with the Buddhist Kalmucks...living in the steppes of Astrachan till the age of ten,”²⁹⁷ she only stayed with her grandfather for ten months, during which time her mother wrote a novel about Kalmuck life on the steppe.²⁹⁸ Nonetheless, one can reasonably trace the young Helena’s fascination with Tibetan culture to this time, as merely by virtue of living there she would have come into contact with Buddhist monks and the local Buddhist temple constructed by Prince Tumene. As Marion Mead puts it, “it is certain that the shaven-headed lamas and the painted effigies of Buddha

²⁹⁵ Samuel 2013, 2.

²⁹⁶ Liechty 2017, 6.

²⁹⁷ Meade, Marion. *Madame Blavatsky: The Woman Behind the Myth* (New York: Open Road Integrated Media, 2014).

²⁹⁸ Johnson, K. Paul. *The Mystery Revealed: Madame Blavatsky and the Myth of the Great White Lodge* (New York: SUNY Press, 1994), 1.

stirred her a great deal more than the rituals and icons of the Russian Orthodox Church.”²⁹⁹

Further, as Mead speculates, it is likely Blavatsky learned horsemanship at this time from the “Kalmuck daredevils.”

Excellent horsemen who delighted in reckless displays of agility, the Kalmucks disported themselves by lassoing a wild stallion, springing upon the horse’s back, and trying to keep from being thrown. Sometimes rider and horse rolled together on the grass; sometimes they skittered through the air with the speed of an arrow. These violent rodeo maneuvers, performed by women as well as men, impressed H.P.B. and it was most likely at this time that she first learned to ride. Clearly, her model of equestrianism was that of the Kalmuck daredevils. Ten years later, when conventional young ladies were sedately riding sidesaddle, she would still be straddling a horse like a tribesman, having near fatal accidents, and causing her worried family to gnash their teeth. They could not deny, however, that she was a superb horsewoman.³⁰⁰

Married off at the age of 17, within a year Blavatsky had left her husband to journey East, in her own words, “to travel the world in pursuit of esoteric teachings.” It is here that Blavatsky’s biography splits into two dimensions: the historical, which has been more or less reconstructed by a number of highly able biographers,³⁰¹ and the mythical, that is Blavatsky’s own self-mythologizing account, and the story carried forward in Theosophical hagiography and

²⁹⁹ Meade 2014.

³⁰⁰ Meade 2014.

³⁰¹ See Meade 2014, also Cranston, Sylvia. *The Extraordinary Life and Influence of Helena Blavatsky: Founder of the Modern Theosophical Movement*. Santa Barbara: Path Publishing House, 1993.

popular memory. Dealing as we are with imaginal bodies and orientalist mnemohistory, that is, history as it is remembered, it is Blavatsky's mythical biography which is of interest to us here.³⁰²

As the story goes, after a short stint in Odessa, Russia's own Miami beach,³⁰³ she made for Constantinople before arriving in Cairo in 1850, where she was initiated into the occult mysteries of Egypt. Here she learned snake charming, studied under a Coptic magician,³⁰⁴ and acquired a lifelong friend who would act as a visionary catalyst for the rest of her days: hashish, a "wonderful drug" which enabled her to go "anywhere I wish."³⁰⁵ In 1851 Blavatsky encountered a group of Nepali princes, among whom was one Master Morya, who instructed her to head for Tibet. Delaying her mission a bit, she travelled throughout the Americas before setting out for Asia, where she made several unsuccessful attempts at entering Tibet - first via Darjeeling in 1856, then through Ladakh. Her subsequent journeys took her to Java, Burma, and Italy, from where she was contacted again by Master Morya who reminded her of her Tibetan destiny. Her oriental peregrinations culminated in her return to Tibet in 1860,³⁰⁶ when she successfully made it to Shigatse where she rendezvoused with Master Morya's colleague, Koot Hoomi, with whom she spent the next two,³⁰⁷ or seven years,³⁰⁸ studying the Tibetan Tantras – in particular the *Stanzas of Dzyan*, "the first volume of the Commentaries upon the seven secret foilos of the *Kiu-te* [i.e. *rgyud*, the Tibetan word for Tantra]."³⁰⁹ After returning to the West,

³⁰² For more on mnemohistory, see: Assmann, Jan. *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

³⁰³ Meade 2014.

³⁰⁴ Dodin 2001, 154.

³⁰⁵ Liechty 2017, 7.

³⁰⁶ Though this period of her life is undocumented, circumspect, and has been subject to much spilled ink, the veracity of her claims are only peripherally relevant to this genealogy. See: Ellwood, Robert S. "Helena Blavatsky." *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (Thomson Gale, 2005), 977.

³⁰⁷ Dodin 2001, 155.

³⁰⁸ Lopez, Donald S. *Prisoners of Shangri-La: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 50

³⁰⁹ From Lopez 1998, 50.

Blavatsky was once more sought out by a messenger from Master Morya, who instructed her to leave immediately for New York. An extraordinary mission was in store for her.³¹⁰

Blavatsky made her way to America in 1873, and with the help of Henry Olcott, founded the Theosophical Society in New York in 1875. The establishment of the society was followed quickly by a slew of books: *Isis Unveiled* of 1877, *The Secret Doctrine* of 1888, and *The Voice of the Silence* of 1889, all of which draw on the Egyptian and Tibetan wisdom she gleaned during her decade of travels. Her books also attest to continued revelations from Egyptian adepts or himalayan Mahatmas who communicated with Blavatsky and her followers through dream, vision, automatic writing, materialized letters, and even embodied astral visitations.³¹¹

The footnotes to these books are quite astounding. In tracing the historiography of the subtle body, I figured we might see her engaging with the Indological literature which references it, and perhaps the Tibetological essays of Csoma. Not only does she do that (she cites Colebrooke's *Samkhya Karikas* specifically as well as the essays of Csoma de Koros), but she also cites the Cambridge Platonists, and even the Neoplatonic thinkers from whom they got the idea of the subtle body in the first place (Iamblichus, Porphyry, Proclus). How she actually wrote her books has been the subject of a century of speculation. Suffice it to say, it would appear a lot of her footnotes were post-facto emendations done to affect an academic normalcy otherwise absent from her rather footloose style.³¹²

Subtle Embodiment in Isis Unveiled

³¹⁰ Dodin 2001, 155.

³¹¹ Lopez 1998, 51.

³¹² See Hanegraaff, Wouter J. 'The Theosophical Imagination.' *Correspondences: Journal for the Study of Esotericism* Vol. 5 (2017), 3-39.

Blavatsky's treatment of the subtle body goes through several renditions. Earliest on, it appears in *Isis Unveiled* (1877) as a woolly amalgam – a combination of Eliphas Levi's "astral light" and Paracelsian ideas about the astral soul combined with fragments from the Neoplatonists, the Cambridge Platonists, various Kabbalistic sources, and the Church Fathers. Due to the diversity of overlapping ideas present in *Isis Unveiled*, I'd like to begin my treatment with the caveat that Blavatsky's work – here in particular – resists really any taxonomical gaze whatsoever. Blavatsky, though bestowed with a unique genius, was not graced with a systematic mind. I can do no better in characterizing her books than to follow Ramsay's qualified praise of Cudworth in declaring them a confused heap of pearls and precious gems. To draw any coherent doctrine out of the quasi-anarchical morass of *Isis Unveiled* requires the scholar to overstep bounds, to interpose distinctions to an uncomfortable degree, and perhaps cherrypick beyond the unspoken limits of conventional scholarly propriety. This is all to say that, despite my most earnest attempt at providing a detailed and fair descriptive account, my hermeneutical lens is an awkward fit to the data which refuses the sometimes overbearing standards of internal coherence required by an historical-critical method.

Blavatsky kicks off *Isis Unveiled* with a glossary, a sort of crash-course in occult terminology. The first entry is "*Aetherobacy*," the Greek term for human levitation. From there the glossary introduces the reader to an array of eclectic trivia – "Alchemists" follows, and then "Akasa" (the Sanskrit word for space). We find her first treatment of the subtle body under the heading "Astral Light," a term from Eliphas Levi which she identifies with the *sidereal light* of

“Paracelsus and other Hermetic philosophers.”³¹³ This light is “the *anima mundi*, the workshop of Nature and of all the cosmos, spiritually as well as physically.”³¹⁴ Indeed throughout *Isis Unveiled* the astral light shines through as the monistic backdrop on which everything else is displayed. It is the magnetic fluid of the mesmerists and that which facilitates the levitation of human and non-human subjects. It is the intelligent, spiritual aspect of the all-pervasive aether.

She next turns to Porphyry, who “describes the celestial body which is always joined with the soul as ‘immortal, luminous, and star-like’.”³¹⁵ She expands upon this celestial body in her entry “Theurgist,” an occupation she defines as principally concerned with making spirits visible to the eyes of mortals. She then describes theurgical praxis:

After having prepared a lamp, some sandal, incense, etc., and having traced the magic circles taught to him by the superior guru, in order to keep away *bad* spirits, he “ceases to breathe, and calls *the fire* to his help to disperse his body.” He pronounces a certain number of times the sacred word, and “his soul escapes from his body, and his body disappears, and the soul of the evoked spirits descends into the *double* body and animates it.” Then “His (Grihasta’s) soul reenters into his body whose subtile particles have again been aggregating, after having formed of their emanations an aerial body to the spirit he evoked.”³¹⁶

³¹³ Blavatsky, Helena. *Isis Unveiled: a Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*. Los Angeles: Theosophy Company, 1877. xxv.

³¹⁴ Blavatsky 1877, xxv.

³¹⁵ Blavatsky 1877, xxv.

³¹⁶ Blavatsky 1877, xlii-xliii.

Here Blavatsky displays the mechanics of spiritual evocation, a process centered around an aerial body formed of “subtile particles.” This practice, she continues, was first demonstrated to Plotinus by an Egyptian priest. So to begin our tally, here we have a spirit-housing aerial body, cast in Egyptian garb, elucidated in a practical context, metaphysically situated within a fine material physics. This is a Neoplatonic body inspired by the Platonic translations and commentaries of Thomas Taylor (1758-1835), who is graced with a footnote in this entry.

With the glossary behind us, Blavatsky proceeds to her first volume of *Isis Unveiled*, “Part One – Science,” wherein she argues that “the discoveries of modern science do not disagree with the oldest traditions,”³¹⁷ hoping to harmonize the ancient wisdom of the *prisca theologī* with the latest developments in modern science. Among the ancient doctrines corroborated by recent scientific developments are the subtle and astral bodies. First, however, she establishes the doctrines from an eclectic array of ancient documentary evidence.

Shifting her gaze to *Genesis*, Blavatsky finds a complex subtle body metaphysics at play in the story of Adam and Eve.

As the reptile upon casting his coat becomes freed from a casing of gross matter, which cramped a body grown too large for it, and resumes its existence with renewed activity, so man, by casting off the gross material body, enters upon the next stage of his existence with enlarged powers and quickened vitality. Inversely, the Chaldean Kabalists tell us that primeval man, who, contrary to the Darwinian theory was purer, wiser, and far more spiritual, as shown by the myths of the Scandanavian Bur, the Hindu Dejotas, and

³¹⁷ Blavatsky 1877, 3.

the Mosaic “sons of God,” – in short, of a far higher nature than the man of the present Adamic race, became *despiritualized* or tainted with matter, and then, for the first time, was given the *fleshy body*, which is typified in *Genesis* in that profoundly-significant verse: “Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God *make coats of skin*, and clothed them.” Unless the commentators would make of the First Cause a *celestial tailor*, what else can the apparently absurd words mean, but that the spiritual man had reached, through the progress of involution, to that point where matter, predominating over and conquering spirit, had transformed him into the physical man, or the second Adam, of the second chapter of *Genesis*?³¹⁸

In Blavatsky’s reading, *Genesis* is about the despiritualization of man, the involution of the spirit which is tainted with matter and eventually clothed in a fleshy body. Here the real punishment for Adam and Eve’s shenanigans is incarnation. In this passage we can see a number of rhetorical moves that demonstrate Blavatsky’s fidelity to earlier subtle body theorists. On the one hand, this is the incarnational vision of the “Chaldean Kabbalists,” providing the notion with Oriental *bona fides*. On the other hand, these same Kabbalists contradict Darwin, showing us that ancient man was not brutish, but pure, wise, and spiritual. So we can see that even in the late-nineteenth century, the subtle body remained active in the battle for the historical imagination, waged between the historical modernists and the prisca theologians, with Blavatsky firmly though somewhat problematically planted in the latter camp.³¹⁹ So already Blavatsky’s

³¹⁸ Blavatsky 1877, 149.

³¹⁹ For more on how Blavatsky fits into the debate, as a prisca theologian who champions a form of spiritual evolutionary theory, see Prophet, Erin. *Evolution Esotericized: Conceptual Blending and the Emergence of Secular, Therapeutic Salvation*. Unpublished Dissertation. Rice University 2018.

subtle body fits the spatial (orientalist) and temporal (prisca theologia) parameters established by her forebears.

Next she takes us to the “*sidereal* force” of Paracelsus, “that emanation from the stars and celestial bodies of which the spiritual form of man – the astral spirit – is composed.” She continues,

The identical composition of the earth and all other planetary bodies and man’s terrestrial body was a fundamental idea in his philosophy. ‘The body comes from the elements, the astral spirit from the stars...Man eats and drinks of the elements, for the sustenance of his blood and flesh; from the stars are the intellect and thoughts sustained in his spirit.’ *The spectroscope has made good his theory as to the identical composition of man and stars; the physicists now lecture to their classes upon the magnetic attractions of the sun and planets.*³²⁰

Her point here is that Paracelsus was right all along. And here’s the crux:

If we recollect how they have deprecated Paracelsus and his theory of man and the stars being composed of like substances; how ridiculed he was by astronomers and physicists, for his ideas of chemical affinity and attraction between the two; and then realize that the spectroscope has vindicated one of his assertions at least, is it so absurd to prophesy that in time all the rest of his theories will be substantiated?³²¹

³²⁰ Blavatsky 1877, 168.

³²¹ Blavatsky 1877, 168.

Here Blavatsky takes the newly established chemical affinity between the material makeup of the human body and the stars as evidence for the Paracelsian astral spirit (elsewhere the astral soul or astral body), subjecting the subtle body, at least rhetorically, to external standards of empirical verification.

After taking us through various other forms of scientific corroboration (referencing William Crooke's 1874 *Researches in the Phenomena of Spiritualism*), Blavatsky shows us the Paracelsian doctrine in more detail.

“Three spirits live and actuate man,” teaches Paracelsus; “three worlds pour their beams upon him; but all three only as the image and echo of one and the same all-constructing and uniting principle of production. The first is the spirit of the elements (terrestrial body and vital force in its brute condition); the second, the spirit of the stars (sidereal or astral body - the soul); the third is the *Divine* spirit (*Augodides*)...”

Here we arrive at a tripartite vision of the human – terrestrial, astral, and divine. This is the vision we find in Paracelsus, and one consonant with the Neoplatonic summary we find in Cudworth, echoed through Glanvill, More, and Ramsay. Blavatsky continues to contextualize this tripartite scheme:

Man is a little world – a microcosm inside the great universe. Like a foetus, he is suspended, by all his *three* spirits, in the matrix of the macrocosmos; and while his

terrestrial body is in constant sympathy with its parent earth, his astral soul lives in unison with the sidereal *anima mundi*...As to his third spirit, the divine, what is it but an infinitesimal ray, one of the countless radiations proceeding directly from the Highest Cause – the Spiritual Light of the World?

In Blavatsky's early system of *Isis Unveiled*, the tripartite division of Man is a natural result of the process of cosmic involution. Beginning from the spirit/divine, a ray exuded by the Spiritual Light of the World involutes itself into the material world, taking on first an astral soul/body which lives in constant communion with the animating spirit of the cosmos, and finally a terrestrial body, in sympathy with the earth. The whole picture is aligned with the Porphyrian accretional model of incarnation through the celestial spheres outlined in chapter two, and the Theosophical prescription for our incarnated predicament is Neoplatonic through and through – sloughing off of materiality to resume our beatific, “pure, wise, and spiritual” state.

A big part of this process, at least in Blavatsky's earlier work, involves theurgical magic, “the last expression of occult psychological science.”³²² Regarding how this science relates to the subtle body, Blavatsky defers to Eliphas Levi, who describes the initiate who, upon becoming

“Quite *lucide*, he communicates and directs at will the *magnetic* vibrations in the mass of astral light...Transformed in human light at the moment of the conception, *it* (the light) becomes the *first envelope of the soul* by combination with the subtlest fluids it forms an ethereal body, or the *sidereal phantom*, which is entirely disengaged *only* at the

³²² Blavatsky 1877, 281.

moment of death.” To project this ethereal body, at no matter what distance; to render it more objective and tangible by condensing over its fluidic form the waves of the parent essence, is the great secret of the adept-*magician*.³²³

The adept should learn to condense the astral light (the monistic substrate of the cosmos) and, combining it with the subtlest fluids, form an ethereal body which can a) survive bodily death, and b) be projected at will. It is through the cultivation of the astral body that one can “win immortality.”

The secret doctrine teaches that man, if he wins immortality, will remain forever the trinity that he is in life, and will continue so throughout all the spheres. The astral body, which in this life is covered by a gross physical envelope, becomes -- when relieved of that covering by the process of corporeal death - in its turn the shell of another and more ethereal body. This begins developing from the moment of death, and becomes perfected when the astral body of the earthly form finally separates from it. This process, they say, is repeated at every new transition from sphere to sphere.³²⁴

This thoroughly Neoplatonic, Porphyrian model of subtle incarnation is carried forward in *Isis Unveiled Part Two – Religion*, which uses the subtle body to variously explain a quasi-docetist model of the crucifixion (only Christ’s terrestrial body was crucified),³²⁵ Job’s faith (he can put

³²³ Blavatsky 1877, 281.

³²⁴ Blavatsky 1877, 328-329

³²⁵ Blavatsky 1877 v.2, 186.

up with all the punishment because he knows about the spirit body),³²⁶ and various terms from other traditions, from the Hindu *atman* to the Mithraic *ferwer* (*Feruer* or *Ferouer*) and the Buddhist *aggra*. Through this process Blavatsky is continuing the trend started in the Cambridge Platonists and developed by Ramsay – that is, the expansion of the subtle body concept, through even the most tenuous connection, into further and further flung historical and geographical domains. As a liminal concept – mediating body and soul – the subtle body can always be found at the furthest reaches of the orient, wherever its maximum happens to be located at that particular historical moment.

Isis Unveiled was a hit. Despite nearly universal elite disdain for the book – ignored by the *New York Times*, and derided by scholars – its initial thousand-copy run sold out immediately.

³²⁷ It was, in the words of Glenn Campbell, “An immediate success. A first edition of one thousand copies sold out in ten days. Within a year, all copies of two reprints had also been sold. It has continued to sell well for a century, the total copies now numbering about half a million,”

³²⁸ a remarkable state of affairs for a truly eclectic 1300-odd page manifesto. As Peter Washington characterizes its readership, these were “passionate amateurs and spiritual autodidacts: readers too concerned with answers to important questions to be bothered with academic quibbles about authenticity and internal coherence.”³²⁹ *Isis Unveiled* was the right book at the right time, and though it did little to bolster membership in Blavatsky’s newly-founded Theosophical Society, it certainly bolstered her faith in her own destiny. Visited

³²⁶ Blavatsky 1877 v.2, 495

³²⁷ Washington, Peter. *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon: A History of the Mystics, Mediums, and Misfits Who Brought Spiritualism to America* (New York: Schocken Books, 1993), 52.

³²⁸ Quoted in Prophet 2018, 161.

³²⁹ Washington 1993, 53.

soon thereafter by the Tibetan master Morya, Blavatsky and Olcott were instructed to leave immediately for India. They moved to Bombay in February of the following year.³³⁰

This move marked a precipitous change in Blavatsky's eastern orientation. Where *Isis Unveiled*, "an exposition of Egyptian occultism and the cult of the Great Mother" is filled with Egyptophilic orientalism, and many of its secrets are revealed by generic "sages of the Orient," all of Blavatsky's subsequent work is marked with a Tibetophilic orientalism centered now around the Mahatmas, from whom Blavatsky and Olcott would receive the "Mahatma letters," what would form the prima materia for her second book and magnum opus, *The Secret Doctrine* (1888).

Subtle Bodies in The Secret Doctrine

When *Isis Unveiled* was published in 1877, much of Blavatsky's biography, the tale recounted above, had yet to be written. Most of her story was actually fleshed out in her correspondence with A.P. Sinnett, between their first acquaintance in 1881 and his 1886 publication of *Incidents in the Life of Madame Blavatsky*, the first biography about her.³³¹ Where the philosophical substrate and technical jargon of *Isis Unveiled* was predominantly Neoplatonic, Paracelsian, Kabbalistic, Hermetic, and Biblical, her second book, *The Secret Doctrine* (1888) exhibited a distinctly eastern shift, a symptom of what Washington describes as "a general shift of interest in occult circles from Egypt to the Himalayas" during the 1870's. He continues, "after 1878 we hear little from Blavatsky about Egyptian Masters."³³² This move in Blavatsky is

³³⁰ Washington 1993, 57-60

³³¹ This relationship is recounted in Washington 1993, ch. 3.

³³² Washington 1993, 57.

signalled by a change in nomenclature. Whereas the exalted masters referenced in *Isis Unveiled* are referred to as “adepts” throughout the work, after Blavatsky’s relocation to India, she changes to the Indic locution, “Mahatama.”³³³ Speculating on the motivation behind the Oriental drift, Washington writes,

Now that the Middle East was becoming comparatively familiar to Europeans (who had begun to travel extensively in Egypt, courtesy of Thomas Cook), was it desirable to locate the Mysteries somewhere more exotic and less accessible? Or was this just another caprice, like Blavatsky’s flight from her father’s servants in 1848? However familiar she may have been with cosmic orientation, her sense of mundane geography had always been shaky. Her own fanciful travel stories had often taken her to different remote parts of the world simultaneously. India, Egypt – it was all the same.³³⁴

Like the adepts become Mahatmas, the subtle body of *The Secret Doctrine* also exhibits an eastward relocation. On a linguistic level, the technical nomenclature flips into Sanskrit and Tibetan. On the level of citations, it is no longer the dusty academic sources she follows in *Isis Unveiled*, but the Mahatma letters themselves – revealed spirit communications that transmit the doctrines with a clarity and authority that the pedantic essays of a Csoma or translations of a Colebrooke could never assume.

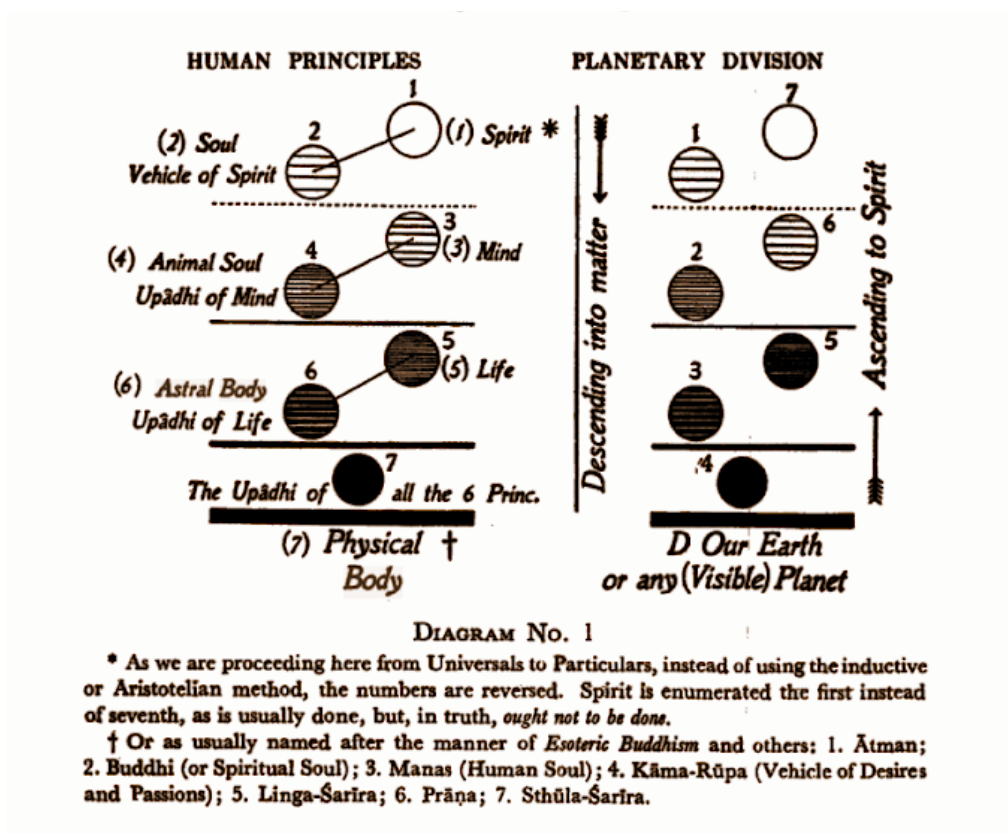
Blavatsky opens *The Secret Doctrine* with the translation of a pithy and oracular wisdom text called the *Book of Dzyan*, originally written in the unknown language of Senzar. Blavatsky

³³³ Prophet 2018, 167.

³³⁴ Washington 1993, 58.

claimed to have learned the language and studied the text in Tibet during her years with Koot Hoomi. The rest of *The Secret Doctrine* – all 1,500 pages – really just amounts to a commentary on the seven-page translation of the first seven stanzas of this mysterious book.³³⁵

Continuing the microcosmic-macrocosmic model outlined in *Isis Unveiled*, Blavatsky shows us that the cosmogenesis related in the stanzas of Dzyan is also simultaneously a model of subtle embodiment. Her treatment of these themes is accompanied by a number of diagrams, the first of which displays an involuting spirit exhibiting an accretion-based subtle body somatogenesis.³³⁶



³³⁵ Lachman, Gary. *Madame Blavatsky: The Mother of Modern Spirituality* (New York: Tarcher/Penguin, 2012), 250.

³³⁶ Blavatsky, Helena. *The Secret Doctrine* (Los Angeles: Theosophy Company, 1888), 153.

Here for the first time we see what will become the characteristic Theosophical septenary subtle body map, what Blavatsky refers to as “the seven principles in the human division.”³³⁷ In this reading, which remains morphologically a standard model of Neoplatonic emanationism along the lines of Porphyry or Proclus, we can witness the oriental drift, where above we have a septenary model in English, still using Neoplatonic terminology (vehicle of the spirit, animal soul, astral body), in the footnotes we have the Sanskrit translations for these seven levels.

To clarify, we have:

	English (Neoplatonic)	Sanskrit
1.	Spirit	<i>Atman</i>
2.	Soul, Vehicle of the Spirit, Spiritual Soul	<i>Buddhi</i>
3.	Mind, Huan Soul	<i>Manas</i>
4.	Animal Soul, Vehicle of Desires and Passions	<i>Upadhi of Mind, Kama-Rupa</i>
5.	Life	<i>Linga-Sarira</i>
6.	Astral Body	<i>Upadhi of Life, Prana</i>
7.	Physical Body	<i>Upadhi of all 6 Principles, Sthula-Sarira</i>

All seven principles abide in an emanatory framework – from the absolute spirit/*atman* down to the physical body. And of the seven principles, it is only the lowest that is available to our incarnated sensorium. “Out of these seven only *one, the lowest and the most material of those*

³³⁷ Blavatsky 1888, 153.

globes, is within our plane or means of perception, the six others lying outside of it and being therefore invisible to the terrestrial eye.”³³⁸

With this layout, though syncretistic, we would appear to have something of a working model of the layers of the subtle body - more systematic than anything we find in *Isis Unveiled*. But it only takes five pages for Blavatsky to upset the taxonomy. In the very next section, “SEPTENARY DIVISION IN DIFFERENT INDIAN SYSTEMS” she provides us with alternative models to consider.³³⁹

SEPTENARY DIVISION IN DIFFERENT INDIAN SYSTEMS

We give below in a tabular form the classifications, adopted by the Buddhist and Vedāntic teachers, of the principles of man:

CLASSIFICATION IN <i>Esoteric Buddhism.</i>	VEDĀNTIC CLASSIFICATION.	CLASSIFICATION IN TĀRAKA RĀJA-YOGA.
1. Sthūla-Śarīra.	Annamaya kośa.*	} Sthūlopādhi.§
2. Prāṇa.†	} Prāṇamaya kośa.	
3. The vehicle of Prāṇa.‡		
4. Kāma-Rūpa.	} Manomaya kośa.	} Sūkshnopādhi.
5. Mind { (a) Volitions and feelings, etc.		
(b) Vijñāna.	Ānandamaya kośa.	
6. Spiritual Soul.	Ātman.	Kāraṇopādhi.
7. Ātman.		Ātman.

She begins her treatment by remarking that though the four-part Raja Yoga classification is superior from a metaphysical point of view, “as it is a question of simple choice and expediency,

³³⁸ Blavatsky 1888, 152.

³³⁹ Blavatsky 1888, 157.

we hold in this work to the ‘time-honoured’ classification of the trans-Himalayan ‘Arhat Esoteric School.’”³⁴⁰ The “time-honoured” Esoteric Buddhist classification is sourced in the Mahatma Letters, ostensibly reflective of Tibetan doctrines concerning the subtle body, which we can ultimately trace back to Koot Hoomi.³⁴¹ The Tibetan provenance of her ideas is bolstered by the fact that all of this is simply commentary on the sixth stanza from the *Book of Dzyan* (“Dzyan” according to Blavatsky, the Tibetan translation of Sanskrit *Dhyana*, or “meditative absorption,” a word usually translated *bsam gtan*) and later she even cites from *The Book of Aphorisms of Tsong-Kha-Pa*.

As we can see, in the *Esoteric Buddhism* column Blavatsky puts forth an eight-part model of the human, from the *sthula sarira* (she translates as the “gross body”), through the “vehicle of prana” (aka the astral body). This seems to be a novel map, especially as it culminates in that most un-buddhist of terms, the *atman*!

Thankfully his model was not in fact delivered from on high, and we can witness the genesis and expansion of the model throughout the 1880’s. Blavatsky earlier provided the following 7-fold schema in a letter from 1882 as an aid to understanding the precise metaphysics of reincarnation:³⁴²

	English	Sanskrit
1.	Pure Spirit	<i>Atman</i>
2.	Spiritual Soul, Intelligence	<i>Buddhi</i>
3.	Mind, Animal Soul	<i>Manas</i>
4.	Body of Desire	<i>Kama-Rupa</i>

³⁴⁰ Blavatsky 1888, 157.

³⁴¹ Lachman 2012.

³⁴² Godwin, Joscelyn. *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (New York: SUNY Press, 1994), 341.

5.	Astral or Vital Body	<i>Linga-Sarira</i>
6.	Life-Principle	<i>Jiva</i>
7.	Physical Body	<i>Sthula-Sarira</i>

In *The Secret Doctrine* Blavatsky explicitly cites AP Sinnett's 1883 *Esoteric Buddhism* as the source of her taxonomy,³⁴³ from where we are further pointed back to an article in *The Theosophist* from October 1881, by William H. Terry, the founder and editor of the famous spiritualist journal turned Theosophical journal, *The Harbinger of Light*, which ran continuously from 1870 to 1954. When we return to Terry's article, we can again see the eclectic roots of the septenary division.

In order to understand clearly the view of the Occultists, it is necessary to glance at the constitution of the living human being. Even the spiritual theory teaches that man is a trinity, composed of (1) a higher spirit, or the "spiritual Soul" as ancient philosophers designated it; (2) its envelope - the ethereal form or shadow of the body - called by the Neoplatonists the "animal soul"; and (3) the physical body. Although from one point of view this is broadly correct, yet, according to Occultists, to render our conceptions of this truth clearer and follow successfully the course of man after death, it is necessary to subdivide further these three entities and resolve them into their constituent principles. This analysis being almost wholly unknown to Western nations, it is difficult in some

³⁴³ Sinnett, A. P. *Esoteric Buddhism*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1884. 68-75.

cases to find any English words by which to represent the Occult subdivisions, but we give them in the least obscure phraseology that we can command.³⁴⁴

Under this Terry provides a tripartite model subdivided into seven sections as follows:

Divisions of the Spiritualists.	Subdivisions of the Occultists.
1. The Body.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The Physical body, composed wholly of matter in its grossest and most tangible form. 2. The Vital principle—(or <i>Jiv-atma</i>)—, a form of force, indestructible and when disconnected with one set of atoms, becoming attracted immediately by others.
2. The Animal Soul or <i>Perisprit.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3. The Astral body (<i>Linga Sharira</i>) composed of highly etherialized matter; in its habitual passive state, the perfect but very shadowy duplicate of the body; its activity, consolidation and form depending entirely on the <i>kama rupa</i>. 4. The Astral shape (<i>kama rupa</i>) or body of desire, a principle defining the configuration of— 5. The animal or physical intelligence or consciousness or Ego, analogous to, though proportionally higher in degree than, the reason, instinct, memory, imagination, &c., existing* in the higher animals.
3. The Spiritual Soul or Spirit.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6. The Higher or Spiritual intelligence or consciousness, or spiritual Ego, in which mainly resides the sense of consciousness in the <i>perfect</i> man, though the lower dimmer animal consciousness co-exists in No. 5 7. The Spirit—an emanation from the ABSOLUTE; uncreated; eternal; a state rather than a being.

So in the earliest attestation of the septenary model we can see it differentiated from the tripartite model (the one which dominated *Isis Unveiled*) along spiritualist vs. occultist lines. It

³⁴⁴ Terry, W. H. Esq. 'Spirits Embodied and Disembodied.' *The Theosophist* Vol. 3. No. 1 (Bombay, October 1881), 17-22.

is the more exhaustive model of the occultists, a model whose rhetorical utility seems to center around its ability to explain the mechanics of reincarnation, as Terry explains below his chart, “Now the change that we call death, only immediately affects the first three constituents; the body decomposes to enter into new combinations, and the vital force is dissipated to help animate new organisms, and astral human form (*Linga Sharira*) dies with the body. There remain four principles.”³⁴⁵ As remarked above, it is the septenary model that dominates throughout *The Secret Doctrine*. It flows into her 1889 *Key to Theosophy*. It is also the operating model in her late-life Esoteric Section, where it is picked up and expanded on by the second generation Theosophists Annie Besant and Charles Leadbeater, the subject of our next chapter.

The Creolization of the Subtle Body

The narrative so far has been largely one of the elucidation, claiming, and recontextualization of a problematic concept, one that blurs the line between oriental import and orientalist projection. This negotiation has taken place through millennia of subtle body theorists, from Porphyry to Blavatsky. The subtle body inherited from late antiquity came as a package deal, bundled with the *prisca theologia* historical vision, what has been labelled “Platonic Orientalism,” a term coined by John Walbridge and expanded upon by Wouter Hanegraaff. Referring to the late-antique development of Platonic Orientalism, Hanegraaff:

³⁴⁵ Terry 1881. This justification shows up both in Terry’s passage after this as well as HPB’s usage in her 1882 article.

There are innumerable references to the ruling idea that the most ancient “barbarian” peoples possessed a pure and superior science and wisdom, derived not from reason but from direct mystical access to the divine, and that all the important Greek philosophers up to and including Plato had received their “philosophy” from these sources. The modalities of such transmission were not seen as problematic: after all, countless testimonies confirmed that Plato himself and all his notable predecessors had personally traveled to Egypt, Babylon, Persia and even India, where they had studied with the priests and sages.³⁴⁶

This, more or less, is the situation as it stands from Cudworth through the Indologists of the 19th century. The Eastern sources drawn on by the Cambridge Platonists are relatively close to home – the Hermeticism of Cudworth, spurring his Egyptophilic Platonic orientalist vision, and the Kabbalah of More, with its source in a Chaldean Orient. Even at this stage, it is difficult to maintain a completely projectionist model of what is going on with the subtle body and the orient, as our thinkers engaged dialectically with the purportedly oriental sources from which they were drawing. The situation becomes more complicated with the birth of Indology – when Colebrooke is bringing the notion to bear on the texts of *Yoga* and *Sāṃkhya*. There is an undeniable dialectical process going on in Colebrooke’s translation process, where the subtle body concept, drawn from Cudworth, is employed to elucidate the *linga śarīra* of the Sāṃkhyas. Though the fit between the ideas is imperfect, the scission is accounted for by an India-first

³⁴⁶ Hanegraaff, Wouter J. *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 14.

prisca theologia, where the Greek versions are later, more degenerate forms of the classical Indian model brought West by Pythagoras.

We can think of the historical aspect of the subtle body as embroiled in an orientalist dialectic, where in some cases, eastern sources are actually drawn from, in other cases, as most obvious in Ramsay, overly-zealous generalization facilitates an unearned projection of sameness across vast swaths of historical and literary data. Blavatsky brings this dialectic to a new threshold, partially due to her bridging of the philosophical and literary domains into which the subtle body, before her time, had been bifurcated. While she employs scholarly sources – citing academic classical philology alongside Indology and Tibetology – she promulgates doctrine with a confidence and finality we'd never see from the likes of Csoma, Colebrooke, or Muller. And so with her, the Indological and Tibetological subtle bodies flip from translational heuristics to salvational dogmatics.

The movement of this orientalist dialectic is a model of the process of creolization. Various defined, in this case I follow Robin Cohen's broad usage,

When creolization occurs, participants select particular elements from incoming or inherited cultures, endow these with meanings different from those they possessed in the original cultures, and then creatively merge these to create new varieties that supersede the prior forms.³⁴⁷

³⁴⁷ Cohen, Robin. "Creolization and Cultural Globalization: The Soft Sounds of Fugitive Power." *Globalizations* 4(3), January 1994.

Coming out of linguistics, creolization originally referred to the creative merging of two or more languages, a process wherein, “The ideal intertwined language would have 100 per cent structural replication from Language A and 100 per cent lexical replication from Language B.”³⁴⁸ That is to say, an ideal Creole would consist of the grammar of one language overlaid with the lexicon of another (where, as in the case of Hatian Creole, though more complex in actuality, exhibit a West African grammar fused with an Indo-European lexicon). Of course such an ideal case does not exist. But the model is quite relevant to the shifting sources from which subtle body discourse draws. Though the subtle body of *Isis Unveiled* still abides along the lines of the earlier *prisca theologia* models ala Ramsay, with oriental provenance mostly a matter of inference and speculation, by *The Secret Doctrine* Blavatsky is actually using Indian and Tibetan sources, and more substantially, Indian and Tibetan nomenclature.

We merely have to look to the Stanzas of Dzyan, cryptic in large part due to the number of undefined Sanskrit, Tibetan, and Chinese words they employ. Ostensibly written in the mysterious language of Senzar, only to be translated into English by Blavatsky, the stanzas nonetheless contain a huge number of Indo-Tibetan locutions. From Sanskrit we have: *Paranishpanna, Alaya, Paramartha, Anupadaka, Manvataric, Devamatri, Svabhavat, Matripadma, Maya, Rupa, and Arupa*, all of which are actual Sanskrit words gleaned from Indological sources. When we dig into the commentary she further syncretizes these concepts, often in creative and not strictly correct ways. *Alaya*, for example,

³⁴⁸ Smith, Norval and Veenstra, Tonjes (eds.) *Creolization and Contact* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001), 89.

...is literally the "Soul of the World" or Anima Mundi, the "Over-Soul" of Emerson...not Nirvana, but a condition next to it...Thus, while the *Yogacharyas* (of the *Mahayana* school) say that *Alaya* is the personification of the Voidness, and yet *Alaya* (*Nyingpo* and *Tsang* in Tibetan) is the basis of every visible and invisible thing...other schools dispute the statement.³⁴⁹

She immediately identifies the Sanskrit term with a Neoplatonic locution – *Anima Mundi*, then later the “Over-Soul” of Emerson (who, as it turns out, actually coined that term as a translation of *atman*, while reading Colebrooke’s essays on the Vedas).³⁵⁰ A few pages later she identifies the *Alaya* with the “Supreme Spirit” of Hegel.³⁵¹ Further, in these pages on the *Alaya*, Blavatsky employs a number of Tibetan terms, and though she deploys them incorrectly (*Tsang*, we might surmise is *gstang*, or “pure,” while *Nyingpo*, or *snying po* typically translates to “heart” or “essence,” both quite distinct from *kun gzhi*, the standard Tibetan translation of the Sanskrit *alaya*) they aren’t entirely made up – that is, they are actual Tibetan words.

It is cases like this where it’s most useful to invoke creolization. What appears to be happening – microcosmically in this passage, and macrocosmically throughout *The Secret Doctrine* – is the creolizing fusion of a deep Neoplatonic grammar with an orientalizing Indo-Tibetan syntax. Though Blavatsky is drawing heavily from Sanskrit and Tibetan sources throughout *The Secret Doctrine* (or more precisely, Indological and Tibetological sources), her metaphysical, anthropological, and soteriological models remain steadfastly Neoplatonic

³⁴⁹ Blavatsky 1888, 48.

³⁵⁰ Pradhan, Sachin N. *India in the United States: Contribution of India and Indians in the United States of America*, (SP Press International, Inc., 1996), 12.

³⁵¹ Blavatsky 1888, 50.

schemes of emanation and return. Tempered with the many and varied discourses we've seen Blavatsky employing (from Kabbalah to Darwin), the fundamental substrate, or deep grammar, from *Isis Unveiled* through to the student notes from the Esoteric Section we'll see in the next chapter retain a distinct Neoplatonic glow.

Tibet Beyond Blavatsky

Blavatsky's influence here was lasting. Walter Evans-Wentz (1878-1965), an academically trained Tibetologist and lifelong Theosophist, published prolifically on Tibetan mysticism, with a monograph on Milarepa and another on Tibetan Yoga, being most famous for his 1927 translation of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, wherein he uses the term "subtle body" to refer to the mental bodies one has in the post-death bardos.³⁵² In a sense, Evans-Wentz took Blavatsky's creolized, only semi-coherent fusion, and domesticated it, making it academically viable, and bringing the subtle body concept into the Tibetological mainstream, where it persists to this day. The Tibetan subtle body would reach a popular mainstream through Evans-Wentz's translations of a substantial body of Tibetan mystical and technical yogic material – translations published with embedded psychological commentaries by C.G. Jung, a figure we will turn to in chapter six.

And so with Blavatsky's relocation of the oriental locus classicus from Egypt to Tibet, and with the popular explosion Evans-Wentz's translations of Tibetan tantric and thanatological texts, the subtle body concept extended its reach into the himalayas.

³⁵² Evans-Wentz, W.Y., Karma-Glin-Pa. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: Or the After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane, according to Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdub's English Rendering*. Oxford University Press 2000.

Kuden: The Hidden Body of the Ninja

The futuristic e-Asia of 90's cartoon and video game culture was an obvious descendant of Theosophical orientalism. As we have seen, though Blavatsky was far from the first to posit a mystical East as the source of subtle bodies and superpowers, it was she who packaged and popularized the notion for immediate modern consumption. As the next chapter will show, the second generation of Theosophy built on Blavatsky's foundation, pioneering sophisticated subtle body maps and cultivation methodologies, laying the groundwork for the Western reception of Eastern somatic systems from hatha yoga to the martial arts.

By the 1990's these once exotic methodologies from the mystic Orient, popularized in the American Counterculture, had been so thoroughly naturalized as to be available as afterschool programs for kids in public elementary school even in pious Texas, where I grew up. In fourth grade I enrolled in our after school yoga program, taught by a turban-bedecked Kundalini Yogi from a local Sikh temple. The following year I enrolled in our after school Yang style Tai Chi class. In sixth grade I added Taekwondo to my list of afterschool activities, experientially sampling a wide variety of Asian somatic cultivation methodologies.

This pastiche of practices was complemented by the newly emerging internet world. It was around this same time that the first websites aspiring Jedi went up, and it was through those that I was introduced to the respective literary and philosophical cultures out of which the yogas and martial arts I was learning were born.³⁵³ One site posted a translation of the entirety of Miyamoto Musashi's *Book of Five Rings*, which I printed out and carried around with me for

³⁵³ These were jediacademy.com and forceacademy.net, both since deceased

months. And Sunzi's *Art of War* as well as the *Daodejing* were often referenced in the Jedi sermons section, which additionally contained a whole archive of "Jedi meditation methods," what I would now categorize as New Age meditations of healing and empowerment, many of which were focused on various somatic cartographies featuring inner channels (those "ki lines" I knew about from Batman) and chakras.

But perhaps the most extraordinary thing about all of these mystical-esoteric discourses I was swimming in before I even reached the age of ten was just how commonplace this all actually was in the context in which I grew up. I wasn't raised on an ashram, and no one in my family was into this stuff. My dad was an atheist math professor, and my mom was a spiritual but not religious preschool teacher. My upbringing was decidedly middle-class, and explicitly non-religious. Everything I explored happened through a sheer childlike curiosity. This is just how present, how ubiquitous all of these ideas and practices had become in the U.S. by the early 90's, that an unguided child could wind up learning to meditate on his chakras from a website, could learn Kundalini yoga in an afterschool program.

By the time I was fourteen I had branched out significantly beyond my immediate middle school surround. I sought out multiple local martial arts teachers, spending some time studying Aikido, then venturing out to Chinatown to attend the Houston Shaolin Temple, created by two touring Shaolin monks who had stayed in Houston to open a school in 1998. I landed eventually at a Ninjutsu dojo. This art held my attention in no small part due to the large role subtle anatomic maps played in the curriculum, which employed several in what was to my mind a real-life version of Batman's body map from the *Kiba no Hoko* style.

The first subtle body map I ever received was a mashup of two classical maps dating from the Edo period (1603 – 1868), the *Kirigami Yurushi* of *Takagi-Yoshin Ryu* and the *Kinketsu Teisoku* of *Koto Ryu*, with the points on the body labelled in Japanese characters (kanji) and transliterated Japanese

(romaji).

Though the points were untranslated in the chart,

through our training I was

quickly introduced to the

meanings of the various

words and points. Where

kasumi was a point in the

middle of the temple, its

English translation was

“mist,” and it referred to how

one's eyes would ‘mist up’

after being struck in that spot.

Similarly, *shichibatsu*, a point

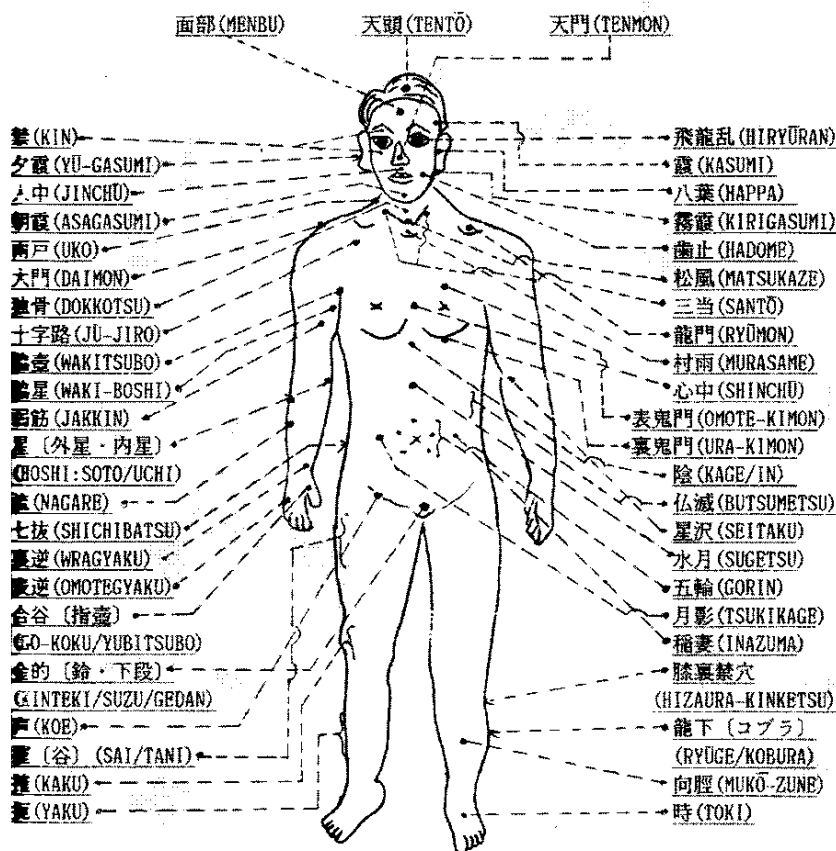
in the center of the kidney,

meant “seven extractor,” and referred to how one would not be able to walk for seven days after

being hit there.

CHART OF THE BODY'S WEAK POINTS KYUSHO

The Kyusho (weak and lethal points) of the martial arts have to be understood because they differ from healing points (Tsubo/Kyusho) used in Acupuncture or Shiatsu. The learning and eventually mastering, involves experience, both in using on others as well as having it used upon oneself by others. The effectiveness will undoubtedly differ from person to person, so be aware that there are some people who feel absolutely no pain, in which case the solution is taught only by word of mouth.



Inspired by this real-world, historically attested subtle body cartography and the esoteric, “oral transmission” (*kuden*) teachings that illuminated it, I made two trips to Japan in 2004 and 2006, during which I first got copies of the classical maps from which the hodgepodge cartography above was assembled.³⁵⁴ It was at this point that I began to study Japanese seriously, to decode the arcane references these maps contained.

And so it now begins to come into focus how the orientalist imaginal space of 90’s childhood media, combined with the flourishing domestic occulture that had, by this time, become so ubiquitous as to facilitate Kundalini Yoga and Tai Chi programs in public schools, led me eventually to an academic, philological engagement with untranslated somatic cartographies from classical Japanese martial arts. This is the point at which my interest went beyond what I would describe as childlike curiosity, and took on a more serious dimension, bolstered by the philological and research methods I was learning as an undergraduate Classical Studies major.

Through the translation of these charts I became acquainted with the poetic, historical, esoteric Buddhist, Chinese medical, and Daoist currents that underlied the terminology – where the point in the center of the upper lip, “human center” *jinchu* 人中 was a more or less practical designation straight out of a Chinese acupuncture chart, the name of a point on the third rib, colloquially translated as “the day the Buddha died” *butsumetsu* 仏滅 was a reference to the Buddha’s mystical birth from his mother’s side; and the solar plexus point’s name “moon on water” *suigetsu* 水月 came from 9th century Buddhist poem by Tang Dynasty official Pei Xiu 裴休 about the illusory nature of conditioned phenomena.

³⁵⁴ See appendix I.

It was through this genealogy of the subtle body of the Ninja, through tracing the names back to their mythical, mystical, and medical sources, that I came to understand these charts as really second-rate, layman's versions of the much more theoretically complex and exhaustive internal cartographies from the Chinese and Daoist medical and alchemical traditions. If I were interested in tracking down the locus classicus of the subtle body, it was clear where I should look.

Chapter Five

Theosophical Gnosis and Astral Hermeneutics

*The Gnosis, or traditional secret knowledge,
was never without its representatives in any age or country.*
– H.P. Blavatsky *Isis Unveiled*

*The notion that the physical body . . . is as it were the exteriorization of an invisible
subtle embodiment of the life of the mind is a very ancient belief.* – G. R. S. Mead

The early Theosophical engagement with subtle bodies and the forms of knowledge to which they expose us is also deeply implicated in the historiographical struggles of the late-nineteenth century. In Blavatsky's first book, *Isis Unveiled* (1877), she crafts a highly erudite history of the transmission of gnosis from India all over the world, revealing to the reader "the profoundest mysteries of Oriental Gnosis, the most majestic articles of faith of the Secret Wisdom."³⁵⁵ This gnosis, however, has a tortured relationship with its historical manifestations. Being a strictly oral doctrine from time immemorial, it suffered much degeneration in its transmission to the present, such that "the primitive pure Oriental Gnosticism was completely corrupted and degraded by the different subsequent sects."³⁵⁶ What Blavatsky wants to do is to get back to the primitive and pure, the original gnosis, unsaddled with historical dross. So, already in Blavatsky, there is an inherent dualism in the theosophical scheme between the

³⁵⁵ Blavatsky, H. P. *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*. Centenary Anniversary Edition. The Theosophy Company. Los Angeles, California 1982. Vol II. 152-153

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, Vol I 27n.2.

various historical manifestations we might call gnosticisms and the trans-historical gnosis of which each of them participates, if only partially.

We can witness a similar bifurcation in the contemporary scholarly engagement with gnosticism. On the one hand, there is gnosticism as an historical phenomenon – usually something that arose in murky, syncretistic conditions some time in the Hellenistic period. There's a general way we understand this gnosticism – it was categorized as a heresy by the church fathers, and was more or less suppressed into extinction. This gnosticism, as an historical datum, a bit of trivia, is a totally comfortable entity for the historian. It can be traced through writings, art history, and even archeology, and its larger metaphysical, epistemological, and soteriological claims can be unproblematically bracketed or reduced to social, economic, or political context.

The other way we talk about it is with reference to gnosis as an epistemological category. And this is a bit more problematic. When we try to engage with gnosis as a way of knowing, we're forced to muster some serious philosophical sophistication in order to elucidate an alternate epistemological modality in the face of the overwhelming normativity of the academic Neo-Kantian epistemologies that have shaped our field – historicism and social constructivism. We can see serious engagement with gnosis as a form of knowledge throughout the 20th century – early in the works of Carl Jung, where it is an historical proxy for his own psychological soteriology of individuation,³⁵⁷ Gilles Quispel, where gnosis is a sort of bridging epistemology that can help us square the modern bifurcation of faith and reason.³⁵⁸ It enters the modern study of Western Esotericism in the work of Antoine Faivre,³⁵⁹ and is explored in Wouter Hanegraaff's

³⁵⁷ Jung, C. G., and Robert Alan. Segal. *The Gnostic Jung* (Routledge, 2000), 145.

³⁵⁸ Quispel, Gilles, ed., *Gnosis: De derde component van de Europese cultuurtraditie*. Utrecht: HES, 1988.

³⁵⁹ Faivre, Antoine. *Access to Western Esotericism*. State University of New York Press, 1994.

work, especially his essay “Altered states of knowledge: The attainment of gnōsis in the hermetica,” where Hanegraaff critiques the orthodox epistemology of our field as “quasi-positivist descriptivism,” unsatisfactory in the face of texts that speak of a knowledge which “cannot be taught,” or which refer to “trans-rational stages of direct experiential knowledge,” and calls for a recognition of the importance of the radical alterity of the altered states of consciousness from which these texts spring. This third way of knowing is a major focus of Jeff Kripal’s, from the gnostic dialectic he outlines in his 2001 *The Serpent’s Gift* to the New Comparativism of his 2017 *Secret Body* (where he is quite explicit in differentiating between gnosis and “Big-G Gnosticism”).³⁶⁰

For the early Theosophists, the historiography of gnosticism (i.e. gnosis in the past) was intimately aligned with the epistemic superiority of gnosis (i.e. gnosis in the present), and the epistemic superiority of gnosis was predicated on a transcendental anthropology of the human-as-multiplicity, elucidated through models of the subtle body. The Theosophists sought to return to that ancient gnosis through practices related to subtle models of embodiment in a unitive cosmos of imbricating metaphysical planes, where the historical dimension was re-concieved of as merely the shadow play of higher beings in higher dimensions. What we see here is a picture of gnosis as a more subtle, literally meta-physical knowing attainable only by a more subtle, meta-physical body. Here I’ll be tracing these tropes – gnosis and the subtle body – through the works of three luminaries of second-generation Theosophy: Annie Besant, Charles Leadbeater, and G.R.S. Mead.

³⁶⁰ Kripal, Jeffrey J. *Secret Body: Erotic and Esoteric Currents in the History of Religions* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 363. I came to graduate school for the gnosis.

Blavatsky's Astral Bodies

Gnosticism and the subtle body, interestingly enough, are both terms that were coined at the same time, in the same place. Gnosticism by the Cambridge Platonist Henry More,³⁶¹ and “subtle body,” as outlined in chapter one, by his fellow professor, Ralph Cudworth.³⁶² Both of these terms, from their initial coinage, are framed as ancient doctrines – as Cudworth puts it, the “ancient and True Cabala,” that is, two aspects of the *prisca theologia*, ancient theology revealed in pharaonic Egypt, and transmitted through Hermes Trismegistus to Moses, then Democritus, finally to Plato and all the rest.

An aura of ancient revelation follows these ideas into the 18th century, where they inform British Indology from whence they flow into the 19th century via German Romanticism. In the late 19th century, gnosis and the subtle body collide once again in the syncretistic writings of Helena Blavatsky, mixing creatively with Buddhist philosophy, Neoplatonism, Hindu cosmology, Hermetic soteriology, Kabbalah, and Darwinian evolution, to name a few major strands.

As covered in the last chapter, Blavatsky's cartographies of embodiment were a constantly shifting, mercurial creolization of mostly Neoplatonic and Indo-Tibetan strands. What we find in these categorizations are variations on visions of the structure of the human being culled from the writings of academic Indologists of the 18th and 19th centuries, who brought the multiplicitous anthropologies of Yoga and Sāṃkhya to Europe in translation. Blavatsky forms her own creative approximation toward the end of her life, but always appears

³⁶¹ More, Henry. *The Immortality of the Soul: so farre forth as it is demonstrable from the Knowledge of Nature and the Light of Reason*. 1659.

³⁶² As covered in chapter one, though it technically shows up earlier in Hobbes, it is Cudworth who is the first to use the anglophone term systematically and it is his use that is carried forward.

to waffle on the specifics. And despite, or perhaps thanks to the fluidity of the concept – changing from her work in the 1870’s through the 1880’s, it is expanded upon as a doctrinal cornerstone for the next generation of Theosophists.

But the taxonomy of bodies is a rather minor, pedantic point within Blavatsky’s larger corpus. A major theme in all of her work is a vociferous disdain for contemporary Christians, whom she refers to as

Dolts and hypocrites! Blasphemers and impious Pharisees, who speak in the same breath of the endless merciful love and care of their God and creator for helpless man, and of that God *scourging the good, the very best of his creatures, bleeding them to death like an insatiable Moloch!*³⁶³

The foil to Blavatsky’s contemporary, bourgeois Christians are the gnostics, who “were by far the superiors of the disciples, in point of education and general information; even in a knowledge of the religious tenets of the Jews themselves.”³⁶⁴ The history of religions in Blavatsky is the history of gnosis – a universal category which suffuses all historical religions and wisdom traditions, transmitted through historical diffusion, but still transcultural. It is clear she saw her own reflection as a heterodox modernist in the heretical gnosticism portrayed by the church fathers – to her, gnosticism was to early Catholicism what Theosophy was to contemporary religion and science.

³⁶³ Blavatsky, H. P. *Secret Doctrine*. The Theosophy Company. Los Angeles, California 2004. Vol II, 304.

³⁶⁴ Blavatsky 1982. Vol II, 208.

With respect to the category of gnosis, Blavatsky inherited the same *prisca theologia* the Cambridge Platonists did, but added some steps along the way. In traditional Renaissance *prisca theologia*, Egypt was the source of all divine revelation, passed down through the great minds of each age. In a similar fashion to how she altered subtle body orientalism, Blavatsky further orientalizes this narrative, and places the source of divine revelation in India, where an ancient religion known as Budhism (one D) transmitted gnosis to Egypt, from where it was eventually transmitted back to India, where Buddhism as we know it (two D's) was born. So when she is displaying the various subtle body schemas, the Buddhist is the gnostic, and the path from the physical body to the spirit is the gnostic ascent to The Pleroma of Eternal Light, also known as *Nirvana* or *Moksha*.³⁶⁵

Annie Besant's Esoteric Christianity

The basic details of the theosophical body are finally nailed down by Blavatsky's spiritual successor Annie Besant. In 1889, two years before her death, Blavatsky founded The Esoteric Section, an exclusive group of disciples within the Theosophical society who would learn directly from her.³⁶⁶ The group was comprised of twelve students – six female and six male – and met on a weekly basis for esoteric instructions. In 1897 Besant collated much of the information Blavatsky had passed on in the Esoteric Section and published it under Blavatsky's

³⁶⁵ Blavatsky, H. P. *The Key to Theosophy: Being a Clear Exposition, in the Form of Question and Answer, of the Ethics, Science, and Philosophy for the Study of Which the Theosophical Society Has Been Founded*. Theosophical Pub. Society, 1889, 51.

³⁶⁶ Washington, Peter. *Madame Blavatsky's Baboon: a History of the Mystics, Mediums, and Misfits Who Brought Spiritualism to America*. Schocken Books, 1996, 100.

name as part of what she labelled volume three of *The Secret Doctrine*.³⁶⁷ This volume was highly controversial, but after the dust had settled, it was accepted as canon by a number of influential voices in the Theosophical Society, and with it Besant's version of the subtle body became something of a standard Theosophical model.

The body revealed through Blavatsky's esoteric teachings, as related to us by Besant, goes like this:

Annie Besant's Cartography³⁶⁸

	English	Sanskrit
1.	Divine Nature, Monad	<i>Atman</i>
2.	Spiritual Intelligence, Intuition	<i>Buddhi</i>
3.	Mind	<i>Manas</i> (bifurcated into higher <i>Buddhis Manas</i> and lower <i>Kama Manas</i>)
4.	Desire Body	<i>Kama Rupa</i>
5.	Vitality or Life Force	<i>Prana</i>
6.	Subtle Body, Etheric Double, Etheric Body	<i>Linga Sarira</i>
7.	Dense Body	<i>Sthula Sarira</i>

A clear echo of Blavatsky's earlier models, this is the vision that informs Besant's numerous works on the subtle body as summed up in the seven-volume series of Theosophical Manuals she

³⁶⁷ Leland, Kurt. *Rainbow Body: a History of the Western Chakra System from Blavatsky to Brennan*. Ibis Press, 2016, 102-103.

³⁶⁸ Leland 2016, 103.

put out with Charles Leadbeater in the 1890's. The first of these, *The Seven Principles of Man* of 1892 takes us in detail through these seven bodies. The last of these manuals, *Man and His Bodies* of 1897 is again a hundred-page excursus on the seven bodies and their functions. These trips through subtle anthropologies are simultaneously elucidations of theosophical soteriology. As one ascends the bodies, one gets closer to the Monad, which is synonymous with the highest body, the *Atman*, which is also identified as the Universal Oversoul.

Compared to Blavatsky, Besant had a relatively sympathetic view of Christianity. Though she left the church at age 26 and spent her later 20's and 30's as an active secularist and socialist, her works on Christianity sought not to displace contemporary forms of the religion with some novel, more gnostically sensitive variety. Her mission was simply to point out the forgotten esoteric dimension already present in Christianity. For Besant, restoring gnosis to the modern world is a matter of reminding Christians of what she calls the hidden side of Christianity.³⁶⁹

In her 1905 book *Esoteric Christianity* Annie Besant re-writes the history of Christianity through "theoretic mystic teaching," a hermeneutic endorsed by none other than St. Paul. "The history therein written is not regarded by him as a mere record of facts, which occurred on the physical plane. A true mystic, he saw in the physical events the shadows of the universal truths ever unfolding in higher and inner worlds."³⁷⁰ In this reading, the outward events of Christian history comprise only one of the "Lesser Mysteries," and are simply reverberations of higher spiritual events taking place on higher spiritual planes through agents in higher, more subtle bodies. The epistemic capacity that avails one of this knowledge, she is careful to point out, is

³⁶⁹ Besant, Annie. *Esoteric Christianity*. Quest Books. Wheaton, Illinois. 2006. ch. 2.

³⁷⁰ Besant 2006, 34.

not the imagination, but “true intuition.” Here she is separating herself once more from Blavatsky, who championed a form of active imagination to set her esoteric knowledge apart from the wholly passively attained knowledge of the spiritualists.³⁷¹ Besant does not go into detail over the nature of this form of intuition, but she seems to be striking some middle ground between the clairvoyant epistemologies of the spiritualists on the one hand and the active imagination of Blavatsky on the other.³⁷²

It is through the organ of true intuition – distinguished from the “mere play of the imagination” that one is able to “see the patterns in the heavens, and not only the shadows cast by them on the screen of earthly time.” Besant grounds her entire narrative of Christianity in this bifurcation between the shadows of earthly time (aka the Lesser Mysteries), that is, the parables and stories of Christianity taken at face value, and the patterns in heaven (aka the Greater Mysteries), the more hermeneutically sophisticated truths that lie behind the stories. These truths also exist on two levels: the mythic (lower) and the mystic (higher). The intercommunication between these three realms – the historical, the mythic, and the mystic, is nothing other than the intercommunication between “Spirits veiled in flesh and those clad in subtler vestures.” And so for the theosophist, ascending from the historical truth to the mystic truth is a process of subtle body purification – of shedding our grosser vestments to reveal our subtler natures.³⁷³

Regarding the historical Christ, Besant has news for the reader. As detailed in the akashic records, recovered through a form of psychic archeology, Jesus was actually born in B.C.E. 105, trained in an Essene community in the desert, a place much visited by the learned

³⁷¹ Hanegraaff, Wouter J. 'The Theosophical Imagination.' *Correspondences: Journal for the Study of Esotericism* Vol. 5 (2017), 3-39.

³⁷² Besant 2006, 34.

³⁷³ Besant 2006, 56.

men of Persia, India, and Egypt, where he spent years reading in its occult library many books from the Indian and Trans-Himalayan regions. From there he later travelled to Egypt, where he became a disciple of “that one sublime Lodge,” which we might surmise was the Brotherhood of Luxor much celebrated in the writings of Blavatsky. The next major event in the life of this Jesus was his baptism at the hands of John the Baptist, at which point this most purified of vessels, schooled in occult philosophy as he was, was filled with the spirit of “The Christ,” the godhead manifest in the flesh. Over the next three years it was this Christ, dwelling temporarily in the body of the occult adept, Jesus, who wandered around Palestine teaching and healing. As Besant tells us,

That Mighty One...used the body of Jesus as his vehicle...Perfecting his human evolution, Jesus became one of the Masters of Wisdom...the inspiration that kept alight the Gnosis in the Church, until the superincumbent mass of ignorance became so great that even His breath could not fan the flame sufficiently to prevent its extinguishment.³⁷⁴

Here we can see the story of the historical Jesus as the archetypal path of the theosophical initiate. Through Essene monasticism and studies in occult philosophy – especially eastern occult philosophy – Jesus purifies his bodies to such a degree that the most rarefied substance, God itself, can descend into and occupy his physical body as an “earthly tabernacle.” And even though the Christ leaves the physical body of Jesus on the cross, his many subtle bodies have been so empowered by this contact with the divine that he becomes a Master of Wisdom, a sort

³⁷⁴ Besant 2006, 74.

of intermediary spirit entity that keeps the Gnosis burning. He did this by continuing to visit his disciples for over fifty years in his subtle spiritual body, and it was these teachings that formed the basis of the “Mysteries of Jesus,” which Besant sees as the inner life and nucleus of Christianity.

As an example of these “Mysteries of Jesus,” Besant finds techniques of subtle body manipulation in the writings of Clement of Alexandria, in whose words there are some “divine Mysteries” that are only orally transmitted – never to be written, and which are not really transmitted through words, but “mystically,” through “understanding.” Clement ends his passage by comparing the hearing of this mystical speech to being struck with the Thyrsus.³⁷⁵ Here we find a prime example of what I term Besant’s astral body hermeneutics, where she deciphers esoteric passages by an appeal to a subtle body cartography, effectively elevating cryptic language into a higher dimension, where all the pieces suddenly fit together. In this case, the mystic significance of the thyrsus is that it symbolizes the spinal cord and pineal gland.³⁷⁶ Besant goes on to declare the mere presence of the Great Ones can stimulate and activate powers normally latent in the pupil,³⁷⁷ a clear reference to the physiology and process of *kundalini* awakening, which Besant finds here in early Christianity, where it was passed down as an oral secret, as teaching it openly would be like “reaching a sword to a child,” as Clement puts it.

And with this reading we’ve moved from the historical to the mythical dimensions of Besant’s esoteric Christianity, a move she illustrates once more by referring to the relationship between an object and the shadow it casts. “A myth is far truer than a history, for a history only gives a story of the shadows, whereas a myth gives a story of the substances that cast the

³⁷⁵ Besant 2006, 38. Thyrsus is the ivy-covered fennel staff carried around by Bacchus.

³⁷⁶ Besant 2006, 38.

³⁷⁷ Besant 2006, 39.

shadows.”³⁷⁸ She goes on to describe great principles according to which her mythical system is built, and, cascading down, certain beings who embody these principles, and going further down the Chain of Being, hosts of inferior beings who act as vehicles for these activities, everyone performing his or her share of the great cosmic [*sic*] drama. These many workers up the Chain of Being cast their shadows on physical matter, and these shadows are “‘things’ – the bodies, the objects, that make up the mystical universe.”³⁷⁹

Through this hermeneutic we can read the story of the historical Jesus as merely a shadow-play of the actual events taking place on a higher plane of being. “Myth,” Besant relates, “is an account of the movements of those who cast the shadows; and the language in which the account is given is what is called the language of symbols.”³⁸⁰ Besant spends the rest of her chapter on the mythic Christ, meditating on the solar cult mythos, where Jesus, the Buddha, Osiris, Mithras, among other Gods and Heroes, were all read as different symbolic retellings of the same myth – the Solar Hero, born on the winter solstice, killed and resurrected on the vernal equinox. For Besant, “The Christ of the Solar Myth was the Christ of the Mysteries, and we find the secret of the mythic in the mystic Christ.”³⁸¹

The mystic Christ, for Besant, is the perennial, secret doctrine that permeates all religions. It’s prime mythical proxy is the Solar Myth, where the Logos descends into matter, symbolized by the Sun-God. She spends the rest of this chapter elucidating this cosmogenesis and the path toward salvation, consisting of practical stages: discrimination between the Eternal and the Temporary, disgust with the unreal, control of action, control of thoughts, endurance,

³⁷⁸ Besant 2006, 80.

³⁷⁹ Besant 2006, 81.

³⁸⁰ Besant 2006, 81.

³⁸¹ Besant 2006, 89.

tolerance, and balance. It is only after traversing this salvific path that one is able to experience and enact the cosmic love that allows him or her to ascend to the Logos, synonymous with the highest self, redeeming the Logos from its descent into matter.

Besant elucidates all three of these dimensions – the historical, the mythic, and the mystic, in terms of a subtle body hermeneutic centered around a fine-material physics. The universe was formed when the super subtle Logos descended into gross physical reality, even incarnating in the physical body of one Jesus, who, though a high-level occult initiate, was wholly human. From this follows a soteriology of purification of the physical and the sloughing off of materiality to achieve a state of mystical henosis with this Logos. This whole thing is cast as a system of subtle body purification. For Annie Besant, the structure of the subtle body was integral to the soteriology she was setting out. If we are to avail ourselves of higher, subtler realities, we must ascend to our higher, subtler bodies and their respective more refined sensory and cognitive apparati. In her book *Esoteric Christianity* she illustrates this path through a symbolic, mystical re-reading of the story of Jesus, where the purification of the subtle body is the path toward gnosis. The two go hand in hand.

But for all the mythical context and theoretical backdrop, the explicit subtle body praxis one might engage to tread the path toward gnosis is conspicuously absent here. It was through her books written with her clairvoyant comrade Charles Leadbeater that Besant really showed us the mechanics of it all. Let us now turn to Leadbeater and his own take on the gnosis of the subtle body.

Leadbeater's Christian Gnosis

If we want to talk about theosophical formulations of the subtle body, Charles Leadbeater is our man. His own theosophical journey began after he received a letter from the theosophical spiritual Masters in Tibet telling him to join Helena Blavatsky in India in 1885, a journey he immediately set out on. While studying at the theosophical headquarters in Adyar, Chennai, Leadbeater was visited by one of the Theosophical Masters who taught him “a certain kind of meditation connected with the development of a mysterious power called *kundalini*.”³⁸² After assiduously practicing this meditation over forty days, in Leadbeater’s telling, the subtle channels and chakras in his body were opened up and dissolved, availing him of “astral sight,” a form of clairvoyance through which he would phenomenologically explore the structure and function of the subtle bodies.

This exploration is reflected in a slew of articles and books Leadbeater published over the next several decades – from his 1895 article in the *Theosophist*, “The Aura,” where he provides a list of auric colors and their meanings, associating these also with the chakras, through his seven volumes on the subtle body co-written with Annie Besant to his 1927 *The Chakras* and his posthumously published *Christians Gnosis* of 1935. All of these books are informed by Leadbeater’s own clairvoyant explorations of the structure and function of the subtle body – from the number and color of the chakras to the forms of knowledge associated with each of the subtle vestures the soul assumes in its descent into matter. Whereas Besant engages with the subtle body hermeneutically and mythically, Leadbeater looks at it phenomenologically and

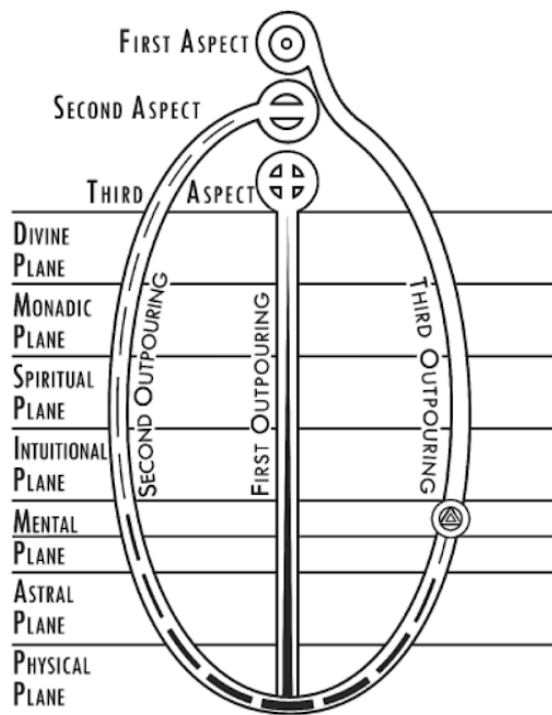
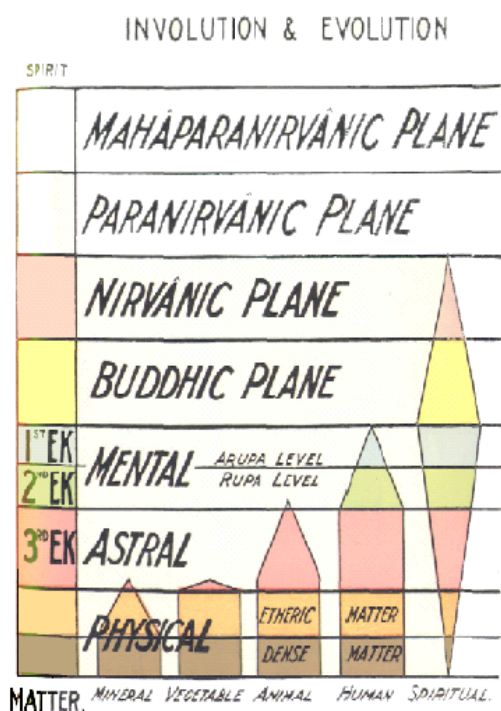
³⁸² Leland 2016, 183.

elucidates it with authority. He knows what the subtle bodies look like because he has literally seen them with his own astral vision, marking a precipitous shift from the argument-from-authority that has characterized really every prior scheme we have encountered in this genealogy. Leadbeater opens the door for phenomenological testimony.

It is in his 1902 *Man Visible and Invisible: Examples of Different Types of Men as Seen by Means of Trained Clairvoyance* that Leadbeater first gives us a comprehensive vision of the structure of the human – from the physical to the most subtle. In line with the scheme laid out in Blavatsky’s many works, Leadbeater divides the universe into seven planes: physical, astral, mental, buddhic, nirvanic, paranirvanic, and mahaparanirvanic -- presented here in Sanskrit, as he asserts Western philosophy still has no vocabulary for these worlds composed of finer states of matter.³⁸³ For Leadbeater, we have almost no knowledge of the three highest planes. For a human being, the end goal is Nirvana, which only corresponds with the fifth of the seven planes. The two planes beyond are simply ways of saying “beyond Nirvana,” and “way beyond Nirvana” respectively.

As in Besant, this cosmology cascades into Leadbeater’s anthropology. In a mirror image of Blavatsky's orientaling lexical shift, over Leadbeater’s career we can see a move from the Sanskritized, Indic model of his early books to a more Christian lexicon. Fast forward to his 1935 *Christian Gnosis*, we can see these seven planes recast: physical, astral, mental, intuitional, spiritual, monadic, and divine – all seven abiding below three “aspects,” what Leadbeater identifies with the holy trinity.

³⁸³ Leadbeater, C. W. *Man Visible and Invisible: Examples of Different Types of Men as Seen by Means of Trained Clairvoyance*. Theosophical Publishing Society, 1902, 16.



In the diagram from *Christian Gnosis* [right] we see a pictorial representation of Leadbeater's Christian cosmogenesis. The father, son, and holy spirit – aspects one, two, and three – while abiding outside of space and time enter the universe in three outpourings, descending through the seven planes. Where the Father only descends as far as the intuitional plane, the Holy Spirit descends straight to the bottom, physical plane. This process of divine involution is what makes possible the temporal ascent of human evolution. And the motive force of this evolutionary process Leadbeater identifies with that very power that granted him his clairvoyance and astral sight: *kundalini*, the Serpent Fire.³⁸⁴

With the holy spirit existing with matter – involuted, curled up as it were – the process of spiritual ascent, for Leadbeater, is a process of unveiling the spirit that permeates all of reality in

³⁸⁴ Leadbeater, C. W., et al. *Christian Gnosis*. Theosophical Publishing House, 2011, 17. Again we see the Blavatskian mystical evolution, but in Leadbeater more rigorously tied to *kundalini*.

potential. In this context – in Leadbeater’s late-career, Christianized subtle physiology, the *kundalini* Serpent Fire of the body is synonymous with the involuted Holy Spirit which descends through the planes, drawing around itself first a mental body, then an astral body, and finally a physical body in the process of incarnation. This process, it turns out, is the esoteric, gnostic dimension of the story of Jesus.

Here Leadbeater, following Besant, uses psychical archeology combined with creative philology to re-read the history of Christianity through a subtle body hermeneutic.

We have the possibility of a play on the word Maria (which in Latin means “seas”), and yet another suggestion of the true meaning of the descent into the seas of virgin matter – the Virgin Maria, which, although impregnated and permeated with the life of the Holy Ghost, nevertheless remains pure or virgin because when that life is withdrawn the matter is as it was before. This is the original idea behind the dogma of the Virgin Birth.³⁸⁵

Maria refers here to the subtle virgin matter impregnated by the Holy Ghost. A bit further on Leadbeater identifies this matter with the causal body – that is, the super subtle body (finer than the astral) which is the vehicle by which the soul transmigrates from life to life. This is the subtle body hermeneutic in action. Throughout his *Christian Gnosis* Leadbeater echoes Besant’s grievances concerning the loss of the Christian esoteric tradition. For Leadbeater the gospels are wholly allegorical, and those who take them literally exhibit what he calls a “materializing

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 122.

tendency,” that completely subverts their allegorical intent and turns them instead into “pseudo-history.”³⁸⁶

Leadbeater lays out a threefold hermeneutical scheme for the gospels, none of which take them historically. For simple souls the gospels serve as illustrative stories. Beyond this there is the intellectual meaning of the parables. And for the “perfected,” there is the highest level of interpretation: Gnosis. Leadbeater demonstrates these three levels at work in the parable of the sower.

It tells that a sower went forth to sow his seed, and some fell on good ground, some on rocky ground, some in sandy soil, and some among thorns. That is a story we might tell to a child or to any simple person. Then comes the intellectual interpretation: Christ explained that the seed is the word of God and the different kinds of soil are the different types of hearts into which the seed falls. Behind that again, according to universal tradition, there was the deep, mystic, spiritual meaning, which was never written down at all, but was always conveyed from mouth to ear...the inner meaning of that parable refers to the outpouring of the divine life into nature, and the different strata which it touches as it pours down.³⁸⁷

For Leadbeater, the gnostic hermeneutic is the hermeneutic of subtle bodies on subtle planes. And this is the ultimate meaning of the gospels. In the parable of the sower, the seed is the Holy

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 83.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 86.

Spirit and the various grounds – the good, the rocky, the sandy, and the thorny, correspond with the subtle planes – the intuitional, mental, astral, and physical.

The narrowing influence of this pseudo-historical reading of Christianity evidently extended to the hands of the scribes through whom the gospels were transmitted. When Leadbeater speaks of the difference one *iota* can make in Christian dogma, we might naturally think of the fourth-century disputes over whether Jesus was of similar or identical substance to God (that is, *homo-ousia* or *homoi-ousia*). But once again Leadbeater’s subtle body reading throws us for a loop. It is the *iota* in Pontius Pilate’s first name that perturbs him and occludes the true, gnostic meaning behind Jesus’ story.

The word *pontos*, meaning a sea, was thus altered to Pontius, a Roman proper name. Instead of Pontius Pilatus, the earliest Greek manuscripts which clairvoyant investigators have yet been able to find, all read *pontos piletos*. (It must be remembered that the interchange of “a” and “e” is by no means infrequent in various Greek dialects.) Pilatus is another proper name, but *piletos* means “thick,” “solid,” so that *pontos piletos* means really a compressed or dense sea, by no means a bad description of the astral plane.³⁸⁸

In this reading, Christ’s encounter with Pontius Pilate, if we follow the spelling of Leadbeater’s clairvoyant investigators, actually reads “He endured the dense sea,” which is to say Christ allowed himself to be imprisoned in astral matter, marking the further descent of the Holy Spirit

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 123.

– no longer in the causal body of the trans-astral planes (the immaculately conceived Maria), but now down into the denser astral realm.

The story of Christ climaxes when he is crucified on the cross which refers to his crossing into physical matter. In his gross, physical state, Christ is referred to as “dead and buried.” As Leadbeater explains, “the cross has for ages been a symbol of matter. The Divine Man is bound upon it, cramped and confined by His descent into matter which He takes upon Himself in order that we might exist.”³⁸⁹ The story to this point is the tale of the involution of the Holy Spirit descending through the subtle planes into our familiar gross, physical, atomic reality. Entering time in order to breathe life into dead, virginal matter.

Leadbeater wants to wake us up to the secret meaning of the gospels. When we take his symbolic reading, through the subtle body hermeneutic, we are reminded that we are part of the divine. Our descent into matter, our “crucifixion” has rendered us amnesiac. We identify with the cross of matter upon which we are bound, and with the physical, astral, and mental vehicles which are not our selves, but merely instruments of our souls. And this is the crux. “So whenever we find, as it were, two selves warring within us, we must remember that we are in truth the higher and not the lower – the Christ, not the cross.”³⁹⁰

For Leadbeater, the resurrection of Christ is our symbolic awakening from material slumber into astral life. If we can awaken to the reality of our situation despite our embodied condition, then we achieve a sort of solidity of soul that allows us to jump outside the cycle of reincarnations. In this state we can incarnate at our leisure in the vehicle of our choice. Now hinting at a sort of Bodhisattva Christ ideal, Leadbeater suggests we might, after our own

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 130.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 131.

awakenings and ascensions into the astral (and then the trans-astral) planes, descend again to aid the evolution of humanity.

To return to the beginning, this whole process starts with the purification of the physical and astral bodies. These are the bodies Leadbeater elucidates in his seven book series with Annie Besant, and later in his *The Chakras*, where he literally illustrates the seven force centers of the etheric body. Through these seven centers flow three energies – associated with the three persons of the Trinity. The second of these forces is the Serpent Fire (*kundalini*) which comes from the Holy Spirit and rests in the chakra at the base of the spine. In Leadbeater’s reading the root chakra is the physiological manifestation of Christ’s material incarnation. Christ is literally within you, and in a very specific location: curled up inside your root chakra. Through Leadbeater’s chakra-based esoteric anatomy, we can somatically recapitulate the descent and resurrection of Christ within our own bodies, as the seven chakras correspond to the seven subtle planes. And this was the gnostic doctrine only hinted at by the gospels and in the church fathers – never written down, and always passed on through oral tradition. For Leadbeater, the highest form of Christianity was the gnostic, and the gnostic was a form of subtle body yoga.

G.R.S. Mead, the Subtle Body, and the Esoteric Tradition

When Besant refers to Jesus the Essene born in 105 B.C.E. who journeyed to the trans-Himalayan regions, and when Leadbeater shows us that Pontius Pilate refers not to the Roman prefect of the first century, but to “enduring the dense sea,” they are both writing with

reference to the historical and philological excavations of G.R.S. Mead (1863-1933), former secretary to Blavatsky and member of the Esoteric Section.

Mead's conversion to Theosophy took place soon after his reading of A.P. Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* in 1883. The following year, upon receiving his B.A. from Cambridge, he joined the London section of the Theosophical Society, from where he pursued further researches into Oriental philosophy as an external student at St. Catherine's House, Oxford.³⁹¹ Upon Blavatsky's founding of the Esoteric Section in 1889, Mead left his teaching job and became full-time secretary, working with her on a daily basis, serving as her editor and acting as joint secretary of the Esoteric Section.³⁹²

In the years following Blavatsky's death, Mead published a prodigious amount of highly erudite anthologies and translations, from his 1892 *Simon Magus*, a substantial compilation of quotes from antique sources overlaid with a theosophical gloss, to his 1919 *The Doctrine of the Subtle Body in the Western Tradition*, where, in similar fashion, Mead scours antique sources to try and make sense of their visions of intermediary bodies on intermediary planes. The subtle body hermeneutic makes an appearance in most of his books, whether it's the seven aeons of Simon Magus³⁹³ or the planes of Basidilian gnosis,³⁹⁴ Mead often equates whatever historically specific manifestation he is elucidating with the perennial theosophical undercurrent of the system, "a doctrine common to the Hermetic, Vedântic, and many other schools of Antiquity."³⁹⁵

³⁹¹ Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas, and Clare Goodrick-Clarke. *G.R.S. Mead and the Gnostic Quest*. North Atlantic Books, 2005, 2.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 3.

³⁹³ Mead, G. R. S. *Simon Magus: an Essay on the Founder of Simonianism Based on the Ancient Sources with a Re-Evaluation of His Philosophy and Teachings*. Kessinger Pub. Co., 1999.

³⁹⁴ Mead, G. R. S. *Fragments of a Faith Forgotten; the Gnostics, a Contribution to the Study of the Origins of Christianity*. University Books, 1960, 265

³⁹⁵ Mead 1999, Footnote 97

His vision of subtle bodies is appropriately elucidated in *The Doctrine of the Subtle Body*, which opens with the statement, “The notion that the physical body of man is it were the exteriorization of an invisible subtle embodiment of the life of the mind is a very ancient belief.”³⁹⁶ This ancient belief is present to mankind in “all ages and climes,” and despite the “prevailing habit of skeptical rationalism,” is undergirded by a far-reaching truth. Mead speculates that as the fields of biology, psycho-physiology, and psychology develop, the ground will only grow more and more ripe for a revivification of the ancient hypothesis of subtle embodiment.³⁹⁷

The old-fashioned materialism, which reached its culminating stage in the latter half of the last century, is now generally discredited, if not dead and buried. The ever more subtle analysis of matter is revealing well-nigh boundless vistas of hitherto undreamed-of possibilities locked up within the bosom of nature, ever more subtle and potent modes of energy that may ere long be made available for our use.

It is now a general persuasion in scientific circles that the static conception of matter, which once reigned supreme, explains nothing. Physical nature is found to be dynamic through and through, even when the method of research still insists upon arbitrarily abstracting the matter of our Great Mother from her life and mind.³⁹⁸

In distinction to his theosophical brother and sister, Mead’s perennialist vision of the subtle body stems not from a revealed *prisca theologia* or even direct experience, but from a more

³⁹⁶ Mead, G. R. S. *The Doctrine of the Subtle Body in Western Tradition*. Cosimo, 2005, 1.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3

contemporary theory of ontological sameness which is subject to scientific investigation. In Mead's view, the idea of the subtle body, which passed out of favor with the rise of sceptical rationalism, was poised to be revived in updated form, elucidated in the language of 20th century science.

After establishing the utility of the notion, Mead returns to those most intellectually rigorous theoreticians of the subtle body, the Neoplatonists, who pioneered what he refers to as "Alexandrian psycho-physiology."³⁹⁹ He begins his treatment with a chapter on the "spirit-body," which he equates with a volley of ideas: the spiritual body of St. Paul, the Hellenic afterlife notions of "image" (*eidolon, imago, simulacrum*) and "shade" (*skia, umbra*), the subtle or light vehicle of the soul in Plato, and the spirit vehicle of the Hermetica.⁴⁰⁰ To Mead these are the most well-thought out engagements with the subtle body in history, and though the scientific worldview from which these antique thinkers were proceeding is itself woefully outdated, their subtle body schemas may yet be of value to contemporary researchers.

I venture to think that perhaps some of the notions of these old thinkers with regard to this idea of a subtle soul vehicle, may be still not entirely without interest to those who are either specially engaged in psychical research or generally familiar with psychic and psycho-physical phenomena. For indeed some of the modern theories put forward to account for certain classes of such phenomena favour a very similar hypothesis.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 33-38

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 33.

He repeatedly stresses the utility of the subtle body concept with respect to psychical research, which he sees as gesturing toward the existence of something like what the Alexandrian psycho-physiologists were elucidating in late antiquity.⁴⁰² The purpose of Mead's treatment (indeed the purpose of his book) is simply to make modern readers aware of the erudite accounts of the subtle body they might find among the Neoplatonists, showing that the idea is not simply reducible to "the naive dreams of primitives," but includes "the views of thinkers who conjectured its fundamental constitution to be of the nature of a dynamic system of energy, in a manner that is by no means so foreign to the way in which we are now being taught to regard the under-work of all natural objects,"⁴⁰³ a reference to the new physics of relativity and the burgeoning quantum revolution.

In stark contrast to his contemporary theosophists, Besant and Leadbeater, but in total harmony with his larger *oeuvre*, Mead forgoes systematization or the production of a subtle body dogma, and instead provides us with an anthology of different historical views tied together by historical contextualization and intermittent speculation. He closes his second chapter with a call for an updated, scientific elucidation of the subtle body.

Of course the vastly greater knowledge of physiology and biology which we now possess must very considerably change the ancient doctrine in many respects; but the main notion in its simplest form has so well fitted in with the unsophisticated experience

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, 4.

of mankind for so many ages, that it may still be found in some respects to deserve the scrutiny of unprejudiced investigation.⁴⁰⁴

For Mead, there is a gnostic dimension to this combination of ancient doctrine and modern science. As the scientific psychology of religious experience is explored, as the data of psycho-physical and psychological phenomena are collected,⁴⁰⁵ as we hear of “telepathy, telergy, clairvoyance, clairaudience, psychometry, mesmerism, hypnotism, suggestion and auto-suggestion, automatic writing, trance-phenomena, mediumship of every variety, multiple personality, exteriorisation of sensibility, psychical materialization, communication with the departed, visions and raps, dream-psychology, the psychology of the abnormal,...psycho-analysis, psychical research, psycho-therapeutics, mental and spiritual healing of every kind, and so on...,”⁴⁰⁶ we approach a place where “science, and philosophy and religion, not only join hands, but blend into a single unitary gnosis that enables man to know himself in the perfect fulness of the presence of his God.”⁴⁰⁷ Indeed the idea of the subtle body is the key to transcending the materialist-idealist impasse in which we’ve found ourselves for so many centuries, a way of harmonizing those views in a new form of scientific gnosis which completes the project Blavatsky set out on in *Isis Unveiled*: to unify theology and science.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 107

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 109

Gnostic Bodies Unleashed

The three models we see in Besant, Leadbeater, and G.R.S. Mead, elucidated around the inauguration of the 20th century, provided fertile soil for the expansion of the ideas of gnosis and subtle embodiment into both elite and popular arenas. Mead's scientifically-oriented, more historical-critical framework would have the biggest impact in elite intellectual culture, serving as the foundation of Jung's engagement with both gnosticism and the subtle body. Eliade as well was influenced by Mead in his early Romanian papers on alchemy, and Mead's post-theosophical Quest Society with its quarterly magazine and focus on comparative religion, psychical research, and philosophy, set the stage for the later Eranos conferences centered around Jung.⁴⁰⁸ Unable to foresee the academic defrocking of psychical research and the structuralist turn taken by psychology and the biosciences in the decades following his death,⁴⁰⁹ Mead's vision of a unitive gnosis would have to be put on hold.

Annie Besant's mythical hermeneutics, revealing the gnostic substrate that was there all along within our familiar scriptures and traditions, foreshadowed the countercultural and New Age gnostic awakenings which followed the discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices and eventual publication of Elaine Pagels' *The Gnostic Gospels* (1979), a mainstream success, selling almost half a million copies and winning numerous national awards. If we are to juxtapose Blavatsky's incendiary anti-Christian rhetoric against Besant's more amenable gnostic

⁴⁰⁸ Goodrick-Clarke, Nicholas, and Clare Goodrick-Clarke 2005, 26.

⁴⁰⁹ For the elite history of psychical research, see Kripal, Jeffrey J. *Authors of the Impossible* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2010). For the structural turn in the biosciences, see the opening chapter of Strick, James E. *Wilhelm Reich, Biologist* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

hermeneutics, we can see that it was Besant's vision, in the end, that presaged the capacious soul of the New Age, what April DeConick refers to as its "Gnostic, transtheistic perspective."⁴¹⁰

Yet unlike Mead who is specifically cited by the thinkers who draw from him, Besant is mostly absent from the bibliographies of contemporary gnosticism. Perhaps an unsung hero, but also perhaps a woman before her time, Besant's works may have served not as direct inspiration to the liberal spiritualities of the future, but as a sort of genre precursor or spiritual predecessor to the counterculture and New Age movements.

The yoga and bodily praxis explicit in Leadbeater's elucidation of a subtle body gnosis has had perhaps the most widespread effect as a part of the growth, proliferation, and eventual Western domestication of Hatha Yoga in the 20th century, wherein, as Kurt Leland traces it through the "unintentional collaboration of esotericists, clairvoyants, scholars, psychologists, yogis, and energy healers,"⁴¹¹ a Western chakra system was produced which was in no small way shaped by Leadbeater's many early books on the subject – particularly his 1927 *The Chakras*, still in print, which sold hundreds of thousands of copies, becoming something of a countercultural classic in the 60's and 70's. His vision of an embodied gnosis was again a precursor to the later Tantric orientalism of Esalen as well as the embrace of the body of the American counterculture and New Age

All three of these thinkers, in alignment with Blavatsky, were functioning from a place disenchanted with disenchantment. Seeking to read meaning back into the mechanical cosmos of a science bereft of spirituality, and in an attempt to restore some substance to the bourgeois Pharisaic religion bereft of science (i.e. contemporary Christianity), Besant fashioned her own

⁴¹⁰ DeConick, April D. *The Gnostic New Age: How a Countercultural Spirituality Revolutionized Religion from Antiquity to Today* (Columbia University Press, 2016), 351.

⁴¹¹ Leland 2016, 23.

mythical hermeneutics, while Leadbeater engaged Eastern traditions to phenomenologically explore both the structure of his own body and the planes of the cosmos. Both of these thinkers provided their readers with a new, enlivened body, world, and path toward salvation. Mead took a decidedly academic route, mining antiquity for subtle bodies and forms of religiosity that could serve as a life-restoring tonic to even the hard-nosed and historically-minded.

Kuden: The Daoist Alchemical Body

From the *Kiba no Hoko* scroll in that Batman episode to the *Kirigami Yurushi* and *Kinketsu Teisoku* charts I had accessed through my study of Ninjutsu, my search for a definitive subtle body cartography was decidedly textual. The charts were obviously esoteric documents – that is, they were intentionally ciphered, and hence required decipherment – and as far as I could tell this decipherment took on two forms. On the one hand, the original form of decoding I encountered was the *kuden*, or oral transmission, where one’s martial arts master would share secrets that were passed down outside the written tradition (something like Besant’s mythic or mystic hermeneutic). The oral complement to the textual transmission, I was told, was an ancient necessity to guard against the secrets contained in the charts. Even if one’s enemy got his or her hands on it, without the *kuden* keys, they wouldn’t understand a thing. The other form of decipherment was what I learned during my undergraduate study of the classics, that is, genealogical-philological (more in G.R.S. Mead territory). This twofold hermeneutic, you might have noticed, is how I have structured this dissertation.⁴¹²

In 2008 I finished my undergraduate degree and immediately moved to central China to study *taijiquan* (*Tai Chi*) and Daoist inner alchemy with a master I had a loose connection with through the martial arts grapevine. My destination was Wudang mountain, a place I had first heard about in Ang Lee’s 2000 *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*. There were three important

⁴¹² That is, the back-and-forth between the historical chapters and autobiographical sketches.

mythemes that attracted me to this particular location. First, it was the mythical birthplace of the martial art *taijiquan* (“Tai Chi”), which, so the story goes, was created by a 14th century Daoist immortal, Zhang San Feng who himself learned the style through a dream state divine transmission from the Daoist warrior god, Zhenwu, and, upon awakening, used this deadly art to kill 100 bandits who were trying to rob him.⁴¹³ Second, the part of the art that gave Zhang San Feng such lethal force was the touch of death, also of Wudang provenance. And third, as most spectacularly demonstrated in *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon*, this particular mountain was regarded as the home of the Daoist practice of *qing gong*, or “lightness training,” which, at its highest levels of cultivation, could allow humans to forgo the persistent request of gravity and actually fly.

All three of these themes – the mystical revelation of a deadly martial art, the touch of death, and a body so enlightened as to facilitate levitation – were ingredients in the countercultural orientalist pastiche out of which my own childhood media were fashioned. But these themes had a long history of their own, being most immediately drawn from Hong Kong and Taiwan cinema,⁴¹⁴ which themselves were cinematic transformations of the Chinese martial art novel, a genre that stretches back to the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), and much of which consisted of the literary formalization of themes (including all three of these mythemes) from Chinese folk theater, taking us back to at least the Song dynasty (960–1279).⁴¹⁵ This is all to say

⁴¹³ This story was Chinese archetype upon which the story of *Kiba no Hoko* was based in “Day of the Samurai.” *Batman: The Animated Series*. There are many versions of the origin story of Taijiquan, perhaps the most famous of which was that Zhang San Feng created the style after witnessing a snake and sparrow (or crane) fighting. There is also over a century of debate over the purported origins of *taijiquan*, and this Zhang Sanfeng myth has been traced back to the 17th century with a fair degree of certainty. See Wile, Douglas. *T'ai Chi's Ancestors: The Making of an Internal Art* (New York, NY: Sweet Chi, 1999)., also Lorge, Peter. *Chinese Martial Arts: From Antiquity to the Twenty-First Century* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁴¹⁴ Davis, Darrell William and Chen, Ru-Shou Robert (eds.). *Cinema Taiwan: Politics, popularity, and state of the arts* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2007), 95-108.

⁴¹⁵ Lorge 2012, Chapter 6.; see also Lorge 2012, pp. 158-160 on the pre-Ming oral history of *Shuihuzhuan*.

that these mythemes, far from being Western projections or colonialist confabulations, had deep roots in Chinese literary history. And the deployment of these mythemes in Western film and cartoon media in contexts that “make no pretensions to be serious history, focusing instead on the exploits of a hero or brotherhood,”⁴¹⁶ were totally consonant with their classical Chinese literary heritage.

So when we reflect on the origins of my own textual focus in the search for a definitive map of the subtle body, when we engage in an inquiry informed by the literary and historical roots of countercultural orientalism, we can see that it was not “Western” logocentrism or warmed over Protestant *sola scriptura* that spurred me in this direction, but the Chinese mytheme of the secret scroll, born out of the classical archetype of the warrior-scholar, a mainstay of Chinese theatrical, literary, and later cinematic culture, absorbed in the American counterculture and transmitted to me through a Batman cartoon. And it was through this mytheme that I was re-enacting a sort of eternal return. Which gets to one of the larger points of these little autobiographical interludes. When I redirect my scholar’s gaze, when I apply the tools of historical criticism, philology, and textual analysis to my own life, the reductive models of orientalist discourse as simplistic, hegemonic projection are immediately problematized by the cultural fusion that, by the 1990’s, inheres at the ground floor of a blooming global mediascape. The purported, essentialized “West” from which I am coming at these things is just as problematic as any mystical “East” to which I am going. These categories simply don’t map onto the world in which I grew up.

⁴¹⁶ Wan, Margaret B. *Green Peony and the Rise of the Chinese Martial Arts Novel* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009), 4.

I spent six years in China, living in what I might describe as a quasi-monastic context, within the walls of a fifteenth-century temple that had, during the Republican era, been divided in half, the East retrofitted into a hospital, while the West was turned into a prison. In the 1980's it was handed back to the local Daoist association who informally granted it to my own master in 2005. The hospital became our dormitory, and the prison area, formerly the heart of the “Forbidden City of the South,” was our training ground.⁴¹⁷

My own goals here – the quest for the mythemes laid out above – were self-consciously more than a little ridiculous, and I approached the whole experience, initially, as a method actor might; where I would do the practices, and to the best of my ability adopt the views I found there, just to see what happened. This was the place, after all, where all those malleable physiologies had been forged and put to the test over the many centuries. How malleable, really, was my own being?

The ridiculousness of my quest was soon tempered by an understanding of local context, and more specifically the life and motivations of my own teacher, Yuan Xiugang 袁修刚. Born in 1971 in a fishing village in southern Hubei province, he had grown up watching the same kung fu movies I had (albeit in their original language). He had also started martial arts training at the age of seven, and come to love it in no small part because of the esoteric knowledge and super powers promised to those of us who, in words from Bruce Lee's *Enter the Dragon*, “through long years of rigorous training, sacrifice, denial, pain...forge our bodies in the fire of our will.” After sampling various martial arts styles, including a three-year stint at the Shaolin

⁴¹⁷ The Wudang mountain complex, of which our temple was historically the administrative headquarters, was commissioned in the early fifteenth century by the third emperor of the Ming Dynasty, Zhudi (the Yong Le emperor), who simultaneously commissioned the construction of the Forbidden City in Beijing, referring to the unified project as, “constructing the Forbidden City in the North, fixing Wudang in the South” 北建故宫南修武当.

temple, Yuan Xiugang was drawn to Wudang mountain in search of more esoterically-infllected Daoist martial arts and the ability to manipulate his own *qi* energy, both of which are centered around the understanding of a specifically Daoist occult physiology.

In embarking on my own Journey to the East, having already had an entree to the scholarship on orientalism (I had read Edward Said by this point), I was reflexively braced for the destruction of my own romantic and inherently colonialist projections upon arrival. But what I found was something altogether different. In my master (and not just him – the more I got to know other people around my age, the more I came to see we were all in this mythematic mess together), I saw that despite radical alterity that inhered between us in almost every meaningful category – he was raised in unimaginable poverty, eating nothing but sweet potato for the first seven years of his life, while I was raised fat and happy in wealthy Houston; he grew up mono linguistically, mono culturally Chinese, while I grew up in 90's post-historical USA – that is, despite the abyss that separated our conditioned beings linguistically, socioeconomically, and politically, it was the very same mythemes, often through the very same media, that had contoured our lives and landed us both at this mountain in central China, in search of this same Daoist body, and I would argue, enacting the same eternal return.

Over my time in China I was initiated into a Daoist lineage that, though recently picking up the pieces after a half-century of religious prohibition and persecution, had a long history, and based all its practices on a classical Daoist model of occult physiology centered around alchemical, aquatic, and agricultural metaphors. The specific lines of energetic movement within the body that I learned, however, differed significantly from what I had read about in the Chinese medical texts from which my Japanese charts were clearly drawn. Why was there this

disjunction between Chinese medical and Daoist bodies? On closer inspection, I found even the idea of a monolithic Chinese medical subtle body, much less a monolithic Daoist subtle body, was nothing more than wishful thinking. The system of 361 acupoints as standard in contemporary TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) has been a product of continuous cartographical iterations since the 1960's, an attempt to clean up the messiness of the various models to be found in classical Chinese medicine and make it all more sciency.⁴¹⁸ And no such chart even exists for Daoism, for which, though the broad strokes of occult physiology are more or less standard, at the level of minute detail, there seems to be a different body for every lineage.

What I ended up with in my search for the definitive classical Chinese subtle body was a truly Byzantine historical narrative – “well, the subtle body looks like *this* to so-and-so from this time period in this lineage, while it looks like *this* in another place and another time” – seas of radical incommensurability separating thinker from thinker. But in a more charitable reading of my situation, instead of one secret scroll, I had found a veritable treasury of scrolls, no one more definitive than the other. I had followed the scroll from my own lineage (Wudang Sanfeng Pai), and like a 21st century Charles Leadbeater, explored it phenomenologically through years of dedicated practice. But if the other Daoist texts I was reading from other lineages were true, the body I was exploring was actually just one body. And the experiences its cultivation led me to were perhaps just one type of experience.

Up to this point I had seen the variegated subtle bodies of Japanese and Chinese medicine, religion, and martial arts as an historical problem, as the many historical morphologies of what, I had thought, was one hypothetical Ur-body. But perhaps my framework was all

⁴¹⁸ See: World Health Organization. *Standard Acupuncture Nomenclature: A Brief Explanation of 361 Classical Acupoint Names and Their Multilingual Comparative List* (Manila: World Health Organization, 1993.)

wrong. This Ur-body, if it existed, was sure good at hiding itself. And if it didn't exist, then where did all these bodies come from? And what were they for?

Chapter Six

The Alchemical Body of Carl Jung

It is beyond our grasp per definition; the subtle body is a transcendental concept which cannot be expressed in terms of our language or our philosophical views, because they are all inside the categories of time and space.

– C.G. Jung⁴¹⁹

The story so far is one of several strands – from the subtle body cartographies mitigating a theory/praxis debate in late antiquity to the life-giving subtle bodies of the Cambridge Platonists; from the orientalist perennialism of Ramsay to the diffusionist subtle bodies of the Indologists; and finally from the patchy creolization of Blavatsky to the unmoored subtle body hermeneutics of the later Theosophists.⁴²⁰ We can trace a direct line from here to Carl Jung, who approached the notion with a systematicity unseen since Proclus. And though Jung labored within the orientalist milieu we’ve traced thus far – as we will see he continues the semantic expansion of the term by fusing it with Chinese sources – in a sense he journeys beyond the discourse as it stood, bringing to the platonic orientalist, *prisca theologia*, perennialist history of the subtle body a newfound form of (Kantian) critical subjectivity and psychological reflexivity. He combined these qualities with the scholastically rigorous model set out by the Indologists of

⁴¹⁹ Jung, C.G. and Jarrett, James L. *Nietzsche's "Zarathustra": Notes of the Seminar Given in 1934-1939*. Two Volumes. 1989. Routledge, 441.

⁴²⁰ At stake in these conversations, of course, is everything from the shape of the cosmos to the trajectory of history. Are we evolving from brutish to wise? Or do we live in a decadent age in the shadow of ancient theologians whose forgotten doctrines we need to piece together to get things back on track? And the big question, what am I? As the Cambridge Platonists asked, “nothing more than a machine?”

the 19th century through engaging with eastern presentations of the subtle body with the help of specialists who had the linguistic chops to actually read the primary sources.

In this chapter we will trace Jung's engagement with the idea – one which finds its earliest source in G.R.S. Mead and expands through Jung's exploration of eastern sources in translation: the Daoist Alchemy of Richard Wilhelm (1929), the Kundalini Yoga of Arthur Avalon (1932), and the Bardo Yoga of Walter Evans-Wentz (1935). Jung's subtle body receives its most exhaustive treatment in his Nietzsche seminars (1934-39), and remains a subject of considerable interest throughout the rest of his career.⁴²¹

From Mead to Jung

“Mead has written a book about it,” Jung continues in his seminar on Nietzsche, “...I usually do not deal with that concept simply because it is too difficult. I content myself with things of which I can really know something.”⁴²² In *G.R.S. Mead and the Gnostic Quest*, Nicholas and Clare Goodrick-Clarke trace the Mead-Jung line of influence from 1910 (the inauguration of Jung's interest in Gnosticism) on, demonstrating the extent to which Jung's ideas about Gnosticism, though also informed by more scholarly presentations, were most heavily indebted to the fluid and fluent “easy access” translations of the theosophical scholar.⁴²³

Amongst the eighteen books of Mead's that populate Jung's library is a first-edition copy of his 1919 *The Doctrine of the Subtle Body in the Western Tradition*.

⁴²¹ Mentioned over 20 times in his collected works - well into the 1950's.

⁴²² Jung and Jarrett 2012, 443.

⁴²³ Goodrick-Clarke Clare and Nicholas. *G.R.S. Mead and the Gnostic Quest* (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 2005), 29.

Jung's modesty in the face of this difficult concept – the subtle body – is striking. At first glance, perhaps a refreshing dose of self-consciousness after all the brave subtle body theorists who have peopled the pages above, Jung's statement, when we trace the idea through his larger corpus, becomes something of a koan. He prefers not to speak of the subtle body because, he implies, it's something he is incapable of "really knowing something of." Yet it shows up dozens of times throughout his collected works (52 times in his Nietzsche seminars alone). Jung's use of the subtle body functions in the interstices of his psychology. In good Neoplatonic form, his subtle body is an intermediary vehicle that traverses the troubled waters separating mind from body and conscious from unconscious; a liminal structure possessed of a different kind of "knowing." But unlike his Neoplatonic forebears, Jung's subtle body is not delivered from on high, but manufactured from below out of the chaos of psychosomatic experience. And so Jung's many and varied uses of the idea are not just a flagrant forgoing of his epistemic reservation, but instead function as the forging of an epistemology of an entirely different order – subconscious-conscious and somatic-psychical – a knowing integral to his soteriology of individuation.

Citing Mead's *A Mithraic Ritual* as early as 1910, we can safely trace Jung's acquaintance with the subtle body to the second decade of the twentieth century, a period characterized primarily by his traumatic 1913 break with Freud which was followed closely by his three-year descent into an existential disorientation out of which he formulated a new, empirical psychology centered around the techniques of dream analysis and active imagination.

⁴²⁴ Jung's trauma was assuaged by his gnostic studies, and ultimately resolved through his

⁴²⁴ This is the story related in Jung, Carl and Jaffe, Aniela. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1973)

engagement with alchemy, two subjects to which he was much indebted to Mead, and both of which deal with subtle bodies. Even in the earliest of Mead's works we find in Jung's library (*Simon Magus 1898*), we find a very clear Porphyrian incarnation-as-accretion scheme of subtle embodiment,

There are other bodies, vestures, or vehicles of consciousness, besides the gross physical "coat of skin," for the use of the spiritual man, each being an "appearance" in comparison to the higher vehicle, which is in its turn an "appearance" to that which is more subtle and less material or substantial than itself.

Thus, in the descent from the Divine World, the Soul transforms itself, or clothes itself in forms, or bodies, or vestures, which it weaves out of its own substance, like to the Powers of the Worlds it passes through, for every Soul has a different vehicle of consciousness for every World or Plane.⁴²⁵

This model, by now, should sound very familiar. As mentioned in the last chapter, it is echoed throughout Mead's works, and is most completely elucidated in his 1919 *The Subtle Body in the Western Esoteric Tradition*. This is all to say that well before the publication of Mead's subtle body book, Jung would have been no stranger to the notion. However it isn't actually until 1929 that we find the first attestation of the subtle body from Jung's own pen – in this context as part of his commentary on a Chinese alchemical text translated by the Sinologist Richard Wilhelm. This almost two-decade lacuna between Jung's reading and writing about the subtle body can be

⁴²⁵ Mead, G.R.S. *Simon Magus: His Philosophy and Teachings* (London: Theosophical Publishing House, 1892).

accounted for by the fact that this was the period in which Jung was forging his own form of psychoanalysis, independent and in opposition to Freud, and so his gnostic, esoteric, and later alchemical studies were something of a nocturnal hobby, unpublished until later in his career, after he had firmly established his bona fides as a diurnal, analytic, straightlaced intellectual.

The Secret of the Golden Flower

Like Blavatsky, Jung's orientalist gaze was fashioned early on. Though his childhood wasn't so glamorous as to include galloping across the steppe with the Kalmuks, he did have an early affinity for Hindu mythology. As he relates in his memoir, even before he was literate he would often pester his mother to read him the Hindu selections from the *Orbis Pictus*, a seventeenth-century compilation of mythology for children wherein, "there were illustrations of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva which I found an inexhaustible source of interest. My mother later told me that I always returned to these pictures."⁴²⁶ We can see intellectual engagement with Indology as early as Jung's undergrad days (as reflected in his *Zofingia* lectures of 1896-1899).⁴²⁷ And in his early career, as J.J. Clarke summarizes it,

By the time he came to write his two early major works, *Symbols of Transformation* (CW5; 1912) and *Psychological Types* (CW6; 1921), he had acquired an extensive knowledge of Vedic, Buddhist, and Taoist ideas and mythology which he treated on a par, and closely interwove, with symbolic material from Western sources.⁴²⁸

⁴²⁶ Jung, Carl and Jaffe, Aniela. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (New York, NY: Pantheon Books, 1973), 17.

⁴²⁷ Clarke, J. J. *Jung and Eastern Thought: A Dialogue with the Orient* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1994) 58-59.

⁴²⁸ Clarke 1994, 58.

Among the texts cited in his 1912 work are the *Yi Jing*, *Rig Veda*, *Ramayana*, and *Bhagavad Gita*, side by side with the academic work of the great Indologists: Max Muller, Hermann Oldenburg, and Paul Deussen,⁴²⁹ and as Clarke goes to great pains to point out, Jung's engagement here was a hermeneutical one – not a simple case of the psychologization of oriental exotica, and beyond the creolization we saw in Blavatsky, but rather a deep engagement wherein Jung's foundational categories were themselves altered in his communion with these materials.⁴³⁰

Jung's fascination with eastern philosophy would blossom in the 1920's through his relationship with Hermann Keyserling, founder of the School of Wisdom at Darmstadt. Keyserling was a wealthy amateur philosopher who wrote a number of books, most notably his best-selling 1919 *Travel Diary of a Philosopher*, wherein he recounts his travels through India, Sri Lanka, and the Himalayas. *Travel Diary* is a call for religious pluralism (that we move from the Theosophical notion of "world religion" to a pluralistic "world religions"),⁴³¹ and an exercise in comparative philosophy across borders, Keyserling's prescription for an ailing and spiritually disoriented West.⁴³²

In 1923 Jung was invited to lecture at the School of Wisdom where he met Richard Wilhelm. They immediately hit it off. Jung was struck by how Wilhelm seemed, "totally Chinese, in his gestures as well as in his handwriting and speech...He had adopted the Oriental viewpoint."⁴³³ Wilhelm was equally taken with Jung, declaring,

⁴²⁹ Clarke 1994, 59.

⁴³⁰ This is one of the larger, meta-points of Clarke 1994, an argument he skillfully spends the entire book making.

⁴³¹ Keyserling, Herman. *The Travel Diary of a Philosopher* (Rahway, N.J.: Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc., 1925), 158.

⁴³² Clarke 1994, 59.

⁴³³ Quoted in Hayman, Ronald. *A Life of Jung* (New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1999), 246.

Chinese wisdom and Dr Jung have both descended independently of each other into the depths of man's collective psyche and have there come upon realities which look so alike because they are equally anchored in the truth...The congruity between the Swiss scientist and the old Chinese sages only goes to show that both are right because both have found the truth.⁴³⁴

Wilhelm revolutionized Jung's vision of the *Yi Jing*, which he had been reading in Legge's English translation at least since 1912, and their conversations about the ancient Chinese classic would culminate in the 1950 publication of Wilhelm's German translation, *The I Ching Or Book of Changes*, with Jung's commentary as a foreword, and shape one of Jung's last works, *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle* (1952). But it was their first publication together, *The Secret of the Golden Flower* (1929), that would provide outlet for Jung's earliest engagement with the subtle body.

In 1927, fifteen years after his break with Freud, and well into the development of his new analytical psychology, while allowing fantasy to express itself through painting, Jung sketched a mandala with a golden castle at the center. Apparently the painting exhibited some oriental flare. "Why is this so Chinese?" he asked himself. Shortly thereafter he received a manuscript from Wilhelm, a translation of *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, with a request that Jung append a commentary. The timing was right. Jung "devoured" the text as it corroborated

⁴³⁴ Hayman 1999, 247.

many of the ideas he had been playing with about active imagination and the relation between the conscious and unconscious minds.

Wilhelm's translation has been characterized by later sinologists as "in fact a garbled translation of a truncated version of a corrupted recension of the original work."⁴³⁵ Based on the 18th century *Taiyi Jinhua Zongzhi* 太乙金華宗旨, a pseudepigraphical quasi-Manichaeic Daoist text attributed to the 9th century immortal Lü Dongbin. Of the 13 chapters present in the original text, Wilhelm appears to have translated only eight,⁴³⁶ and his work on the text has been heavily critiqued by subsequent scholars.⁴³⁷ Wilhelm's translation is woven through with a heavily Jungian auto commentary, and many problematic Chinese terms are translated into a psychologizing vernacular in such a way that the radical alterity of the respective metaphysical and epistemological orientations from which the ideas are being pulled are occluded by drawing identities where perhaps analogies are more appropriate.

Jung was deeply affected by the text, describing his experience in reading it as "the first event which broke through my isolation. I became aware of an affinity; I could establish ties with something and someone."⁴³⁸ Indeed the text spoke directly to several of his blooming notions about the imagination and his novel therapeutic methodology. The first step in his technique of active imagination, that is, releasing willful control over conscious process as to allow fantasy to surface from the unconscious, is mirrored in the Daoist notion of *wu wei* 無為, translated as "action through non-action," wherein the practitioner of Daoist alchemy lets go of striving and

⁴³⁵ Cleary, Thomas. *The Secret of the Golden Flower: The Classic Chinese book of Life* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 3.

⁴³⁶ Cott, Christopher and Rock, Adam J. "Turning the light around' in the secret of the golden flower," in *Living authentically: daoist contributions to modern psychology* (St. Petersburg, Fla: Three Pines Press, 2011), 79-100.

⁴³⁷ Cott and Rock 2011, 82.

⁴³⁸ Jung and Jaffe 1973, 197.

conscious control over the alchemical process in order to allow it to unfold naturally. In just the same way it is only through non-doing and letting go that one achieves that first phase of active imagination. Jung's thought is also corroborated by the notions of *Yinyang* and *Dao*, where *Yin* and *Yang* are taken as the masculine and feminine polarities of the psyche (*animus* and *anima* in Jung's thought), and are synthesized through the process of individuation (which Jung reads in the Daoist texts as *Dao* – the overarching whole which contains all opposites).

The framework of Jung's entire commentary is centered around a Daoist anthropology bifurcated between the *Hun* and *Po*, two terms which Wilhelm saw fit to translate as *animus* and *anima*, technical terms from Jung's psychology which refer to the masculine and feminine aspects of the psyche. Jung initially agrees to this translation, elucidating the resonance between the concepts,

According to our text, among the figures of the unconscious there are not only gods but also the animus and anima. The word *hun* is translated by Wilhelm as animus. Indeed, the concept 'animus' seems appropriate for *hun*, the character for which is made up of the character for 'clouds' and that for 'demon'. Thus *hun* means 'cloud-demon', a higher 'breath-soul' belonging to the yang principle and therefore masculine. After death, *hun* rises upward and becomes *shen*, the 'expanding and self-revealing' spirit or god. 'Anima', called *po*, and written with the characters for 'white' and for 'demon', that is, 'white ghost', belongs to the lower, earth-bound, bodily soul, the yin principle, and is therefore feminine. After death, it sinks downward and becomes *gui* (demon), often explained as the 'one who returns' (i.e. to earth), a revenant, a ghost. The fact that the

animus and the anima part after death and go their ways independently shows that, for the Chinese consciousness, they are distinguishable psychic factors which have markedly different effects, and, despite the fact that originally they are united in ‘the one effective, true human nature’, in the ‘house of the Creative’, they are two.⁴³⁹

Here Jung points out the concrete differentiation, the multiplicitous psyche, that abides in the classical Chinese view of the self. Likening the structures of the psyche to those of the human body, Jung points out,

Just as the human body shows a common anatomy over and above all racial differences, so, too, the psyche possesses a common substratum transcending all differences in culture and consciousness...This explains the analogy, sometimes even identity, between various myth-motifs, and symbols, and the possibility of human beings making themselves mutually understood.⁴⁴⁰

It is on the foundation of this assumed psychological sameness that Jung’s comparative structure is built and Wilhelm’s identification of *hun/shen=animus*, *po/gui=anima* is justified. But whereas the discovery of the unconscious was a recent phenomenon in Western culture, this multiplicitous Chinese cartography of the psyche goes back to time immemorial, reflective of the high antiquity of Chinese civilization which backlights Wilhelm’s text by “a culture thousands of years old, one which has built organically upon primitive instincts and which, therefore, knows

⁴³⁹ Jung, C.G. and Wilhelm, Richard. *The Secret of the Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life* (New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, 1931), 115-6.

⁴⁴⁰ Jung and Wilhelm 1931, 87.

nothing of the arbitrary morality violating the instincts characteristic of us as recently civilized Teutonic barbarians.”⁴⁴¹ Jung continues,

We must never forget our historical premises. Only a little more than a thousand years ago we stumbled from the crudest beginnings of polytheism into the midst of a highly developed Oriental religion which lifted the imaginative minds of half-savages to a height that did not correspond to their degree of spiritual development...To grow up is the most we can hope for.⁴⁴²

Whereas the “discovery of the unconscious” was a quite recent phenomenon in western culture, in Jung’s reading, it was old news to the Chinese, who had long since incorporated it into their foundational understanding of the psyche. Wilhelm’s text, in this reading, was an advanced course in the negotiation of the animus and anima; in other words, a rigorous methodology of individuation.

This methodology, in the Daoist context, pertains to the manufacture of what Wilhelm translates as “The Golden Flower,” “diamond body,” or “body of light.” As he remarks in his introduction,

The Golden Flower alone...is eternal. A man who reaches this stage transposes his ego; he is no longer limited to the monad, but penetrates the magic circle of the polar duality of all phenomena and returns to the undivided One, the Tao...the goal is to

⁴⁴¹ Jung and Wilhelm 1931, 126-7.

⁴⁴² Jung and Wilhelm 1931, 127.

preserve in a transfigured form the idea of the person, the ‘traces’ left by experience.

That is the light which, with life, returns to itself and which is symbolized in our text by the Golden Flower.⁴⁴³

The creation of the Golden Flower takes place through the technique of “circulating the light,” wherein “the energies of the anima are mastered by the animus.” Whereas the energies of the anima are usually dissipated through interaction with the outer world, through the alchemical process, they are preserved, “interiorized,” and used to create an immortal psychical body. “Instead of these being dissipated they have created within the inner rotation of the monad a life-centre which is independent of bodily existence.”⁴⁴⁴

Despite Jung and Wilhelm’s propensity for using theory-laden Latinate terminology, when we place their engagement with the Daoist subtle body in the context of our genealogy, we can see that there is something genuinely new here. Though their terminology is conservative, the conversation with Daoist materials – and this is indeed a conversation – introduces us to a novel morphology. Eschewing the Neoplatonic emanatory metaphysics, our authors grasp the significance of the self-as-multiple of the Daoist scheme and how that affects both conceptions of the subtle body and of an immortal soul. Jung addresses this significance directly,

Chinese yoga philosophy bases itself upon the fact of this instinctive preparation for death as a goal, and, following the analogy with the goal of the first half of life, namely, begetting and reproduction, or the means towards perpetuation of physical life, it

⁴⁴³ Jung and Wilhelm 1931, 17.

⁴⁴⁴ Jung and Wilhelm 1931, 16.

takes as the aim of spiritual existence, the begetting and perpetuation of a psychic spirit-body ("subtle body") which ensures the continuity of the detached consciousness. It is the birth of the pneumatic man, known to the European from antiquity, but which he seeks to produce by quite other symbols and magical practices, by faith and Christian way of life. Here again we stand on a basis quite different from that of the East. Again the text sounds as though it were not very far from Christian ascetic morality, but nothing would be further from the truth than to assume that it is actually dealing with the same thing.⁴⁴⁵

This is the critical-subjective lens Jung brings to bear on the subtle body. While he has been widely critiqued for perceived orientalist psychological reductionism in his engagement with Eastern materials (and indeed this was my first impression when I began reading this stuff), such a view is only tenable if we cherry pick the worst of Jung.⁴⁴⁶ In reality he was deeply ambivalent in his engagement with the orient, occasionally exalting the East as ancient and far more grown up than the West only to, on the very next page, critique the East for its infantile mentality in the face of fully developed Western science.⁴⁴⁷ Despite Jung's hot and cold attitude towards the orient, his engagement with Wilhelm's text plumbs hermeneutical depths unheard of in the prior history of the subtle body. With its long orientalist history, from the Neoplatonic deep engagement with the *Chaldean Oracles* to Blavatsky's Mahatmas, the Jung-Wilhelm expansion of the semantic range of the subtle body concept, now used to refer to the product of the Daoist

⁴⁴⁵ Jung and Wilhelm 1931, 125.

⁴⁴⁶ Clarke 1994, 151, 175–6, 190.

⁴⁴⁷ I refer readers to Clarke 1994 for an in depth exploration of this topic. But also, most illuminating concerning the two personalities within Jung is Kingsley, Peter. *Catafalque: Carl Jung and the End of Humanity* (London: Catafalque Press, 2018), 159-166.

alchemical process, is simultaneously the extension of the concept into a novel surround. For the first time it has been withdrawn from its Neoplatonic metaphysic – now cast into the Daoist worldview of psychic multiplicity and flux, where an immortal soul is not a given from on high, but a product of a complex inner process of circulation and transformation, manufactured from the depths.

Subtle Bodies Top-Down or Ground-Up?

This formal distinction between the Neoplatonic subtle bodies that emanate from The One, cascading into a cosmos of increasing corporeality, versus the Daoist alchemical subtle body which is manufactured from the diverse psychophysical constituents of the human being through processes of circulation and refinement (circulation of the light), is perfectly captured in Wouter Hanegraaff's analytic framework juxtaposing Platonic and alchemical cosmologies, two worldviews and forms of logic he traces to Ficino and Paracelsus respectively.

The Platonic view Hanegraaff elucidates is precisely the cosmos in which we've seen the subtle body situated up to this point. It is explicitly present in the Cambridge Platonists, and inheres, initially consciously and later in a subterranean fashion, in the writings of the Indologists and subsequently the Theosophists. As Hanegraaff outlines it, this framework is top-down, hierarchical, and begins from general principles from which it emanates physical realities. It is dominated by concepts of universal harmony, stasis, and an immutable Great Chain of Being. The Platonic cosmogenesis is inevitably a "downward" motion, a Fall or fashioning of the lesser from the greater. Indeed this downward or diminishing cosmogenesis is necessary to explain

how the darkness, ignorance, and multiplicity of our world could have emerged from the “original bliss, perfection and unity of divine Harmony and Light.”⁴⁴⁸ Finally the temporal orientation of the Platonic view is retrograde. That is, “conservative and backward-looking... argued essentially by accumulating the testimonies of past authorities,”⁴⁴⁹ something we’ve seen no shortage of from Cudworth to Mead.

By contrast, the Alchemical view, and this is the subtle body we begin to see in Jung, exhibits a bottom-up approach, beginning from the physical world and proceeding into the spirit realm. It is dynamic, linear, dialectical, “starting with the simple unity of primal matter and working its way up from there, by means of dramatic and painful processes of growth and development full of violent conflicts between opposed forces or principles.”⁴⁵⁰ In contrast to the Platonic downward motion, the Alchemical cosmos is upward-tending, based on metaphors of birth, gestation, and generation, using these to elucidate how our multiplicitious and conflicted reality “could be the matrix of superior or even divine realities.”⁴⁵¹ The temporal orientation of the alchemical view was open-ended, centered on a more empirical engagement with the data of direct experience. Hanegraaff sums up the differentiation in the following table:

⁴⁴⁸ Hanegraaff, Wouter. *Esotericism and the Academy: Rejected Knowledge in Western Culture* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

⁴⁴⁹ Hanegraaff 2012, 193.

⁴⁵⁰ Hanegraaff 2012, 193.

⁴⁵¹ Hanegraaff 2012, 193.

“Platonic” paradigm	“Alchemical” paradigm
Platonic	Hermetic/Aristotelian/Paracelsian
From metaphysics to nature	From nature to metaphysics
Static harmony	Dynamic process
Fall: from light to darkness	Birth: from darkness to light
Tradition	Experience

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The Secret of the Golden Flower ignited Jung’s alchemical furnace. Though he never learned Chinese, the foreign alchemical text roused in Jung a passion for alchemy that would last the rest of his life. From 1929 on he would devote a considerable amount of his time to the collection and study of European alchemical texts, which he viewed as the link between the modern and ancient worlds, as the medieval bridge back to Gnosticism, the ultimate precursor to his own psychoanalytic method.⁴⁵³ And so the timeline of Jung’s alchemical interest is crucial here. Though the Wilhelm-Jung engagement with *The Secret of the Golden Flower* has been widely critiqued, from Gopi Krishna’s assertion that Jung found nothing in the work besides “material for the corroboration of his own ideas,” to Joseph Needham’s mild assertion that they were, “not exactly wrong but not exactly right either,”⁴⁵⁴ what we find in Jung is a genuine recognition of the bottom-up alchemical metaphysic which is foundational to the understanding of the Daoist alchemical process. This idea, at the very least, was new to Jung. Despite the crystalized layers of hermeneutical interference overlaying Jung’s reading of the text, from the pregnant Latinate terminology to overdetermined psychoanalytic technicalia, through the refraction shone the

⁴⁵² Hanegraaff 2012, 194.

⁴⁵³ Hayman 1999, 284-5.

⁴⁵⁴ Hayman 1999, 284-5.

alchemical metaphysic, and with it a novel vision of the “pneumatic man,” the now not-so-Platonic subtle body.

The Yogas of India and Tibet

Jung’s engagement with the subtle body continues into the 1930’s, first in his *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga* and later in his commentary on the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*.⁴⁵⁵ His Kundalini lectures were centered around the model of yogic occult physiology laid out in Arthur Avalon’s *The Serpent Power*,⁴⁵⁶ and it is through this traditional Hindu anthropology, here centered on the *cakras*, that Jung reads his own process of psychic integration and the coming-to-be of consciousness, again following the bottom-up model. In a manner not so distant from Leadbeater, Jung reads his soteriology of individuation and psychic integration into the evolutionary scheme of the *cakras* – from root to crown. This is the general hermeneutic through which his 1932 seminar on the psychology of Kundalini Yoga proceeds.

The *cakras* are symbols for human levels of consciousness in general. Ethnically and psychologically we can distinguish three different psychical localizations, of which the first corresponds more or less to *muladhara-svadhithana* [perineum-genital], the second to *manipura* and *anahata* [navel and heart], and the third to *visuddha* and *ajna* [throat and brow].

⁴⁵⁵ Evans-Wentz, W. Y. and Jung, C. G. *The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1954, xlvii).

⁴⁵⁶ Arthur Avalon, I should mention, was the pen-name of the tantric duo, Sir John Woodroffe and his friend A. B. Ghose, a story wonderfully told in: Taylor, Kathleen. *Sir John Woodroffe, Tantra and Bengal: 'An Indian Soul in a European Body?'* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013).

In this passage Jung establishes his own tripartite chakra system centered in the lower abdomen, upper abdomen, and the head/neck. He goes on to clarify how these different levels of consciousness function.

The psychology of the lower centers is analogous to the one of primitives – unconscious, instinctive, and involved in participation mystique. Life appears here as an occurrence, so to speak, without ego. One is not aware that one wants or does things; everything happens as it were in the third person.⁴⁵⁷

Life in these lower centers, as he demonstrates elsewhere in the seminar, is the life of animals and of “primitives,” and accordingly corresponds to the earliest phase of human evolution. Before the arising of ego identity or the idea of the self there was the life of the *muladhara* and *svadisthana*, where we abided in “a dark and unconscious place...hapless victims of circumstances.”⁴⁵⁸ He repeatedly coins Levy-Bruhl’s *participation mystique* to refer to a consciousness sunk into an infantile, pre-egoic state; to consciousness entirely enveloped in a herdlike unconscious, a state preceding any concrete bifurcation of subject and object. Regarding that first cakra, the *muladhara*, he even goes so far as to declare it “a condition of psychic sleep...we have then no consciousness there and can say nothing about it.”⁴⁵⁹ Deep in the abdomen, life has “no air substance: you are just bones and blood and muscles; you are in the

⁴⁵⁷ Jung C. G. *The Psychology of Kundalini Yoga: Notes on the Seminar Given in 1952 by C.G. Jung* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). 85.

⁴⁵⁸ Jung 1996, 15.

⁴⁵⁹ Jung 1996, 64-65.

intestines; you are functioning there like a worm with no head.”⁴⁶⁰ And as for what abdominal thinking really means, it refers to a state wherein “consciousness was so dim that people noticed only the things that disturbed their intestinal functions, and everything else simply passed by the board; it did not exist because it had no effect upon them.”⁴⁶¹

Regarding Jung’s second *cakra* complex, the solar plexus-heart centers, we find:

The first notion of the self, of the absolute center, the substance to which life is related. This notion of the self is the flame in *anahata* [the heart]. Here the rational functions start. We have figures of speech that still now express this. We say “cross my heart,” or we beat our chest when we refer to ourselves.⁴⁶²

Moving up from the headless worm of the intestines, one reaches the diaphragm which “would correspond to the surface of the earth,”⁴⁶³ where subject-object division begins to take hold, concretizing in the heart, the center of the self. Ascendance into the heart is simultaneously “the withdrawal from the emotions; you are no longer identical with them. If you succeed in remembering yourself, if you succeed in making a difference between yourself and that outburst of passion, then you discover the self; you begin to individuate.”⁴⁶⁴

By traversing the diaphragm we enter into the more spacious realm of the chest, where we become “breath-beings,” or what we classically identify as the soul, the Latin *animus*, or

⁴⁶⁰ Jung 1996, 35.

⁴⁶¹ Jung 1996, 34.

⁴⁶² Jung 1996, 85.

⁴⁶³ Jung 1996, 36.

⁴⁶⁴ Jung 1996, 39.

“mind” which Jung reminds us is identical to the Greek *anemos*, or “wind.”⁴⁶⁵ It is this state that prepares us for the final ascent into the third *cakra*-complex, located between the neck and forehead, where, “the psyche gets wings—here you know you are nothing but psyche.”⁴⁶⁶ It is this state of psychic excarnation that corresponds with the manufacture and assumption of the subtle body.

Here the “subtle body,” the diamond body, develops (cf. *The Secret of the Golden Flower*)—that being which Goethe termed “Faust’s Immortal.” It is portrayed individually as...the golden seed (Orphic: the world egg), the “great self.” At the hour of death, *prana* is removed from the *yoni* [genitals] into the *ajña* [brow] *cakra*, from which it passes over into the godhead, into timelessness, into *nirvana*—into those *cakras* situated above the corporeal, in the “house without foundation,” on the “island in the ocean of nectar.”⁴⁶⁷

As in his reading of Daoist alchemy, Jung views the traversal of the *cakras* as a proxy or recapitulation of his own process of individuation, beginning from an animal state of sheer unconsciousness and *participation mystique*, to a highly evolved, trans-egoic state as a psychical being in a subtle body. This reading operates on at least three levels here. On the one hand, and most immediately obvious, is its significance for the individual. Where most people in Jung’s contemporary Europe seem to be at the level of the navel *cakra*,⁴⁶⁸ there are those who

⁴⁶⁵ Jung 1996, 44.

⁴⁶⁶ Jung 1996, 57.

⁴⁶⁷ Jung 1996, 77-8.

⁴⁶⁸ Jung 1996, 36

undeniably identify better with the lower levels of sheer unconsciousness, or the higher, subtler *cakras*. Next is the level of cultural critique, from the “primitive tribes who have their psychical localization in the abdomen,”⁴⁶⁹ to those on a “higher level of civilization” who have discovered the higher centers.⁴⁷⁰ And third, and perhaps most interesting for our purposes, is the employment of *cakras* and imagistic thinking as a pre-philosophical means of theoretical understanding the psyche.

“The cakras are symbols,” Jung says, “they symbolize highly complex psychic facts which at the present moment we could not possibly express except in images. The cakras are therefore of great value to us because they represent a real effort to give a symbolic theory of the psyche.”⁴⁷¹ This symbolic theory of these complex psychic facts is absolutely vital, he continues, as the psyche is so vast and complex, any attempt at a more rigorous philosophical or mechanical theorization in his age would be woefully premature. Jung compares our predicament in dealing with the psyche to Plato’s predicament in dealing with the problem of knowledge at the dawn of the western intellectual tradition.

In philosophy, for instance, take the example of Plato in his parable of the cave. He tries by that rather clumsy parable to explain the subjectivity of our judgment, which is really the same idea which was called later on in the history of philosophy the theory of cognition. He describes people sitting in a cave with their backs against the light, looking at the shadows on the wall, cast by the moving figures outside. Now, this is an exceedingly apt parable to explain the problem, but it needed more than two thousand

⁴⁶⁹ Jung 1996, 34.

⁴⁷⁰ Jung 1996, 40.

⁴⁷¹ Jung 1996, 61.

years until that problem was formulated in a philosophically abstract way in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.⁴⁷²

In other words, when it comes to the cartography of the psyche, we are in the same position Plato was with respect to the problem of knowledge. All we can really do is construct images to represent how the thing seems. And it just so happens some of the most highly developed symbolic theories of the psyche can be found in Indian Yoga and Chinese alchemy. The implication, of course, is that the psyche, from the sheer unconsciousness of the *muladhara* to the subtle body of the *ajna*, is at least in principle knowable – able to be theorized. But as for now, we must still await the Kant of the subtle body, and make do with the symbolic theories of alchemists and yogis.

Nietzsche, Snake, and Eagle

The subtle body idea follows Jung into the latter half of the 1930's, showing up 53 times in his 1934-1939 seminars on Nietzsche's *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, and receiving substantial treatment in his 1937 *Religious Ideas in Alchemy*. It is in these works that the germinal idea present in hazy fashion in Jung's earlier commentaries on Eastern philosophical traditions blossoms into a concrete concept with a place in his larger schematic of the self. And it is this

⁴⁷² Jung 1996, 55.

concretized idea that is carried forward over the next three decades, appearing dozens of times in at least 18 different publications.⁴⁷³

In 1935, at the 26th session of his seminar on Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, Jung begins by addressing a question posed by the attendees. "Both Mrs. Baumann and Mrs. Stutz have asked about the concept of the subtle body which I mentioned last time. That is a very big problem in itself, and I think it would be a good thing if a comprehensive report were made next term about the primitive idea of the body of breath."⁴⁷⁴ Jung follows with the first comprehensive exposition of the concept. Where his earlier treatments all pertain to Chinese, Indian, and Tibetan uses of the idea, here Jung explicitly incorporates the subtle body into his own system, building on his earlier uses.

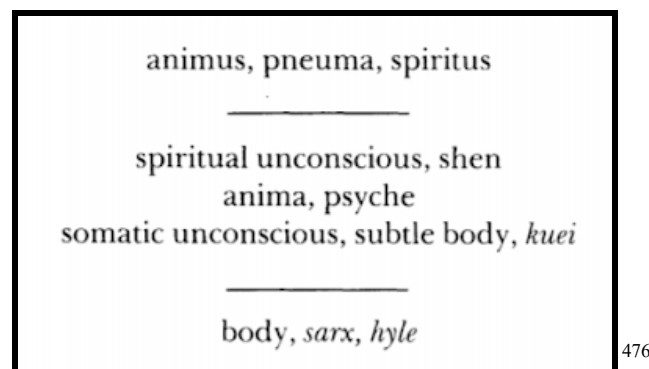
You see, when we speak of the unconscious we mean the psychological unconscious, which is a possible concept; we are then dealing with certain factors in the unconscious which we really can understand and discriminate. But the part of the unconscious which is designated as the subtle body becomes more and more identical with the functioning of the body, and therefore it grows darker and darker and ends in the utter darkness of matter; that aspect of the unconscious is exceedingly incomprehensible. I only mentioned it because in dealing with Nietzsche's concept of the self, one has to include a body, so one must include not only the shadow – the psychological unconscious – but also the physiological unconscious, the so-called somatic unconscious which is the

⁴⁷³ See, for example, 1940: Transformation Symbolism in the Mass CRW 5713, Psychology and Religion CRW 5508,5520, 5596, Psychology of Religion: West 55709, Psychology of Religion East 6017; 1946 Specific Problems of Psychotherapy 8540; 1948 The Spirit of Mercurius 7058; 1949 Letter to Gebart Frei.

⁴⁷⁴ Jung, C.G., and James L. Jarrett (ed.). *Nietzsche's Zarathustra: Notes of the Seminar given in 1934-1939*. Two Volumes (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 441.

subtle body. You see, somewhere our unconscious becomes material, because the body is the living unit, and our conscious and our unconscious are embedded in it: they contact the body. Somewhere there is a place where the two ends meet and become interlocked. And that is the place where one cannot say whether it is matter, or what one calls "psyche."⁴⁷⁵

This subtle body is no longer the manufactured product of the Daoist inner alchemical process. Neither is it the quasi-material spirit body of the *ajna cakra* or the transmigrating vehicle of a bardo being. In Jung's reading here, the subtle body refers instead to a "somatic unconscious," or those parts of the self that constitute the nexus in which matter and psyche shake hands, as it were. Here Jung draws this concept he initially encountered on very foreign Chinese and Indian soil and into his more immediate terrain. Home turf for Jung, of course, was medieval Latin alchemy and, most importantly, gnosticism, both of which operate on the basis of a tripartite anthropology.



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⁴⁷⁵ Jung and Jarrett 2012, 441.

⁴⁷⁶ Jung and Jarrett 2012, 442.

In this linguistically diverse chart Jung provides a comparative cartography of the self that correspond roughly with his earlier tripartite reading of the *cakras*. At the base is the body, *sarx* or “flesh” in Greek, as St. Paul employed the term, which is also identified with *hyle*, literally meaning “wood,” a term out of Aristotle that came to refer to matter as an external, dead, inert substance and, according to Jung, was a standard gnostic appellation. At the top is the *pneuma*, which was translated into Latin as *animus* (not to be confused with Jung’s idiosyncratic use of the term, he points out), or *spiritus*. This is the psyche itself in Jung’s system. And finally, between the body and psyche we find the third term – as Jung puts it,

Then with the psyche would be the *anima*, with the connotation of the breath of life, the living flame, the living warmth of the body. This *anima* has a spiritual side, called in China the *shen*, and their concept of *gui* would be the somatic or corporeal part. This region contains the psychology of the subtle body because it reaches into the *sarx*.⁴⁷⁷

So to summarize here, subtle body refers to the intermediary body that inheres between body and spirit. But this body is itself split in two as we can observe in Chinese alchemy. The subtler, more spiritual part of the subtle body would correspond with the *shen*, that is, that part of the subtle body that was quite nearly psyche, while the denser, more material aspect, the somatic unconscious, would correspond with the Chinese *gui*. To recap quickly, we have a three part system where the middle term is divided in two.

⁴⁷⁷ Jung and Jarrett 2012, 442.

Psyche
Subtle Body (lower: <i>gui</i> , upper: <i>shen</i>)
Body

Jung's use of the Chinese terms here stands at odds with his use of them in *Secret of the Golden Flower*, where he drew an *anima=gui*, *animus=shen* identity. In this revamped cartography, both terms have been drawn into the realm of the subtle body as its relatively more material and more spiritual aspects.

In the next paragraph, Jung addresses this new development in his formulation of this subtle body concept. "Is the subtle body identical with what Chinese Yoga calls the diamond body, or it is rather the *gui* of Chinese philosophy, the somatic unconscious?"⁴⁷⁸ His answer, in a word, is that it is both of these things. Subtle body refers to both the exalted diamond body, the "golden germ, the golden child, *hiranyagarbha*... the philosopher's stone or the eagle (*aurum nostrum*, "our gold")," and as well to the *gui*, the somatic unconscious, the "primitive" mentality of *participation mystique*. And what unifies these two readings of the subtle body is the alchemical, bottom-up manufacturing model.

"The Chinese Yoga procedure...is a process of transmutation which creates out of the subtle body within, something which is equal to the subtle body, yet it is of very great value."⁴⁷⁹ That is, it is out of the *prima materia* of the somatic unconscious that the philosopher's stone, or diamond body, is fashioned through a process of alchemical transmutation. The old alchemists,

⁴⁷⁸ Jung and Jarrett 2012, 444.

⁴⁷⁹ Jung and Jarrett 2012, 445.

and here he refers to the Latin alchemical tradition, “started from bodies and tried to develop something out of the water region into a substance of highest value, something with the qualities of light.”⁴⁸⁰ In Jung’s reading alchemy is the transmutation of the body into light. Yet the place this transmutation actually takes place, this “water region,” “is located in the center-the psyche – between body and spirit – and consists of both. So in that respect one can say the concept of the diamond body is really identical with the idea of the subtle body.”⁴⁸¹

Now Jung further specifies that the alchemical process can in fact be begun from anywhere in his tripartite scheme – whether body, subtle body, or psyche – but wherever you start from, you have to return to the body and work your way back up, as it is the body itself, the *sarx*, which provides the primary alchemical matter.

You see, that is exactly this idea; the process begins no matter where, deep down or up above, but if above, you have to work down into the *sarx*, because the body also must be in the great mixture. The body is an important contribution to the diamond body, the final finished product. So, as I said, the diamond body would be merely the finished product of the primitive concept of the subtle body.⁴⁸²

And this is the way Jung squares his earlier readings in Eastern philosophy with its subtle bodies of diamond and light with his later readings of the subtle body as somatic unconscious and *participation mystique*. His reading is bifurcated between the lower, undeveloped subtle body that ties *sarx* to *psyche*, and the higher subtle body of light manufactured out of an alchemically

⁴⁸⁰ Jung and Jarrett 2012, 445.

⁴⁸¹ Jung and Jarrett 2012, 445.

⁴⁸² Jung and Jarrett 2012, 446.

transmuted nexus of flesh and psyche, effected through that same lower subtle body, which corresponds with the alchemical “watery region.”

This process of production is captured in the famous line from Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*,

Still is his soil rich enough for it. But that soil will one day be poor and exhausted, and no lofty tree will any longer be able to grow thereon.

Alas! there cometh the time when man will no longer launch the arrow of his longing beyond man-and the string of his bow will have unlearned to whizz!

I tell you: one must still have chaos in one, to give birth to a dancing star. I tell you: ye have still chaos in you.⁴⁸³

This star, Jung explains, is a reference to the divine spark that fell into matter at the beginning of creation, according to an old Gnostic myth. It is this very spark that is distilled from coarse matter through the alchemical process. Jung expands on the dual image of the growing tree and the dancing star, saying we should plant a seed. This seed would grow up in the form of a plant,

...and the plant would create a flower which would be the star. It would be what we call the Yoga plant, with the star flower. It is an age-old poetical metaphor to call a meadow full of flowers an image of the sky with its thousands of stars; flowers have

⁴⁸³ Quoted in Jung and Jarrett 2012, 105.

those starlike forms, symmetrical structures. So if man succeeds in planting that germ, it is as if he were pregnant with a twinkling star.⁴⁸⁴

Here we see the generative metaphors of the alchemical paradigm as well as Jung's tripartite structure, a process of transmutation that begins from organic seed (read body) through Yoga plant (subtle body) to star flower (psyche); from the unconscious plant-mind of phylogenetic memory to the brilliance of a dancing star.

And so Jung provides us with a unique vision of what Nietzsche was up to, an alternative to, as Heidegger put it, "Nietzsche's alleged biologism," Jung shows us a psychologically sophisticated, alchemically oriented subtle biologism.⁴⁸⁵ And this subtle body reading, as Jung points out, is not just incidental to Nietzsche's philosophy, but actually the key to making heads or tails of any of it. "We must respect the fact that when Nietzsche speaks of the body, he does not exactly mean what we understand by a substantial or material body, but something that is spirit as well, and there is also that middle thing...the subtle body."⁴⁸⁶ According to Jung, Nietzsche's own revelation concerning this concept came out of the trance condition from which he wrote *Zarathustra*, the implication being that Nietzsche was not pulling ideas out of the air, but drawing them up from the depths, accessing a pre-egoic consciousness, that of the lower *chakras* of the "watery region," of the subtle body.⁴⁸⁷

⁴⁸⁴ Jung and Jarrett 2012, 105.

⁴⁸⁵ For Heidegger's reading and an overview of conventional doxographies of Nietzsche, see Rayman, Joshua. "Heidegger's Biological Nietzsche." *South African Journal of Philosophy*, Volume 36, 2017 - Issue 3, pp. 337-349.

⁴⁸⁶ Jung and Jarrett 2012, 432.

⁴⁸⁷ Though they never met, Jung and Nietzsche, both from Basel, had many mutual friends, so Jung has a lot of personal anecdotes he fills his seminars with. The image we get is one of a true eccentric, a "pathological personality" (Jung and Jarrett 2012, xii) who had "no sense of pleasure," who "lived on bottles" and "took chloral by the heap." (Jung and Jarrett 2012, 109) Being unable to live in his human, biological body due to his "migraines,...vomiting and sleeplessness and chloral and all the other narcotics, and...terrible sensitiveness and

The relationship between the body, subtle body, and psyche, is not necessarily the unilinear evolutionary one we see in the growth from seed to yoga plant to star flower, however. And Nietzsche's own tortured life is a testament to the back and forth, the yin-yang relationship of psyche and soma, a relationship exemplified in the eagle and snake of *Zarathustra*.

Then he looked inquiringly aloft, for he heard above him the sharp call of a bird. And behold! An eagle swept through the air in wide circles, and on it hung a serpent, not like a prey, but like a friend: for it kept itself coiled round the eagle's neck.

"They are mine animals," said Zarathustra, and rejoiced in his heart.⁴⁸⁸

It is the position of the snake that concerns Jung. In the usual depictions, as the attendees of the seminar reflect, from the Aztec Quetzalcoatl to the Greek myth of Ganymede or the Indian Garuda versus the Nagas, the snake, held in the eagle's claws, is entirely at the mercy of the bird. Why, in the picture Nietzsche paints, is the snake wrapped around its neck? The usual depiction, with snake and eagle as obvious opponents, as Jung points out, is "the general idea of the conflict between Yang and Yin, or between spirit and matter," and in the usual iconography, it is Yang, or the spirit, that is ascendant. But from his studies in Chinese philosophy, Jung points out that the ascendance of Yang is neither permanent or inevitable. The idea that "the flesh or matter deserves to be eaten by the spirit," which we in the West presumably take as a given, is, in

irritability" (Jung and Jarrett 2012, 83), Nietzsche became a creature of the subtle body, and so to understand him we must first understand the body from which he was living and writing.

⁴⁸⁸ Jung and Jarrett 2012, 226.

certain cases neither commendable nor desirable,⁴⁸⁹ and it is with this image that Nietzsche shows for us the precarious position of the subtle body-dweller.

The snake is obviously uncomfortable, drawn far out of its natural abode. There is no slithering to be done in the sky. But the eagle isn't entirely at home either since, though the snake, wrapped safely around its neck, is its friend for now, with just a slight tightening of its grip, she could choke the eagle and bring him crashing down to earth.⁴⁹⁰ To the eagle's credit, this would kill the snake as well. So they persist in this uneasy friendship backlit by mutually assured destruction. This, in Jung's reading, was Nietzsche's personal situation.

The snake is carried up into the air, away from its usual abode, and this would be the man Nietzsche carried off his feet by the Hamsa, the bird of the archetype, and he doesn't defend himself against it. On the contrary, he gives himself voluntarily to that kind of travel...But you must know that it is exceedingly dangerous; we don't know how it will turn out in the future. I should say it was a precarious situation for that serpent.⁴⁹¹

Jung's diagnosis is one of archetype possession, where Nietzsche wilfully allowed the archetypal Zarathustra to pick him up and draw him into the sky. But in the end, in Nietzsche's situation, we can see how it turned out. The serpent strangled the eagle and Zarathustra's prophecy, that

⁴⁸⁹ Jung and Jarrett 2012, 236.

⁴⁹⁰ I follow Jung's use of gendered pronouns, where the snake is feminine, yin, earth and the eagle is masculine, yang, and sky.

⁴⁹¹ Jung and Jarrett 2012, 232.

“Thy soul will be dead even sooner than thy body: fear, therefore, nothing any more!” came to pass.⁴⁹²

Subtle Body and Eschaton

Toward the end of his life, Jung remarked,

It seems to me that we are at the end of an era. The splitting of the atom and the nuclear bomb bring us a new view of matter. As physical man cannot develop any further, it would seem that this particular evolution ends with man. Like the caterpillar dissolves and turns into a butterfly, it is conceivable that the physical body of man could change into a more subtle body. It might not be necessary for him to die to be clothed afresh and be transformed.⁴⁹³

Just as Jung reflected in his *kundalini yoga* seminars on contemporary Europeans moving from the navel to the heart and now throat *cakras*, making their way toward the subtle body of the brow *cakra* (which our mind-is-in-the-head folk psychology was already intuiting), he posited an

⁴⁹² Jung sums up the late Nietzsche’s madness, “This is the classical passage in Zarathustra, the prophecy, the unmistakable anticipation of the final catastrophe, his madness, where his mind or his soul was dead long before his body. And during his madness he was utterly gone—there was absolutely no connection with him. It was an atypical form of the general paralysis of the insane, and he was quite bad; one could not talk to him. There was no reasonable connection. Occasionally, he ran away. Once he ran away from his sister’s house, and was caught naked in one of the gardens of Weimar. Then he had quiet times when she could walk with him but he could not react if talked to; there were only a few intelligible remarks. For instance, he once said to his sister: “Are we not quite happy?” -- perfectly reasonably, and then he was gone, confused. People have concluded from that that his madness was a divine mania -- what the Greeks called mania, a divine state, the state of being filled with the god; one is entheos, the god is within. The remark was quoted as evidence that he had reached a sort of nirvana condition.” (Jung and Jarrett 2012, 137.)

⁴⁹³ Ostrowski-Sachs, Margaret. *From Conversations with C.G. Jung* (Zurich: C. G. Jung Institute, 1977), 63.

evolution from matter through spirit in a cyclic return best exemplified by the changing lines of the Chinese *Yijing*, where the past half-millennium of material mechanistic philosophy is demonstrated in the culmination of the earth hexagram of six yin lines ☷. But as we have seen in the parable of the eagle and the snake, just as spirit will never entirely conquer matter, so matter will never drown out spirit.

Reflecting on scientific inquiry in the nuclear age, Jung speculates,

See, we have reached that stage where everything is a derivative of matter, the Yin condition ☷. But now physics has done the trick. The Yin condition is exploded and the first Yang line is appearing ☰. There is no return to material matter now, no chance. It is completely gone. For the last thing you really can observe is the mind. You disturb whatever there is by means of your mind, and what you are able to disturb, you can observe: you can perceive your disturbance...That is the cognitional principle of the Yoga: you create the void and out of the void comes the beginning of all knowledge, all real understanding.⁴⁹⁴

Taking the abandonment of mechanical metaphysics as inevitable in the face of the quantum revolution and splitting of the atom, Jung saw humanity moving into a new phase, with Yang, spirit, and eagle ascendant. Wherein, just as in the movement into the throat *cakra* we move beyond the four elements (i.e. physical world) into “a psychical reality...a world of psychical substance,”⁴⁹⁵ our new physics was taking us into an ontologically psychical world. “So the

⁴⁹⁴ Jung and Jarrett 2012, 245

⁴⁹⁵ Jung 1996, 43.

spirit that descended into the earth has exploded matter, and comes up again in the form of psychology. That is what the Garuda has done.”⁴⁹⁶

This movement up the Great Chain of Being, however, still lay in the future for Jung, and his late-life forays into what we might call the interfaith dialogue between psychology and physics were his last attempts to bridge the gap, to smooth the transition from the pure *yin* philosophy of physicalism into the new quantum world where the single *yang* line of mind had been inserted as they very ground on which the physical stood.

What is important to understand here is that Jung took this idea really seriously. I mean ontologically seriously. It is not just reductive psychologism. And his engagement with eastern materials, as J.J. Clarke exhaustively demonstrates, was a sophisticated negotiation of the hermeneutical circle, not simple reductive orientalist projection. Though the subtle body is always accompanied by rich imagistic flourish and mythological context in Jung’s engagements, he was clear that it was not that the concept itself was “primitive.” What was actually primitive to Jung was the epistemological the limitations of our current era, the shackles of our still-too-material zeitgeist, that prevent us from elucidating the subtle body concept with the theoretical clarity of an Immanuel Kant. And if Jung’s prognostications about a future beyond material reductionism gestured toward the world we find ourselves in today, then it would seem we stand at the beginning of another chapter in the history of the subtle body.

⁴⁹⁶ Jung and Jarrett 2012, 245.

Kuden: The Tibetan Vajra Body

In the Spring of 2013 a few of my classmates and I travelled north to Labrang Monastery, the largest monastery in Eastern Tibet. While we were there, we got one of the monks to take us on a tour of their traditional pecha manuscript (xylograph) printing facility and the attached library which contained thousands of wood blocks onto which were carved the many and various scriptures read in the *sutra* and *tantra* colleges housed there.

What I witnessed on that trip to Tibet was a level of scholastic systematicity that was simply unthinkable in the Daoist context from which I was coming. By his point I had travelled all over China, visiting innumerable Daoist temples and monasteries, both urban and rural, and never had I seen anything like this library or the institutionalized scripture study and culture of erudition that flowed from it. What I now understand is that I had stumbled upon one of the Six Great Monasteries of the Geluk sect of Tibetan Buddhism, known far and wide as the most scholastically rigorous and bibliophilic of all Buddhisms. This erudition was precisely what I had always been seeking in my years of rooting about for an unimpeachably authoritative subtle body text. The Japanese texts weren't where it was at, since they were just slightly amended, militarized Chinese medical texts. And China didn't have what I was looking for since no one – Daoist alchemist, doctor, or martial artist – could ever agree on anything! Tibet, it seemed, with its millenium-old university tradition and highly sophisticated domestic historiographical and philosophical lineages was the proper place to look for the definitive map.

And so just as we have seen the continental drift of the Orient, from the Chaldea and Egypt of the Renaissance to Ramsay's China, Colebrooke's India, and finally Blavatsky's Tibet, the always-elsewhere, utopic Orient of my own life drifted in the opposite direction: from Japan to China, and now Tibet. HPB and I met in the middle.

I began studying classical Tibetan in 2014 with the somewhat dubious intention of breaching its tantric literature to find, hopefully, clearer and more definitive presentations of the subtle body. In a sense, this is exactly what I found. From the presentation of the body in the Tibetan medical classic *Four Tantras* to Rangjung Dorje's *Profound Treasury of Meaning*, the models of esoteric physiology in Tibetan context are truly presented with scholastic sophistication, logical coherence, and just this satisfactory completeness that you never get in Chinese materials. The maps I found were, for the most part, unified in a tripartite presentation centered around channels (*rtsa*), winds (*rlung*), and congealed essences (*thigle*), and so there even seemed to be a basic lingua franca everyone rallied around in the history of the Tibetan subtle body. But I once again discovered here the subversive, counterintuitive aspect of historical and philological investigation. As my linguistic aptitude increased and historical understanding deepened, instead of the clarity and tightness I was looking for, as with my investigation of the classical Chinese materials, I found just more and more ambiguity. Disjunction between the different sects, then disagreements between masters and disciples.

I found a thirteenth-century Tibetan phenomenologist who, seeking to bring coherence to the multivocal trove of Tantric literature that made its way to Tibet between the seventh and twelfth centuries, meditated on his own body to determine the locations, and yes, even colors of

the energies residing in the chakras.⁴⁹⁷ I found erudite scholars who composed authoritative, seamlessly coherent texts on the subtle body, detailing it within exhaustive philosophical (yogacara-tantric), astrological, and medical contexts, drawing authority from a dazzling array of classical sources.⁴⁹⁸ I found visionaries who penned extremely intricate subtle body cartographies gifted to them by sky-going deities.⁴⁹⁹ And each presentation was brilliant in its own right, and had its own function within its own lineage, context, and cosmos. If the many bodies of the different Daoist traditions gestured toward different experiences within an overarching Daoist cosmic framework, the rainbow-like variety of Tibetan subtle bodies seemed like gateways into entirely other worlds.

What my journey into the literature of the Tibetan subtle body taught me was that I had been asking the wrong question. Continuing to revel in my monosomatic myopia, my search for the bodily equivalent of the *ur-pflanze*, some transcendental grounding of the signifier, “subtle body,” got me nowhere closer to the singular *mysterium tremendum* I sought.

So what was the subtle body, after all? Should I just do a sort of positivist reading, where all these cartographies across time, space, and cultures, were just early attempts at elucidating our physical bodies in objective, scientific terms (such a view is most charitably framed in G.R.S. Mead, for example)? This view seems barbarically simplistic in light of the radical alterity of epistemological frameworks from which all these different bodies are operating and being framed. To regard every previous thinker regardless of context as a proto-scientist is the

⁴⁹⁷ Here I refer to Yanggonpa clear forerunner of Charles Leadbeater in this regard. See: Miller, Willa Blythe. 2013. “Secrets of the Vajra Body: Dngos po'i gnas lugs and the Apotheosis of the Body in the Work of Rgyal ba Yang dgon pa.” Doctoral dissertation, Harvard University.

⁴⁹⁸ Here I refer to the writings of Tsongkhapa (Guhyasamaja Tantra and his Six Yogas commentary), but also Rangjung Dorje, and more recently Jamgon Kongtrul.

⁴⁹⁹ This most intricate of maps, Longchenpa's *zabdon gyatso trin*, from the *khandro yangtik*. I've included a translation of its cartography of the channels. See Appendix III.

height of modernist hubris, untenable in light of every development that has happened in the humanities since the 19th century.

What about the common New Age view, wherein all of these different bodily maps are just different paths to the same place? Such a historically naive view flew in the face of the vast chasm that separated the bardo-traversing bodies of Tibetan yogis, predicated on *yogacara* metaphysics, tantric methodologies, and Buddhist aims from the alchemical bodies of Daoist hermits, based as they were on a Daoist cosmological framework and classical Chinese medical view of the body, not to mention third-century Syrian theurgists or twentieth-century Theosophical gnostic yogis. In a few words, Iamblichus and Tsongkhapa most definitely did not have the same destination in mind.

The fallacy I've found in both of these views is the assumption of what I might call a monosomatic normativity. In the positivist reading, the basin of attraction to which all of these somatic cartographies through space and time gravitate is simply what we in the 21st century call "the body," that is, the biomedical body which we know now through the wizardry of modern science, from cell biology to sports medicine, better than anyone ever has. In the New Age reading, it is the New Age body to which all these roads lead – an eclectic mashup of all the discourses we've seen in this dissertation, from Neoplatonism through Theosophy, Kabbalah, quantum mysticism, and as we will see in the next chapter, all the Orientals combined – and it is this eclectic body, read for sameness, not difference, that sublates and absorbs all the fragmented historical manifestations that preceded it.⁵⁰⁰

⁵⁰⁰ This body is best presented in the works of Cyndi Dale.

What unites these views is the idea that there is actually just one body, and more fundamentally, one ontology in which that body persists. But what if we alter our gaze and instead of scouring history for different worldviews and the different bodily maps they give rise to, we search for different worlds and the different bodies that live in them? My own years-long journey through the various literary and practical contexts of Japanese, Chinese, and finally Tibetan subtle bodies has forced me to abandon my own monosomatic framework. Combined with the theories and methods I have learned in graduate school, I now see a more fruitful vista in what I might call a multinatural somatic pluralism, where these many bodies can be seen as gateways into alternate realities.

Chapter Seven

From Eranos to Esalen

Carl Jung's interest in the subtle body concept lent it an academic credence it lacked in its newfound theosophical context. As with his engagement with Eastern and occult materials more generally, his deepening of the East-West dialogue helped break the seal on formerly taboo materials, facilitating serious scholarly engagement with Yoga, Tantra, alchemy, gnosticism, and by extension, subtle bodies in various contexts. This isn't to say Jung alone pioneered these fields, of course, but their endorsement by such an established academic certainly helped make them culturally fashionable.

Jung's influence radiated outward through his seminars, books, and beginning in 1933, the Eranos conferences, where subtle bodies in comparative context flourished in the papers of budding European academics who followed in his wake (e.g. Mircea Eliade, Henri Corbin). But a key moment of influence began in 1928 at a conference in Dresden, where Jung met a young eclectic theologian named Frederic Spiegelberg (1897-1994), who had recently picked up Sanskrit and taken an interest in Jung's Eastern intellectual sojourns. Spiegelberg was among the attendees at Jung's 1931 Kundalini Seminars, and became a close friend of the doctor's, speaking intermittently at his institute in Zurich, attending the Eranos conferences, and visiting Jung every year until the latter's death in 1961.⁵⁰¹

⁵⁰¹ Kabil, Ahmed Moharram, "Dao of Dasein: A History of the Way of Being, 1893-1968." (BA thesis, Reed College, 2011).

The Religion of No-Religion

Spiegelberg's star-studded academic career got him involved with, among others, Carl Jung, Rudolf Otto, Rudolf Bultmann, Martin Heidegger, Sri Aurobindo, Shri Ramana Maharshi, and Paul Tillich, whose position at Dresden he assumed in 1933. Spiegelberg was fired four years later when the Nazis began purging academia of Jewish faculty and staff. Seeing the writing on the wall, he made his way to the United States, where, with the help of Tillich he eventually landed a position at Stanford.

Spiegelberg's own trajectory began with a teenage mystical experience precipitated by a poem by Rainer Maria Rilke,

All will again be great and Mighty
 And no churches which clasp Him tight
 As though a fugitive, then wail over Him
 As over a captive and wounded deer.⁵⁰²

As Kripal sums up the spontaneous mystical initiation that followed,

He was walking in a wheat field on a bright day when, quite suddenly, his ego vanished and what he calls the Self appeared. Through this altered perspective, he began

⁵⁰² Kripal, Jeffrey J., *Esalen: America and the Religion of no Religion* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007a), 49.

to see that God was shining through everything in the world, that everything was divine, that there was nothing but holiness. As he reveled in this revelation, he came around a corner and found himself confronting a gray church. He was horrified. How, he asked himself, could such a building claim to hold something more sacred, more divine, than what he had just experienced in the poppies, birds, and sky of the now divinized cosmos? It all seemed preposterous, utterly preposterous, to him.⁵⁰³

From this personal experience of the divinity of the cosmos, Spiegelberg developed a theology he termed the religion of no-religion, centered around a Jungian reading of religions that re-imagines them as variegated human, symbolic expressions of a more fundamental, sacred dimension that pervades yet simultaneously transcends them all. Kripal accurately characterizes Spiegelberg's religion of no-religion as an "apophatic mystical theology that approaches religious language, symbol, and myth as non-literal projective expressions of some deeper metaphysical truth that, paradoxically, is simultaneously immanent and transcendent—a kind of dialectical or mystical humanism."⁵⁰⁴

Alan Watts, a dear friend of Spiegelberg's, and the publisher of the initial article that later morphed into his monograph, *The Religion of No-Religion* (1948), characterized Spiegelberg's theology as, "the theory that the highest form of religion was to transcend religion. He called it the religion of nonreligion I call it atheism in the name of God; that is, the realization that ordinary everyday life and consciousness is what the Hindus call *satchitananda*, and which I translate as 'the which than which there is no whicher.'" He continues,

⁵⁰³ Kripal, Jeffrey J., "From Altered States to Altered Categories (and back again): Academic Method and the Human Potential Movement." *Religion and Culture Web Forum* (April 2007b), 13.

⁵⁰⁴ Kripal 2007b, 13.

Flowers, cats, and butterflies attend no church, have no illusions of history and destiny, and do not require laws, parliaments, and policemen to maintain their lives. Never have I heard a clergyman preach on that passage of the Sermon on the Mount which begins, "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow," and I have heard sermons galore...Spiegelberg and I have always regarded ideas and conceptions of God, as well as compulsive and scheduled notions of the "right way" of spiritual culture, as forms of idolatry more confusing than any amount of material images and icons. No sensible person ever confused a crucifix or an image of the Buddha with the divinity itself, and as for techniques of spiritual development, "The ways to the One are as many as the lives of men."⁵⁰⁵

Spiegelberg's general theory is what we might call an epistemologically dualist theology based on the phenomenology of religious experience, focusing on the split between what he terms "the divine realm itself" and "the earthly expression of revelation." Confusion of these two dimensions -- the mistaking of the symbol itself for what one is trying to symbolize -- is the primary source of misunderstanding in the history of religions. As he expresses it in the opening chapter of his *The Religion of No-Religion*,

We must always be aware of the fact that symbols are merely pointers, alarm-signs, trying to make us conscious of another side of reality, but themselves not yet

⁵⁰⁵ Watts, Alan. *In My Own Way: an Autobiography* (Novato, CA: Pantheon Books, 1972), 110.

belonging to that other side but wholly rooted within our secular limitations. All the religious expressions in history...are merely traces of God in our lives. But traces are not, of course, the thing in itself, which we are after.⁵⁰⁶

Spiegelberg's bifurcated theology is itself reflective of a complex anthropology that floats around the margins of his book. In addressing the above dilemma, the classic mistaking of map for territory, Spiegelberg claims "the explanation lies in the very fact that the human being is not an integrated unity but is mostly scattered through various levels of existence...with one part of ourselves deeply aware of the miracle of all being, another part of ourselves stands in the dullest blindness. And what the Icarus in us has discovered is of no validity to the brute in us."⁵⁰⁷ *The Religion of No-Religion* continues in an unusual fashion, covering such topics as iconoclasm, art and religion, and ending with a most curious chapter on alchemy which, by the end of the book, is clearly Spiegelberg's religion of no-religion by another name. In fact the very last sentence of the book is an admonishment to who we might assume are alchemy's cultured despisers. "All others must beware of scorning a path by which, in times past, untold numbers have attained the purification of their soul, and with it, the transformation of their world."⁵⁰⁸

The alchemy chapter, profoundly reminiscent of Jung's alchemical deep dive, is entirely absorbed with subtle physiologies that facilitate psycho-physical transmutation, and it is here that Spiegelberg brings his larger religion of no-religion hermeneutic to bear on the concept of the subtle body. Just as there is a division between a divine realm in itself and its earthly expressions or traces, just so is there a division between the inner soul and the outer body. As incarnated

⁵⁰⁶ Spiegelberg, Frederic. *The Religion of No-Religion* (Stanford, CA: James Ladd Delkin, 1948), 4.

⁵⁰⁷ Spiegelberg 1948, 11.

⁵⁰⁸ Spiegelberg 1948, 122.

creatures, our only access to the divine is through its earthly, symbolic expressions. Just so the alchemical transformation of the soul is only something that can take place through matter, through embodiment.

Alchemists are really concerned with the soul and its development, and not with material gold or quicksilver. But they cannot experience the rise of the inner powers of the soul except in matter and its transformation in the retort. It is not the fact that our body has a soul that seems to them wonderful or noteworthy, but the contrary: the fact that our soul has a body, a body formed from matter, from water, fire and metallic substances, is for them the greatest of miracles, worthy to be venerated and to serve as the basis of a religion.⁵⁰⁹

The key to understanding alchemical expressions, according to Spiegelberg, lies in a specific understanding of the phenomenological nature of alchemical language. After a short excursus on alchemically expeditious methods of diverting the flow of semen away from the genitals and up the spine (what he terms the “retrogressive method”), Spiegelberg points out, “It is rather the inner force of those substances that is meant, both of the liquids and the wind in the human body...the words and names of Yoga writings never refer to the ‘coarse body,’ but to the bodily sensations that belong to it.”⁵¹⁰

This division between the “coarse body” and “bodily sensations that belong to it,” a phenomenological distinction, was a major sticking point for Spiegelberg, showing up over and

⁵⁰⁹ Spiegelberg 1948, 100.

⁵¹⁰ Spiegelberg 1948, 106.

over again in his published and unpublished material. And to Spiegelberg, it was the very essence of the concept of the subtle body as it appears in the Indian texts he had spent his entire career studying. But before we get to his Indological critique, let us hear once more from the folksy pen of Alan Watts who, in the two pages he devotes to Spiegelberg in his autobiography *In My Own Way* (1972), tellingly focuses on just two of the Indologist's ideas: the religion of no-religion and the subtle body.

[Spiegelberg] believes, for example, that the difference between the physical body and the subtle body is that the former is the way others see and define you, and the latter the way in which you feel your own existence. This he used to illustrate in class with a sequence from the *Corky* comic strip in which the boy watching the stunts of an airplane grows his neck longer and longer and is finally tied up in knots. He also used an advertisement for some cure for "the morning after" in which a distorted photography shows a man with a hugely enlarged pate.⁵¹¹

This is an undeniably novel interpretation of the subtle body in our historical genealogy. The phenomenological appeal is quite distinct from anything we've seen before, aside from the possible exception of Charles Leadbeater, the first figure in our narrative to *explicitly* bounce textual data off first-hand experience.⁵¹² Spiegelberg was aware of the uniqueness of his

⁵¹¹ Watts 1972, 109.

⁵¹² It is odd that in a genealogy of the subtle body there is so little reporting of first-hand experience, and the reasons for this are many and various. In the case of the Neoplatonists it was the question of praxis that was central to the debate over the cartography of the vehicles of the soul, so a phenomenological element is fairly assumed, and in places in Iamblichus, for example, patently obvious. Nonetheless, even the most robust phenomenological event, without a confessional expression, remains beyond the limited grasp of the historian. In the cases of the Cambridge Platonists, Indologists, and some Theosophists, the subtle body seems to be more a theoretical construct than lived

interpretation and how it flew in the face of generations of Indological renderings of the *suksma sarira* and *linga sarira*, the story we traced in chapter three. In an abstract of a no longer extant paper entitled “The Suksma sarira in Indian Psycho-physiology (a study of the changing trends in lexicography),” Spiegelberg pithily sums up his critique.

The history of misunderstanding India may be summed up in the word *Suksma sarira* and its translations. It being categorical, it is more stretchable than other words. - Etymologically nothing definitely established. - Older translations: small, minute, etc. are quantitative. - Later under pseudo-Christianity, rosicrucian-theosophical influence (vivekananda) emphasis on quality. Translation now: subtle, astral, ethereal, words which are meaningful in gnostic-manichean dualism, but not in India. - Still later translations: vital, atomic, electric, show influence of later trends in Western physics...

Linga sarira and the *Tanmatras*; the evient difference between "eye" and "seeing", etc. - The *Suksma sarira* to be shown as the feeling body. If thus rightly understood, all other translation attempts appear as unnecessary mystification.⁵¹³

This is the first outright critique of the early linking of Neoplatonic anthropologies with Yogic metaphysics that, as shown in chapter three, inhered at the ground floor of British and German

reality. Blavatsky’s Esoteric Section and particularly Charles Leadbeater are clear exceptions to this rule, and it is really Leadbeater’s reclamation of phenomenological agency and authority, combined with the popularization of alternative somatic cultivation methodologies in the West throughout the 20th century, that opens the gate both for people to explore their own experiences of subtle bodies and, just as importantly for the historian, express those experiences in written or spoken form.

⁵¹³ Spiegelberg, Frederic. “The Suksma sarira in Indian Psycho-physiology (a study of the changing trends in lexicography),” Frederic Spiegelberg Papers (SC0631). Department of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, Calif.

Indologies. Spiegelberg elucidates three phases in the mistranslation of the term *Suksma Sarira*, and the term “subtle body” seems to be part of phase-two of misunderstanding, what he qualifies as pseudo-Christian, Rosicrucian-Theosophical, and Gnostic-Manichaeic.⁵¹⁴ Here it is clear he is addressing everything from Colebrooke through Theosophy, throwing Vivekananda into the mix. Phase three of the misunderstanding of the *Suksma Sarira* pertains to post- or para-theosophical movements and the further development of subtle body schemes of everyone from Rudolf Steiner to Julius Evola.⁵¹⁵ “Vital,” though apparent even as early as Colebrooke’s essay on Vedanta, appears in a number of subsequent authors from Vivekananda to Aleister Crowley, but eventually landed firmly in the territory of Rosicrucianism,⁵¹⁶ while Alice Bailey, a third-generation theosophist and ideological opponent of Annie Besant, shifted her cartographies of the soul into the realm of atom consciousness and the language of physics, presaging the flowering of electromagnetic, hyperdimensional, and later quantum-mystical subtle bodies of the New Age.⁵¹⁷

The three phases of misunderstanding Spiegelberg outlines are a model of hermeneutical transformation as the Indic concept of the *suksma sarira* enters the Neoplatonic subtle body

⁵¹⁴ These three phases do not map onto my own explorations of Indological literature on this stuff, where Colebrooke and the subtle body are part of the very earliest stratum, a full century before Vivekananda, who usually employs the term “fine body.”

⁵¹⁵ For Steiner’s see: Steiner, Rudolf. *Theosophy: An Introduction to the Supersensible Knowledge of the World and the Destination of Man* (New York, NY: Rand McNally&Company, 1910); for Evola’s, see: Evola, Julius. *Introduction to Magic: Rituals and Practical Techniques for the Magus* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1971, 2001)

⁵¹⁶ See Max Heindel’s magnum opus, *The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception* chapter III, for example.

⁵¹⁷ Alice Bailey is a hugely important figure in how the subtle body is imagined in the later-20th century, and really a hinge joint between orientalist and extraterrestrial-scientific discourses, for example in: Bailey, Alice and Djwhal Khul. *Telepathy and the Etheric Vehicle* (New York, NY: Lucis Trust, 1950)., wherein Bailey, aided by a channeled Tibetan master Djwhal Khul, elucidates subtle bodies in scientific terms with sections on inter-planetary subtle body contact. In her work, one can see the orient migrating from Tibet into the extraterrestrial. See also Bailey, Alice. *Atom Consciousness* (New York, NY: Lucis Trust, 1922).

discourse from initial mistranslation to creolization to novel hybridity.⁵¹⁸ But where his critique holds for the first two phases (translation and creolization) that still cleave to the Indic origins of the concept, I would argue it no longer really applies by the third phase (hybridity). The problem here is that Spiegelberg is making an Indological argument about a concept that had long since parted ways with orientalist philology. By the time this stuff gets to the atomic and vital bodies of Alice Bailey (Theosophy) and Max Heindel (Rosicrucianism), the Sanskritized creole of Blavatsky has been all but abandoned. Though post-Blavatsky subtle body writers in the public sphere inevitably retain some notion of the concept's esteemed, alleged oriental pedigree, their reliance on and regard for its textual history (again, we might say mnemohistory) lessens as the 20th century progresses, paving the way for the wholly scientific subtle body schemes of the New Age whose claims to legitimacy rest not on the laurels of ancient Tibetan sages, but on the oracular proclamations of cutting-edge scientists.

Stanford Counterculture

Spiegelberg's tenure at Stanford was somewhat rocky on account of his popularity with the undergrads. His courses on comparative religion were wildly popular, and the passion with which he expounded on Yoga and Indian philosophy more generally had the effect of spurring his pupils to rethink their respectable paths towards med school or ministry. The parents of these

⁵¹⁸ Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994).; In Bhabha's words, hybridity is "the rearticulation, or translation, of elements that are *neither the One... nor the Other...but something else besides*, which contests the terms and territories of both." (41). This concept encapsulates the post-indological history of the subtle body, a negotiation of the boundaries between its historical Neoplatonic roots and mnemo-historical Indic origin. Spiegelberg saw himself as a "professional cleanup man," in addressing the creolizing tendencies of his Indological predecessors who projected Neoplatonic subtle bodies into the quite distinct traditions of Sāṃkhya, Yoga, and Vedānta.

wayward students tried to have Spiegelberg thrown out on multiple occasions but were never successful. In the words of one university administrator, the problem with Spiegelberg was that “parents want their children to learn about these things, not become excited about them.”⁵¹⁹ As Alan Watts remembers it, “several years ago the students of Stanford voted him the best teacher on the faculty, which must have enraged his colleagues because you cannot maintain proper status in an American university without cultivated mediocrity. You must be academically “sound,” which is to be preposterously and phenomenally dull.”⁵²⁰

One shining example of Spiegelberg’s ability to turn even the most respectable young person into a mystical yogi is the case of Michael Murphy (b. 1930), a premed Episcopalian undergrad from a well-to-do Big Sur family who had every intention of becoming a priest. One serendipitous first day of classes, Murphy mistakenly wound up in the huge auditorium in which Spiegelberg was delivering his first lecture of the semester. “Brahman!” the professor boomed, “is Atman.” As Spiegelberg remembered the event,

In my lecture, I spoke the term “Brahman” with what one might call fullness of inflection, aided by the tremendous acoustics of the hall. Unbeknownst to me, this young Michael Murphy sat in the back, amidst the Hindi reverberation, wondering what strangeness he had happened upon. Some time later Michael paid a visit to my office to meet me, saying his life had not been the same since that moment. I offered my condolences, but he said, no, it was all to the good, and could he please study philosophy and religion at my direction for the rest of his academic career?⁵²¹

⁵¹⁹ Kripal 2007a, 58.

⁵²⁰ Watts 1972, 109.

⁵²¹ Kripal2007a, 56.

Following this initiatory event Murphy would drop out of his fraternity (not an ideal place for meditation), abandon his childhood faith, and spend sixteen months at the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in Pondicherry. Upon his return to the States, Murphy, with the help of Dick Price (1930-1985), another one of Spiegelberg's Stanford converts, would found the Esalen Institute in Big Sur, California.

Esalen's culture has been characterized as a "peculiar mix of Eastern mysticism, behavioral psychology, and multiple bodywork modalities that came together...in Big Sur, California, in the 1960s and 1970s."⁵²² Quoting from its initial catalogue, it is also described as, "an outrageous, avant-garde center for the exploration of 'those trends in education, religion, philosophy, and the physical and behavioral sciences which emphasize the potentialities and values of human existence.'"⁵²³ It would go on to become the birthplace and spiritual home of the Human Potential Movement, a major artery in the East-West conversation, and the institutional source of the New Age. In the words of another author and long-time Esalen community member, "It is The Age of Aquarius, and Esalen is Mecca."⁵²⁴

Murphy's guiding vision was always centered around what he would later refer to as "explorations into the further evolution of human nature,"⁵²⁵ a sentiment drawn earliest from his undergraduate exposure to Darwin and later, via Spiegelberg, his exposure to the evolutionary mysticism of Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950) in whose *The Live Divine* (1944), which Murphy read

⁵²² Leland, Kurt. *Rainbow Body: A History of the Western Chakra System from Blavatsky to Brennan* (Lake Worth, FL: Ibis Press, 2016), 312.

⁵²³ Leland 2016, 312.

⁵²⁴ Milne, Hugh. "Esalen and the Recovery of Classical Osteopathy." esalen.org. <https://www.esalen.org/page/esalen-and-recovery-classical-osteopathy> (accessed July 25, 2019)

⁵²⁵ From the subtitle of his 1995 *The Future of the Body*.

under Spiegelberg's auspices his sophomore year in college, he found a synthetic "Western-influenced, future-oriented, evolutionary mysticism,"⁵²⁶ systematically laid out in both theoretical and technical detail, what Aurobindo referred to as his Integral Yoga.

It was in Aurobindo that Murphy likely first encountered the subtle body with which Spiegelberg was so preoccupied. In distinction to many of the previous characters in our genealogy, Aurobindo was mercifully systematic. Widely-read in both Indian and Western philosophy, he drew on the Vedantic *koshas* we encountered in chapter three, which he traces to the Taittiriya Upanishad, but puts forward his own tripartite version, divided between gross body, subtle body, and causal body. Reminiscent of Leadbeater's early reticence to present the cartography of our invisible planes in any language other than Sanskrit, Aurobindo reflects,

[They are] difficult to represent accurately in any other language than the ancient Sanskrit tongue in which alone they have been to some extent systematised. The only approximate terms in the English language have other associations and their use may lead to many and even serious inaccuracies. The terminology of Yoga recognises besides the status of our physical and vital being, termed the gross body and doubly composed of the food sheath and the vital vehicle, besides the status of our mental being, termed the subtle body and singly composed of the mind sheath or mental vehicle, a third, supreme and divine status of supra-mental being, termed the causal body and composed of a fourth and a fifth vehicle which are described as those of knowledge and bliss.⁵²⁷

⁵²⁶ Kripal 2007a, 66.

⁵²⁷ Sri Aurobindo. *The Synthesis of Yoga* (Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 1999), 16.

In Aurobindo's system, the cultivation of our physical body through Hatha Yoga, subtle body through Raja Yoga, and the causal body through Jnana Yoga lead naturally to the birth of superpowers, and the arising of subtle or causal consciousnesses, which Aurobindo identified with, "in fact the opening up of the veil between [the gross, subtle, and causal bodies] and consequently between our physical, psychical and ideal personalities which is the cause of those 'psychic' and 'occult' phenomena that are now beginning to be increasingly though yet to little and too clumsily examined, even while they are far too much exploited."⁵²⁸ What Europeans know as psychic or occult phenomena, Aurobindo points out in his *Synthesis* have been known for millennia in Sanskrit philosophy as *siddhis*, or "perfections," of which there are various categorizations, including the ability to increase one's bodily weight (*garima*) or size (*mahima*) to the size of the universe, or decrease one's bodily weight (*laghima*), facilitating levitation, or size (*anima*), to the point of an atom.⁵²⁹

The subtle body concept and its attendant *siddhis* as presented in Aurobindo show up repeatedly in Murphy's books, beginning with his best-selling 1972 *Golf in the Kingdom*, a pseudo-memoir about Murphy's run-in with a mystical, left-handed golf pro named Shivas Irons. While the first half of the book is a sentimental, humorous recounting of the single day they spent together, the second half is an unpacking of the lessons the young Murphy gleaned from the wise Shivas. It turns out golf has a lot to do with the subtle body.

"Ken yer inner body," Shivas tells Murphy. Inflected by Speigelberg's phenomenological subtle body orientation Murphy relates how Shivas introduced him to the lived reality of this inner body, beyond proprioceptive metaphor or mental image. "For him, the inner body was

⁵²⁸ Sri Aurobindo. *The Life Divine* (Pondicherry, India: Sri Aurobindo Ashram Press, 2005), 274.

⁵²⁹ Sri Aurobindo 1999, 533.

more than metaphor or ‘experiential construct.’ It was a vivid undeniable reality forever impinging on our workaday world. And once you paid attention to it, it was a doorway to marvelous realms.”⁵³⁰ Murphy expands on this “inner body” in one of the clearest explicit expressions of the perennialism that has characterized the entire history of subtle body discourse.

Psychologies other than our twentieth-century Western model include these dimensions of human experience, and have included them for thousands of years. It has been helpful for me to remember that Indian psychology, for example, has much to say about the *sukshma sharira*, the so-called “subtle” or “feeling” body; the Upanishads describe various *koshas* or “soul-sheaths”; Hindu-Buddhist contemplative practice has given birth to elaborate systems of inner anatomy, full of *nadis* and *chakras* and *Kundalini* powers. These esoteric anatomies correspond in significant ways to similar systems in the lore of Africa, China, and the American Indian nations. Not only has there been a perennial philosophy, there has also been a *perennial anatomy* of the inner body. Lately, these ancient discoveries have been finding their way into the outskirts of our cautious Western psychology. They were bound to find their way there eventually, given the fundamental and irrepressible power of the realms they point to.⁵³¹

Murphy ends *Golf in the Kingdom* with a list of *siddhis* cultivable through the sort of subtle body practices Shivas introduces him to, and though in this context they are presented in a sort of tongue-in-cheek fashion, they foreshadow Murphy’s later, quite serious investigation into

⁵³⁰ Murphy, Michael. *Golf in the Kingdom* (New York, NY: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972), 138.

⁵³¹ Murphy 1972, 139.

these very same phenomena in his 1992 *The Future of the Body*. The list in *Golf in the Kingdom* includes human levitation, universal clairvoyance, bodily luminosity, knowledge of the cracks in space-time, and materialization, among others.⁵³²

The notion that there is some perennial subtle body structure hinted at in texts and oral traditions throughout history the world over has been a running assumption amongst many of our thinkers so far, debated in great detail throughout antiquity amongst neoplatonists who were establishing universal cartographies of the soul which were then codified more or less in the Cambridge Platonists with their Renaissance *prisca theologias*. But wasn't this sort of perennialism the very thing Spiegelberg was critiquing in his abstract above -- the pseudo-Christian, Rosicrucian-Theosophical, Gnostic-Manichaeic?⁵³³

Right around the time *Golf and the Kingdom* came out, Esalen hosted a series of seminars at the apartment of Spiegelberg's friend Steve Donovan in what have come to be known as the Spiegelberg Apartment Lectures.⁵³⁴ One of these was devoted to Spiegelberg's presentation of the *suksma sarira*, followed by a wide-ranging discussion on the subtle body, highlighting the differences between Spiegelberg's and Murphy's visions concerning the relationship between the *sthula sarira* (gross body) and *suksma sarira* (subtle body). I include the following extended conversation because it perfectly encapsulates the divergence between the two.

Murphy: Well see many of these athletes...they're not good introspectors

basically...They cannot check in with their own experience very well. But they have

⁵³² Murphy 1972 181.

⁵³³ Murphy's is a complex perennialism contextualized within what he terms "Evolutionary Panentheism." See his paper, "The Emergence of Evolutionary Panentheism" for more detail:

https://www.itp-international.org/sites/default/files/Emergence_of_Evol_Panentheism.pdf (accessed 10/18/2019)

⁵³⁴ Kripal 2007a, 415.

masterful control of the *sthula sarira*. Now you have another group that has had this whole kind of *suksma* experience, for example, you know that little book I did with Rhea White [*The Psychic Side of Sports*, 1979] is full of these experiences. I mean it says for example, a man who was changing the shape and size of the body, see that was one of the trickiest ones we ran up against. You see, was it purely *suksma* or was it sometimes *sthula*? Some of them, they believe, were *sthula*.

Spiegelberg: Yes, that in between. Levitation. Levitation is an experience maybe relatively easily reached in the *suksma sarira*. You feel like flying. But of course it's always interpreted by other people as *they saw him rising over the ground*, which in my book is purely misunderstanding, a mistranslation.

Murphy: But the mystery, but the problem, Frederic, is you have people as accomplished a connoisseur as George Balanchine commenting that the *ballant* in the ballet has advanced dramatically since --

Spiegelberg: Very advanced, yes, but it still does not lead to even an inch of levitation of a sitting yogi who...or walk on water, or has anyone seen the movie, *Do Saints Really Glow?* (1977) Have you seen that? Yeah, I just wonder, does that affect the *sthula* or the *suksma sarira*?

Murphy: See Frederic here's the thing. It's clear. It's clear that these things are *mainly* about the *suksma*, and I would say 99%, but there's this little border area of highly dramatic events observed by a number of people that force us to keep the doors open where you have a translation into the *sthula* realm of these effects.

Spiegelberg: But that 1% would be decisive. That would be. Because I'm still in the realm of fighting 99% of misinterpretations which are all wrong like seeing the halo of other people, lots of people who can do that or pretend to be able. That's not meant, according to Indian ideas, to be seen with *sthula* eyes. But it's meant to be something that I myself may feel my halo, but you can never see it... I'm a professional clean up man, [laughing] in the spirit of Sanskrit translations and so forth.

Murphy: But once it's cleaned up that does not then eliminate the possibility of these more radical transformations. And that's what interests me very much is that little 1%. It's in there that it's very interesting. And the translation from *suksma* to *sthula* this is part of what I would call the *lila* of our age, is this thing, you know what Aurobindo would say is this coming down into matter. It's like that, you see.⁵³⁵

Murphy's aurobindonian vision of the relation between "coarse" (*sthula*) and "subtle" (*suksma*) bodies, oriented toward superpowers (the *siddhis*), wherein a purely internal experience of levitation, at least in principle, can manifest in an outward, empirically verifiable levitation event, goes beyond the phenomenological reduction Spiegelberg was attempting in his re-translation of the terms. In other words, Murphy, while accepting Spiegelberg's phenomenological framework, incorporates it into the graduating, evolutionary scheme of Aurobindo to depict a future of the body wherein the *siddhis* and superpowers Spiegelberg relegates to inner experience (*suksma*) manifest outwardly (*sthula*) in observable ways.

⁵³⁵ Spiegelberg, Frederic and Murphy, Michael et al., "Body and Soul." Sound recording. San Francisco, CA: Steve Donovan personal collection. From Dr. Frederic Spiegelberg Esalen Lecture Series San Francisco, 1979-1983. Tape (accessed May 2019).

This is the vision Murphy explores in his 1992 *The Future of the Body: Explorations Into the Future Evolution of Human Nature*, a 761-page tome divided into two sections, part one being something of a theoretical, methodological, and historical introduction to the subject of the human development of metanormal capacities, while part two, the lion's share of the book, is a vast array of selected studies, empirical, often clinical evidence gesturing toward "our latent supernature."⁵³⁶ The theoretical dimension of the book is constellated around an Aurobindonian (or Hegel/Bergson, care of Aurobindo) evolutionary mysticism which Murphy contextualizes within a Neoplatonic-Darwinian (or again, Bergsonian ala *Creative Evolution*), emanatory framework of cosmic involution-evolution, wherein we are all headed back toward our original, "primordial Superexistence,"⁵³⁷ and the signposts along the way are the *siddhis*, or manifestations of our metanormal capacities. The methodological dimension of the book lies in an eclectic, Jamesian, radical empiricism, what Murphy calls a "synoptic, multidisciplinary, or integral empiricism," that draws synthetically across fields from the farthest flung domains of the academic kingdom, from parapsychology to sports science; religion to evolutionary biology.⁵³⁸ And the historical review, as with Murphy's expressed subtle body perennialism from *Golf in the Kingdom*, crosses time and space in a matter of pages, from the Glorified Body of Christianity to the light bodies of Daoist immortals; dismembered bodies of Eskimo and Aboriginal Shamans, to the post-mortem materialized bodies of Yoda and Obi-Wan Kenobi. In fact when I do a word search for "subtle body" in Murphy's book, almost every instance of the term's appearance is within a testimony of its ubiquity. For example,

⁵³⁶ Murphy, Michael. *The Future of the Body* (New York, NY: Penguin Putnam Inc., 1992), 561.

⁵³⁷ Murphy 1992, 193.

⁵³⁸ Murphy 1992, 14-15.

The Egyptian *ka*, the Greek *ochema*, and the Sanskrit *kosha*, *deha*, and *sarira*, which represent vehicles of consciousness that can live after death. Different doctrines accompany the idea that we possess a subtle body (or bodies), too many to summarize here. Some were described by philosopher G. R. S. Mead in *The Doctrine of the Subtle Body in Western Tradition*...in the Rig Veda, Upanishads, Old Testament, pre-Socratic philosophers, Plato, Aristotle, certain Epicureans and Stoics, Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus, Origen, Saint Paul, many Gnostics, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Origen, Descartes, Paracelsus, Swedenborg, and works of several modern philosophers, novelists, and scientists.⁵³⁹

And following the abundance of testimonies, ancient and modern, to the existence of some subtle body, Murphy speculates, echoing Plotinus, “it is at least conceivable that we could realize a metasomatic existence, coming ashore like amphibians into a world beyond our first habitat, transcending many patterns of ordinary human life.”⁵⁴⁰

Out of Esalen

Murphy’s vision of Esalen as a sort of Institute for Advanced Study of metanormal capacities, while underlying its mission from the getgo, was early eclipsed by the more democratic, egalitarian vision of his co-founder, Dick Price, who wanted to create a space of “maximum availability, minimum coercion,” where “no one captures the flag.”⁵⁴¹ Price referred

⁵³⁹ Murphy 1992, 224.

⁵⁴⁰ Murphy 1992, 219.

⁵⁴¹ Kripal 2007a, 172.

fondly to Esalen as the Rorschach Institute or Ink-Blot Institute,⁵⁴² a space where various paradigms and practices could flourish in dialogue. In a sense, the Esalen that came to be was a combination of Murphy's more elite, metanormally-oriented vision, and Price's more democratic, conversational, therapeutic design.

It was in this metanormal, democratic garden that numerous subtle body discourses, but also forms of praxis, blossomed in the American Counterculture, cross-pollinating, spinning off hybrids and truly entering the cultural mainstream, setting the stage for the world I grew up in. Afterschool Taiji. Subtle bodies and super powers in cartoons. Chakras on The Oprah Winfrey Show.

It was at Esalen that the "Western Chakra System" as we know it was formed, as detailed in Kurt Leland's 2015 *Rainbow Body: A History of the Western Chakra System from Blavatsky to Brennan*, in a fusion of the evolutionary chakra scheme from Aurobindo's Integral Yoga melded with the psychology of Abraham Maslow (1908-1970), an Esalen regular, whose hierarchy of needs was applied to the seven centers, forming a psychologistic subtle anatomy moving from basic physiological survival of the root chakra to the self-actualization of the crown chakra.⁵⁴³

It was another Esalen regular, the comparative mythologist Joseph Campbell (1904-1987), whose works provided the "New Age Roots of Jedi philosophy,"⁵⁴⁴ to George Lucas, who began reading Campbell during his undergraduate years at USC and listened to excerpts from Campbell's lectures on *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1949) as he wrote the

⁵⁴² Hanegraaf, Wouter J., and Kripal, Jeffrey J. (eds.). *Hidden Intercourse: Eros and Sexuality in the History of Western Esotericism* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2008), 496.

⁵⁴³ Leland 2016, 312-333.; and it is this system, as Leland humorously recounts, that made its mainstream debut on Johnny Carson's *The Tonight Show* in 1990. (Leland 2016, 19)

⁵⁴⁴ Marchesini, Roberto. "Star Wars, the New Age Roots of Jedi philosophy." *O Clarim: Macau Catholic Weekly*, June 8, 2018 oclarim.com. <https://www.oclarim.com.mo/en/2018/06/08/star-wars-the-new-age-roots-of-jedi-philosophy/> (accessed July 2019)

script for the original Star Wars film.⁵⁴⁵ The Esalen-Star Wars connection hardly stop there, and we can even witness a sort of recursive effect where an idea radiates out from the Esalen community, becomes normalized in mainstream discourse, and is reabsorbed into Esalen's vernacular, as in Murphy's *The Future of the Body*, in which Luke Skywalker and Obi-wan Kenobi show up regularly as exemplars of the metanormal. Further, Murphy was called upon by the U.S. Army to be an advisor for the Jedi Warrior Training Program at West Point Military Academy in the 1980's, codenamed Project Jedi, the goal of which was to create super soldiers with the powers of invisibility, seeing into the future, remote viewing, and telekinesis.⁵⁴⁶

Esalen was also a major hub in the American reception of Daoism, home to Gia-Fu Feng (1919-1985) during the 1960's. As an expert at the abacus, Feng was enlisted as Esalen's first accountant. He was also the institute's first Taiji instructor, and "keeper of the baths." Feng, with his wife Jane English, later authored the 1972 *Tao Te Ching: A New Translation*, to this day the best-selling, most widely-read English version of the Daoist classic.⁵⁴⁷ He would go on to found his own Daoist institute in Colorado and teach Taiji on an international circuit, catalyzing the popularization of the art in Europe and the U.S.⁵⁴⁸

Chungliang Al Huang (1937–) followed in Gia-fu's wake as Esalen's resident Taijiquan instructor, teaching Taiji and Qigong seminars there from the late-60's to the present (2019), and publishing prolifically on Taijiquan and Daoist philosophy from his classic *Embrace Tiger Return to Mountain* (1973) to his more recent *Coaching with Heart: Taoist Wisdom to Inspire*,

⁵⁴⁵ Baxter, John. *George Lucas: A Biography* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Entertainment, 2000), 103.

⁵⁴⁶ Hawkins, Ed. *The Men on Magic Carpets: Searching for the superhuman sports star* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019).

⁵⁴⁷ Feng, Gia-Fu and English, Jane. *Tao Te Ching: A New Translation* (Vintage Books, 1972).

⁵⁴⁸ Wilson, Carol Anne. *Sill Point of the Turning World: The Life of Gia-fu Feng* (Portland, OR: Amber Lotus Publishing, 2009).

Empower, and Lead in Sports & Life (2013). It is fair to say that American understandings of Daoism stem in a large way from the early work of Feng and Huang, particularly as regards how closely intertwined the art of Taiji is with notions of Daoist religious praxis in Euro-American understanding, where Taiji has come to constitute the practical core of international Daoist identity.

The ways in which Esalen's influence radiated out into the counterculture at large are too many to count, and my above list is intentionally idiosyncratic with reference to those aspects that were formative on my own upbringing in the sober 80's and utopian 90's.⁵⁴⁹ Behind Murphy's heady vision of subtle bodies and metanormal capacities lies the entire historical genealogy outlined in the above chapters. And behind my own life lies the fantastical orientalism of the 90's mediascape in which all these bodies and powers, creolized, hybridized, had been set loose to profoundly redistribute what kids like me imagined as the conditions of the possible. The phenomenological reclamation of the subtle body that we see in Spiegelberg authorized generations of seekers to explore the undetermined, irreducibly subjective terra incognita of the subtle body. And where Spiegelberg opened the ideological space for this exploration, Murphy and Price opened a geographical locale for its practical implementation.

The story hardly ends here. On the contrary, this is where it all began. In November of 2016 to be exact, when I travelled to Esalen to present a paper I had cobbled together entitled "A Genealogy of the Subtle Body," about how the Cambridge Platonists established the lexicon for Indological renderings of Sanskrit bodies. But wait, which story are we talking about anyway? At this point it's impossible to maintain the illusion of separateness that cleaves this historical

⁵⁴⁹ For a fuller view of its impact, of course see Kripal 2007a.

genealogy from my own life. No more ventriloquizing through historical figures, and no more quasi-positivist descriptivism, just the burning question that started this whole thing.

Conclusion

What is the Subtle Body?

Once someone has been taken into another world and given a vision of reality,
the whole game of personal existence is over.
– Peter Kingsley⁵⁵⁰

We set out to catch a sparrow and instead ensnared a great albatross. So let us release it back into the open sky from where it came, and call to mind the important first letter of this genealogy's title, that is, the infinitely fertile indefinite article, “a.” This is indeed one, singular, inevitably idiosyncratic rendering of the genealogy of this most magnetic and persistent of concepts. It is an unwieldy topic. And I have attempted to rein it in through a somewhat arbitrary philological reduction – that is, by limiting the scope of our investigation to the anglophone signifier “subtle body” as a way of averting our gaze from the concept’s essentially universal ubiquity; a sleight of hand to skirt the problem of the heresy of the “essential” and the “universal” in our postmodern age.

Of the roads not taken, too many to count, there are a few I really should mention. The shape of the narrative crafted in this dissertation, tracing the concept from a late-antique, Neoplatonic, European context that dissolves, along with Western antiquity, into the world of medieval Christianity, while being the case within our established philological and methodological parameters, is of course more complicated than described. Conversations about subtle bodies and subtle matter in antiquity were by no means limited to the (neo)Platonic or Aristotelian discourses from which we begin, and were in fact just a sort of normal way of

⁵⁵⁰ Kingsley 2018 Vol I, 194.

thinking about the world, an accepted, pre-reflective *weltanschauung* that found elite outlets in the different brands of fine-material physics expounded in everything from folk demonologies to Epicurean atomism or the corporealistic ontology of Stoicism. My philological reduction allowed us to gloss this fact, but subtle bodies were *everywhere* in antiquity. The *ochema-pneuma* discourse on which I have focused my second chapter was simply one literary expression of this worldview, the one that would go on to become the source of subtle body doctrines from the Italian Renaissance through the New Age.

If we broaden our philological parameters only slightly we might run into the Latin heritage of the *subtile corpus*, attested in Augustine (354-430), which will extend our genealogy into Manicheism,⁵⁵¹ Tertullian,⁵⁵² and Origen,⁵⁵³ into a continuous and vibrant demonological-angelological tradition that extends through the medieval period, one that was hugely important in the Paracelsian strand that courses through the genealogy of the subtle body, channeled as are most of the relevant discourses in Blavatsky and through her into the New Age.

⁵⁵⁴ And if we follow the idea East, the Neoplatonic *ochema-pneuma* lives on continuously through the middle ages in the Islamic tradition, wherein Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, once again in pseudonymous form, proved hugely influential.⁵⁵⁵

⁵⁵¹ It is Manichaeism Augustine is critiquing in his use of the term *subtile corpus* in *Confessions* (V.10)

⁵⁵² Kitzler, Peter. Tertullian's Concept of the Soul and His Corporealistic Ontology, in: J. Lagouanere - S. Fialon (eds.), *Tertullianus Afer. Tertullien et la littérature chrétienne d'Afrique*. Turnhout: Brepols (Instrumenta Patristica et Mediaevalia, 70) 2015, pp. 43-62.

⁵⁵³ Edwards, M. J. "Origen No Gnostic; Or, On the Corporeality of Man." *The Journal of Theological Studies, New Series*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (April 1992), pp. 23-37.

⁵⁵⁴ This genealogy has a lot of supporting literature. See Peers, Glenn. *Subtle Bodies: Representing Angels in Byzantium* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2001).

⁵⁵⁵ A transformation of Proclus was translated into Arabic under the title *Kitāb al-Īdāh li-Aristūṭālis fī l-khayr al-mahd*, or *The book of Aristotle's explanation of the pure good*, subsequently translated into Latin in the twelfth century as *Liber de Causis*. Both Albertus Magnus and Thomas Aquinas wrote commentaries on it. For more on the subtle body in Islam, see Corbin, Henri, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: From Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), 90-105.

Again, in the British Renaissance the Cambridge Platonists hardly stood alone in discussion of subtle bodies. Two generations before Cudworth we see subtle bodies on subtle planes Kabbalistically rendered in the writings of Robert Fludd (1574-1637) who once again has both feet planted in our overlooked Paracelsian stream.⁵⁵⁶

And what about those terms out of Indian, Tibetan, and Chinese religions that were at least lexically if not semantically fused with the subtle body? Truly that is where my interest in this genealogy thing took off. I lived in China for six years in a Daoist context, reading Chinese texts and doing Daoist subtle body practices. The normative framework I was operating from was one of 奇经八脉 the “miraculous meridians and eight channels” through which circulated 精气神 “essence, *qi*, and spirit.” The subtle body I thought I was talking about when I used that term was a palpable, if invisible, dimension of the lived body, and not something apart from it. I quickly realized, upon talking about this concept in graduate school, that my use of the term was way off-base, and for most people “subtle body” referred to an autonomous system that might interface with our fleshy bodies, but could in principle live apart from them. This concept was analogous to ideas about the 神胎 “spirit embryo” I was familiar with through Daoism, but that idea, at least to my mind, was totally distinct from the “subtle body” I wanted to talk about, which consisted of these mysterious energetic structures within our bodies that, with a bit of proprioceptive sensitivity, are plainly obviously there, yet resist any objective gaze and, at least as of yet, can only be called phenomenologically real. What I encountered was a parallax in discourses that was itself a downstream effect of a parallax in ontologies. Like Spiegelberg bewildered at the earlier creolized renderings of the *sūkṣma-śarīra*, I detected a disjunction

⁵⁵⁶ Godwin, Joscelyn. *Robert Fludd: Hermetic Philosopher and Surveyor of Two Worlds* (Grand Rapids, MI: Phanes Press, 1979).

between how I was using the term “subtle body,” operating from what I now understand was an uncommon Daoist normativity (which becomes completely common if you just take a day to fly to China), and how the subtle body was generally understood by my colleagues operating through what we might paint with broad brush as a Western ontological framework.

But the incommensurability of our starting positions, far from being a deterrent to grasping the concept, stretched thin as it may be over the chasm that separates our ontologies, becomes the very condition of the possibility of understanding something so mercurial and hybrid, universal and unspecified as the subtle body. It is the disparity in our positions that allows for the fusion of multiple horizons of understanding, a fusion that, like all proper hybrids, “contests the terms and territories of both sides.”⁵⁵⁷ As Eduardo Viveiros de Castro might comment on our parallax, “I would also add that the incommensurability of the clashing ‘notions,’ far from being an impediment to their comparability, is exactly what permits and justifies it...For only the incommensurable is worth comparing—comparing the commensurate, I think, is a task best left to accountants.”⁵⁵⁸

Radical Somatic Mutability

This has been the history of an idea, a trajectory we might visualize as the function of a high-amplitude wave, rising to cultural prominence and historical relevance, and sinking into

⁵⁵⁷ Here I am channeling Hans Georg Gadamer and Homi Bhabha, for example Gadamer: “hermeneutic work is based on a polarity of familiarity and strangeness...It is in the play between the traditionary text’s strangeness and familiarity to us, between being a historically intended, distanced object and belonging to a tradition. *The true locus of hermeneutics is this in-between.*” (*Truth and Method*, London: Bloomsbury Academic. p. 306); but also Homi Bhabha’s rendering of hybridity, see note 522.

⁵⁵⁸ Viveiros de Castro, Eduardo. *Cannibal Metaphysics* (Minneapolis, MN: Univocal, 2014), 90.

centuries of dormancy before its resurrection and following slumber. I was born into an upswing. Really an unprecedented upswing, amplified by multimedia proliferation, as television, once the domain of a trifecta of three-letter syndicates – ABC, CBS, NBC – democratized through cable subscription services before exarnating and ascending into the thermosphere in luminous, revolving satellites (Iamblichus would approve), where thousands of channels could engender and nourish niche delights.

With a few keystrokes on my PC I could access a library of classics East and West and a trove of mystical literature in translation that the characters in this genealogy could scarcely have dreamed of. And as I have established in my *Kuden*, it was not just vicarious intellectual engagement that was available to me as a 90's kid, but practical, embodied experience, through the post-Esalen explosion of imported, hybridized Asian cultivation methodologies into the mainstream, entering our culture's subterranean, irrepressibly anarchical noosphere to fuse with unipolar America's post-Cold War/Asia-Rising anxiety of empire to craft the Japano-futuristic e-Asia I grew up in.

The French philosopher Jacques Rancière (1940-) would describe this coalescence of diverse discourses and forms of bodily praxis as a moment of aesthetic dissensus, a rupture in the “concordance of sense and sense,” that is, a rupture between what is considered conventionally sensible or (onto)logical and novel senses of being in the world.⁵⁵⁹ The fusion of discourses that created this e-Asia 90's mediascape birthed with it a new aesthetic regime that contained not just a creolized orient and virtual Buddho-Daoish aesthetic cast into an imagined cyber-future, but

⁵⁵⁹ Tanke, Joseph J. *Jacques Ranciere: An Introduction* (New York, NY: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 82.

new modes of perception, new bodies, and novel ontologies whose influence was amplified by the media of cartoon, movie, and computer game.

Again, from Rancière,

Politics consists of reconfiguring the distribution of the sensible that defines the common of a community, by introducing into it subjects and new objects, in rendering visible those who were not, and of making understood as speakers those who were only understood as noisy animals.⁵⁶⁰

By “distribution of the sensible,” Rancière refers to the distribution of everything that can be sensed: seen, heard, tasted, touched, smelled, indeed that which can be talked about or even thought, “for thinking is always firstly thinking the thinkable - a thinking that modifies what is thinkable by welcoming what was unthinkable.”⁵⁶¹ Aesthetic dissensus takes place between that which is culturally determined to be sensible and those forms of discourse and praxis that are rejected from the normative cultural sensorium. In other words, the distribution of the sensible, the aesthetic regime into which a given self is insinuated, is itself determinative of the conditions of the possible. Full stop.

This mode of thinking is reflected in a few volumes from the subtle body archive I have assembled in the pages above. Damascius, for example, who theorized about the pre-substantial *participation (methexis)* that is itself determinative of our *essence (ousia)* and hence which domain along the Neoplatonic cosmic spectrum we incarnate into, speaks on the same level as

⁵⁶⁰ Quoted in Tanke 2011, 26.

⁵⁶¹ Rancière, Jacques. *Aisthesis: Scenes from the Aesthetic Regime of Art* (Brooklyn, NY: Verso, 2013), xi.

Ranciè here, where perhaps instead of *participation* being determinative of our *essence* we can say our aesthetic regime is determinative of our particular ontology. Likewise, within the spiritual monism of Anne Conway, perhaps what we could call a myriad-aspect monism,⁵⁶² the darkness or luminosity of our reality and the body through which it is filtered is refracted through a pre-ontological substrate. In both cases, ontology is itself secondary to some form of praxis that is itself determinative of the ontological.

Through the expansion of the semantic range of the subtle body traced in this genealogy, from its localized late-antique context to its use in the farthest flung orient, we can see a simultaneous expansion in the distribution of the sensible. To draw from Eliade,

In hermeneutics one is discovering a certain stance of the human spirit in the world. And even if it isn't your own stance, it still affects you. And such encounters are undoubtedly a source of creativity. Think of the impact Japanese painting had on us in the nineteenth century, or African sculpture and masks in this century. Those weren't mere cultural discoveries; they were creative encounters.⁵⁶³

Creolizing or not, the Indic, Tibetan, and Chinese discourses implicated in the subtle body's genealogy served as gateways into other worlds, especially in the literary and popular domains the concept entered through Theosophy. In the same way we can see a distinct shift in aesthetic mores with the introduction of *Ukio-E* painting to Europe, from Impressionism to Art-Nouveau,

⁵⁶² Conway's monism bears some resemblance to dual aspect monism, though she functions along a different cosmic axis. See Atmanspacher, Harald. Dual-aspect monism à la Pauli and Jung, *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 19 (9-10):9-10 (2012)

⁵⁶³ Eliade, Mircea and Rocquet, Claude Henri. *Ordeal by Labyrinth : conversations with Claude-Henri Rocquet : with an essay on Brancusi and mythology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 130-131.

or we can hear the hints of the Javanese Gamelan in the floating, hypnotic chimes of Debussy, we can witness altered bodies, and the arising of new modes of being in the body and being in the world that are directly related to the aesthetic dissensus caused by subtle body orientalism.

Countercultural orientalism, the Esalen synthesis, and their next-generation spinoffs in 1980's-90's martial arts culture and cartoon media brought with them totally novel distributions of the sensible, of perception, and of proprioception. As I have established above, this was not your granddaddy's orientalism. By the 90's, chakras were fully domesticated, as were *Ki*, *Qi*, and *Prana*, all part of what we might call a New Age creole – but not just a linguistic creole on the level of discourse, but an embodied, somatic creole, one that physiologically altered its participants through praxes. To write externally about this world, I can trace its lines of influence, what came from where, to what degree was this or that term mistranslated? But to live in this world is something wholly different. Indeed, to occupy a given spiritual universe is to occupy a given aesthetic regime, to have the conditions of the possible determined in a particular way. And within this particular spiritual universe, the super powers of the jedi or cartoon heroes were absolutely within the realm of possibility. Again, Eliade is helpful here.

That is what an Italian ethnologist and historian of religions, Ernesto De Martino, asserted in his book *Il mondo magico*, which contains studies of a number of parapsychological or “spirit” phenomena among “primitive” peoples. Martino recognized the reality of these phenomena in primitive cultures but not in ours. He believed in the authenticity of the apparitions brought about by a shaman, but he denied it to the analogous apparitions produced during our spiritualist seances. This was because,

for him, nature itself is *culturalmente condizionata*. Certain “natural” laws vary according to the idea of “nature” that different cultures have acquired. With us, nature obeys the law of gravity, for example; but that law is not a law among archaic societies: hence the possibility of parapsychological phenomena. It is a very controversial theory, needless to say, but I find it interesting.⁵⁶⁴

While such a thoroughgoing multinaturalism – the notion that nature itself is culturally conditioned – may be overstating the case for a general ontology (I don’t think it is), it is most certainly the case as regards the phenomenology of embodied being. This dissertation began with an invocation of Auden, from the libretto of Benjamin Britten’s 1941 *Paul Bunyan*, “WANTED: Energetic Madmen, those who have Thought Themselves a body large enough to devour their dreams.” The genealogy of the subtle body is simultaneously a genealogy of the cultural conditions of embodied being, and it seems plainly obvious to state that different cultural conditions give rise to different embodied beings. This is a vision of radical somatic mutability that challenges both the New Age all-in-one vision of some subtle body of which each version is just one slice, but it also challenges the normativity of the reductive, dreamless, biomedical body that resides, as Spiegelberg might put it, entirely in the realm of the *sthula*. Were we so fortunate to have Auden as a theorist of the subtle body, he might put it this way: whatever dreams we have will determine what body it is that we *think ourselves*, but it takes Energy, and perhaps a bit of Madness, to get there.

⁵⁶⁴ Eliade and Rocquet 1982, 146.

Last Thoughts on the Subtle Body

I never did find the original scroll, the source of the subtle body. The entire autobiographical dimension of this dissertation is a laying bare how flawed my own basic premise was in that search. But I don't mean this to simply be some self-indulgent exercise in intellectual humility. The notion of univocal originality, a sort of essentialism, so nineteenth-century of me, was itself just a downstream effect of the objectivist epistemology from which I was proceeding. An epistemology wherein,

To know is to objectify by distinguishing between what is intrinsic to the object and what instead belongs to the knowing subject, which has been inevitably and illegitimately projected onto the object. To know is thus to desubjectify, to render explicit the part of the subject present in the object in order to reduce it to an ideal minimum (and/or to amplify it with a view to obtaining spectacular critical effects). Subjects, just like objects, are regarded as the result of a process of objectification: the subject constitutes or recognizes itself in the object it produces, and knows itself objectively when it succeeds in seeing itself "from the outside" as a thing. Our epistemological game, then, is objectification; what has not been objectified simply remains abstract or unreal. The form of the Other is the thing.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶⁵ Viveiros de Castro 2014, 60.

As Iamblichus might put it, here we are seeking to know an “other” as “other.” The impetus for a genealogy is to engage in an extended objectification, indeed to disambiguate the strands of a concept in a wholly detached dimension on the level of historical discourse. But the very liminality of the subtle body concept – inhering between worlds, between home turf and your orient of choice, between body and soul – problematizes the objectifying tendency of historical consciousness at every turn.

In our journey to catch the sparrow, we acknowledged at the very beginning the shaman’s perspective before moving right along in our objectivist game. But maybe the idea of becoming more bird-like ourselves is worth a second look.

Amerindian shamanism is guided by the inverse ideal: to know is to “personify,” to take the point of view of what should be known or, rather, *the one* whom should be known. The key is to know, in Guimaraes Rosa’s phrase, “the who of things,” without which there would be no way to respond intelligently to the question of “why.” The form of the Other is the person. We could also say, to utilize a vocabulary currently in vogue, that shamanic personification or subjectivation reflects a propensity to universalize the “intentional attitude” accorded so much value by certain modern philosophers of mind (or, more accurately, philosophers of *modern* mind)...

Thus if a subject is an insufficiently analyzed object in the modern naturalist world, the Amerindian epistemological convention follows the inverse principle, which is that an object is an insufficiently interpreted subject.⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶⁶ Viveiros de Castro 2014, 60-63.

This distinction is at the heart of my own misguided attempts at “sufficient analysis” of the subtle body as an object of knowledge. I was searching in a uniform Newtonian historical space for a single, self-identical entity differently perceived through time, and what I ran into instead was an immediately relational multiplicity, always thickly contextualized and altered by its surrounding space. The problem is the body itself. As Mark C. Taylor writes in *Altarity*,

The living body cannot be defined in terms of the binary opposites that structure conceptual reflection. The body is neither “subject nor object”, neither “*in itself*” nor “*for itself*”, neither *res extensa* nor *res cogito*. Rather the body is the *mean* between extremes—the “milieu” in which opposites like interiority and exteriority, as well as subjectivity and objectivity, intersect. Never reducible to the differences it simultaneously joins and separates, the body is forever *entre-deux*.⁵⁶⁷

It makes perfect sense that the distribution of the sensible would be determined within the very means of sense itself – the body, which does not merely contain the sensorium, but both constitutes and is constituted by it. In this light we can see this body, this mesocosm inhering between interiority and exteriority, between *sūkṣma* and *sthūla* aspects, itself constitutes the pre-ontological basis on which a given aesthetic regime, spiritual universe, or ontology, is arrayed. To alter the body is to simultaneously alter the cosmos.

In the final analysis, when dealing with the body, and especially the more malleable subtle body, we have to drop the classical onto-theological conceit that *operari sequitur esse*

⁵⁶⁷ Taylor, Mark C. *Altarity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 69.

(“function follows from being”), and replace it with the shamanic *esse sequitur operari* (“being follows from operation”).⁵⁶⁸ The subtle body *is* what the subtle body *does*. And if we take the body not as a given object within particular predetermined ontological parameters, but as the very plane on which the parameters of the ontological are negotiated then perhaps, after the energy and madness, we can hypothesize that all these subtle bodies may be gateways into other worlds.

⁵⁶⁸ Maffie, James. *Aztec Philosophy: Understanding a World in Motion* (Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2014), 26.

Gateways

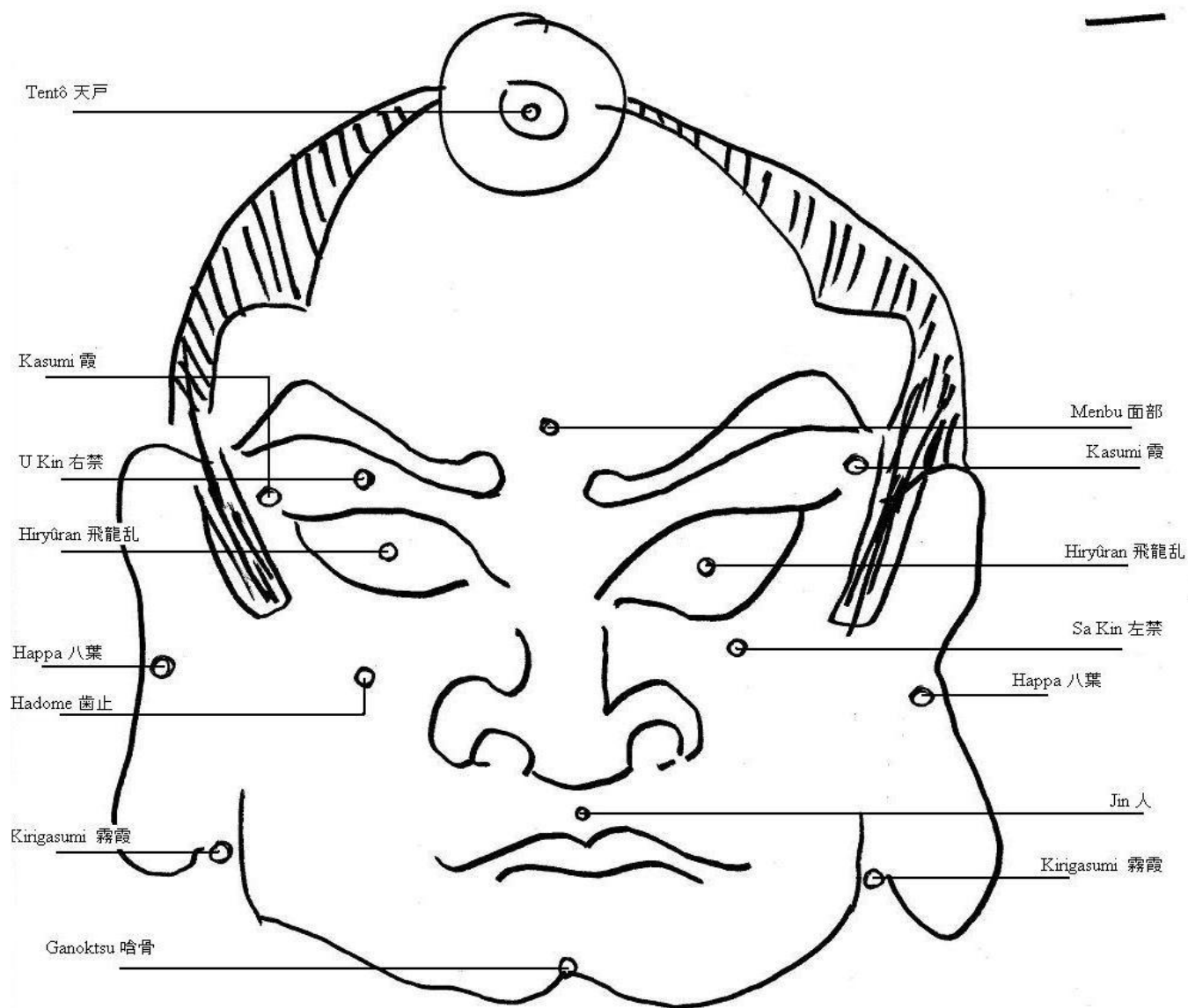
Appendix I

Koppojutsu Kinketsu Teisoku Kasho Meisho

骨法術禁穴定則ヶ所名称

Bone-Method Skill: Secret Openings, Established Names

The following is a weak point chart from the Japanese martial art Koto Ryu Koppojutsu 虎倒流骨法術. It has been recently published in Massaki Hatsumi's *Unarmed Fighting Techniques of the Samurai* (Kodansha International, 2013). These are the copies I made of another chart in 2006.



Kasumi 霞 (Mist), also called Rangiku 乱菊 (Tangled Chrysanthemum) - The temple area

Hiryûran 飛龍乱 (Unrest of the Flying Dragon) - The eyeballs

Kirigasumi 霧霞 (Dew and Mist) - The jaw directly under the ear

Ganoktsu 哈骨 (Containing Bone) - The chin

Tenmon 天門 (Heaven's Gate) - Above and below the eyes and nose

Jin 人 (Man) - The area below the nose, above the upper lip

Happa 八葉 (Eight Leaves, also Hachiyo) - The ear

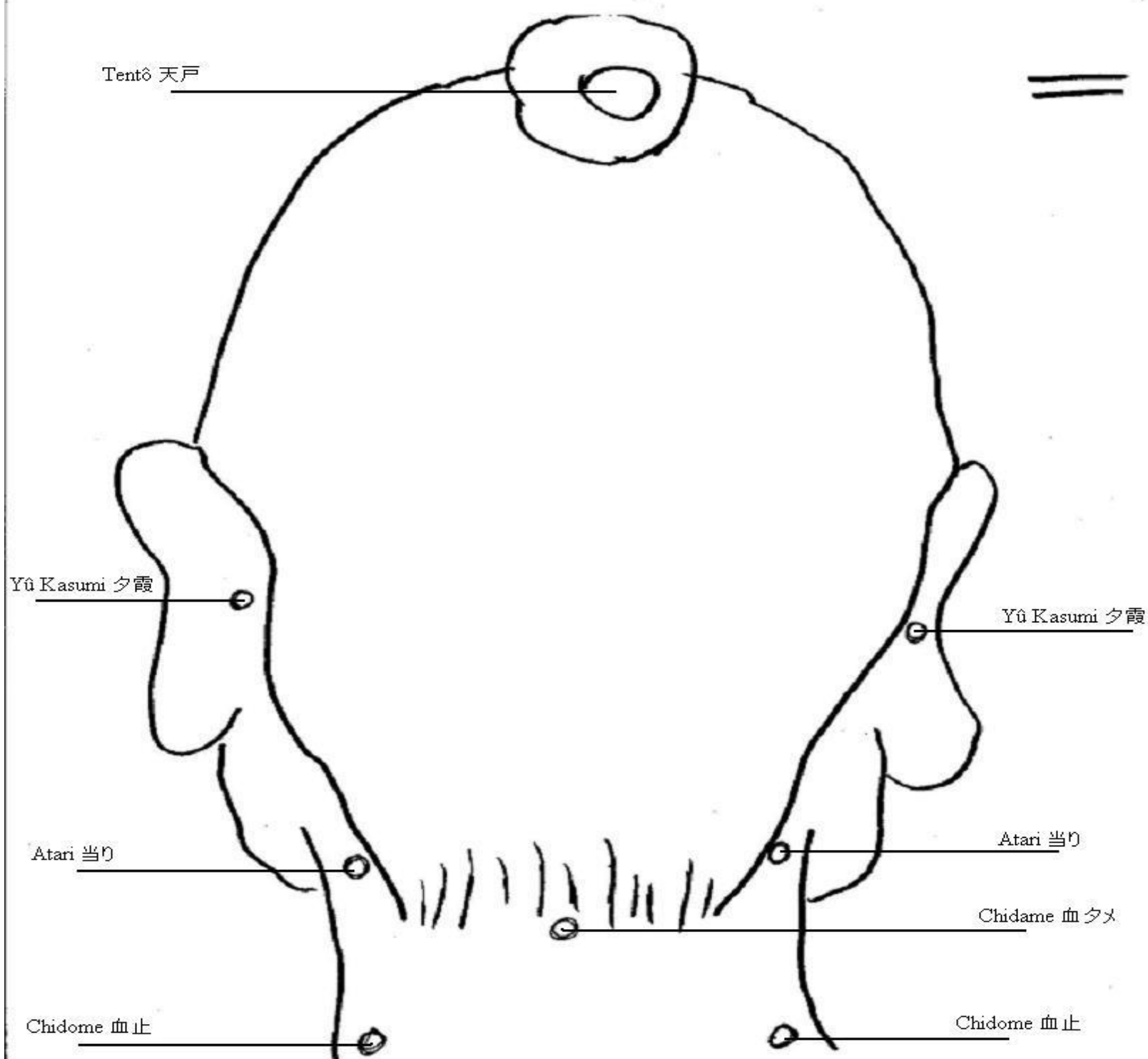
Menbu 面部 (Face) - The face and the forehead

U Kin 右禁 (Right Forbidden) - The area immediately above the right eye

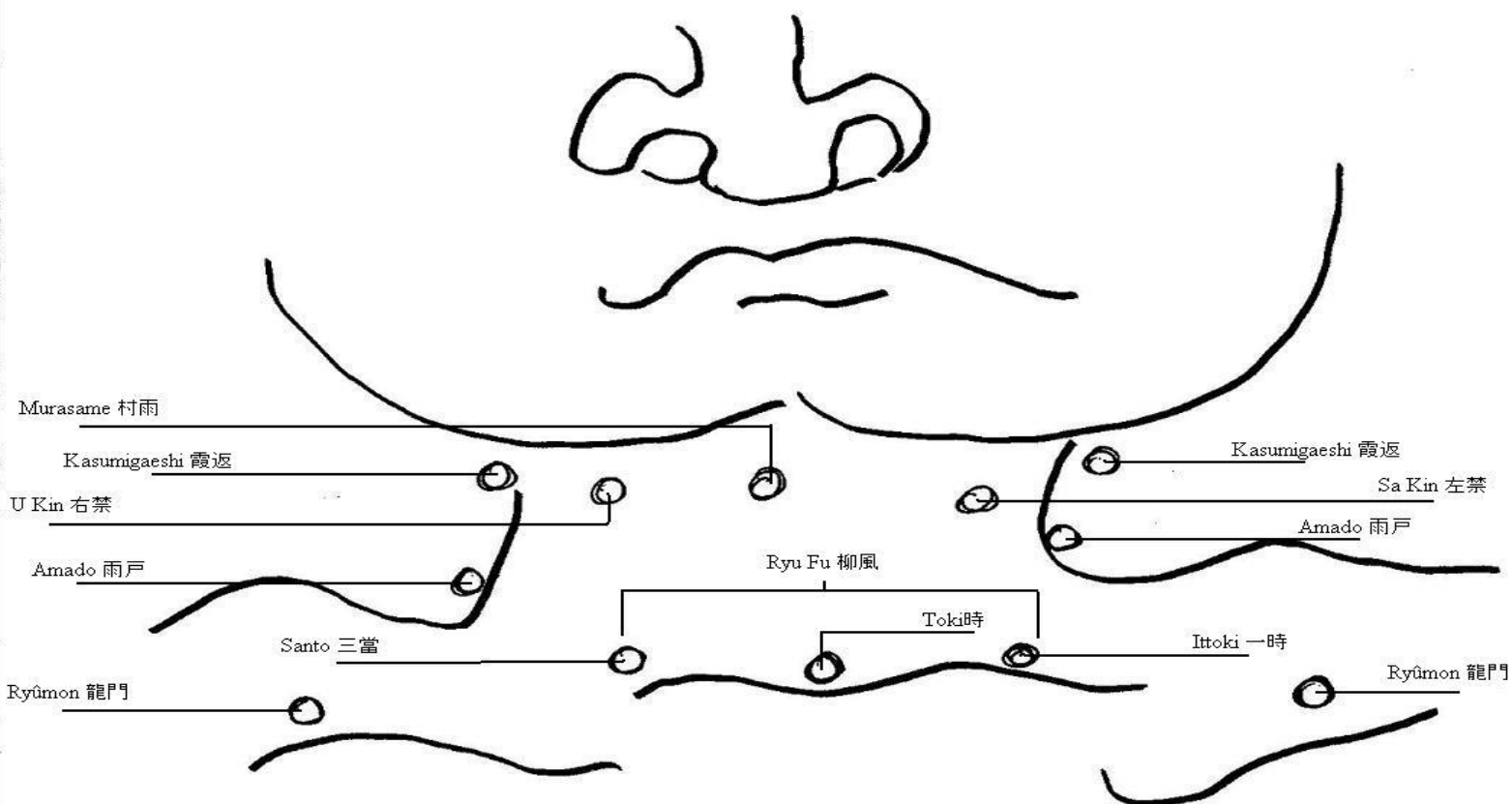
Sa Kin 左禁 (Left Forbidden) - The area immediately below the left eye

Tentô 天戸 (Door of Heaven) - The top of the head

Hadome 齒止 (Teeth Stopper) - One sun below the earlobes



- Chidome 血止 (Blood Stopper) – Back of the neck, right and left sides
 Chidame 血タメ (Blood Evening) – Center back of the neck, base of skull
 Atari 当り (Hit/Success) – Back of the head, base of the skull, left and right
 Yû Kasumi 夕霞 (Evening Mist) - Hollow point behind the ear
 Tentô 天戸 (Door of Heaven) - The top of the head



Ryūmon 龍門 (Dragon's Gate) Hollow area of the clavicle

Amado 雨戸 (Rain Door) - The area where the lymph glands are, about two inches below the ear

Murasame 村雨, the area immediately below the Adam's Apple.

Kasumigaeshi 霞返 (Turning Fog) - Where the neck meets the skull

U Kin 右禁 (Right Forbidden) - The area immediately above the right eye

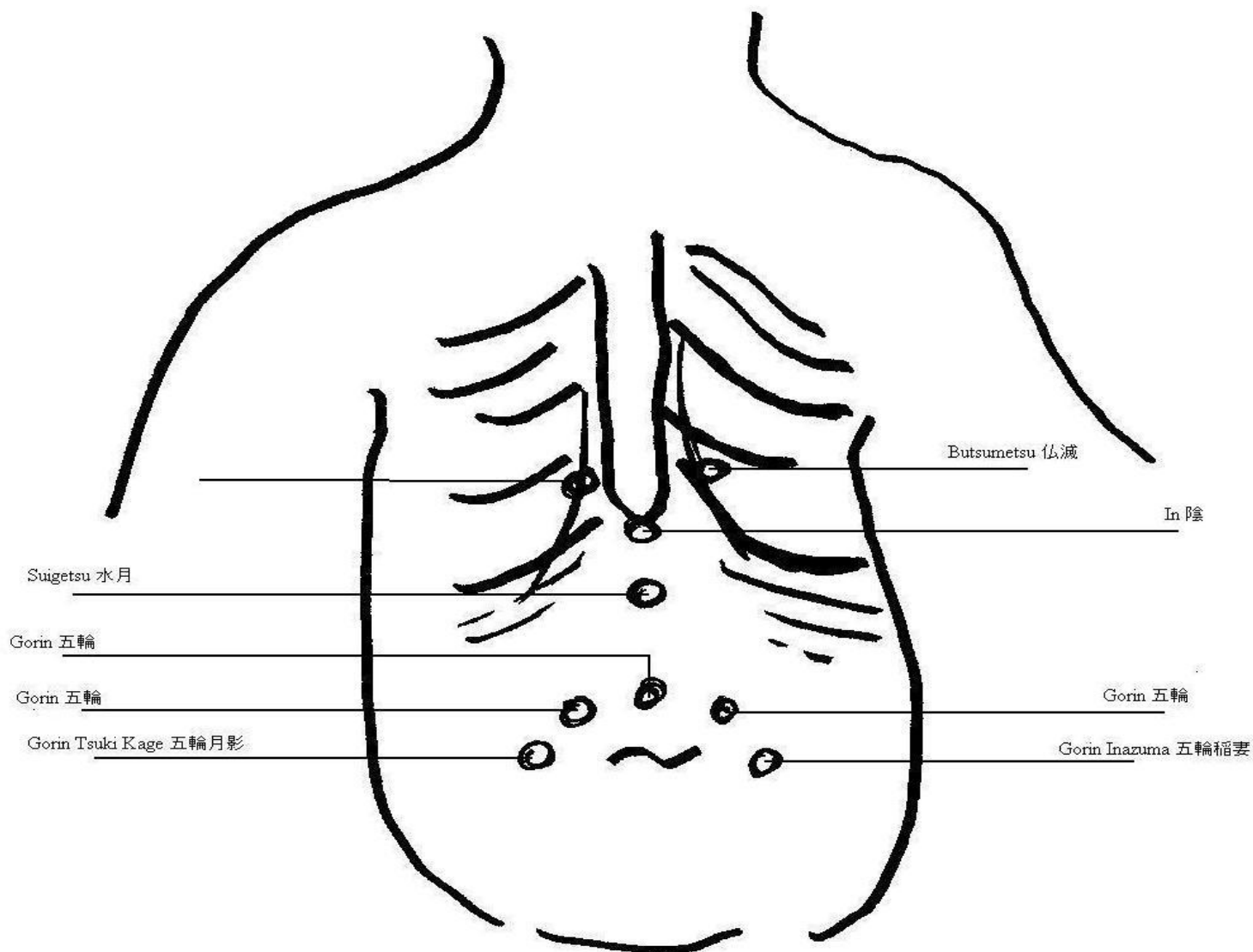
Sa Kin 左禁 (Left Forbidden) - The area immediately below the left eye

Ryu Fu 柳風 (Willow Wind) - The windpipe (Toki, Ittoki, Santo)

Toki 時 (Time) - Middle soft spot of the throat

Ittoki 一時 (One time) - Left lower throat (strike Toki and Ittoki)

Santo 三當 (Three times) - Right lower throat (Strike to Toki, Ittoki, and Santo)



Butsumetsu 仏滅 (The day the Buddha Died) - The side of the ribs.

Gorin Tsuki Kage 五輪月影 (Five Rings Moon Light) the right side of the area around the navel

Gorin Inazuma 五輪稲妻 (Five Rings Lightning) - The left side of the area around the navel

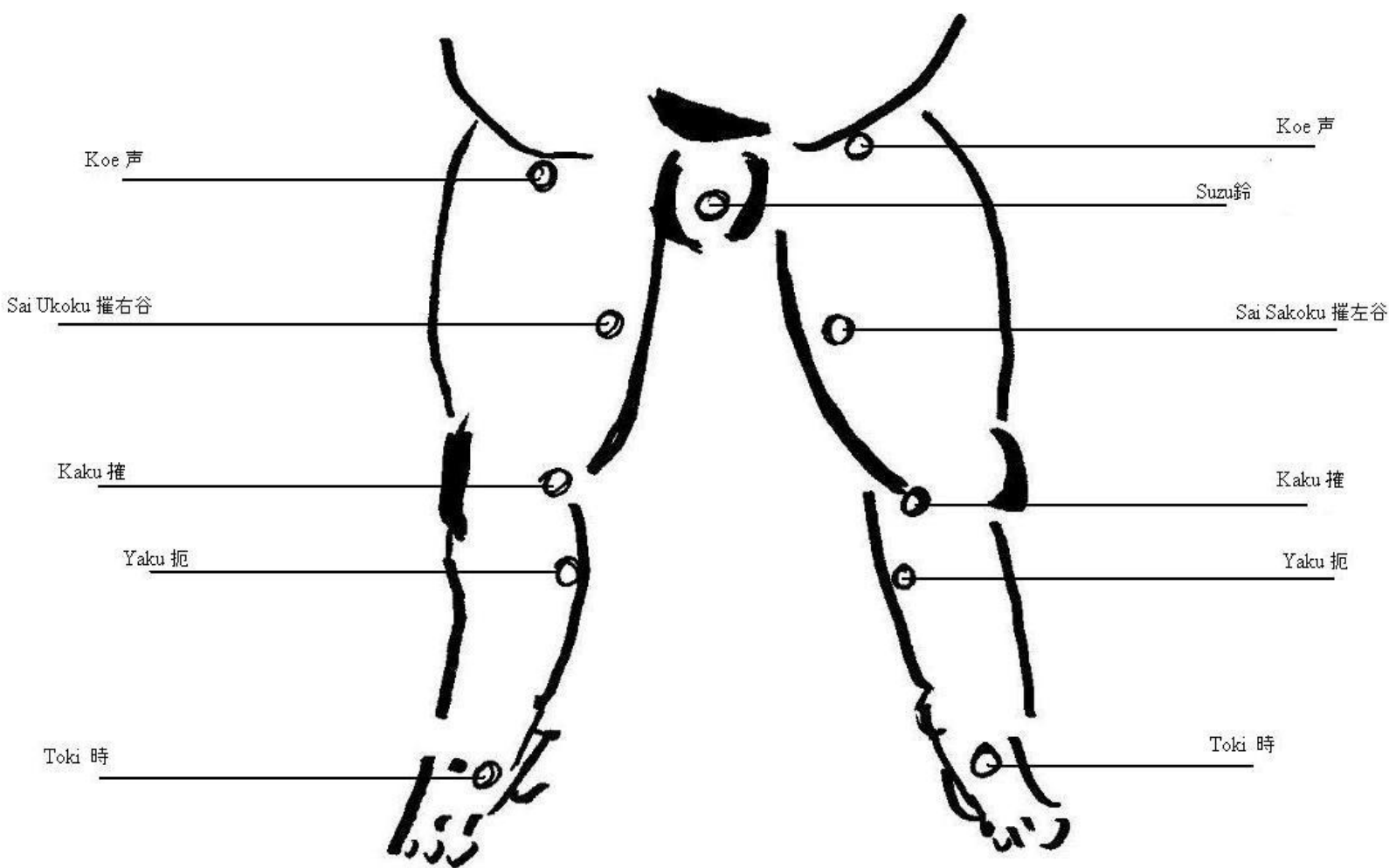
Gorin 五輪 - Five points forming a semi-circle above the navel

Suigetsu 水月 (Water Moon) - The solar plexus

Shishiran 獅子乱 (Disturbing the Lion) - The solar plexus

In 陰 (Yin) - The tip of the sternum

五



Koe 声 (Voice) - The leg joint at the lymph nodes

Kosei 虎勢 (Springing Tiger) - The testicles

Suzu 鈴 (Bell) - The testicles

Sai Ukoku 摧右谷 (Crushing right valley) - Right inner thigh

Sai Sakoku 摧左谷 (Crushing left valley) - Left inner thigh

Toki 時 (Time) - Top of the foot

Kaku 摧 (Knock) - The knee

Yaku 扼 (Obstruct) - The calf

Jyujiro 十字路

Wakidai 脇壺

Jakkin 弱骨

Kenkotsu 顴骨

Kasei 星下

Nagare 流

Shakkotsu 尺骨

Ura Gyaku 裏逆

Omote Gyaku 表逆

Kin 禁

Daimon 大門

六

Hoshi 星

Seitaku 星澤

Nagare 流

Ura Gyaku 裏逆

Omote Gyaku 表逆

Kin 禁

- Jakkin 弱骨 (Weak Bone) - The upper arm
 Nagare 流 (Flow) - The upper forearm
 Ura Gyaku 裏逆 (Inner Reversal) - The inner edge of the wrist
 Omote Gyaku 表逆 (Outer Reversal) - The outer edge of the wrist
 Jyujiro 十字路 (Crossroads) - The front part of the shoulder bone
 Daimon 大門 (Large gate) - The inside of the shoulder joint
 Hoshi 星 (Star) - The armpit
 Seitaku 星澤 (Star Swamp) - Left elbow joint
 Kasei 星下 (Under the Stars) - Right elbow joint
 Kenkotsu 顴骨 (Cheek Bone) - Four places on Tenkotsu
 Kin 禁 (Forbidden) - The Crutch area of the thumb (also Shikotsu 指骨)
 Shakkotsu 尺骨 (Ulna) - The outer side of the forearm
 Wakidai 脇壺 (Depression of the armpit) - The armpit

Appendix II

Daojia Neidan Gong

道家內丹功

Daoist inner alchemical practice

著：钟云龙

by Zhong Yunlong 钟云龙⁵⁶⁹

一，性命之道

The path of *Xing* and *Ming*

人之生死，繫於性命，性命之道，養生之道，生命之源，升仙之階。

性者，心也，乃心中之元神，發於兩目。心性好動如猿。

命者，腎也，乃腎中之元氣，發於淫根牽於心性，意氣奔騰如馬。謂之心猿意馬。

收回心猿，意馬自歸，古之修煉家，以收回後天之心意，而固精養氣，以後天呼吸之氣為風，以真陽之氣為火，去烹之煉之，使精化為氣，氣化為神，使精神凝聚而還虛合道，這種人身三寶【精，氣，神】的修煉方法道家將它稱之謂【丹道】。

修煉【丹道】必須具備以下三個條件。 ，

Human life and death are connected with *Xing* and *Ming*. The path of *Xing* and *Ming* is the way of nourishing life, the wellspring of *Ming*, the stairway to immortality. *Xing* refers to the heart, to the original *Shen* that resides within it. It is expressed through the eyes. The heart *Xing* tends toward motion like a restless monkey. *Ming* refers to the kidneys and the original *Jing* therein. It is expressed through the genitals and leads the heart *Xing* along. The will *Qi* (*Yiqi*) surges forward like a horse. So together these are called the heart monkey and horse of the will.

Retake the heart monkey and the horse of the will returns of its own volition.

Practitioners of ancient times would withdraw the post-celestial heart and will and strengthen the *Jing* to cultivate *Qi*. Using the post-celestial breath *Qi* as the wind and the true *Yang Qi* as fire,

⁵⁶⁹ This is a translation of a chapter from: Zhong Yunlong 钟云龙. *Wudang Taijiquan* 武当太极拳 (Beijing 北京: Beijing aomei caise yinwu youxian gongsi, 2013 北京奧美彩色印务有限公司, 2013).

cook and refine the *Jing*, then transform it into *Qi*, and *Qi* into *Shen*. Condense your essential *Shen* (*Jingshen*) and return it to emptiness to unite with *Dao*. This sort of bodily cultivation (the path of the elixir) is predicated on the following three conditions.

1) 身體要正常。。要按照大自然的規律去生活，使自己的生規規律，身體狀態回歸到自然健康的狀態，確保人體內的器官，經絡等功能能正常運作，能正常發運作用。

此時需要有相應的生活和學習環境以及正確自然養生知識，要達到四時，晝夜生活規律正常，身體各系統機能運作正常，要有良好的精神狀態。

1) **Regulate the body:** Follow the the rhythms of nature in living your life. In this way your body will return to its natural and healthy disposition. This will ensure proper internal functioning of the organs and meridians, as they will resume their normal actions.

At this phase one must have an appropriate environment for living and studying, as well as proper knowledge of the natural path of nourishing life. Follow the rules of the seasons as well as hours of the day, as is appropriate. Every system and function of the body must reach normality. This practice also requires a good psychological state.

2) 能量（陽氣）要充足。。要使體內的能量（陽氣）保持充足，也就是說要固養好自身的【精氣】，使自己保持有旺盛的精血。

此時可學習一些運動型的修練方法，可通過運動來培養和固存能量，比如【太極拳】類的修練方法。

2) **Energy (*Yang Qi*) must be sufficient:** The body's inner energy (*Yang Qi*) must be sufficient. That is to say, one must strengthen and nourish the bodily *Jing Qi*, so that one can preserve vigorous *Jing* and blood.

In this phase one can study some moving methods of cultivation. This helps with cultivating, solidifying, and storing energy - for example, *Taijiquan* variety cultivation methods.

3) 清心寡欲。清心寡欲能稱定思想，固定行為，能固養精神，固存能量，能使自己保持安靜和清靜，【靜極生動，物極必返】，只有，【清】和【靜】才能凝聚神氣，集中能量，修煉精，氣，神。

此時可學習，修練一些動靜結合，內外雙修的靜態式功法，比如【混元樁，鶴行樁】等。

除此之外還要了解【三丹】，【三關】及【周天】只說。

3) **Purify the heart and lessen desires:** In purifying the heart and lessening desires one can achieve balance and stability in thought, which will lead to stability in deed. It can solidify and cultivate the *Jingshen*, strengthen and store energy, and can help one preserve inner peace and tranquility. “At the peak of tranquility, movement is born. At their extreme all objects must return.” Once one has “purity” and “tranquility” then they can gather the *Shen Qi*, collect energy, and cultivate *Jing, Qi, and Shen*

【三丹】說

【丹】是可治百病的靈藥，道家修煉中的【丹】是指人體內的【能量】，【丹田】是聚集【能量】，產生【能量】之所處。

人有三【丹】，也就說人有三處聚集能量，產生能量的丹田。

1) 下【丹田】，為任脈中的【關元穴】，在臍下三指之處，為藏精之所，是【精氣】聚結之處。【精氣】可通經絡，強臟腑。

2) 中【丹田】，在胸中【膻中穴】處，是【血氣】即【宗氣】聚結之所。【血氣】可壯筋骨，強體魄。

3) 上【丹田】，在印堂處，為【神氣】聚結之所。【神氣】可出現靈感，產生智慧，開發潛能。

On the three elixirs

The elixir is the panacea to the hundred illnesses. In Daoist cultivation, elixir refers to the body's internal energy. The *Dantian* is the place where this energy can be gathered and produced.

Humans have three elixirs. Put another way, humans have three places where they store and produce energy - these are the elixir fields (*Dantian*).

1) **Lower *Dantian***: This is the *Guan Yuan* point of the *Renmai*, three finger's width below the navel. It is where *Jing* is stored. It is where the *Jing Qi* is stored and produced. *Jing Qi* can move through the meridians and strengthen the internal organs.

2) **Middle *Dantian***: This is in the middle of the chest, in the *Shanzhong* point. It is where blood *Qi*, that is *Zong Qi* is gathered and produced. Blood *Qi* can strengthen the muscles and bones and invigorate the bodily physique.

3) **Upper *Dantian***: this is in the *Yintang*, where the *Shen Qi* is gathered and produced. *Shen Qi* can give rise to insight and produce wisdom - it can help one develop their hidden abilities.

【三關】說

【關】即是【關隘】，【關口】。

【丹道】之三關就是指周天氣血運行比較難以通過的關卡。

【三關】有上【三關】和下【三關】之說。

上【三關】分別是督脈中的尾閭，夾脊和玉枕。

On the three passes

Here “pass” has the meaning of “mountain pass” or “strategic pass”. In the path of the elixir the three passes refer to three “inspection stations” on the cosmic orbit of *Qi* and blood through which it is relatively difficult to pass. There are both an upper and lower set of the three passes. The upper three passes are separated into three points on the *Dumai*: *Weilu*, *Jiaji*, and *Yuzhen*.

1) 尾閭。。是督脈中的【尾閭穴】，是肛門動，靜脈的分支，還分布着尾神經後支及肛門神經。

【尾閭】又曰【長強】，中醫曰【腎為作強之官】，為此，【尾閭】與【腎】有着密切的關聯，很多與腎相關的病（如。。遺精，陽痿，便血，脫肛，泄瀉，便秘等）均可通過對【尾閭穴】進行推拿，按摩，針灸來進行治療。

1) *Weilu*..This is the *Weilu* point on the *Dumai*. It is where the veins around the anus branch out, from where the nerves of the tailbone and anus are distributed.

Weilu is also known as *Changqiang*. Chinese medicine calls it, “The place where the kidneys are strengthened.” For this reason the *Weilu* and the kidneys have an intimate link. Many ailments related to the kidneys (such as leaking *Jing*, impotence, bloody stool, prolapsed anus, diarrhea, constipation) can be alleviated through massage, acupuncture, or moxibustion of the *Weilu* point.

2) 夾脊。。指背部脊椎兩旁的穴位，有相應椎骨下方發出的脊神經後支及其伴行的動，靜脈叢分布。

通過對【夾脊穴】進行推拿，按摩或針灸能調節植物神經的功能，故可用【夾脊穴】夾治療與植物神經功能相關的一些病症。。如血管性頭痛，肢端感覺異常症，植物神經功能紊亂症，腦血管病，紅斑性肢痛症，高血壓等。

（植物神經是內臟運動神經的別名，又稱為自主神經。植物神經脊神經由脊髓發出，主要分布于軀干，四肢，司理運動與感覺。由腦和脊髓發出的內臟神經，主要分布在內臟，控制與協調內臟，血管，腺體等功能。因不受人意志支配，古稱自主神經，也稱植物神經。人體在正常情況下，功能相反的交感和副交感神經處於相互平衡制約中。在這兩個神經系統中，當一方起正作用時，另功能。如果植物神經系統的平衡被打破，那麼便會出現各種各樣的功能障礙）。

2) *Jiaji*: This is a place on either side of the spine. It has a corresponding vertebra from which the nerves and veins of the back are distributed.

Massage, acupuncture, and moxibustion of this point can harmonize the functioning of the vegetative nervous system. So one can use *Jiaji* to treat illness and disorders of the

vegetative nervous system, for example, headache due to vein problems, anomalous ailments of the extremities, chaotic illness of the vegetative nervous system, disorder of the veins on the brain, rashes and aching of the limbs, and high blood pressure.

(The vegetative nervous system is another name for the nerves that govern the internal organs, also known as the autonomic nervous system. The vegetative nervous system spreads out from the spinal cord, and is distributed throughout the human body, the four limbs, managing movement and sensation. The inner nervous system comes from the brain and spinal cord, and is distributed throughout the internal organs. It controls and coordinates the functioning of the organs, veins, and glands of the body. It is not controlled by conscious thought, and so it is called the autonomic nervous system or the vegetative nervous system. In the midst of normal situations, the human body's sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems restrain each other in equilibrium. In this system an aberration in one system can affect the other, and so if the balance of the vegetative nervous system is broken, it can cause all manner of ailment throughout the body.)

3) 玉枕。。是足太陽膀胱經上的穴位，該穴位于人體的後頭部，在後髮際正中直上二點五寸，右旁開一點三寸平枕外隆凸上緣的凹陷處。

玉枕有枕肌。有枕動脈，靜脈。還布有枕大神經分支，通過對【玉枕穴】配合【大椎穴】進行推拿，按摩，針灸，可治頭痛，目痛，鼻塞等病症。

玉，金性器物，肺金之氣也。枕，頭與枕接觸之部位，言穴所在的位置也。該穴名意指膀胱經氣血在此化為涼濕水氣。本穴物質為絡却穴傳來的寒濕水氣與天柱穴傳來的強勁風氣，至本穴後匯合而成天部的涼濕水氣，其性表現出肺金的秋涼特征，故名。

3)**Yuzhen**: This is a point on the *Taiyang* bladder meridian, on the back of the head, on the edge of the hair, in the middle, up 2.5 inches. The right side opens 1.3 inches on level with the upper edge of the protuberance on the back of the head.

Yuzhen is where the flesh and veins in the back of the head meet the pillow. It is also where some nerves are. *Yuzhen* point is also the *Dazhun* point, and through massage, acupuncture, and moxibustion, can help treat illness of the head and eyes, and aid blockage of the nose.

Yu refers to something made of metal. It is the metal *Qi* of the lungs. *Zhen* refers to the place where the head touches the pillow, it refers to the specific place. The name of the point refers to the bladder meridian, where the *Qi* and blood turn into cool and moist water *Qi*. This point is where the *Luoquewei* point brings the cool and moist water *Qi* and the *Tianzhu* point brings the powerful wind *Qi*. These converge at this point, and form the heavenly cool and moist water *Qi*. This is expressed through the cool autumn of the lung metal.

下【三關】分別是【胯，膝，踝】三處關節。

通下【三關】的【胯】關節和【膝】關節時，會出現下肢發熱，發燒及疼痛的感覺，特別是這種疼痛感覺有時會非常強烈，甚至難以忍受，丹經有。【蘆葦穿膝】之謂，此時，當加強呼吸，以【武火】助之，亦可略加外氣輔助，迫使氣血下行，促進通關。

The lower three passes are divided into: hip, knee, ankle. It refers to the joints in these three places.

Passing through the lower three passes - first the hip and the knee - the lower extremities might become hot, feverish, or sore. The pain can become especially strong here, to the point where it is difficult to bear it. The elixir classics call this, "the reed passing through the knee." At this time strengthen the breath, use the martial fire to help. You can also use external *Qi* to help, to force the *Qi* and blood to go downward, to push through the passes.

【周天】說

周天。。是古代天文學上的術語，是觀測者眼睛所看到天體上的大圓周叫【周天】。這大圓周成為大圓，又稱黃道。

On the celestial circulation

Celestial circulation is a term from ancient astronomy, when an ancient observer saw the great circle of the heavenly bodies, he called it “celestial circulation.” This great circumference was seen as a large circle, and is also known as the ecliptic.

黃道劃為三百六十度，在其兩側的八度內即為黃道帶，布列各星宿，并在其上運行。所以孔穎達『禮記-月令篇疏』中說。。【凡二十八宿及諸星，皆遁天左行，一日一夜為一周天】。

內丹術中的煉精化氣，既是指內氣的感覺從下丹田循督脈，任脈回至下丹田作循環走動，也借用了這個周天的名詞。正如『天仙正理』上說的。。【小周天云者，言取象于子，丑，寅，。。。十二時如周一日之天也】。

The ecliptic is divided into 360 degrees. The eight degrees on either side are known as the ecliptic belt, and these are arranged into the 28 astrological mansions within its upward circulation. *Kong Ying Da*, in his commentary on the classic of rites, said, “the 28 mansions and all the stars move left within the heavens, one day and one night is one celestial circulation.”

Within inner alchemy, transmuting *Jing* to *Qi* refers to the feeling of inner *Qi* moving from the lower *Dantian* up the *Dumai*, then going down the *Renmai* back to the lower *Dantian*. This also employs the name, “celestial circulation.” Just as is said in *True principles of the celestial immortals*, “Microcosmic circulation refers to the images of *Zi, Chou, Yin...* the 12 hours as one day’s celestial circulation.”

由于煉精化氣內氣感覺的第一階段只走督，任二脈，故將此稱之謂【小周天】，而第二階段的感覺是通行了全身之十二經絡和奇經八脈，所以稱之謂【大周天】。具體了解了以上條件，了解了以上相關知識後方可進入【丹道】修煉。

【丹道】修練之法雖分行，住，坐，臥不拘一格，但，萬變不離其宗，今在此謹將靜坐功法，闡述如下。。

In the first level of transmuting *Jing* to *Qi*, the feeling of the inner *Qi* only traverses the *Dumai* and *Renmai*. This is known as microcosmic circulation. In the second level the feeling passes through the entire body - the 12 meridians and the 8 extraordinary meridians. This is known as macrocosmic circulation.

Once one has concretely realized the above conditions, realized the above correlative knowledge, then they can advance to elixir path cultivation.

Elixir path cultivation methods are divided into: moving, standing, seated, lying - not being limited to one form, having a vast variety of methods that all adhere to the original standards. Here we will sincerely outline the quiet sitting methodology, as explained below...

進入內丹【靜坐】修煉功法應掌握以下基本知識。。

1) 基本動作。。

第一，形體。。

靜坐前，寬放衣帶，鬆沉身心。務要使入坐時，身體平直端正，不受束縛，血脈自然流通無阻。

第二，坐盤。。

散盤。。兩腿曲膝收回于小腹前，然後，自然盤膝而坐。

單盤。。兩腿曲膝收回于小腹前，然後，將右腳放置于左大腿之上，左腳在下，右腳在上盤膝而坐（男左女右）

雙盤。。兩腿曲膝收回于小腹前，然後，將右腳放置于左大腿之上，再收回左腿放於右大腿之上。左腿在外，右腿在內，成環抱式（男左女右）。

第三，掐訣

子字訣。。左右雙手各自分別用大拇指指面掐住十二地支之【子】位上，然後，其他四指自然回握抱住大拇指分別放置于兩膝內之大腿上，拳心朝上，朝內跟據的習慣均可。

午字訣。。左右雙手各自分別用大拇指指尖面掐住中指（十二地支之【午】位）的指尖面，然後，自然分別放置于兩膝內之大腿上。掌心朝上，朝下，朝內根據自己的習慣均可。

子午訣。。右手大拇指捏定右手中指午字訣.,左手拇指進入右手內,捏定右手子字訣。此名為【子午連環訣】,左手抱住右手,為負陽而抱陰(男左,女右),然後掌雙手環抱,掌心朝上,自然放於臍下兩腿中間。

When beginning internal alchemical tranquil sitting cultivation method one must grasp the following basic knowledge:

1) **Basic movements**

a) **Body form**

Before sitting, loosen the clothing and relax the body and mind. When entering sitting the body should be level and upright, unconstrained. The blood should flow naturally without hindrance.

b) **Sitting**

Free sitting: two legs bend at the knees, and place the feet in front of the belly. Then coil the knees in and sit.

Single lotus: two knees bend, bring the legs in front of the belly. Place the right foot on top of the left thigh, left foot underneath, right foot on top. Coil the legs in and sit (men left, women right).

Double lotus: two knees bend, bring the legs in front of the belly. Place the right foot on top of the left thigh, then bring in the left leg and place it on top of the right leg. Left leg on the outside, right leg on the inside, form encircling posture (men left, women right).

c) **Mudras**

Zi character mudra: left and right hands each touch the thumb to the *Zi* point of the 12 terrestrial branches. Naturally wrap the other 4 fingers around the thumb, place

your hands on the inside of the two knees, palms facing upward or inward, as is comfortable.

Wu character mudra: left and right hands place thumb tip on the top of the middle finger (the terrestrial branch for *Wu*). Place the two hands on the insides of the two knees. Palms face upward, downward, or inward, as is comfortable.

Ziwu mudra: right hand thumb touches the right hand middle finger tip to form *Wu* character mudra. Left hand thumb enters the right hand, pinch the right finger's *Zi* mudra. This is called, “*Ziwu* linking mudra.” Left hand embraces the right hand, so *Yang* embraces *Yin* (left for men, right for women). Then the palms embrace one another, palms facing upward. Naturally place this below the navel in between the two legs.

2) 練心

第一，取代安靜法

道家【丹道】修煉功法稱之為【性命雙修】，【性】則【心】也。丹經曰。。【心猿，意馬】，【心猿】就是【心性】，【意馬】就是【意氣】，而，【意馬】常隨【心猿】動，為此，丹經又曰。。【收回心猿，意馬自歸】。

2) Training the heart

a) Substituting tranquility method

Daoist elixir path cultivation methods are also known as, “Cultivation of both *Xing* and *Ming*.” *Xing* refers to the heart.

The alchemical classics say, “heart monkey, will horse - the heart monkey is the heart *Xing*, the will horse is the will *Qi*, and the will horse always follows the movements

of the heart monkey, and so it is said, return the heart monkey and the will horse will return of its own volition.”

人自幼開始學習也正是為了培養【心猿】這種【靈性】，然而，世界萬物均屬兩面性，一面是【正】，另一面是【負】，【靈性】能讓人【開悟】產生【智慧】，同時，【靈性】也是大量消耗能量（元氣）造成人體負面影響的罪魁禍首，而且，【丹道】修煉，一要健康，二要陽氣（能量）充足，三要安靜（靜極能生動），它是一種集中人體中的能量，利用自身的能量來轉化和提升能量的靜態修煉功法，為此，【靜】就是【丹道】修煉必要可少的基本條件，要想【靜】就必須收回【心猿】，讓【心猿】安靜下來，然而，人們自幼學習，煅煉，早已培養成了自然靈動的【心猿】，要想讓這種自然靈動的【心猿】回到身中安靜下來決非易事，為此，道家也將此稱之為【築基】，築基功在內丹修煉中猶為重要。丹經曰。。【物極必返，靜極生動】，收不回【心猿】，【意馬】難歸，安靜不了心性，人體中的氣血就無法集中，氣血無法集中就難成修煉之功。

收回【心猿】，【意馬】道家常用【取代】，【導引】之法。

道家常用的取代導引之法。。

【念經】，重復默念【經文】能使其性歸，氣沉，自然安靜。

叩齒數數，閉嘴，叩齒，每叩三十六次為一組，點數叩齒之數，重復叩齒，數數，亦可收回【心猿】，使其心靜，氣沉。

From childhood people study and cultivate this heart monkey, that is, their spiritual nature. All phenomena are categorized into two essences (*Xing*), one is positive and the other negative. Spiritual nature can produce wisdom and help one become enlightened. At the same time one's spiritual nature can also consume their power (original *Qi*), and can actually bring about negative consequences to the body to the extent that it is the body's main source of illness. Furthermore elixir path cultivation requires that one be:

- 1) Healthy
- 2) Possessed of enough *Yang Qi* (power)
- 3) Tranquil (the extreme of tranquility produces motion).

Spiritual nature is a kind of power gathered inside the body. It is advantageous in that it can promote and transform the energy in the body through tranquil cultivation methods. For this reason tranquility is a necessary condition for the cultivation of the elixir. In tranquility one can call back the heart monkey and pacify it. However, from childhood people study and train, and from a young age feed the quick-witted heart monkey. One should want to send this heart monkey back into the body to be at peace. However this is not an easy matter. So Daoists call this process, “establishing the foundation.” In the cultivation of the elixir, establishing the foundation is very important. The alchemical scriptures say, “at their peak, phenomena return, at this extremity, stillness gives rise to movement.” If one cannot lead the heart monkey back, then the horse of the will can be hard to overtake. If you cannot pacify the heart *Xing*, then the *Qi* and blood have no way of gathering. If *Qi* and blood cannot gather, then all the cultivation methods will be difficult.

To return the heart monkey and will horse, Daoists often use “substitution” and “leading and drawing (*Daoyin*)” methods.

Common Daoist substitution and leading and drawing methods:

Chanting scriptures: Even silent recitation of Daoist scripture can help retrieve the *Xing* and sink the *Qi*, leading one naturally to tranquility.

Knocking the teeth: close the mouth, knock the teeth together - every 36 knocks is one set. Silently count the knocks and knock the teeth, counting. This can return the heart monkey, make one’s mind tranquil and sink the *Qi*.

第二，安神守靈法

心靜氣沉之後便可進行安神養元（氣）。。

安神法。。虛靈頂頸舌頂上齶，兩目下觀鼻准不可緊閉，閉則神氣昏暗。亦不可太睜，睜則神光外馳不能歸舍而無所作為，兩目垂簾為妙，意在兩目中間之上齊平處（印堂）。待心氣適合後，含眼光，凝耳韻，調鼻息（用鼻呼吸）。初練時，使呼吸之氣深，細，長，勻，息息歸根（呼吸之氣升降起落于丹田）。

久之，神氣歸中，靈氣上騰。兩目之中，有靈光出現，常觀之。丹經云。。【心猿鎖在橄欖樹】是也！

養性法。。常觀之，五行之中，神氣自然凝聚，倘能一念不起，久久澄淨，虛極靜篤之時。真氣發動，（物極必返，靜極生動，丹田產生真陽真氣，即，發熱）虛室生白（靈光出現，由暗而明，由昏而白，謂之。。【性光】），經云。。【垂簾明心守祖竅，見着性光是功夫】，此為安神養性之功。

（注。。兩眉中上，印堂處，曰【祖竅】，因真性，真靈在此出現，為仙道之源，故曰【祖竅】）

b) Pacify the *Shen* and guard the spirit (*Ling*) method

After the heart is peaceful and the *Qi* has sunken down one can advance to pacifying the *Shen* and nourishing the origin (the *Qi*).

Pacifying the *Shen* method: hollow out the neck and lift the head (*Xuling Dingjing*), touch the tongue to the roof of the mouth, the two eyes remain slightly open and are aimed at the nose. Close the spirit (*Shen Qi*), making it faint and obscure. Do not open the eyes too wide, otherwise the *Shen* will flee, and it will be difficult to return it to its abode. The eyelids hang like curtains covering the mystery. The will (*Yi*) is just above the space between the two eyes (that is, the *Yin Tang*). After staying the heart *Qi*, suck in the energy of the eyes, and congeal the energy of the ears. Regulate the breath through the nose (breathe in and out through the nose). In the beginning strive to make the breath deep, thin, long, and even. The breath returns to the root (inhalations and exhalations rise and fall, up and down, back to the *Dantian*).

After some time the *Shen Qi* will return to the middle. The *Ling Qi* will soar upward. The two eyes remain in the center - a numinous light will appear. Concentrate on it. The elixir classics say, “the heart monkey is locked in the olive tree.” This is that!

Nourish Xing method: Constantly observe this. In the midst of the five elements the *Shen Qi* will naturally coagulate. From here one can reach the stage where no ideas arise, completely clean and clear for a long time. This is the time at the extreme of emptiness, true stillness. The true *Qi* will move (the extreme of matter must overturn, the peak of stillness engenders movement, the *Dantian* creates true *Yang* true *Qi*, that is, it becomes hot). The empty room creates the white (the numinous light appears, from darkness comes brightness, from twilight comes the white, this is called “*Xing* light”). The scriptures say, “closed like a curtain the bright heart guards the ancestral opening, seeing the *Xing* light, this is the achievement.” This is the method of pacifying the *Shen* and nourishing the *Xing*.

(Note: The place above the middle of the eyebrows, the *Yintang*, also called “ancestral opening” (*Zuqiao*), the true *Xing*, the true numinous, appears here. This is the source of the immortal path, and so it is called “ancestral opening.”

3) 調息

第一，自然呼吸調理法

以鼻息用自然呼吸法，調理呼吸至深，細，長，勻。

第二，小腹自然呼吸法。

當呼吸調至深，細，長，勻時，可進一步下引呼吸的深度，以小腹起伏配合呼吸取代胸部起伏的呼吸法，以鼻息，使深，細，長，勻的呼吸【深】度至小腹（丹田處），保持自然呼吸法（即，吸氣時小腹微微鼓起，呼氣時小腹微微沉落），這種呼吸法亦稱之謂【順腹式呼吸法】。

第三，小周天意念導引呼吸法。

吸氣時，將氣緩緩吸入丹田（丹田成進氣狀），同時，微微提肛，提肛時，用意念將氣血從尾閭處順督脈向上提引，引導氣血順督脈上行至百會（頭頂），然後，開始呼氣，呼氣時用意念引導氣血從百會，經印堂，過鵲橋（舌頂上齶），下十二重樓（十二節喉骨為十二重樓），順任脈下行，最後沉至丹田（丹田成沉氣狀），此為小周天意念導引法，又謂【逆腹式呼吸法】，亦為【龜息】法。

3) **Regulating the breath**

a) **Natural inhalation and exhalation regulating method**

Use the nose to breathe in a natural manner. Regulate the breath so it is deep, thin, long, and even.

b) **Lower abdomen natural breathing method**

After regulating the breath so it is deep, thin, long, and even, you can advance to the next stage of pulling the breath deeper. Coordinate the rising and falling of the lower abdomen with inhalation and exhalation to substitute the motion of the chest. Use the nose and make the breath deep, thin, long, and even, arriving at the belly (lower *Dantian*). Preserve the natural method (that is, when you breathe in, the abdomen rises slightly. When you breathe out it sinks slightly.) This type of breathing is also called “smooth abdominal breathing method.”

c) **Microcosmic circulation thinking *Daoyin* breathing method**

When breathing in, send the *Qi* to slowly enter the *Dantian* (the *Dantian* receives the *Qi*). At the same time, slightly lift the anus. When lifting the anus use the mind to lead the *Qi* and blood from the *Weilu* point smoothly up the *Dumai*, pulling it up, lead the *Qi* and blood up the *Dumai* to the *Baihui* (top of the head). Then begin to exhale. When exhaling, use the mind to lead the *Qi* and blood from the *Baihui*, through the *Yintang*, past the magpie bridge (the tongue touches the upper palate), down the twelve story pagoda (the 12 sections of the larynx are called the twelve story pagoda), smoothly down

the *Renmai*, finally sinking down to the *Dantian* (here the *Qi* sinks to the *Dantian*). This is microcosmic circulation thinking *Daoyin* method. It is also called “reverse abdominal breathing method”, also called “turtle breathing method.”

4) 周天運行法

第一，小周天。。

周天運行會出現意念周天，氣血周天和金丹周天三個階段。

意念周天。。意念周天只是用意念導引之術導引氣血順周天運行時思想意識上提所出現的一種感覺，這種感覺只是蘊含在人體肌膚中衛氣受到意念導引後所產生的酥麻，蠕動的感覺，這種感覺是小周天前期所會出現的感覺，它的出現會對氣血周天產生積極的正面影響，應該說意念周天是氣血周天的基礎。

氣血周天。。氣血周天是周天功的重要環節，它會在意念周天的基礎上出現不同的感覺。丹經曰。。【煉精化氣】，【精】所化之【氣】為真陽真氣，是【熱能】，氣血周天就是導引這種【熱能】順經絡運行，為此，它運行時所出現的感覺是一股很明顯的熱流。這種感覺常常會出現在打通小周天和大周天時。

金丹周天。。金丹周天是完成大小氣血周天運行後的養煉過程，也是我們周天修煉的目標，這階段所出現的感覺清爽，和美，通達。

在小周天修練過程中還會出現采藥入爐和調理火候兩個程序。

采藥入爐。。首先當調文火以深，細長勻的自然呼吸法加個精氣，然後，以呼吸之氣為【風】，以真陽之氣(丹田氣)為【火】，對腎【精】進行烹【煉】，使丹田產生溫熱之感，此為【產藥】，然後，在以小周天意念導引之術引導氣血順督脈上行至百會，在順任脈導引氣血沉至丹田，若提氣時，有熱流順督脈而上，沉氣時，有清爽之氣，順任脈而下，沉及丹田，當丹田產生蘇麻，結實之感時，這便是已采藥入爐（提氣至百會，謂【采藥】，沉氣於丹田，曰【入爐】）。

調煉火候。。采藥入爐後，便可調用【文，武】之火進行修煉。

調鼻息，用順腹式呼吸為【文火】。

調口，鼻之息，用小周天意念導引之逆腹式呼吸為【武火】。

調煉文武火候是根據修煉者的狀態利用【文火】溫養，或加強呼吸，利用【武火】進行【烹煉】的自我調理方法。

4) Cosmic circulation moving method

a) Microcosmic circulation

Cosmic circulation moving method arises from thinking cosmic circulation. With the *Qi* and blood cosmic circulation and the golden elixir cosmic circulation they form the three levels of training.

Thinking cosmic circulation: Thinking cosmic circulation simply uses the mind to lead the *Qi* and blood smoothly through cosmic circulation. The feeling arises from conscious thought. This sort of feeling is contained within the skin and flesh - the protective *Qi* (*Wei Qi*) receives the intention to lead the feeling, and so this produces a soft and numb wriggling sensation. This is the sort of feeling that arises in the period before microcosmic circulation has been established. Its appearance can have a positive influence on the production of the *Qi* and blood cosmic circulation. One could say that the thinking cosmic circulation forms the foundation of the *Qi* and blood circulation.

***Qi* and blood circulation:** *Qi* and blood circulation is an important segment of celestial circulation training. It manifests a feeling not present in, but based on, the thinking circulation. The elixir classics say, “transmute *Jing* to *Qi*.” The *Qi* that arises from *Jing* is the True *Yang* True *Qi*. It is heat energy. *Qi* and blood cosmic circulation is the method of leading this “heat energy” smoothly through the meridians. With respect to this, when moving this energy, the feeling that arises is a very distinct flowing heat. This type of feeling most commonly arises when circulating through microcosmic and macrocosmic orbits.

Golden elixir cosmic circulation: Golden elixir cosmic circulation is the process of nourishing and refining that comes after the completion of the large and small *Qi* and

blood celestial circulations. It is also the goal of the celestial circulation practice. The feeling that arises at this level is fresh and cool, totally harmonious, clear understanding.

In the practice of microcosmic orbit there are the two procedures, “collecting the medicine and leading it to the stove” as well as “regulating fire timing.”

Collecting the medicine and leading it to the stove: First one must regulate the literary and martial breaths so they are deep, thin, long, and even - then they can secure the *Jing Qi*. After that use the breath *Qi* as “wind.” Use the true *Yang Qi* (*Dantian Qi*) as “fire.” Advance the fire to boil (refine) the kidneys (*Jing*). This causes the *Dantian* to produce a warm feeling. This is “producing the medicine.” Then use the microcosmic thinking circulation to lead the *Qi* and blood smoothly up the *Dumai* to the *Baihui*. Then lead it down the *Renmai*, sending the *Qi* and blood to the *Dantian*. When rising the *Qi* up the *Dumai*, there should be a flowing heat feeling. When sinking the *Qi* there should be cool and refreshing *Qi*, following the *Renmai* down, sinking to the *Dantian*. When the *Dantian* produces a numb sensation, when the real sensation has arrived, this is “collecting the medicine and leading it to the stove.” Raising the *Qi* to the *Baihui* is known as “collecting the medicine.” Sinking the *Qi* to the *Dantian* is called “leading to the stove.”

Regulating fire timing: after collecting the medicine and leading it to the stove then the practitioner can regulate and use literary and martial fires to proceed in their cultivation.

Regulate the nose breath. Use the smooth abdominal breathing - this is literary fire.

Regulate the mouth, nose breathing. Use microcosmic orbit thinking circle and reverse abdominal breathing - this is martial fire.

Regulate and refine with the literary and martial fire timings as is appropriate in accordance with the practitioner's state. The literary fire is advantageous in warming and nourishing. Strengthen the breath, the martial fire is advantageous in boiling and refining.

第二，大周天。。

沐浴。。每作深呼吸沉氣時，有清爽之氣，從百會向下流之周身，深有淋浴之感，此又謂【沐浴】。

胎息。。但覺呼吸之氣升降自如，開合自然之中，氣血暢通，周身和暖，然後，保持身心鬆沉自然，精神意識渾然一體，呼吸之氣至精至細，甚至達到丹田之外無呼吸感覺，丹田之內存着微小微妙呼吸，此謂蘊養精氣神之【胎息】。

入定。。進入胎息境界，達到忘我，忘物，忽忘之後，便進入了恍恍惚惚，杳杳冥冥之境，此謂入定】。

開發潛能。。恍惚杳冥之中便能養成真性，真靈。

真性出現，虛室生白（印堂生光），丹經云。。【如一輪皓月當空，似夜明珠高懸】是也。真靈出現，產生慧覺，出現慧眼，這謂之開【天目】。大定之後便能養出神通，開發潛能。

b) Macrocosmic circulation

Bathing: every time the practitioner does deep breathing to sink the *Qi*, having fresh and cool *Qi*, from the *Baihui* downward into the entire body, sinking the same feeling as showering. This is known as “bathing.”

Embryonic breathing: The breathing *Qi* ascends and descends unobstructed. In the midst of opening and closing, the *Qi* and blood are free-flowing, the entire body is

soft and warm. Then, preserving the relaxation and naturalness of body and mind, spirit (*Jingshen*) and consciousness blending into one another, the breath *Qi* reaches the *Jing*, reaches thinness, to the point where outside the *Dantian* there is no feeling of breathing. Within the *Dantian* there exists an infinitesimal mysterious breathing. This is known as accumulating and nourishing *Jing Qi Shen*, as “embryonic breathing.”

Entering stillness: Proceeding into the realm of embryonic breathing, one gets to the place where they forget the self, forget matter, forget forgetting. Then they enter the dim, the indistinct realm. This is known as entering stillness.

Developing hidden capabilities: In the midst of the dim and indistinct, one can cultivate their true *Xing*, their true spirit (*Ling*).

Once the true *Xing* appears, the empty room creates the white (the *Yintang* sends out light). Like the elixir classics say, “like one revolution of the bright moon in space, resembling a bright pearl in the high expanse of night.” When the true spirit (*Ling*) appears, this creates wisdom - the wisdom eyes appear. This is known as opening the celestial eyes. After achieving the great stillness one can cultivate spirit travel and develop their hidden capabilities.

二，靜坐功法

靜坐前，寬放衣帶，鬆沉身心。務要使入坐時，身體平直端正，不受束縛。血脈自然流通無阻掃除一切雜念，使心歸意回。

盤膝而坐，盤坐前，端正身體，平放兩腿，自然而坐，曲回右腿放於左大腿之上，再收回左腿放於右腿之上。左腿在外，成環抱勢。右手大拇指捏定右手中指午字訣，左手拇指進入右手內，捏定右手子字訣。此名為【子午連環之訣】抱住右手，為負陽而抱陰（男左，女右）。放於臍下兩大腿間。虛靈頂頸，舌頂上齶，兩目下觀鼻准，不可緊閉，閉則神氣昏暗，亦不可太睜，睜則神光外馳不能歸舍而無所作為，兩目垂簾為妙，意在兩目中間之上齊平處（印堂）。待心氣適合後，含眼光，凝耳韻，調鼻息（用鼻呼吸）。初練時，使呼吸之氣，深，細，長，勻，息息歸根。（呼吸之氣升降起落于丹田）久之，神氣歸中，靈氣上騰。兩目之中，有靈光出現，常觀之。丹經云。。【心猿鎖在橄欖樹】是也！

常觀之，五行之中，神氣自然凝聚，倘能一念不起，久久澄清，虛極靜篤之時，真氣發動，（物極必返，靜極生動，丹田產生真陽真氣，即發熱）虛室生白（靈光出現，由暗而明，由昏而白又曰。性光），經云。。【垂簾明心守祖竅，見着性光是功夫】，意念伏降，性真純靜，此是煉己，煉心之功，又曰築基功。

（注。。兩眉中上，印堂處，曰祖竅，因真性，真靈在此出現，為仙道之源，故曰【祖竅】。）

此時，可凝神閉目，靜守虛白，待丹田氣足，自然分行，出函谷，過三關，順督脈而上，然，三關之過，艱難無比，故，當調呼吸，掌火候，用吐納導引之術引之，助之。

（注。。火候即呼吸之氣，掌握火候，是掌握呼吸之深淺。然，火候，又有文，武之別，以鼻息之細小呼吸為文火，以口吸，鼻呼之深呼吸為武火）

導引時，要神氣相依，意氣相含，以意領氣。吸氣時，出函谷，過三關，順督脈提氣至百會（提氣時，提肛），呼氣時，從百會，過鵲橋，下十二重樓，順任脈而下，沉氣於丹田，此為小周天運行法。若提氣時，有熱流順督脈而上，沉氣時，有清爽之氣，順任脈而下，沉及丹田，有發熱。或蘇麻結實之感，此謂采藥入爐（經曰。。【上藥三品，神與氣精】提氣至百會，謂【采藥】，沉氣於丹田，曰【入爐】）同時，每作深呼吸，沉氣時，有清爽之氣，從百會向下流至周身，深有淋浴之感，此又謂【沐浴】，而後，但覺呼吸，升降自如，開合之中，氣血暢通，周身和暖，此乃煉精化氣之周天功成。

如此綿綿莫勤。息息歸根，性光出現，常觀祖竅，一呼一吸，一升一降，神氣發動，自然凝聚於祖竅之中，祖竅之中便有空洞暢快。玄妙之感，此時，當反觀內照，（經曰【觀空不空】是也）觀而莫守（經曰。。【生而不有】，守則，作色相，耗散元真），呼吸之氣，亦由大而小，由小而無，及至胎息（神氣呼吸為真息，曰【胎息】），息養之時

，惚存惚忘，不沾不脫，恍惚杳冥之中內相不出，外相不入，是為靜定。忽然，心清氣爽，精神朗發，氣暢身壯，智慧日生，此乃煉氣化神之功就。

逐而，有一點真陽，從中出現，復見天地，心性靈通。如此，大道見矣，神仙近矣。

2) Tranquil sitting training method

Before meditation loosen the clothes, relax the body and mind. When one wants to enter seated meditation, the body should be level and straight. One should not feel bound by anything. The blood should flow naturally, without hindrance. Sweep away all distracting thoughts. Cause the heart and will to return.

Cross the legs and sit. Before sitting the body should be straight. Straighten the two legs and sit down naturally. Bend the right leg and place it on top of the left leg. Then pull in the left leg and place it on top of the right leg. Left leg on the outside, forming an embracing posture. The right thumb pinches the middle finger to form the *Wu* mudra. The left thumb enters the right hand, pinching the right hand at the *Zi* mudra. This is known as, “*Ziwu* linking mudra,” embracing the right hand so that *Yang* embraces *Yin* (left for men, right for women). Place this below the navel, between the thighs. Empty the neck tuck in the neck, touch the tongue to the roof of the mouth. The eyes close halfway and look at the bridge of the nose. Do not close them too tight, otherwise the *Shen Qi* will grow dark. Also do not open them too wide, or the *Shen* light will escape and you will not be able to lead it back to its abode. The two eyelids hang like curtains over the mystery. The will (*Yi*) is between the two eyes, up a bit (*Yin Tang*). Stay the heart and *Qi*. Contain the energy of the eyes, congeal the energy of the ears. Regulate the breath in the nose (use the nose for inhalation and exhalation). At the beginning of training make the

breath *Qi* deep, thin, long, and even - leading the breath back to the root. The inhalations and exhalations rise and fall, going up and down in the *Dantian*. After some time the *Shen Qi* will gather in the middle. The spirit *Qi* (*Ling Qi*) will ascend. In the eyes the numinous light will appear. Observe it for some time. The elixir classics say, “the heart monkey is caught in the olive tree.”

Constantly observe this. In the midst of the five elements the *Shen Qi* will naturally coagulate. From here one can reach the stage where no ideas arise, completely clean and clear for a long time. This is the time at the extreme of emptiness, true stillness. The true *Qi* will move (the extreme of matter must overturn, the peak of stillness engenders movement, the *Dantian* creates true *Yang* true *Qi*, that is, it becomes hot). The empty room creates the white (the numinous light appears, from darkness comes brightness, from twilight comes the white, this is called “*Xing* light”). The scriptures say, “closed like a curtain the bright heart guards the ancestral opening, seeing the *Xing* light, this is the achievement.” The mind goes up and down, the *Xing* is true, pure, and tranquil. This is the training of refining the self, refining the heart. It is also called establishing the foundation training.

(Note: The place above the middle of the eyebrows, the *Yintang*, also called “ancestral opening” (*Zuqiao*), the true *Xing*, the true numinous, appears here. This is the source of the immortal path, and so it is called “ancestral opening.”

At this time one can gather the *Shen* and close the eyes. In tranquility protect the empty white. Still the *Dantian Qi* until there is enough. It will naturally branch off, going through the *Han Gu*, passing through the three passes, smoothly going up the *Dumai*. After going through

the three passes is a phase of great difficulty. When regulating the breath one must grasp the fire timings, using the breathing (*Tuna*) and *Daoyin* methods to help.

(Note, fire timing is the inhalation and exhalation of *Qi*. In grasping fire timings one grasps the relative depth or shallowness of the breath. Fire timing has literary and martial types. Use the nose to breathe small thin breaths for literary fire. Use the mouth to breathe in, nose to breathe out, breathing deep inhalations and exhalations for martial fire.

When practicing *Daoyin*, the *Shen* and *Qi* must be mutually dependent. The *Yi* and *Qi* contain one another. Use the *Yi* to lead the *Qi*. When inhaling, pass through *Hangu*, then the three passes, smoothly up *Dumai*, lift the *Qi* to *Baihui* (when lifting the *Qi* lift the anus). When exhaling, from the *Baihui*, pass through the magpie bridge, down the twelve story pagoda, smoothly down the *Renmai*, sinking the *Qi* down to the *Dantian*. This is microcosmic circulation moving method. When lifting the *Qi* there will be a hot flowing feeling going up the *Dumai*. When sinking the *Qi* there will be a cool and fresh feeling in the *Qi*, smoothly going down the *Renmai*, sinking to the *Dantian*, which will then exhibit heat or a numb sort of feeling. This is known as collecting the medicine and leading it to the stove. The scriptures say, “the highest medicine is these three: *Shen*, *Qi*, and *Jing*.” Lifting the *Qi* to the *Baihui* is known as “collecting the medicine.” Sinking the *Qi* to the *Dantian* is known as “entering the stove.” At the same time, each time you do deep breathing, deeply sinking the *Qi*, you will have the clear and fresh *Qi*. From the *Baihui*, flowing downward through the entire body, the sinking *Qi* has the same feeling as showering. This is called “bathing.” Then, when breathing, rising and falling naturally, in the midst of opening and closing, the *Qi* and blood will flow unimpeded.

The entire body will have a soft and warm feeling. This is the completion of transmuting *Jing* to *Qi* cosmic circulation.

In this manner continuously practice. Lead the breath back to the root. The *Xing* light appears. Constantly observe the ancestral opening. One exhalation, one inhalation, one ascension, one descent, the *Shen Qi* moves. Naturally congeal it in the ancestral opening. The space within the ancestral opening is empty and carefree. This is the mysterious feeling. At this time, overturning the observation and illuminating the internal (the scriptures say, “seeing the empty is not empty”), observing and not guarding (the scriptures say, “engendering but not being”, guarding gives rise to appearance, dissipating the true origin). Breath *Qi* is large and then small, small and then non-existent, until it arrives at embryonic breathing (*Shen Qi* breath as the true breath, this is embryonic breathing). When nourishing the breath, being and nonbeing indistinct, neither together nor separate, dim and indistinct, the internal appearance does not leave, outer appearance does not enter. This is tranquil stillness. Suddenly the heart will be clear and the *Qi* fresh. *Jingshen* goes forth. The *Qi* flows throughout the body. Wisdom is engendered. This is the success of transmuting *Qi* to *Shen*.

Gradually there will come to be a drop of pure *Yang*. From the middle it will arise. It will return and meet heaven and earth, join with the heart *Xing* spirit (*Ling*). In this way one can see the great *Dao*, and enter the realm of the immortals and gods.

Appendix III

Zabdon Gyatso Trin ཟབ་དོན་རྒྱ་མཚོའི་སྤྱིན

Cloud Oceans of the Profound Meaning

From the Khandro Yangtig མཁའ་འགྲོ་ཡང་ཐེག

By: Longchen Rabjam ལྷོང་ཆེན་རབ་འབྱམས་ (1308-1363)

གཉིས་པ་གནས་པ་རྩ་ཐེག་རྒྱུང་གསུམ་གྱིས་རྒྱས་པར་བཤད་པ་ལ།རྩ་ཡེ་ཤེས་དྲ་བའི་གནས་ལུགས་བསྟན་པ།རྒྱུང་རིན་ཆེན་འོད་འཕྲོའི་གནས་ལུགས་བསྟན་པ།ལམས་བདེ་ཆེན་རྒྱ་མཚོའི་གནས་ལུགས་བསྟན་པ་གསུམ་ལས་དང་པོ་ནི་འོད་གསལ་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ངོ་བོ།

Second, an extensive explanation of these three: stable channels, spheres, and winds. The following consists of an explanation of the mode of abiding in the matrix of the channels of wisdom, an explanation of the mode of abiding in the flowing light of jewels which are the winds (it is taught that precious winds abide in the manner of radiating light), and finally an explanation of the mode of abiding in the ocean of great bliss, which is the *Dhatu*.⁵⁷⁰ From these three, the first one [i.e. the channels], is the essence of the clear light of primordial wisdom.

ཐེག་ལེ་ཉག་གཅིག་གི་དབང་དུ་བྱས་ནས།རྒྱིང་ག་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་སྣོན་མེའི་རྩ་འདབ་འཁོར་ལོ་གཅིག་ཏུ་བསྟན་པ་དང།
ཞི་ཕྱོག་གཉིས་ཀྱི་འོད་གདངས་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་ཚིན་དུང་ཁང་གི་ནང་ན་ཐབས་དང་ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་འཁོར་ལོ་གཉིས་སུ་བསྟན་པ་དང།
དཔྱལ་གསུམ་བདེ་ཆེན་གྱི་དབང་དུ་བྱས་ནས་འཁོར་ལོ་གསུམ་དུ་བསྟན་པ་དང།སྐྱུ་དང་ཡེ་ཤེས་དང་དགའ་བ་བཞི་དང་སྐད་ཅི
ག་མ་བཞིའི་རིམ་བས།

In terms of the unbounded sphere, we teach the heart center, the auxiliary channel of the lamp of wisdom, to be this singular chakra. We also teach both the wheels of method and wisdom within

⁵⁷⁰ Khams - Here this means Thigle, according to Lama Tenzin Samphel

the heart and skull mansion in dependence upon the light and radiance of the peaceful and wrathful deities. We teach in stages the three wheels in terms of the total bliss of the three bodies and the bodies, wisdoms, four joys, and four moments.

འཁོར་ལོ་བཞིར་བསྟན་པ་དང་ལྷན་པ་དང་ཉོན་མོངས་པ་དང་ཡེ་ཤེས་དང་རིགས་དང་སྐྱེ་དང་མཁའ་འགྲོའི་རིམ་བས་འཁོར་
ལོ་ལྔར་བསྟན་པ་དང་འགོ་བ་དང་དེ་འདུལ་བྱེད་སྟོན་པའི་བྱེ་བྲག་གིས་གཙུག་ཏོར་ཆེན་པོ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་རྩ་འཁོར་ལོ་དུག་ཏུ་
བསྟན་པ་སྟེ་རྣམ་གངས་མང་དུ་གསུངས་ཀྱང་འདིར་མཁའ་འགོ་སྟོང་ཉིག་གི་དབང་དུ་བྱས་ནས།

We will teach the four wheels, their arising, affliction, wisdom, and types. We will teach also the wheels which are due to the stages of bodies and Dakinis. We will also introduce a detailed teaching about beings and their taming by way of crown protrusion wheel, along with the six fundamental wheels. And although we reveal many different aspects, here, we focus on speaking in terms of the heart essence of the Dakinis.

འཁོར་ལོ་བཞི་དང་ལྷན་པའི་རིམ་བས་ངེས་པར་བྱེད་དོད་འདུལ་སྐྱེར་གངས་མེད་པའི་རྩ་མི་བ་སྤྱིའི་གངས་རི་ཚམ་པ་རྩའི་གངས་ཡི
ན་ལ།གངས་ཚན་ནི་སྟོང་ཕྱག་བདུན་ཅུ་རྩ་གཉིས་ཏེ།དཔལ་གྱིའི་རྩ་རྩེ་ལས།སྟོང་ཕྱག་བདུན་ཅུ་རྩ་གཉིས་སྟེ་རྣམས་ཀྱི་ནི་རིག
ས་བཤད་དོ།ཞེས་གསུངས་ལ།དེ་ཡང་བསྟན་ཅིའི་གཙོ་བོ་གསུམ་ཀ་བའི་རྩལ་དུ་གནས་པ་ལས།འཁོར་ལོ་བཞི་འམ་ལྔ་གསུགས་
བཅེགས་པ་སྟར་གནས་པའི་རོ་མ་དཀར་བ་གཡས་ལ།རྒྱུང་མ་དམར་བ་གཡོན་ཏེ།ཀློང་མའམ།དབུ་མ་དབུས་ན་ཡོད་པ་དེ་ཉི
ད་ལས།རོ་མ་གཡས་ལ་རྒྱུང་མ་གཡོན་ཀློང་མ་ནི་དབུས་གནས་ཏེ།ཞེས་སོ།དེ་ཉིད་ཟར་མའི་མེ་ཏོག་མཐིང་སྐྱར་གནས་པའི་
རོ་མ་ནི་ཀླན་ལྷབ་ཀྱི་དུས་ན་འབྱུང་བ་རྩལ་བསྐྱེད་ལ།རྒྱུང་མ་སས་བསྐྱེད་ལ།ཀློང་མ་ནི་རྩལ་གིས་བསྐྱེད་དོ།
།རྩལ་གི་དུངས་མའི་མེ་ལས།དབུ་མའི་ནང་ན་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་འོད་རྩ་ཀ་ཏི་ཤེས་ཀྱི་སྐུ་གུ་ཚན་ཞེས་བྱ་བ་ཤིན་དུ་དུངས་ཤིང་གསལ་བ
ཡེ་ཤེས་ཆེན་པོ་འོད་གསལ་གྱི་ཐེག་ལེ་རྒྱ་བ་དང་རྩ་བཞིར་འདི་ནས་བཞེད་དེ།ཐེལ་འགྲུར་ལས།རོ་མ་རྒྱུང་མ་ཀླན་རྣམ་མ།ཀླན་
ཏི་ཤེས་ཀྱི་སྐུ་གུ་ཚན་ལྷོ་ཤེས་དབུ་མའི་ནང་ན་གནས།ཞེས་སོ།

In stages we will ascertain the four and five chakras. Also, in general, as regards the innumerable channels, since the number of channels is as great as the number of hairs on the body, as for this large number, it is 72,000. From the *Majestic Shri HeVajra*:

Seventy-two thousand

As for the channels,

Thus it is explained.

Furthermore, to be brief, the three channels abide like pillars. From this, the four or five chakras abide like stacked up, open parasols, with the Roma, which is white, on the right, and the Kyangma, which is red, on the left. The Kundharma is in the middle. From the same text,

Roma on the right,

Kyangma on the left,

Kundharma abides in the middle.

The Roma channel, which abides as a light blue sesame flower, is engendered through the water element at the time of all-pervading wind. The Kyangma channel is engendered through the earth element. The Kundharma channel is engendered through the wind element, from the fire of clear wind. Inside the middle channel lies the light channel of wisdom. This is called the crystal Ka Ti pipe. It is pure and clear great wisdom, inside of which the sphere of clear light moves. From the *Reverberation of Sound Tantra*,

Roma, Kyangma, and Kundharma

And the crystal Kati tube,

Primordial wisdom abides inside the central channel

དེའང་ཀུན་རྫོབ་ཏུ་ཚ་དེ་གསུམ་མ་རིག་པ་ལས་གཡོན་འདོད་ཆགས་གཡམས་ཞེ་སྟངས་དབུས་གཉི་ལུག་གི་རྟེན་བྱེད་ལ། ཤེལ་སྤྱུག་
 ཅན་ནི་གང་གི་ཡང་མ་དག་པའི་རྟེན་དུ་མེད་དོ། དོན་དམ་པའི་དུས་སུ་སྦྱིར་ཐམས་ཅད་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཚལ་ལས་གྲུབ་ཀྱང་ཉུང་པར་
 དུ་གཡམས་ཐབས་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་གཡོན་ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་རང་བཞིན་དབུས་གཉིས་སུ་མེད་པའི་རང་བཞིན་ལས་གྲུབ་ཅིང་ལམ་དུ་ག
 ཡོན་བདེ་བ། གཡམས་གསལ་བ། དབུས་མི་རྟོག་པ་གསུམ་གྱི་རྟེན་བྱས་པས། འབྲས་བུར་དབུས་ཚོས་སྐྱུག་གཡམས་ལོངས་སྐྱོད་དང་སྤྱུལ་སྐྱུ
 གཡོན་བདེ་བ་ཆེན་པོ་འོད་གསལ་ནམ་མཁའི་མཐའ་ཁྲུབ་པའི་རྟེན་བྱེད་དོ། དེ་ལྟར་ཚ་དེ་གསུམ་གྱི་ནང་ན་རང་བྱུང་གི་ཡི་གེ་
 ལྷོ་ལྷུང་རྒྱུ་གསུམ་དཀར་དམར་མཐའ་གསུམ་དུ་གཡམས་གཡོན་དབུས་གསུམ་ན་གནས་པས། རང་བཞིན་སྐྱུ་གསུམ་གྱི་རྟེན་བྱེད་དོ།
 མ་དག་པས་དུག་གསུམ་གྱི་རྟེན་བྱེད།

Further, conventionally speaking there are three channels. In dependence on ignorance, there is desire on the left, hatred on the right, and ignorance in the middle - that is, the channel functions as the support for ignorance. The right is hatred, and this is supported by the middle, obscuration. As for the glass tube channel, it is not a support for impurity of any kind.

Although in the ultimate dimension, generally speaking, the channels are all established from the energy of primordial awareness, specifically speaking, the right channel has the nature of method, the left channel has the nature of wisdom, and the central channel has the nature of nonduality, from which they are all established.

In the path, the left is bliss, the right is clarity, while the middle is non-conceptuality, which is the basis of all three. Concerning the fruit, the central channel is the dharmakaya, the

right is sambhogakaya as well as the nirmanakaya. The left is great bliss. These are supported by the pervasive infinite space of clear light. Correspondingly, inside these three channels are self-arisen syllables: Om, Ah, Hum - these three being white, red and deep blue respectively, abiding in the right, left, and middle as the supports of the three nature bodies as well as the three impure poisons.

དག་པས་ཕྱིར་ལུས་ངག་ཡིད་གསུམ་མཁན་དུ་སྐྱེ་གསུང་ཐུགས་ཏེ།གསང་བར་སྐྱེ་གསུམ་དངོས་སུ་འཆར་བའི་གཞི་བྱེད་དོད་ཡང་
 'འཁོར་ལོ་བཞིའི་དབང་དུ་བྱས་ན།ཉེ་བ་སྐྱེ་ལ་པའི་འཁོར་ལོ་ན་ཅ་འདབ་དུག་ཅུ་ཅ་བཞི་སྟོང་ག་ཚེས་ཀྱི་འཁོར་ལོ་ན་བརྒྱད།མ
 གིན་པ་ལོངས་སྟོང་གི་འཁོར་ན་བཅུ་དུག་སྐྱེ་གཙུག་བདེ་ཆེན་གྱི་འཁོར་ལོ་ན་སུམ་ཅུ་ཅ་གཉིས་ཏེ་བརྒྱ་ཉེ་ཤུ་གནས་ལ་འབྱུང་བ
 'དང་སྐྱེ་དང་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་མཁའ་འགྲོའི་བྱེ་བྲག་གིས་ལྡན་བཤད་ན།གསང་གནས་བདེ་སྟོང་གི་འཁོར་ལོ་ན་རྒྱུད་གི་དྲུངས་མ་ལས་
 གཙོ་ཆེར་གྲུབ་པའི་ཅ་འདབ་ཉེ་ཤུ་ཅ་བརྒྱད།ཉེ་བར་སྐྱེད་བྱེད་སྐྱེ་ལ་པའི་འཁོར་ལོ་མེད་དྲུངས་མ་ལས་གཙོ་ཆེར་གྲུབ་པའི་
 ཅ་འདབ་དུག་ཅུ་ཅ་བཞི་སྟོང་ཁར་དུན་པ་རྣམ་བཞེད་ཚེས་ཀྱི་འཁོར་ལོ་ན་དང་གི་ནམ་མཁའ་རྣམ་པར་དག་པའི་གདངས་ལས
 'འབྱུང་བཞི་འདུས་པའི་ཅ་འདབ་སུམ་ཅུ་ཅ་གཉིས།མགིན་པར་རོ་རྣམས་འདུས་པ་ལོངས་སྟོང་གི་འཁོར་ལོ་སའི་དྲུངས་མ་ལ
 ས་གཙོ་ཆེར་གྲུབ་པའི་ཅ་འདབ་བཅུ་དུག་སྐྱེ་གཙུག་ཅེ་མོ་རྣམ་བཞེད་བདེ་ཆེན་འཁོར་ལོ་རྒྱུད་དྲུངས་མ་ལས་གྲུབ་པའི་ཅ་འ
 དབ་སུམ་བརྒྱ་དུག་ཅུ་སྟེ་ལྡར་བརྒྱ་གནས་ལ་དེ་ཉིད་ཀྱི་གསང་གནས་མ་གཏོགས་པའི་འཁོར་ལོ་བཞི་བཤངས་ན།བཞི་བརྒྱ་དང་
 བདུན་ཅུ་ཅ་གཉིས་ཅི་ཤངས་ཅན་དུ་གནས་སོདེ་ཡང་རོ་རྒྱུད་གཉིས་ཀྱི་མདུད་པ་ཉེ་ཤུ་ཅ་གཅིག།དབུ་མ་ལ་འཇུ་བ་མོ་སྐྱེ་ལ་ལྟར
 'ལུ་གུ་རྒྱུད་དུ་འབྲེལ་བའི་གཡས་གཡོན་གྱི་ཡར་སྐྱེ་སྐྱེན་མཚམས་ལ།མར་སྐྱེ་ཉེ་འོག་སྐྱེ་སྐྱེ་དགུའི་མཚམས་སུ་རྒྱག་པའི་ཡལ་ག་ཤ
 'མོ་མཚན་མ་དང་བཤད་ལམ་ལ་རྒྱག།ཡར་སྐྱེ་ལས་ཡལ་ག་དགུར་གྱེས་པའི་རོ་མ་སྟོང་ཅེ་གཡས་ནས་ཐོན་ཏེ་སྐྱེན་པ་ན་རྒྱུར་བྱ
 ང་ནས་ཅེ་མོ་གསུམ་དུ་གྲེས་པའི་གཉིས་སྐྱ་གཉིས་ལ་རྒྱག་པས།སྐྱེད་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་རྟེན་བྱེད།གཅིག་ལྟེ་ལ་རྒྱག་པས་སྐྱེད་རྣམ་ཤེས་
 ཀྱི་རྟེན་བྱེད།

Externally, the three -- body, speech, and mind -- are pure. Internally, Body, Speech, and Mind, are the basis for the direct experience of the three secret kayas. Moreover, in terms of the four chakras, regarding the navel emanation chakra, there are 64 secondary channels. Regarding

the Dharmachakra heart center, there are eight. As for the throat resplendent chakra, 16. The chakra of great bliss on the top of the head has 32. 120 secondary channels abide in this manner.

Concerning the elements, due to their specificity, the kayas, and the wisdom dakinis, we have a five-fold explanation. As for the bliss-guarding secret place chakra, there are 28 secondary channels, established principally from the subtle essence of wind. At the navel emanation-producing chakra, 64 secondary channels are principally established from the subtle essence of fire. Through the nondual radiance of the wholly pure aspect inner space of the heart center-establishment-of-mindfulness dharma chakra, the 32 secondary channels form a coalescence of the four elements. At the throat taste-gathering enjoyment chakra, 16 secondary channels are principally established from the subtle essence of earth. At the crown of the head pinnacle-great-bliss chakra, 360 secondary channels are established from the subtle essence of water. The very nature of the abiding of these five hundred channels, with the exception of the secret place, is enumerated in the four chakras. 472 abide as thus enumerated.

Moreover, in the dual Roma and Kyangma, there are 21 knots formed around the central channel, like a continuous pattern of intertwined fingers. The lower tip pierces several buna below the navel at the belly, and further reaches to the genitals and anus in subtle branches. From the upper end, nine branches of the Roma extend from the tip of the heart, on the right side and protrude toward the throat, with three points arising from there, two of which extend into the nostrils, acting as the support for nose consciousness, while the third pierces the tongue and acts as the support for tongue consciousness.

རྒྱུང་མ་སྒྲིང་རྩེ་གཡོན་ནས་ཐོན་ཏེ་མགོན་པའི་རྩའི་དྲ་བ་ལས་ཐོན་ནས་རྩེ་མོ་གསུམ་དུ་གྲེས་ཏེ་དབུས་མ་དེ་ལུས་ཐམས་ཅད་
ལ་ཕྱོགས་ཐམས་ཅད་དུ་བྱུག་པའི་ཡལ་ག་གངས་མེད་པས་ལུས་ཀྱི་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ཏེན་བྱེད་གཡམས་གཡོན་གཉིས་ཐོད་པའི་ནང་ན

‘ཚུར་བྱུང་ནས་མིག་གཉིས་ལ་བྱུག་པ་རྩ་བ་མཉམ་ལ་རྩེ་མོ་ཆེ་བ་མེན་གྱི་རྩ་འདྲ་བས་མིག་གི་རྩམ་པར་ཤེས་པའི་རྟེན་བྱས་ཏེ་ག
 ཟུགས་ལ་སློང་ཅིང་བྱུང་བར་འོད་གསལ་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་སྣང་བ་མཐོང་བར་བྱེད་པའོ། །ཀུན་རྣམ་མ་དབུས་དང་པོ་ན་གནས་པའི་རྩེ་
 མོ་གསུམ་དུ་གྲུས་ནས། རྩེ་མོ་དབུས་མ་ཚངས་བྱུག་ལ་བྱུག་རྩམ་པར་མི་རྟོག་པའི་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་སྐྱུ་འཆར་བའི་རྟེན་བྱེད་མ་དག་པའི་
 དུས་ཡིད་ཀྱི་རྩམ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་རྟེན་བྱེད་དོ། རྩེ་མོ་གཡས་གཡོན་གཉིས། རྩ་བ་གཡས་གཡོན་གཉིས་ལ་བྱུག་ནས། རྩ་བའི་རྩམ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་
 རྟེན་བྱེད་དེ་ལྟར་རྩ་གསུམ་པོ་དེ་དག་ལས་དབང་པོ་སློ་ལྔ་རྩམ་ཤེས་ཚོགས་དུག་གམ། རྟོན་ཡིད་ལ་ཆགས་སྣང་གང་སྐྱེས་དེས་བ
 རྟེན་པས་ཚོགས་བདུན་རྩམ་སློག་པ་རྩུ་ཡིད་བརྟེན་པ་ལས་དེའི་སློ་ལྔ་ལ་སོགས་པ་ཤེས་པ་ཀུན་གྱི་རྟེན་ཀུན་གཞིའི་རྩམ་ཤེས་
 སློག་རྩུ་བརྟེན་པ་དེ་དང་རྩམ་ཤེས་ཚོགས་བརྒྱད་ཀྱི་རྟེན་བྱེད་པས་ན་དེ་གསུམ་ལ་རྩེའི་གཙོ་བོ་གསུམ་ཞེས་བྱའོ།

The Kyangma protrudes from the left tip of the heart, weaving through the channel of the neck, extending in three points. By virtue of the innumerable branches penetrating the entire body - all places - the central of these three channels serves as the support for body consciousness. Inside the skull, on both the left and the right, arising into the vicinity of the eyes, the subtle channel penetrates like a great ox's horn.⁵⁷¹ By virtue of this, it functions as the support for eye consciousness. This engages form - particularly the perceiving of the appearance of luminous primordial wisdom.

The Kundharma, abiding straight up the middle, spreads out into three points. The middle tip pierces Brahma's aperture. This serves as the support for the dawning of the body of non-conceptual wisdom. And when impure, as the basis for mentation. As for the left and right tips, they pierce both ears and serve as the foundation for ear consciousness.

In this way, from the three channels, the five sense powers and six consciousness, due to being based on the engendering of attachment and aversion, the afflictive mind, and the seven collections, are supported by mentation in the life channel, and from this, they are all supported

⁵⁷¹ In oral commentary, Lama Tenzin Samphel remarked that this 'oxen horn' spreads out into the eye like the antlers of a deer.

by the five sense consciousnesses, etc., which are supported by the life channel, which is the basis-of-all consciousness. By this, due to being the support of the eight avenues of consciousness, the three channels are called the three principal channels.

དབུ་མའི་ནང་གི་འོད་ཚུ་ཤེལ་གྱི་སྐྱ་གུ་ཅན་ལས་འོད་ཀྱི་འགོང་བུའི་ཚུལ་དུ་སྒྲིང་གར་བྱུག་པའི་ཚུལ་དུ་སྐྱེ་གཙུག་ཏུ་འཕྲོས་ཤིང་།
 'བ་དུང་ཁང་ན་གནས་པ་ལས་ཁོ་བོའི་སྐྱར་གསལ་ཚེ་མོ་གཉིས་མིག་གཉིས་ལ་བྱུག་གོ་དེའང་ཚུ་དར་དཀར་གྱི་སྐྱད་པ་འདྲ་བ་
 འོད་གསལ་ཞིང་སྤྲ་བ་ལྷག་དང་རྒྱ་སེར་མེད་པ་དེ་སྒྲིང་ག་ནས་མགིན་པའི་ལམ་གྱེ་བ་ནས་ཐོན་ནས་ཤིང་པའི་ནང་ནས་ཚུར་བྱུ
 ང་སྒྲེ་ཚེ་མོ་གཉིས་སུ་གྲུས་པ།ཚུ་བ་སྤྲ་ཤིང་ཚེ་མོ་ཆེ་བ་བ་མེན་གྱི་རྩ་བུ་གཉིས་པོ་དེ་མིག་གཉིས་ལ་བྱུག་པ་ལས་ཡེ་ཤེས་འོད་
 གསལ་གྱི་གདངས་སྐྱ་དང་ཐིག་ལེ་འོད་ཀྱི་སྐྱང་བ་སྐྱ་ཚོགས་པ་རྣམས་དངོས་སུ་འཆར་བ་ཡིན་ནོའོ་ན་མིག་ལ་ཚུ་བ་མེན་
 གྱི་རྩ་འདྲ་བ་གཉིས་ཡོད་དམ་ཞེ་ན།ཡོད་དེ་ཀ་ཉི་ཤེལ་གྱི་སྐྱ་གུ་ཅན་ནི་དབང་པོ་དང་ཤེས་པ་ལས་འདས་པ་འོད་གསལ་འཆར་
 བའི་ལམ་ཡིན་ལ།རྒྱུང་མའི་ཚེ་གཉིས་ནི་གཟུགས་ལ་འཛོན་པ་མིག་གི་རྣམ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་རྟེན་ཡིན་ཏེ།འོད་གསལ་གྱི་གདངས་ལ་སྐྱ་བྱེ
 ད་དུ་བྱུང་བའོའདྲ་འདྲ་ལ་འདི་གཉིས་མ་བྱེད་པ་ཤིན་ཏུ་མང་དོད་ཤིང་དུ་གྲོང་གསལ་ལས་ཚུ་ཡི་གཙོ་བོ་གསུམ་ལས་ནི།
 ཡལ་ག་གདངས་ལས་འདས་པར་གྱེས་ཤིང་སོར་དབང་པོའི་སྒོ་རྟེན་བྱེད་དེ་ཡིས་ཚོས་ཀུན་སྟོན་པར་བྱེད་ཀྱང་པར་ཚོན་ནས་འབྲེ
 ལ་བའི་དར་སྐྱེད་བ་མེན་རྩ་འདྲའི་ཁ།དབང་པོའི་མིག་ལ་བྱུག་པ་སྒྲེད་ནི་ཚོས་ཉིད་ཀུན་གྱི་ལམ་ཞེས་སོ་དེའང་ཚུ་དེ་གསུམ་གྱི་
 གཡས་ནས་ཐབས་ཀྱི་ཆ་ཀུན་ལྷབ་གྱི་ཐིག་ལེ་དཀར་པོ་གཡོན་ནས་ཤེས་རབ་ཀྱི་ཆ་དོན་དམ་གྱི་ཐིག་ལེ་དམར་པོ་དབུ་མའི་དབུ
 ས་ཤེལ་སྐྱུག་ཅན་ནས་ཡེ་ཤེས་ཀྱི་ཐིག་ལེ་འོད་གསལ་རྒྱུ་དོད་འདྲའང་གཡས་ནས་རྒྱུད་གཡོན་ནས་ཐིག་ལེ་རྒྱ་བར་གསུངས་པ་ནི་ཤེ
 ས་ཆེ་རྒྱུང་ལ་དགོངས་པའོའབྱུད་མེད་རྣམས་ལ་གཡས་གཡོན་གོ་སྟོན་ནས་གནས་སོ་ཚུ་སྐྱ་སུམ་ལུ་ཚུ་གཉིས་ཀྱི་གདངས་སྐྱུག་དང་
 བཅས་པས་ཤོན་མོངས་པ་སྐྱེས་པ་བས་རགས་པར་འཆར་བ་ཡིན་ནོ།

From the crystal tube light channel inside the central channel, a ray of light, shaped like a Tibetan *E* rises from the heart center and radiates toward the crown of the head. From the abode of the conch palace of the brain the two tips, as the clear wrathful body, pierce the two eyes. Furthermore, this channel, like a thread of white silk, shines forth like clear light, and is subtle, without blood and lymph. It emerges from the heart center and through the adam's apple of the

throat, and from there, inside the brain, two tips spring forth and split off in subtle channels to either side. Penetrating the two eyes, these two channels, similar to the horn of the great ox. Through it the radiance of the clear light which is wisdom, kayas, bindus, light spheres, and manifold perceptions, directly arises.

If somebody asks, with respect to the eyes, are there two similar to ox horn channels? The answer is yes. The crystal Kati channel is the path of the dawning of luminosity which transcends the sense powers and consciousnesses. And the two tips of the Kyangma are the supports of eye consciousness which apprehends the radiance of clear light arises as seeing activity. These two [channels] are similar. If you don't differentiate, it's a big deal. As it is said in the *Tantra of the Brilliant Expanse*,

From the three principal channels,

Countless branches radiate.

Straightaway acting as supports for the sense doors,

They reveal all phenomena.

They are especially connected with Chitta

The mouth of which is similar to an ox's horn, like a silken thread

Which penetrates the eyes of the sense powers.

This is the path of all dharmata.

Furthermore, from the right of the three channels, there is an all-pervading white sphere, which is the method aspect. From the left there is an ultimate red sphere, which is the wisdom aspect.

From the crystal tube of the central channel, there is the clear light wisdom sphere. Further, as a matter of emphasis, the right corresponds with wind, while the left corresponds with the spheres. For women, right and left are reversed. All together, the varieties of channels number 32, with some left over. Due to creation and affliction, there is the dawning of coarse phenomena.

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